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Attraction of Young Talent: Self-Initiated Expatriates and The Main Motivations of Young People to Work Abroad

Beatriz Carvalho e Figueiredo Polido

Master in International Management

Supervisor:

Ph.D Professor Henrique Manuel Caetano Duarte, Full Professor, Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior, Iscte Business School

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This dissertation symbolizes the end of an academic journey of five years. Five years that made grow not only intellectually but also personally. This journey and this dissertation reflect not only my personal effort, but also the presence, support, and influence of those who were with me throughout this path.

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to understand the role of career stage in shaping motivations for expatriation, perceptions of success, and intention to stay in the host country among Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs). While prior research has highlighted the growing relevance of SIEs in global labor markets, limited attention has been given to intra-group differences across career stages. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a quantitative approach to compare early-career and intermediate-career SIEs.

Data were collected through an online survey and analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), binary logistic regression, and correlation analyses. The results indicate that career stage significantly influences specific expatriation motivations. Early-career SIEs are more strongly motivated by experiential and developmental factors, whereas intermediate-career SIEs place greater emphasis on stability and family considerations. Regarding perceived career success, early-career SIEs report higher levels of satisfaction, authenticity, and perceived growth than intermediate-career SIEs. And, contrary to expectations, career stage does not significantly predict intention to stay in the host country, even after controlling for demographic and expatriation-related variables. Instead, intention to stay appears to be more closely associated with subjective evaluations of the expatriation experience.

Overall, the findings suggest that career stage matters in selective and non-deterministic ways, influencing motivational priorities and subjective success perceptions, but not directly shaping long-term mobility intentions. This study contributes to the literature on self-initiated expatriation by highlighting the importance of experiential and affective factors in international career decision-making.

Keywords: Self-Initiated Expatriates; Career Stage; International Mobility; Career; Success; Intention to Stay

Resumo

Esta dissertação propõe-se a analisar a influência da fase de carreira nas motivações para a expatriação, na perceção de sucesso e na intenção de permanência no país de acolhimento entre Expatriados Auto-Iniciados (SIEs). Apesar do crescente interesse académico pelos SIEs, a literatura tem permanecido relativamente escassa no que diz respeito à análise das diferenças internas neste grupo, designadamente aquelas associadas às diferentes fases de carreira. Com o objetivo de colmatar esta lacuna, este estudo adota uma abordagem quantitativa, comparando SIEs em início de carreira e em fase intermédia da carreira.

Os dados foram recolhidos através de um questionário online e analisados recorrendo a análises multivariadas de variância (MANOVA), regressão logística binária e análises correlacionais. Os resultados demonstram que a fase de carreira influencia significativamente determinadas motivações para a expatriação. Os SIEs em início de carreira revelam uma maior orientação para motivações exploratórias e desenvolvimentais, enquanto os SIEs em fase intermédia atribuem maior importância a considerações familiares. Relativamente à perceção de sucesso, os SIEs em início de carreira reportam níveis mais elevados de satisfação, autenticidade e crescimento percebido do que os SIEs em fase intermédia de carreira. Surpreendentemente, a fase de carreira não se revelou um preditor significativo da intenção de permanência no país de acolhimento, sugerindo que esta decisão está mais associada à avaliação subjetiva da experiência vivida do que a características estruturais da carreira.

Assim sendo, os resultados indicam que a fase de carreira influencia de forma seletiva as motivações e a perceção de sucesso, mas não determina diretamente as intenções de mobilidade a longo prazo. Esta dissertação contribui para a literatura sobre expatriação auto-iniciada ao evidenciar a centralidade de fatores experienciais e afetivos na tomada de decisão em contextos de mobilidade internacional.

Palavras-chave: Expatriados Auto-Iniciados; Fase de Carreira; Mobilidade Internacional; Sucesso de Carreira; Intenção de Permanência

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of *Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs)* has become increasingly relevant in the contemporary context of international mobility. Unlike traditional expatriates, who are typically assigned by multinational companies with logistical and financial support, SIEs are individuals who make the independent decision to leave their home country to pursue opportunities elsewhere. This choice, often made independently and without guarantees of stability, reflects a more proactive and exploratory approach to both professional and personal trajectories (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Inkson et al., 1997).

In the Portuguese context, the presence of young qualified individuals among SIEs has become a significant phenomenon. It reveals not only aspirations for growth, recognition, and development but also reflects structural limitations perceived within the national labour market. These young individuals, often between 18 and 30 years old, emigrate after years of investment in their education, driven by frustrations related to precarious employment, limited career progression, and the undervaluation of their skills within the domestic market (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017; Despotovic et al., 2022).

Young, qualified emigration from Portugal, often associated with the concept of *brain drain*[1], is no longer exclusively driven by economic necessity. On the contrary, many leave with clear goals of professional and personal development, seeking environments where they can be valued, have an impact, and work in more horizontal, innovative, and meritocratic settings. This trend, particularly intensified after the 2008 financial crisis, has profound implications for the country, affecting demographic balance, competitiveness, and innovation capacity (Docquier & Marfouk, 2007; Gomes et al., 2015). According to the Portuguese Emigration Observatory (2021), around 2.3 million Portuguese nationals live abroad, a substantial share of whom are young adults of working age, in a country facing one of the fastest ageing rates in Europe (European Commission, 2021).

[1] Commonly defined as the large-scale emigration of highly skilled individuals from their home country to foreign labour markets, resulting in a net loss of human capital for the country of origin. This process is typically motivated by economic, professional, and institutional disparities between countries (Beine et al., 2001; Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

This dissertation emerges within this context. Taking the Portuguese case as its focus, the main objective of this study is to understand the motivations that lead young Self-Initiated Expatriates to leave their country. The analysis explores how these motivations are linked to structural labour market factors, personal expectations, and the professional aspirations of these individuals.

More specifically, this research aims to:

1. Analyze whether the motivations to become a Self-Initiated Expatriate vary between young people at the beginning of their careers and those in more advanced career stages.

2. Examine how career stage influences the perception of success among Self-Initiated Expatriates;

3. Understand how Self-Initiated Expatriates position themselves regarding the decision to remain in the host country once expatriation is achieved.

By centering the debate on the voices and lived experiences of young expatriates themselves, this dissertation aims to contribute to a deeper, more human understanding of the Self-Initiated Expatriate phenomenon. Ultimately, it seeks to inform the discussion on how Portugal can create the necessary conditions for attracting and retaining talent, so that the young people currently seeking opportunities abroad can find them within the country

Chapter 2

Literature Review

1. The Concept of Expatriation

The concept of *expatriation or expatriates* has emerged as an essential international dynamic for talent mobility, economic development, and the circulation of knowledge in global contexts (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Ridgway & Robson, 2018). This skilled mobility plays an increasingly important role for organizations that benefit from the transfer of competencies and for host countries facing shortages of specialized labor (Borjas, 2001; Baruch & Forstenlechner, 2017).

According to Iredale (1999), skilled migrants are defined as *"individuals with a university degree or extensive experience in a specific area"*. Their contribution to host countries can be significant, addressing structural skill gaps. Historically, expatriation is not a new phenomenon, with missionaries, explorers, and academics serving as early examples of international mobility (Lysgaard, 1955; Bennett, 1985).

The concept of "*expatriate*" has been clearly defined. According to Harzing and Christensen (2004), expatriates are traditionally defined as:

> *"employees transferred by the organization from one country to another for the purpose of fulfilling a temporary mission."*

Typically, expatriates receive financial and logistical support from the company, including benefits such as housing, schooling for children, and travel. Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) emphasize that *"the primary purpose of expatriates is to ensure the transfer of organizational competencies, control of the foreign subsidiary, and the development of global leadership".*

However, since the late 20th century, this mobility has been systematically studied within the framework of international human resource management, with particular attention to the differentiation between *Assigned expatriation* (*AEs)* and *Self-initiated expatriation* (*SIEs*).

2. Typologies of Expatriates: Assigned Expatriates vs. Self-Initiated Expatriates

The most researched group within expatriation studies is *Assigned Expatriates* (AEs), that is, the Traditional Expatriates, which means, individuals sent to another country to work by an organization that has already employed them and specifically recruited them for that role. The distinction between AEs and other types of international mobile workers is clear (McNulty & Brewster, 2017), as the majority of international mobile workers, including migrants and others such as Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), made their own decision to move to another country, rather than being invited by their employer.

The distinction between Assigned Expatriates (AEs) and Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) is crucial for understanding the different motivations behind international mobility. AEs are employees sent by organizations to perform specific roles abroad, primarily driven by corporate needs, structured career plans, and incentives provided by the company, such as logistical support, contractual stability, and repatriation guarantees (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Black et al., 1991). In this context, the decision to expatriate is strongly conditioned by organizational factors, often being an extension of multinational human resources strategies.

In contrast, SIEs make the decision to emigrate independently, driven by intrinsic motivations such as the pursuit of better professional opportunities, personal growth, skills development, or simply the desire for change (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Doherty, 2013). Without a guaranteed contract or institutional support, SIEs take on greater risk and demonstrate higher levels of autonomy and proactivity in their trajectories (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This distinction is particularly relevant in the Portuguese context, where many qualified young individuals fit the profile of SIEs. They are not sent by companies but make the decision to leave the country independently. Thus, by focusing on SIEs, this study captures more accurately the true motivations behind the phenomenon of *brain drain*, which would be obscured if the analysis focused on AEs, whose decisions are largely shaped by business interests and dynamics (Suutari & Bresser, 2000; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014).

Biemann and Andresen (2010) compared the career aspirations and orientations of SIEs and AEs in management and executive positions and recorded several significant differences between the groups. SIEs tend to begin their international careers earlier than

AEs, have greater organizational mobility, and expect this to continue in the future. Suutari and Brewster (2000) found that, compared to AEs, SIEs are more interested in accepting international work and are prepared to stay abroad for longer periods.

In addition to structural differences, in terms of initiative, support, and funding, there are also relevant behavioral and experiential differences. For example, AEs are more integrated into organizational structures and follow more predictable career paths, while SIEs tend to face non-linear trajectories, greater instability, and require high levels of resilience and adaptability (Jokinen et al., 2008). The autonomy of SIEs is often associated with the construction of a "*boundaryless career*"[2], with mobility between different countries, organizations, and sectors (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Despite the clear differences in circumstances and international mobility processes, it is important to recognize that both SIEs and AEs also share some fundamental motivations. Both profiles show an interest in seeking new career opportunities and professional advancement, demonstrating a common ambition for growth in the global labor market (Doherty et al., 2011; Froese, 2012; Quantin et al., 2012). Additionally, the economic and political stability of host countries emerges as a common motivation, influencing the mobility decision for both groups (Harry et al., 2017). Therefore, although motivations vary in their origin and intensity, there exists a shared core that reflects common aspirations in the context of expatriation.

3. Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs)

The phenomenon of *Self-Initiated Expatriates* (SIEs), which is the focus of this dissertation, has been receiving growing academic attention in recent decades, particularly in a context where international mobility patterns have been surpassing traditional corporate expatriation models.

[2] Career trajectories that extend beyond the boundaries of a single organization, being shaped by individual mobility, autonomy, and the accumulation of transferable career capital. According to Michael B. Arthur and Denise M. Rousseau, such careers involve transitions across organizational, occupational, and geographical contexts, reflecting a proactive individual orientation toward career self-management (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

With the turn of the 21st century, it became clear that not all expatriates were assigned by companies. Many professionals began expatriating on their own initiative, with multiple terms emerging to describe them, ranging from "*mobile international professionals*" (Richardson & McKenna, 2002) to "*international itinerants*" (Banai & Harry, 2004), until the consolidation of the term "*self-initiated expatriate*" (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Selmer, Andresen & Cerdin, 2017). SIEs are, by definition:

> *"Individuals who decide to live and work abroad on their own initiative, without direct support from an organization"* (Dorsch, Suutari & Brewster, 2013; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

Inkson et al. (1997) were the first to establish a specific literature for SIEs. Since then, the literature has evolved through several phases, each revealing the difficulty associated with defining this subgroup. Thirty years after Inkson et al.'s (1997) study, researchers focusing on expatriation are still theorizing about the distinction between various types of internationally mobile workers. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish SIEs from similar categories that might appear intertwined in the conceptualization of this study.

The most influential definition is that proposed by Cerdin and Selmer (2014), which identifies four essential criteria: "*1) the relocation is self-initiated; 2) there is an intention to seek employment; 3) the stay is indefinite; and 4) the individual possesses professional qualifications".* This definition allows for the distinction between SIEs and permanent migrants, students, and other international workers.

SIEs differ from migrants because, according to Przytuła (2016), *"migration implies a permanent change, whereas SIEs have indefinite stays but without the intention of permanence".* McNulty and Brewster (2017) clarify the boundaries of the expatriate concept, considering that SIEs fit within this term as they maintain professional ties with organizations, relocate temporarily, and are not citizens of the host country. Therefore, SIEs should not be considered migrants (Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Richardson & Zikic, 2007).

Other authors, such as Selmer, Andresen & Cerdin (2017), emphasize the importance of proactivity in career initiative and the significant change in residential context. Alshahrani (2024) adds that SIEs should possess talent, skills, or training that allows them to secure opportunities in the destination country.

These individuals differ from international students and gap-year travelers (Inkson et al., 1997) and business travelers, as SIEs live in the host country for work purposes and for a limited time.

Despite attempts at consensus, some conceptual ambiguity remains, stemming from the use of terms like "*skilled migrants*," "*immigrant professionals*," or "*internationally mobile*" to refer to similar populations (Henry et al., 2018). The lack of consensus on a definition becomes a limitation for studying this subgroup.

The literature distinguishes three levels of analysis for SIE experiences: *micro* (individual motivation and psychological experiences), *meso* (organizational impact), and *macro* (socioeconomic consequences and global talent management) (Doherty, 2013). At the macro level, questions arise about the knowledge and international networks acquired by SIEs (Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Krantz, 2015). At the meso level, it is observed that although SIEs are guided by personal goals rather than corporate ones, they can be an organizational asset if properly integrated (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010; Abbas et al., 2021). At the micro level, factors such as professional status, education, financial resources, social networks, and cultural adaptability are decisive in the decision to expatriate (Al Ariss & Jawad, 2011; Doherty, 2013). This study will focus on micro-level analysis, aiming to understand the decisive factors in the expatriation decision.

Regarding these factors, that is, the motivations of SIEs, they are diverse. Early literature referred to vague desires for adventure and discovery (Inkson et al., 1997), while later studies identify family, financial, and career-related motivations (Lauring et al., 2014; Muir et al., 2014; Richardson & McKenna, 2006). SIEs demonstrate a strong motivation to live abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), confidence in their skills to work abroad (Doherty et al., 2011), and a great desire for intercultural experiences (Doherty et al., 2011; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Understanding the motivations of SIEs, therefore, requires a more segmented approach. As the analysis deepens, it becomes evident that the reasons driving self-initiated expatriation are not homogeneous. On the contrary, they vary significantly depending on the career stage at which individuals find themselves. This distinction will be crucial for a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon under analysis.

4. Theoretical Segmentation: Career Stage

In addition to the differences highlighted between Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) and Assigned Expatriates (AEs) regarding motivations for international mobility, it is important to recognize that there are also differences within the SIE group itself. The reasons that lead an individual to initiate a self-initiated expatriation experience vary significantly based on factors such as age, career path, personal goals, and sociocultural context (Mello, Suutari & Dickmann, 2023; Doherty, 2013), which can lead to substantially different trajectories and outcomes. Career stage segmentation is particularly relevant, as it influences motivations, available resources, and perceptions of risk and success (Spurk et al., 2019).

Thus, this study adopts the following distinction:

- *SIEs in the early stage of their career (15 to 29 years old):* Young individuals who have recently graduated or have limited professional experience, who choose to begin their professional trajectory abroad through self-initiated expatriation.

- *SIEs in the intermediate stage of their career (30 to 39 years old):* Young professionals already integrated into the domestic labor market, who decide to interrupt or redirect their professional trajectory by emigrating independently in search of new opportunities in the international context.

Motivations vary significantly between these groups. In the case of SIEs in the early career stage, expatriation is often viewed as a stepping stone to economic autonomy, access to their first job, and the beginning of an international professional trajectory (Selmer & Lauring, 2010; Stephan et al., 2016; Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2018; Richardson & Wong, 2018). This group shows greater openness to risk, adventure, and transformative experiences (Thorn, 2009; Dries et al., 2008), especially when confronted with economic and professional stagnation in their home countries (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017). Many of these young individuals identify core motivations such as the *"desire to escape precarious situations, frustration with unpaid internships, skill undervaluation, and difficulty in finding jobs aligned with their academic qualifications"* (Doherty et al., 2011; Thorn, 2009; Inkson et al., 1997; Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017). Thus, expatriation represents a pathway to professional and personal fulfillment that they cannot find within the national context.

In contrast, SIEs in the intermediate career stage tend to have more strategic motivations focused on the enhancement of already acquired skills. These professionals, although still young, are already integrated into the labor market and often experience frustrations related to the *"lack of career progression, stagnant salaries, lack of recognition, and organizational rigidity"* (Despotovic et al., 2022; Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017). In this context, international mobility is seen as an opportunity for repositioning in more meritocratic labor markets, developing new skills, and diversifying professional experience (Andresen & Biemann, 2013). Furthermore, issues such as work-life balance become more relevant at this stage, especially when there are family ties, partners with parallel careers, or parental responsibilities (Vance & McNulty, 2014; De Vos et al., 2020). This distinction forms the first hypothesis of this study:

> *H1: SIEs in the early career stage are motivated by personal and self-development factors, while SIEs in the intermediate career stage are motivated by strategic objectives for professional advancement.*

Career development theory over the life span (Super, 1957) provides an appropriate framework to understand these differences, conceptualizing the career as an evolving process influenced by personal and contextual factors (McMahon & Patton, 2018; Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). Recent studies have shown that career stage significantly influences the perception of success in the international experience (Spurk et al., 2019). Early in their careers, individuals benefit from high-intensity international experiences, which provide accelerated learning and the acquisition of *Career Capital*[3] that is difficult to achieve in their home country (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2017; Mäkelä et al., 2016). In the intermediate stage, they tend to have greater stability and a consolidated level of *Career Capital*, and therefore, they tend to plan expatriation in a more structured manner, as part of a continuous professional trajectory aimed at specific career progression goals (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2017; Phillips et al., 2002).

[3] The stock of competencies, knowledge, and social networks an individual accumulates and leverages to advance their career. It is conceptually divided into three dimensions: 1.Knowing-How (skills/expertise), 2.Knowing-Whom (social networks/capital), and 3.Knowing-Why (motivation/career identity). All actively sought by Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) to navigate their boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

These distinctions between SIEs in the early and intermediate career stages reveal the complexity of the phenomenon of voluntary international mobility among qualified youth. The literature shows that career stage segmentation is relevant not only for understanding the motivations underlying expatriation but also the factors that influence the duration of stay, perceptions of success, and the type of opportunities sought. Therefore, this research adopts this segmentation as the axis of analysis to interpret the different patterns of migratory decision-making.

5. The perception of Success Among Self-initiated Expatriates (SIEs)

Understanding the perception of success is essential for deeply interpreting the effects of the Self-Initiated Expatriates' trajectory, not only at the individual level but also regarding the implications for both the countries of origin and the host countries. This dimension allows for consolidating the conclusions previously discussed, revealing how SIEs interpret the outcomes of their migratory choice in light of their personal and professional objectives, as well as the life path they build abroad.

The perception of success among SIEs is not homogeneous and varies significantly according to the profile and career stage of the individuals involved. As demonstrated by various previous studies, Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) constitute a highly heterogeneous group, whose experiences and motivations directly influence the way they assess the success of their international trajectory (Selmer & Lauring, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

For SIEs at the early career stage, success tends to be perceived in a subjective and exploratory manner. For this group, simply living and working abroad is seen as an achievement in itself. Economic autonomy, the opportunity to start a professional trajectory, the acquisition of new skills, and exposure to multicultural environments are frequently identified as indicators of success (Richardson & Wong, 2018; Thorn, 2009; Dries et al., 2008). The realization of their initial motivations, often related to adventure, mobility, and self-development, reinforces the feeling of personal success and validates the decision to emigrate.

On the other hand, SIEs in the intermediate career stage, young professionals already integrated into the domestic labor market, tend to adopt more strategic criteria in evaluating success. For this group, expatriation is often planned as a tool for professional

repositioning, enhancing already acquired skills, or advancing in more meritocratic labor markets (Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Despotovic et al., 2022). The perception of success is thus more directly linked to tangible outcomes such as promotions, professional recognition, and contractual stability. Additionally, factors such as work-life balance become more relevant for this group, reflecting a more holistic view of professional fulfillment (De Vos et al., 2020; Vance & McNulty, 2014).

Thus, the literature shows that success, for SIEs, is not merely translated into objective career metrics but is influenced by a complex interaction between professional achievements, personal satisfaction, and alignment with the initial motivations for expatriation. This perception varies significantly between different SIE profiles, making it essential to consider career stage as a relevant explanatory variable:

H2: For SIEs in the early career stage, success is perceived subjectively and exploratorily, whereas for SIEs in the intermediate career stage, success is perceived strategically and objectively.

The perception of success among SIEs is also deeply related to the decision to stay in the host country or return to the country of origin. Studies indicate that many SIEs, especially those at the start of their careers, choose to remain abroad, where they find greater opportunities for development and the enhancement of their career capital (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Andresen, Pattie & Hippler, 2020). This stay is often interpreted as a successful extension of the international experience, sustained by more favorable conditions for professional progression, greater recognition of acquired skills, and, not infrequently, a successful social and cultural integration (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2010; Tharenou, 2013).

6. Between Returning and Staying: What Leads SIEs to Remain Abroad After Expatriation?

As widely evidenced in the literature and referred to throughout this analysis, unlike Assigned Expatriates (AEs), Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) voluntarily initiate their international mobility, without organizational sponsorship from a home company, and consequently, without a structured repatriation plan (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This autonomy gives them greater freedom in managing their international trajectory but also confronts them with complex decisions at the end of the

expatriation period, particularly regarding the choice between returning to their home country or remaining abroad.

In general, the decision to repatriate arises as a response to a set of personal and professional factors that evolve over time. Without contractual ties to a home organization, SIEs manage their own return process, often facing reintegration barriers such as the mismatch between the *career capital* acquired abroad and the demands of the domestic labor market (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009; Selmer & Lauring, 2010). Nevertheless, repatriation can occur when there is a significant shift in the initial motivations, such as the pursuit of adventure, mobility, or professional development, being replaced by new priorities like family proximity or the perception of better opportunities in the home country (Brewster, Suutari & Waxin, 2021; Tharenou, 2008). Family ties exert a determining influence, particularly in cases involving elderly parents or dependent relatives (Jones, 2003; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010), and the perception of recognition for international experience in the domestic market may strengthen the return decision (Begley et al., 2008).

However, the literature has highlighted that most SIEs choose to remain in the host country, often for an extended or indefinite period (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Andresen, Pattie & Hippler, 2020), a trend particularly visible among early-career SIEs, who view international mobility as a natural stage in their personal and professional journey (Thorn, 2009; Dries et al., 2008). This extended stay is generally associated with the perception of more advantageous professional opportunities abroad, where the accumulated career capital is more valued than in the home country (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008).

In addition to professional factors, there are personal motivations that have a significant impact on the decision to stay. Among these are satisfaction with the local lifestyle, successful integration into social and cultural networks, emotional stability, and the establishment of a new life in the host country (Selmer & Lauring, 2010; Tharenou, 2013). These dimensions are particularly valued by early-career SIEs, who are more inclined to cultural exploration, detachment from family structures, and the construction of paths marked by geographical mobility (Thorn, 2009; Dries et al., 2008). In this group, adherence to the *boundaryless career* model is more evident, with the continuation of the international experience in the same country or other destinations viewed as an integral part of their professional development strategy (Suutari et al., 2018b; Brewster et al., 2021).

The literature clearly demonstrates that the trajectory of SIEs is shaped by their ability to autonomously manage career decisions in international contexts. The choice between returning or staying is far from uniform, resulting from the complex interaction between individual, relational, and contextual factors. However, it is observed that early-career SIEs have a greater tendency to stay abroad, given the alignment between their initial motivations and the opportunities actually found in the host country, as well as their greater openness to continuous mobility and investment in transformative experiences:

H3: Early-career SIEs are more likely to remain in the host country than SIEs in the intermediate stage of their careers.

7. Research Model

To demonstrate the relationship between the hypothesis previously presented, a conceptual model has been developed, as proposed in Figure 1.

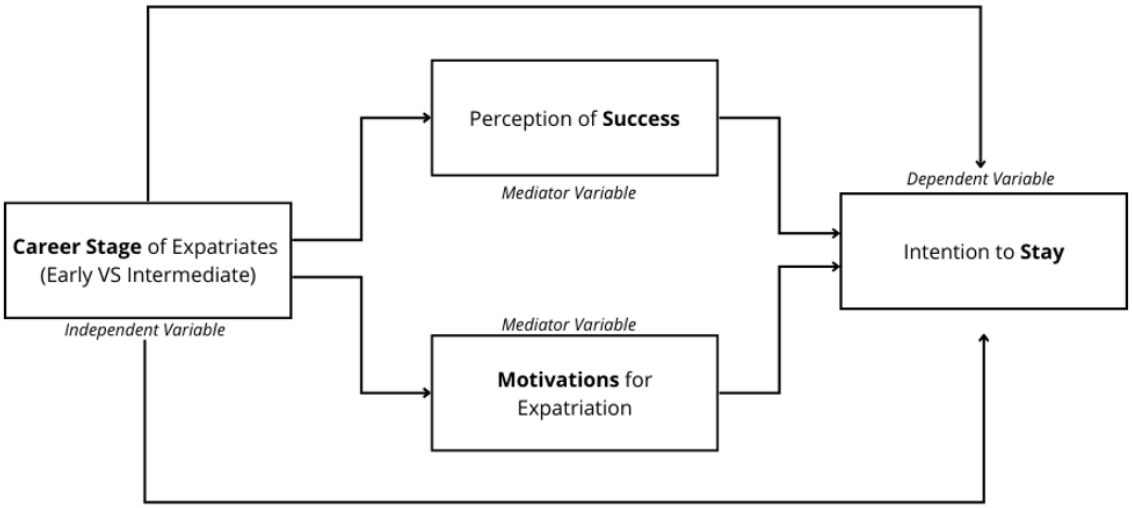


Figure 1 *– Conceptual Research Model*

The proposed research model aims to analyze how the career stage of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), distinguishing between early career and intermediate career stages, influences their intention to stay in the host country. In this model, the *career stage* is assumed to be the independent variable, while the *intention to stay* is the dependent variable.

The model also incorporates two mediator variables that explain the pathway between the independent and dependent variables: (1) *perception of success* and (2) *motivations for expatriation*. These mediator variables are crucial for understanding the

psychological and motivational mechanisms that may differentiate expatriates' behavior at different career stages.

Specifically, it is assumed that SIEs at different career stages will have not only distinct motivations for international mobility but also different ways of assessing their personal and professional success. These dimensions, in turn, directly impact their willingness to remain in the host country.

Chapter 3

Methodology

1. Methodological Framework:

In order to understand the motivations, decisions, and perceptions of success of Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), this research adopts a quantitative approach. According to Kothari (2004), *"quantitative methods are particularly suitable for studies aimed at testing causal relationships, comparing groups, and generalizing results to a larger population".* In this case, the quantitative approach proved to be the most appropriate for studying the differences between SIE profiles, particularly between individuals at the early career stage and those in the intermediate stage, as well as for analyzing the influence of these differences on their motivations, expatriation decisions, and perception of success.

2. Data Collection

In the data collection process, efforts were made to include only participants who fit the concept of Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), ages ranging from 15 to 39 years, making the sample a non-probabilistic sample. Empirical data were collected gathered via a questionnaire, with a focus on ethical guidelines. In this regard, it was ensured that the data collected would be used exclusively for the present study, with participation in the questionnaire being voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity of participants being guaranteed. Questionnaires were administered via Internet (e-mail, LinkedIn and other social networks) and also through some embassies and consulates. The choice of these means was due to the fact that the questionnaires were in electronic format which allowed a fast and easy filling and the forwarding to others.

The collected data will be analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive statistical methods (frequencies, means, and standard deviations), as well as exploratory and confirmatory analyses (Principal Component Analysis – PCA). Hypothesis testing will include variable cross-tabulation and comparative analyses between groups. Analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be conducted to examine group differences across multiple dependent variables simultaneously. And a binary logistic regression analysis will be used to assess the probability of occurrence of dichotomous outcomes based on a set of

independent variables, allowing for the identification of significant predictors and the validation of the observed patterns.

3. The Sample

The sample aimed to achieve a homogeneous number of SIEs in the early stage of their career and in the intermediate stage of their career. The total number of 285 responses have been recorded, however 151 (47%) were regarded invalid due to missing data or failure to complete the questionnaire until the end.

The characteristics of this sample are: 85 females, 41 males and 2 non-binary/other, representing 63,4%, 30,6% and 1,5% respectively. 22,4% were between 30 and 39 years old and 77,6% were between 19 and 29 years old. Given that 17,9% of them were 23 years old. 64,2% live abroad before, mostly for less than a year (65%), and 35,8% never lived abroad before. The average number of years that the participants were living in the host country was 2,64 (standard deviation 2,26). In terms of degree of education its distribution was as follows: 50,8% had a master´s degree; 42,2% had a bachelor degree; 3,9% had a finished high school; and 3,1% had a doctoral degree. 82,9% were Portuguese participants, and the other percentage carries contributes from Croatia, France, Macedonia, Mexico, Montenegro, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Canada, Germany, Brazil and Britain. 79,5% were single and only 20,5% were married/civil partnership. Additionally, only 13,3% have children, mostly from 0 to 12 years old (96%), and 86,7% does not have children. In terms of languages, we could see that the average grade given to the level of Portuguese was 4,32 (standard deviation 1,58), the one given to the level of English was 4,48 (standard deviation 0,70) and the one given to the level of French was 1,88 (standard deviation 1,40). Most of the participants (53,2%) work for a large enterprise (>250 employees), 23,8% work for a medium enterprise (51-250 employees), 16,7% work for a small enterprise (10-50 employees) and only 6,3% work for a microenterprise (0-10 employees). In terms of number of years working at the company its distribution was as follows: 10,4% are working at the company for less than a year; 22% are working between 1 to 3 years; 8,9% are working between 3 to 5 years; and 2,2% are working at the company for more than 5 years. And, finally in terms of number of years working in their current position its distribution was as follows: 8,9% are in their current position for less than a year; 27,7% are between 1 to 3 years; 5,4% are between 3 to 5 years; and only 0,8% are more than 5 years.

4. Measures

As part of the analysis of the variables presented in the conceptual model in Figure 1, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted for the multi-item constructs in order to reduce dimensionality, avoid item redundancy, and maximize the explanatory power of the variable sets. The operationalization of the variables was grounded in the existing literature on Self-Initiated Expatriates, particularly regarding expatriation motivations, perceptions of success, and intentions to remain abroad or repatriate, while career stage was operationalized as a theoretically derived categorical variable based on age. Control variables were included as observed covariates or grouping variables and were not subjected to principal component or reliability analyses, given their non-latent nature.

4.1.Motivations for Expatriation

For the operationalization of the concept *Motivations for Expatriation* in this study, the scale developed by Doherty, Dickmann, and Mills (2011) is used. This scale consists of a total of 33 items and is based on the following question: *"How much influence did the following factors have on your decision to work abroad?"*. These factors encompass both intrinsic elements of the individual trajectory and contextual and structural aspects of the mobility process. Responses are measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing the capture of different motivational intensities of the respondents and ensuring content validity in the measurement of this construct.

Initially the factor analysis showed 9 factors with a total of 33 items. The first step was to eliminate the fifteen items that showed ambiguous values. The second step was to analyze the remaining items corresponded to the expected theoretical factors, obtaining the following result: **(a) Foreign Experience** concerns the desire for adventure, challenge and the opportunities that travel and work abroad offer. This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely "*Desire for adventure"*, ***"****Desire to live in host city/location"*, ***"****To see the world****",*** ***"****The opportunity to improve your language skills"*. The scale showed o good reliability (Cronbach α=, 759). **(b) Family & Benefits** focuses on the benefits to the family of working abroad and stability. This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely *"Better opportunities for your family", "Superior career opportunities for your family",*

"Ability to support your family better abroad", "Reputation of host country in your area of work". The scale showed an acceptable reliability (Cronbach α=,688). **(c) Perceived Readiness** refers to an individual's self-assessment of their preparedness for the expatriate experience, which significantly influences their adjustment and performance in a foreign environment (Black & Gregersen, 1999). Although the literature from which we operationalized this variable does not explicitly define this factor, other studies affirm its importance and existence in the context of expatriate motivations (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013). This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely *"Having the relevant job skills", "Confidence in your ability to work/live abroad" and "Predeparture preparation".* The scale showed an good reliability (Cronbach α=,673). **(d) Personal Relations** comprises items relating to familial, social and partner ties. This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely *"To be with/near loved person(s)", "Expected length of stay"; "Balance between work and social life".* The scale showed an unacceptable reliability (Cronbach α=,457), given that the factor was excluded from subsequent analyses due to the inadequate internal consistency. **(e) Social Networks** refer to the web of relationships and connections that individuals cultivate, which provide emotional support, information, and resources essential for navigating the expatriate experience (Wang & Takeuchi, 2016). Although not explicitly included in the original operationalization of this study, prior research consistently highlights social networks as a decisive factor in SIEs' expatriation decisions and adjustment processes (Black et al., 1991; Wang & Kanungo, 2004; Bozionelos et al., 2015; Tharenou, 2013). This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely "*Maintaining work networks with the home country", "Maintaining personal networks".* The scale showed an acceptable reliability (Cronbach α=,533). **(f) Career** loads on job and career issues. This measure was a 7 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 7- strongly agree), namely "*Impact on my career", "Potential for skills development".* The scale showed an good reliability (Cronbach α=,624). Overall this scale revealed a good homogeneity (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index =, 685).

4.2. Career Stage

The operationalization of the *Career Stage* variable is based on Donald Super's (1980) Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Daniel Levinson's (1986) transition model, which propose that individuals go through different stages throughout their professional trajectory. These models suggest that career is not a static phenomenon, but rather a dynamic and evolving process influenced by personal and contextual factors throughout the life cycle. For empirical analysis purposes, various authors have adopted age as a valid proxy for career stage (Dutta et al., 2021; Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2017). Following this approach, this study adopts the categorization proposed by Cohen (1991), validated by Bedeian et al. (1991) and adapted to the European context by Duarte and Lopes (2018), which organizes individuals into four career stages based on age intervals: (1) Trial (15–29 years), characterized by exploration and learning; (2) Establishment (30–39 years), corresponding to the consolidation of professional identity; (3) Maintenance (40–49 years), associated with continuity and stability; (4) Decline (≥50 years), a phase in which there is a greater emphasis on balance and recognition.

In this study, only the Trial and Establishment stages will be considered, as the focus is on individuals in the early or intermediate stages of their careers, deliberately excluding the more advanced stages due to their divergence from the predominant profile of Self-Initiated Expatriates analyzed in this research.

Career stage was treated as a theoretically derived categorical variable based on age, rather than a latent construct measured through multiple items. Therefore, reliability and factor analyses were not applicable for this variable.

4.3. Perception of Success

The variable *Perception of Success* will be operationalized through the Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI) developed by Kristen M. Shockley, Hakan Ureksoy, O. Berkay Rodopman, Laura F. Poteat, and Travis R. Dullaghan (2016), consisting of 24 items. This scale captures both intrinsic dimensions (achievement, identity, authenticity) and extrinsic dimensions (promotion, recognition, work-life balance), providing a comprehensive measure of subjective career success. Participants were asked to express their degree of agreement with the statements using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Initially the factor analysis showed 4 factors with a total of 24 items. The first step was, as described for the variable *Motivations for Expatriation*, to eliminate the items that showed ambiguous values – nine items were eliminated. The second step was to analyze the remaining items corresponded to the expected theoretical factors, obtaining the following result: **(a) Satisfaction & Authenticity** shaping the direction of one's career according to personal needs and preferences and positive affect or feelings toward one's career in general. This measure was a 5 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree), namely**: "***I´m enthusiastic about my career"; "I found my career interesting", "I´m satisfied with my career", "I have a job that meets my personal needs and preferences", "I have chosen my own career path", "I am in charge of my own career".* The scale showed an excellent reliability (Cronbach α=,886). **(b) Growth & Development** reflects growing in one's career through the development of new knowledge and skill. This measure was a 5 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree), namely: **"***I have improved by developing my skills"; "I stayed current with the changes in my field", "I expanded my skill set to perform better"***.** The scale showed an good reliability (Cronbach α=,799). **(c) Recognition** captures being formally or informally acknowledged for your work by valued others. This measure was a 5 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree), namely: *"Organization recognition", "Being recognized for my contribution", " Supervisors recognition*. The scale showed an good reliability (Cronbach α=,764). **(d) Personal Life** captures Having a career that positively impacts life outside of work. This measure was a 5 item Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree), namely: **"***I am able to spend time with my friends and family", "I am satisfied with my life outside work***"** *and "I am a good employee with maintaining quality non-work relationships".* The scale showed an good reliability (Cronbach α=,692). Overall this scale revealed an excellent homogeneity (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index =,819).

4.4.Intention to Stay

The variable *"Intention to Stay"* will be operationalized using the scale proposed by Cao, Hirschi, and Deller (2013), consisting of two items designed to assess expatriates' willingness to remain in the host country in the near future: "*In the near future, I intend to continue living and working in this country"* and "*Recently, I have seriously considered the possibility of returning to my home country".* Each of the dimensions in this scale was measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly

agree" (5). This formulation simultaneously captures both the intention to stay and the consideration of the return alternative, providing a more comprehensive perspective on future mobility intentions. Given the latent nature of the construct, a principal component analysis was conducted to confirm one-dimensionality, followed by reliability analysis. The scale demonstrated acceptable sampling adequacy (KMO = .500) and satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .711). A composite index was subsequently computed by averaging the two items for use in the hypothesis testing.

5. Control Variables

The statistical analysis will include control variables in order to isolate effects and allow comparison between different subgroups. These variables were selected based on their theoretical and empirical relevance to the expatriation phenomenon.

Age (quantitative variable) allows for the distinction of generational profiles among SIEs. *Gender* (categorical variable: female, male, or other) was included to enable the analysis of potential differences in motivations for expatriation and subsequent decisions. *Nationality* (categorical variable) allows for controlling the influence of cultural context and the country of origin on participants' experience and perceptions.

The *duration of expatriation* (quantitative variable) is relevant for understanding how the length of stay in the host country affects the perception of success and future intentions to stay or return. *Previous expatriation experience* (categorical variable: less than 1 year; 1–3 years; more than 3 years) differentiates between participants with varying levels of international experience. *Household structure* (quantitative and categorical variable: number of children; children under 12 or over 12 years old) and *marital status* (categorical variable: single, married/partnered, divorced, widowed) provide information on participants' relational and family structure, allowing an understanding of how affective factors may influence mobility intentions.

Tenure in the current position (quantitative variable) and *tenure in the company* (quantitative variable) were included to assess professional stability and the degree of organizational embeddedness of individuals. *Type of company* (categorical variable: microenterprise 0–10 employees; small enterprise 10–50; medium enterprise 51–250; large enterprise >250) captures structural differences that may affect the expatriation experience.

Finally, *language proficiency* (categorical variable: Portuguese, English, French, other; with proficiency level indicated) allows for analyzing how language skills influence adaptation, perceived success, and the intention to stay of SIEs.

Chapter 4

Results

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Career Stage	1.22	.418	-											
2	F Career	6.30	.768	-.048	(,624)										
3	F Social Networks	4.90	1.227	-.075	.257**	(,533)									
4	F Perceived Readiness	5.50	1.112	.025	.080	.131	(,673)								
5	F Personal Relations	5.50	1.112	.025	.080	.131	1.00**	(,457)							
6	F Family and Benefits	5.42	1.388	.292**	.071	-.053	.061	.061	(,688)						
7	F Foreign Experience	5.43	1.301	-.446**	.293**	.261**	.104	.104	-.173*	(,759)					
8	F Personal Life	3.91	.790	.138	.043	.072	.033	.033	.252**	-.026	(,692)				
9	F Recognition	4.38	.606	.169	.090	.048	.248**	.248**	.209*	.011	.296**	(,764)			
10	F Growth and Development	4.27	.648	.207*	.225*	.131	.367**	.367**	.196*	.066	.373**	.435**	(,886)		
11	F Satisfaction and Authenticity	4.13	.724	.222*	.225*	.071	.234**	.234**	.357**	-.045	.280**	.395**	.464**	(,799)	
12	F Stay in Host Country	3.74	1.213	.171	.079	-.060	-.121	-.121	.350**	-.039	.315**	.201*	.219*	.222*	(,500)

** p< 0,01; * p < 0,05; the diagonal shows the values of Cronbach's α.

Figure 2 *– Bivariate Correlations (Motivations, Perception of Success, Intention of Stay and Career Stage)*

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of career stage in shaping self-initiated expatriates' motivations for expatriation, their perceived success of the expatriation experience, and their intention to stay in the host country. As a first step, bivariate Pearson correlations were conducted among all study variables (*see Figure 2*) in order to assess preliminary relationships and internal coherence.

Regarding motivational factors, several significant relationships emerge. Career motivation is positively associated with growth and development ($r = .225$, $p < .05$), satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .225$, $p < .05$), and foreign experience ($r = .293$, $p < .01$), suggesting that individuals motivated by career-related goals tend to value professional growth, meaningful experiences, and international exposure. Similarly, motivations related to family and benefits shows significant positive correlations with satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .357$, $p < .01$) and with intention to stay in the host country ($r = .350$, $p < .01$), indicating that relational and stability-oriented motivations play an important role in shaping both perceived success and future mobility intentions. Motivation related to foreign experience displays a distinctive pattern. It is positively associated with career motivation ($r = .293$, $p < .01$) and social networks motivation ($r = .261$, $p < .01$), while being negatively related to career stage ($r = -.446$, $p < .01$). This suggests that earlier-

career self-initiated expatriates are more strongly driven by experiential and exploratory motives than those in more advanced career stages.

Turning to perceived success, strong and consistent correlations are observed among its dimensions. Growth and development is strongly associated with recognition ($r = .373$, $p < .01$) and satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .435$, $p < .01$), while recognition is also positively related to satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .395$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that perceived success is experienced as a coherent and integrated construct. Moreover, perceived success dimensions are significantly linked to motivational factors. Satisfaction and authenticity is positively associated with family and benefits motivation ($r = .357$, $p < .01$), career motivation ($r = .225$, $p < .05$), and growth and development motivation ($r = .464$, $p < .01$), suggesting that initial expatriation motives are meaningfully reflected in how expatriates evaluate the success of their experience.

Career stage shows only weak correlations with perceived success dimensions, such as growth and development ($r = .207$, $p < .05$) and satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .222$, $p < .05$), indicating that differences in perceived success across career stages are limited.

With regard to intention to stay in the host country, significant positive correlations were found with several motivational and success-related factors. Intention to stay is positively associated with family and benefits motivation ($r = .350$, $p < .01$), foreign experience ($r = .315$, $p < .01$), growth and development ($r = .219$, $p < .05$), and satisfaction and authenticity ($r = .222$, $p < .05$). These findings suggest that expatriates who perceive their experience as personally fulfilling and developmentally meaningful, and whose motivations include relational and experiential components, are more inclined to remain in the host country. In contrast, the relationship between career stage and intention to stay is weak and non-significant ($r = .171$, $p > .05$), a pattern that is consistent with subsequent regression analyses showing that career stage alone does not significantly predict expatriates' intention to remain abroad.

Overall, the correlation analysis supports the conceptual distinction between motivations, perceived success, and intention to stay, while highlighting meaningful links between motivational drivers, subjective success evaluations, and future mobility intentions. These results provide a solid empirical foundation for the multivariate analyses that follow, namely the Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) tests examining

differences across career stages and the logistic regression model assessing predictors of intention to stay in the host country.

Hypothesis 1:*"SIEs in the early career stage are motivated by personal and self-development factors, while SIEs in the intermediate career stage are motivated by strategic objectives for professional advancement".*

To test the first hypothesis a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted, with Career Stage (early career stage vs. intermediate career stage) as the independent variable and five motivation dimensions as dependent variables: Career, Social Networks, Perceived Readiness, Family and Benefits, and Foreign Experience.

Prior to interpreting the multivariate results, the assumptions underlying MANOVA were assessed. The Box's M test of equality of covariance matrices was non-significant (Box's M = 20.00; p = .229) indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of covariance matrices was satisfied. Levene's tests for equality of error variances showed that this assumption was violated for Foreign Experience (p = .013) and Family and Benefits (p = .003), while it was met for Perceived Readiness (p = .671), Social Networks (p = .254), and Career (p = .816). Given the robustness of MANOVA to moderate violations of variance homogeneity, particularly when using Pillai's Trace, the analysis proceeded.

The MANOVA revealed a statistically significant multivariate effect of career stage on the combined set of motivation variables, as indicated by Pillai's Trace = .253, F(5, 127) = 8.581, p < .001, with a partial eta squared of .253. This result indicates that career stage accounts for approximately 25.3% of the variance in the overall motivational profile of SIEs, representing a large multivariate effect and suggesting that motivational patterns differ meaningfully between early and intermediate career stage expatriates.

	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Parcial eta squared
Career Stage	F Foreign Experience	44,416	1	44,416	32,339	**<,001**	,198
	F Family and Benefits	21,681	1	21,681	12,218	**<,001**	,085
	F Perceived Readiness	,114	1	,114	,091	**,763**	,001
	F Social Networks	1,105	1	1,105	,733	**,394**	,006
	F Career	,218	1	,218	,367	**,546**	,003

Figure 3 *– Test of Between-Subjects Effects for Motivations for Expatriation*

Follow-up univariate analyses were conducted to identify which specific motivation dimensions contributed to this multivariate effect. Statistically significant differences between career stages were found for Foreign Experience ($F(1, 131) = 32.339$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .198$) and for Family and Benefits ($F(1, 131) = 12.218$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .085$). These findings indicate that motivations related to gaining foreign experience and to family and benefits vary substantially according to career stage. In contrast, no significant differences were observed for Perceived Readiness ($F(1, 131) = 0.091$, $p = .763$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$), Social Networks ($F(1, 131) = 0.733$, $p = .394$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$) or Career ($F(1, 131) = 0.367$, $p = .546$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$), suggesting that these motivations are similarly salient for SIEs across different career stages.

Overall, these results provide partial support for the proposed hypothesis. While career stage significantly influences the overall configuration of motivational factors among SIEs, the differences are not uniformly aligned with a clear-cut distinction between personal and self-development motivations and strategic professional advancement objectives. Instead, the findings suggest a more nuanced pattern in which career stage is particularly relevant for motivations associated with international exposure and family-related considerations, whereas motivations linked to perceived readiness, social networks, and general career aspirations remain relatively stable across career stages.

To further substantiate the patterns identified, post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted. These comparisons confirm that the differences between career stages are not uniform across all motivational factors, but are instead concentrated in specific domains. In line with the previous findings, statistically significant differences emerged for Foreign Experience and Family and Benefits. Early-career SIEs reported significantly higher levels of motivation related to Foreign Experience than their intermediate-career counterparts (mean difference = 1.383, SE = 0.243, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.902, 1.864]), reinforcing the interpretation that this group is primarily driven by experiential, exploratory, and self-development-oriented motives. Conversely, SIEs in the intermediate career stage placed significantly greater importance on Family and Benefits (mean difference = 0.966, SE = 0.276, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.419, 1.513]), indicating a shift towards more pragmatic and stability-oriented considerations as careers progress. No statistically significant differences were found for Perceived Readiness, Social Networks, or Career-related motivations (all $p > .05$), suggesting that these factors are similarly

salient for SIEs across different career stages. Overall, these pairwise comparisons corroborate the previous results.

Hypothesis 2: ***"For SIEs in the early career stage, success is perceived subjectively and exploratorily, whereas for SIEs in the intermediate career stage, success is perceived strategically and objectively"***

To test the second hypothesis, another Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted with Career Stage (early vs. intermediate) as the independent variable and four dimensions of perceived success as dependent variables: Satisfaction and Authenticity, Growth and Development, Recognition, and Personal Life.

Before interpreting the multivariate results, the main assumptions of MANOVA were assessed. The Box's M test indicated that the assumption of equality of covariance matrices was met (Box's M = 17.348, p = .089) as the test was non-significant. This suggests that the covariance matrices of the dependent variables did not differ significantly between career stage groups. Regarding the assumption of homogeneity of variances, Levene's test showed that it was satisfied for most dependent variables. Specifically, non-significant Levene statistics were observed for Satisfaction and Authenticity, Growth and Development, and Personal Life (all $p > .05$). However, the assumption was violated for Recognition ($p < .05$), which should be considered when interpreting the corresponding univariate results.

The multivariate tests revealed no statistically significant overall effect of Career Stage on the combined set of perceived success variables. In particular, Pillai's Trace was not significant ($V = .068, F(4, 123) = 2.239, p = .069$) with a small multivariate effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .068$). Similar non-significant results were observed for Wilks' Lambda, Hotelling's Trace, and Roy's Largest Root, indicating convergence across multivariate criteria. Taken together, these results suggest that, at the multivariate level, career stage does not significantly differentiate how SIEs perceive success across the four dimensions considered.

	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Parcial eta squared
Career Stage	F Satisfaction and Authenticity	3,288	1	3,288	6,547	**,012**	,049
	F Growth and Development	2,277	1	2,277	5,624	**,019**	,043
	F Recognition	1,328	1	1,328	3,691	**,057**	,028
	F Personal Life	1,513	1	1,513	2,455	**,120**	,019

Figure 4 *– Test of Between-Subjects Effects for Perception of Success*

Despite the absence of a statistically significant multivariate effect, univariate analyses were conducted to explore potential differences between career stages across individual dimensions of perceived success. The results of the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects indicated that career stage had a statistically significant effect on Satisfaction and Authenticity ($F(1, 126) = 6.547$, $p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .049$) as well as on Growth and Development ($F(1, 126) = 5.624$, $p = .019$, partial $\eta^2 = .043$). In both cases, the effect sizes were small, suggesting modest yet meaningful differences between early and intermediate career SIEs. By contrast, no statistically significant differences were observed for Recognition ($p = .057$) or Personal Life ($p = .120$).

To further clarify the direction of these effects, pairwise comparisons based on estimated marginal means were examined. These analyses revealed that early-career SIEs reported significantly higher levels of Satisfaction and Authenticity than their intermediate-career counterparts (mean difference = −0.383, $p = .012$, 95% CI [−0.679, −0.087]). A similar pattern emerged for Growth and Development, with early-career SIEs again exhibiting significantly higher scores compared to intermediate-career SIEs (mean difference = −0.319, $p = .019$, 95% CI [−0.584, −0.053]). No significant pairwise differences were found for Recognition or Personal Life, thereby reinforcing the univariate findings.

Overall, the results provide partial support for Hypothesis 2. While the multivariate effect of career stage on perceived success was not statistically significant, univariate analyses indicate that early-career SIEs place greater emphasis on subjective and developmental dimensions of success, namely Satisfaction and Authenticity and Growth and Development. In contrast, there is no empirical evidence that intermediate-career SIEs perceive success in a more strategic or objective manner, as no significant

differences were observed for Recognition or Personal Life. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not fully confirmed.

Hypothesis 3: "*Early-career SIEs are more likely to remain in the host country than SIEs in the intermediate stage of their careers",*

Lastly, to the third hypothesis of this study, a series of binary logistic regression analyses was conducted. The dependent variable was intention to stay in the host country (0 = return home country; 1 = stay host country), and career stage (early vs. intermediate) was entered as the main independent variable.

The baseline model included career stage as the sole independent variable. The Omnibus Test of Model Coefficients indicated that the model was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 0.143$, $p = .705$) suggesting that career stage does not significantly improve the prediction of intention to stay in the host country.

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1	Career Stage(1)	**-,251**	**,677**	**,138**	**1**	**,710**	**,778**	**,206**	**2,931**
	Constant	-1,946	,296	43,072	1	<,001	,143		

a. Variable(s) entered at Step 1: Career Stage..

Figure 5 *– Variables in Equation*

Consistently, the Variables in the Equation table showed that career stage was not a significant predictor of intention to stay. The coefficient for career stage was negative but non-significant (B = −0.251, SE = 0.677, Wald = 0.138, $p = .710$). The odds ratio (Exp(B) = 0.778, 95% CI [0.206, 2.931]) indicates that intermediate-career SIEs were not significantly less or more likely to remain in the host country compared to early-career SIEs. Model fit indices further supported these findings, with very low explanatory power (Cox & Snell $R^2 = .001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = .002$).

To assess the robustness of the results, a series of binary logistic regression models including control variables were estimated. The control variables tested were marital

status, presence of children, level of education, and years in the host country, entered jointly with career stage. Across all extended models, the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients remained non-significant, indicating that the inclusion of control variables did not significantly improve model fit. For instance, when career stage and level of education were entered simultaneously, the omnibus test was non-significant ($\chi^2(2) = 0.728$, $p = .695$). Regarding marital status, the results indicate no significant effect on the intention to stay in the host country (B = 0.109, SE = 0.894, Wald = 0.015, $p = .903$). The odds ratio (Exp(B) = 1.115, 95% CI [0.193, 6.437]) suggests no meaningful difference between single SIEs and those who are married or in a civil partnership. Similarly, having children was not a significant predictor of intention to stay (B = −0.977, SE = 1.191, Wald = 0.674, $p = .412$), with an odds ratio below 1 (Exp(B) = 0.376, 95% CI [0.036, 3.883]), indicating a non-significant tendency toward lower likelihood of staying among SIEs with children. The effect of level of education was also non-significant (B = 0.338, SE = 0.457, Wald = 0.549, $p = .459$), with an odds ratio of Exp(B) = 1.403 (95% CI [0.573, 3.433]), suggesting that higher educational attainment does not significantly increase the likelihood of remaining in the host country. Finally, years in the host country, entered as a categorical variable, did not significantly predict intention to stay either. The overall effect of this variable was non-significant (Wald = 6.926, $p = .645$), and none of the individual categories reached statistical significance, with several coefficients displaying large standard errors and wide confidence intervals, indicative of limited explanatory power.

Importantly, career stage remained non-significant across all models, regardless of the control variables included (e.g., B = −0.379, $p = .587$; B = 0.089, $p = .907$; B = −1.007, $p = .284$), confirming the stability of the initial findings. Pseudo R^2 values across the models remained low (Nagelkerke R^2 ranging from approximately .011 to .172), reinforcing the conclusion that neither career stage nor the selected control variables substantially explain SIEs' intention to remain in the host country.

Overall, the results do not support Hypothesis 3. Career stage does not significantly predict SIEs' intention to remain in the host country, and this finding remains stable even after controlling for relevant demographic, family-related, and expatriation-related variables. These results suggest that intention to stay is not primarily driven by career stage, but may instead be influenced by other affective, contextual, or structural factors beyond those included in the present models.

Chapter 5

Discussion

By focusing on early and intermediate career SIEs, this research aimed to contribute to the literature by introducing a more nuanced understanding of intra-group heterogeneity among SIEs, an aspect frequently highlighted but still insufficiently explored in empirical research (Doherty, 2013; Andresen et al., 2020).

Overall, the findings partially support the proposed hypotheses and reveal a complex pattern in which career stage plays a differentiated role across motivational and perceptual success dimensions, but does not emerge as a direct predictor of intention to stay in the host country. These results suggest that expatriation decisions and outcomes among SIEs are shaped by a selective reconfiguration of priorities over the career life course, rather than by linear or deterministic career-stage effects.

The first hypothesis proposed that early-career SIEs would be primarily motivated by personal and self-development factors, whereas intermediate-career SIEs would be more driven by strategic career advancement objectives. The results provide partial support for this hypothesis. The analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant multivariate effect of career stage on the overall motivational profile, with a large effect size (partial $\eta^2 = .253$). However, follow-up univariate analyses showed that this effect was driven specifically by Foreign Experience and Family and Benefits. Early career SIEs reported significantly higher motivation related to Foreign Experience, confirming prior research that highlights exploration, adventure, international exposure, and personal development as central drivers at the beginning of the career trajectory (Inkson et al., 1997; Thorn, 2009; Dries et al., 2008). This finding aligns closely with boundaryless career perspectives, which emphasize psychological mobility, experimentation, and the accumulation of career capital through diverse experiences early in professional life (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Conversely, intermediate-career SIEs attributed greater importance to Family and Benefits motivations, reflecting a shift towards stability, relational embeddedness, and long-term life planning. This result is consistent with life-span career development theory (Super, 1980) and with empirical studies showing that as careers progress, individuals place increasing emphasis on family

considerations, economic security, and work–life integration (Vance & McNulty, 2014; De Vos et al., 2020).

Interestingly, motivations related to Career and Perceived Readiness did not differ significantly between career stages. This suggests that professional ambition and confidence in one's ability to work abroad are not exclusive to more advanced career stages, but rather constitute a shared motivational baseline among SIEs. This finding supports the view that SIEs, regardless of career stage, are a self-selected group characterized by high proactivity, self-efficacy, and career agency (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Selmer et al., 2017). Taken together, these results indicate that career stage does not operate as a simple dichotomy between "personal" versus "strategic" motivations. Instead, it influences specific domains of motivation, reflecting a gradual reweighting of priorities rather than a complete motivational shift.

The second hypothesis predicted that early-career SIEs would perceive success in more subjective and exploratory terms, whereas intermediate-career SIEs would adopt more strategic and objective success criteria. At the multivariate level, this hypothesis was not confirmed, as career stage did not produce a statistically significant overall effect on perceived success dimensions. However, univariate analyses revealed meaningful differences for Satisfaction and Authenticity and Growth and Development, with early-career SIEs reporting significantly higher scores on both dimensions. These findings suggest that early-career SIEs experience their expatriation as particularly fulfilling in terms of personal alignment, enthusiasm, and developmental learning, reinforcing the notion that success at this stage is closely tied to self-realization and identity construction (Dries et al., 2008; Richardson & Wong, 2018). In contrast, no significant differences emerged for Recognition or Personal Life, which were expected to reflect more objective or externally validated success criteria. This challenges the assumption that intermediate career SIEs necessarily evaluate success through more instrumental or organizational markers such as recognition or status. One possible interpretation is that intermediate career SIEs may recalibrate their expectations, evaluating success in more individualized and contextualized ways, rather than strictly through traditional career metrics (Spurk et al., 2019). These results resonate with recent literature arguing that subjective career success remains highly salient across career stages, particularly in boundaryless career contexts where traditional organizational ladders are less central (Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). Thus, while early-career SIEs appear to derive stronger subjective satisfaction

from the expatriation experience, success perceptions among intermediate-career SIEs do not shift decisively towards more objective or strategic dimensions.

The third hypothesis posited that early-career SIEs would be more likely to remain in the host country than their intermediate-career counterparts. This hypothesis was not supported. Binary logistic regression analyses consistently showed that career stage was not a significant predictor of intention to stay, both in the baseline model and in models including control variables such as marital status, children, education, and years in the host country. The low explanatory power of these models further indicates that intention to stay is influenced by factors beyond those captured by career stage alone.

This finding contrasts with earlier studies suggesting that early-career expatriates are more inclined to prolonged stays abroad due to higher flexibility and fewer family constraints (Thorn, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, it aligns with more recent research emphasizing the role of affective, contextual, and experiential factors, such as satisfaction, perceived growth, and lifestyle fit, are shaping stay-or-return decisions (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Andresen et al., 2020). Indeed, correlation analyses in this study showed that intention to stay was more strongly associated with motivational and success-related variables, particularly Family and Benefits, Foreign Experience, Satisfaction and Authenticity, and Growth and Development. This suggests that intention to remain abroad is better explained by how expatriates experience and evaluate their current situation than by their career stage per se. From a theoretical perspective, this finding reinforces the view of SIEs as autonomous career actors whose mobility decisions are guided by ongoing sensemaking processes rather than by predefined career scripts (Crowley-Henry, 2007; Doherty, 2013).

Overall, this study contributes to the SIE literature by demonstrating that career stage matters, but in selective and non-linear ways. Career stage clearly differentiates motivational priorities and subjective success experiences, but it does not directly determine long-term mobility intentions. These findings advance existing research by moving beyond binary comparisons between SIEs and AEs, and by highlighting the importance of intra-group differentiation. They also suggest that policies aimed at attracting or retaining young talent, particularly in the Portuguese context, should not assume homogeneous motivations or expectations among expatriates at different career stages. Instead, effective strategies should address experiential opportunities and development pathways for early-career professionals, while simultaneously creating

conditions that support stability, family integration, and long-term life planning for those in more advanced stages of their careers.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

International mobility among young professionals is increasingly marked by fluidity, reversibility, and continuous reassessment. Rather than following linear trajectories of departure, settlement, and permanence, contemporary self-initiated expatriation reflects a dynamic process in which individuals repeatedly evaluate whether their international experience continues to be meaningful, fulfilling, and aligned with their evolving personal and professional priorities (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Doherty, 2013).

Within this context, the findings of this dissertation suggest that career stage, while relevant, does not operate as a deterministic driver of expatriation outcomes. Differences between early and intermediate career Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) emerge selectively, particularly in motivational orientations and subjective experiences of success, but do not translate into predictable patterns of long-term mobility. This challenges traditional life-stage and hierarchical career models, which assume that increasing career maturity naturally leads to greater stability and permanence (Super, 1980; Hall, 2004), and instead points to a more complex and evaluative logic underlying contemporary international careers.

One of the most significant and unexpected finding of this study concerns the nature of intention to stay in the host country. Contrary to initial expectations, career stage did not significantly predict intention to stay, even when demographic, family-related, and expatriation-related variables were taken into account. Instead, intention to stay abroad appears to be shaped primarily by motivational and success-related factors, suggesting that permanence is less a function of structural career positioning and more a reflection of how expatriates experience and evaluate their international trajectory over time. More specifically, the factors that best explained intention to stay in the host country in this study were *Family and Benefits*, *Foreign Experience*, *Growth and Development* and *Satisfaction and Authenticity*. These factors capture both the conditions that make expatriation sustainable and the experiential value that makes it worthwhile.

Family and Benefits reflects whether working abroad provides stability, security, and advantages for family life, thereby enabling the construction of a viable long-term

life project. This establishes the foundational conditions for permanence, as remaining abroad becomes less feasible when quality of life and life-work integration are not ensured (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Vance & McNulty, 2014). At the same time, *Foreign Experience* indicates that intention to stay is also driven by the continued experiential value of expatriation. When working abroad continues to offer challenge, novelty, and opportunities for exploration and enrichment, individuals are more likely to extend their stay, even beyond initial plans (Inkson et al., 1997; Doherty, 2013; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). These motivational drivers are reinforced by subjective perceptions of career success. *Growth and Development* captures whether expatriation contributes to the acquisition of skills and long-term career capital, while *Satisfaction and Authenticity* reflects alignment between career choices, personal values, and overall career satisfaction. Together, these dimensions highlight the central role of learning, authenticity, and subjective fulfillment in contemporary career decision-making (Hall, 2004; Dries et al., 2008; Spurk et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that intention to remain in the host country is best understood as the outcome of a balance between stability-oriented considerations, continued experiential value, and positive subjective evaluations of career success. Rather than being driven by career stage or demographic positioning, permanence abroad appears to depend on whether expatriation simultaneously supports family-related life projects, ongoing challenge and exploration, professional growth, and personal authenticity.

From a practical perspective, these insights have important implications for talent attraction and retention strategies, particularly in the Portuguese context. The findings suggest that policies focused primarily on economic incentives or early-career opportunities are unlikely to be sufficient to encourage long-term retention of internationally mobile talent. While competitive salaries and job availability remain relevant, they do not fully address the experiential and evaluative dimensions that shape mobility decisions. Instead, creating environments that recognize international experience, offer meaningful development opportunities, support work–life integration, and enable long-term personal and family planning may be more effective in influencing both retention and return decisions.

This need becomes especially evident in light of one of the most striking findings of the study: 88% of participants reported an intention or desire to return to their home country. This result reveals a critical paradox in contemporary mobility dynamics.

Despite being abroad, a large majority of SIEs express a willingness to return, suggesting that the challenge may not lie in fostering return intentions, but in understanding why this intention does not translate into actual return behavior. Structural constraints, limited career opportunities, insufficient recognition of international experience, and misalignment between expatriates' expectations and domestic labor market realities may all contribute to this gap (Baruch et al., 2016; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014).

Consequently, for countries such as Portugal, the central challenge may be less about reversing talent outflows and more about creating the conditions that make return both professionally and personally viable. Understanding why individuals who want to return ultimately remain abroad may be key to transforming persistent talent loss into more sustainable forms of talent circulation and long-term national development.

Limitations & Future Research

Despite the contributions of this study to the literature on Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs), some limitations should be acknowledged, as they also point to directions for future research.

First, this study is based on a cross-sectional design, meaning that motivations, perceptions of career success, and intention to stay were measured at a single moment in time. While this approach allows for identifying relationships between variables, it does not capture how these factors may change as the expatriation experience unfolds. Since self-initiated expatriation is a dynamic process, future research would benefit from longitudinal studies that follow individuals over time, making it possible to better understand how intentions to stay or return evolve throughout different phases of the international experience.

Second, career stage was operationalized using age as a proxy, which may not fully reflect the complexity of contemporary career paths. Careers are increasingly non-linear, and individuals of similar age may differ substantially in terms of professional experience, career transitions, or personal career perceptions. Future studies could therefore use broader measures of career stage, such as years of work experience, number of career changes, or individuals' own perceptions of their career stage, to better capture differences among SIEs.

Third, the sample is largely composed of Portuguese early-career expatriates. While this aligns with the objectives of the dissertation, it limits the extent to which the findings can be generalized to expatriates from other countries or cultural backgrounds. Because motivations, perceptions of success, and mobility decisions are influenced by national, cultural, and labor market contexts, future research could adopt cross-national or comparative approaches to examine whether similar patterns emerge in different settings.

In addition, intention to stay was measured using a self-reported scale, which reflects what individuals say they intend to do rather than what they ultimately do. Although intentions are strong predictors of behavior, they may change over time due to personal circumstances or external factors. Future research could therefore complement self-reported data with follow-up studies or behavioral indicators, allowing for a clearer link between intentions and actual mobility outcomes.

Finally, although this study focused primarily on career stage, the findings highlight the importance of experiential and affective factors, such as satisfaction, authenticity, and perceived growth, in shaping decisions to remain abroad. Future research could explore these processes in greater depth using qualitative methods, such as interviews, to better understand how expatriates make sense of their experiences. Moreover, incorporating organizational and contextual factors, such as employer support, host-country integration policies, or recognition of international experience in the home country, could provide a more complete picture of what influences SIEs' mobility decisions.

Overall, while this dissertation provides valuable insights into the role of career stage in self-initiated expatriation, addressing these limitations in future research would help deepen the understanding of how international career mobility is experienced and negotiated over time.

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Attachments

Attachment A – Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis of Motivations for Expatriation

Items	Foreign Experience	Family Benefits	Perceived Readiness	Personal Relations	Social Networks	Career
Desire for adventure	**,805**	-,145	,028	,001	,180	,098
Desire to live in host city/location	**,759**	,070	,071	-,184	-,192	,117
To see the world	**,739**	-,116	-,024	,136	,135	,236
The opportunity to improve your language skills	**,659**	-,006	,073	,283	,311	-,085
Better opportunities for your family	-,116	**,805**	-,055	-,124	-,061	-,029
Superior career opportunities in the host country	,046	**,754**	-,003	,008	,071	,074
Ability to support your family better abroad	-,182	**,735**	,055	,328	-,046	,032
Having the relevant job skills	,050	,018	**,840**	,094	,007	,002
Confidence in your ability to work/live abroad	,149	,001	**,798**	,015	-,109	,033
Pre.departure preparation	-,119	,082	**,690**	,001	,304	,025
To be with/near loves person(s)	-,273	,238	-,020	**,773**	,094	-,017
Expected length of stay	,327	-,211	,167	**,642**	,127	-,136

Balance between work and social life	,309	,108	,054	**,552**	-,220	,256
Maintaining work networks with the home country	,132	-,034	,033	,065	**,827**	,086
Maintaining personal networks	,094	-,007	,043	-,022	**,710**	,146
Impact on my career	,046	,145	,098	-,131	,201	**,807**
Potential for skills development	,240	-,022	-,025	,139	,075	**,804**
% of explained Variance	**18,52%**	**14,16%**	**9,75%**	**8,38%**	**8,14%**	**5,60%**
Cronbach´s Alpha coefficients	**,759**	**,688**	**,673**	**,457**	**,533**	**,624**

N=132, N= 133, N=133, N=133, N=133, N=134, respectively. Keiser-Meyer-Olkin index = 0,685. The total variance is explained by 6 factors in 64,54%: *Personal Motivations* explains 18.52%, *Family Support* explains 14.16%, *Skills Development and Preparation* explains 9.75%, *Work–Family Balance* explains 8.38%, *Social Aspects* explain 8.14%, and *Impact on Career* explains 5.59% of the variance. The factor loading were obtained by Varimax rotation, excluding 15 items of original scale: *Poor employment situation at home; Personal financial impact; Reputation of host country being open to foreigners; Successful previous experiences in a foreign environment; Standard of living in host country; Desire to live in the host country; Professional challenge of working abroad; Close ties to your country of origin with host country; Prestige of working in the host country; Possibility of gaining permanent residency in host country; The job you were offered; To distance yourself form a problem; Opportunities to network in the host country; Host Culture; and Willingness of family/partner to move.*

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis of Perception of Success

Itens	Satisfaction & Authenticity	Growth & Development	Recognition	Personal Life
I found my career interesting	**,882**	,214	,014	-,144
I´m enthusiastic about my career	**,872**	,124	,058	-,031
I´m satisfied with my career	**,858**	,180	,223	,028
I have a job that meets my personal needs and preferences	**,686**	,053	,378	,139
I have chosen my own career path	**,660**	,119	,057	,292
I am in charge of my own career	**,652**	,236	,144	,315
I have improved by developing my skills	,229	**,862**	,120	-,017
I stayed current with the changes in my field	,136	**,737**	,354	,063
I expanded my skill set to perform better	,250	**,704**	,126	,320
Being recognized for my contribution	,132	,150	**,847**	-,012
Organization recognition	,180	,149	**,809**	,103
Supervisors recognition	,104	,180	**,710**	,203
I am able to spend time with my friends and family	,022	-,086	,135	**,844**
I am satisfied with my life outside work	,088	,221	,056	**,772**
I am a good employee with maintaining quality non-work relationships	,163	,491	,125	**,575**
% of explained Variance	**38,03%**	**13,63%**	**9,93%**	**8,21%**
Cronbach´s Alpha coeficientes	**,886**	**,799**	**,764**	**,692**

N=126, N= 128, N=128, N=127 respectively. Keiser-Meyer-Olkin index = 0,819. The total variance is explained by 4 factors in 69,80%: *Satisfaction & Authenticity* explains 38,03%, *Growth & Development* explains 13,63%, *Growth & Development* explains 9,93%, *Personal Life* explains 8,21% of the variance. The factor loading were obtained by Varimax rotation, excluding 9 items of original scale*: My work has been meaningful; My work made a difference; Organization I worked for considered my opinion regarding important issue; My work has contributed to society; Others have taken my advice for important decisions; Met the highest standards of quality in my work; Been known for the high quality of my work; I impacted my organization; Being proud of the quality of my work.*

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis of Intention to Stay

Items	**Intention of Stay**
I will stay in the host country	**,882**
Return Home Country (inv.)	**,882**
% of explained Variance	**77,85%**
Cronbach´s Alpha coefficients	**,711**

N= 127. Keiser-Meyer-Olkin index = 0,500. The total variance is explained by this model is 77,85%.

Attachment B- Questionnaire

Study about the motivations that lead Self-Initiated Expatriates, particularly at a young age, to make the decision to leave their home country

This study is part of a research project being conducted at Iscte– University Institute of Lisbon. The purpose of the study is to investigate the motivations that lead Self-Initiated Expatriates, particularly at a young age, to make the decision to leave their home country. Your participation in the study, which is highly valued as it will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this scientific field, consists of completing an online questionnaire with an estimated duration of about 10 minutes.

No significant risks are expected to be associated with participation in the study. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary: you are free to decide whether or not to take part. If you choose to participate, you may interrupt your participation at any time without providing any justification. In addition to being voluntary, participation is also anonymous and confidential. The data collected will be used solely for statistical analysis, and no individual response will be analyzed or reported separately. At no point in the study will you be asked to provide identifying information.

The study is conducted by Beatriz Polido, who may be contacted if you require further clarification or wish to share any feedback (bcfpo@iscte-iul.pt), under the supervision of Professor Henrique Duarte.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the conditions and information provided:

[ ] Yes, I agree to participate [ ] No, I do not agree to participate

Eligibility Criteria

The following questions are designed to classify participants according to their expatriation type and career stage. Specifically, we ask whether you are currently working abroad and whether your expatriation was self-initiated (you independently decided to work abroad) or company-assigned (you were sent abroad by your employer), since research distinguishes between Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) and Assigned Expatriates (AEs). In addition, we ask for your age, which will be used only for statistical purposes, as this study focuses on understanding the motivations of expatriates in different career stages, particularly those in early and middle career phases.

Q1. Are you currently working abroad? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Q2. Who made the decision of working abroad?
[ ] I decided myself [ ] I was assigned by my company

Q3. Please indicate your age. This will be used only for statistical purposes. [ ]

Motives for expatriation & Success & Intention of staying

The following questions focus on your previous international experience and the time you have been living in the host country. This information is important to understand how past experiences and length of stay may influence adaptation and career development abroad

Q4. Have you ever lived abroad before your current expatriation?
[ ] Yes I had [ ] No I haven´t

Q5. If yes: For how long did you lived in the host country?
[ ] Less than 1 year [ ] 1-3 years [ ] 3-5 years [ ] More than 5 years

Q6. Right now, how long have you been living in the host country? (in years) [ ]

This section explores the different motivations that may have influenced your decision to work abroad, such as career development, professional challenges, personal growth, financial considerations, and lifestyle aspirations.

Q7. Please indicate the extent to which you personally agree or disagree with each statement (where 1 = "strongly disagree" ; 7 = "strongly agree"). There are no right or wrong answers, the only interest is in your personal perspective.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe it will have a great impact on my career							
I believe it will give me the opportunity to develop my skills							
I want to take on a professional challenge by working abroad							
I want to see more of the world							
I feel confident in my ability to work and live abroad							
I thought that working abroad was a great opportunity in my career							
I believe I have the necessary job skills for this opportunity abroad							
I want to go abroad because of my desire for adventure							
I want to live in the host country							
I desire a better personal financial independence							
I am motivated by the standard of living in the host country							
I desire to live abroad							
I want to improve my language skills abroad							
I expect to have a good balance between work and social life abroad							

I was influenced by the expected length of my stay abroad.							
I want to experience the host country's culture							
I had a successful previous foreign experience							
My partner/member of my family is going to move with me							
I believe I will maintain my personal networks while abroad							
I believe I will maintain my work networks with my home country while abroad							
The host country offers better career opportunities							
The host country has a reputation of being open to foreigners							
I believe working in the host country gives me prestige							
I want to take advantage of networking opportunities in the host country							
I felt I had good preparation before going abroad							
I value the close ties between my home country and the host country							
The host country has a better reputation in my area of work							
I believe the host country offers better opportunities for my family							
Employment in my home country doesn´t offer opportunities for me							
I have a better ability to support my family abroad							
I want to be near my loved ones							

I want to move abroad to distance myself from problems at home							
I am motivated by the possibility of gaining permanent residency in the host country							

This section addresses perceptions of career success, including recognition from supervisors and organizations, the quality and impact of your work, and the sense of meaning and accomplishment in your professional contributions.

Q8. The stem for each item is “Considering my career as a whole…” Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (where 1 = "strongly disagree" ; 5 = "strongly agree"). There are no right or wrong answers, the only interest is in your personal perspective.

	1	2	3	4	5
…my supervisors have told me I do a good job.					
…the organization I worked for have recognized me as a good performer.					
…I have been recognized for my contributions.					
…I am proud of the quality of the work I have produced.					
…I have met the highest standards of quality in my work.					
…I have been known for the high quality of my work.					
…I think my work has been meaningful.					
…I believe my work has made a difference.					
…the work I have done has contributed to society.					

… decisions that I have made have impacted my organization.					
…the organizations I have worked for have considered my opinion regarding important issues.					
…others have taken my advice into account when making important decisions.					
…I have been able to pursue work that meets my personal needs and preferences.					
…I have felt as though I am in charge of my own career					
…I have chosen my own career path.					
…I have been able to spend the amount of time I want with my friends and family.					
…I have been able to have a satisfying life outside of work.					
…I have been able to be a good employee while maintaining quality non-work relationships.					
…I have expanded my skill sets to perform better.					
…I have stayed current with changes in my field.					
…I have continuously improved by developing my skill set.					
…my career is personally satisfying.					
…I am enthusiastic about my career.					
…I have found my career quite interesting.					

This section explores your future intentions regarding staying in the host country or returning to your home country, reflecting personal considerations about long-term residence and career plans.

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (where 1 = "strongly disagree" ; 5 = "strongly agree"). There are no right or wrong answers, the only interest is in your personal perspective.

	1	2	3	4	5
In the near future, I will continue to live and work in this country					
Recently, I have been seriously considering the option of returning to my home country.					

Sociodemographic Profile

This section collects basic sociodemographic information such as gender, age, and other background characteristics. These details are used only for statistical purposes, helping us to better understand the diversity of participants and to analyze the results across different groups.

Q10. Please indicate your gender:

[ ] Female [ ] Male [ ] Non-binary/Other [ ] Prefer not to answer

Q11. What´s your nationality? [ ]

Q12. What's the highest level of education you have completed?

[ ] High school or below

[ ] Bachelor´s Degree

[ ] Master´s Degree

[ ] Doctorate (PhD or equivalent

[ ] Other

Q13. What´s your marital status?

[ ] Single
[ ] Married/Civil Partnership
[ ] Divorced/Separated
[ ] Widowed
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Q14. Do you have children?
[ ] No
[ ] Yes

Q14.1. If yes: How old is/are your child(ren)?
[ ] 0 -12 years old
[ ] 12 years old or older

Q15. Please indicate your proficiency level in the following languages (scale: 1 = very low; 5 = very high): Portuguese [ ] English [ ] French [ ] Other (please specify) [ ]

This section asks about your company's size and your time in the organization and current position. This information helps us contextualize your professional situation in relation to your expatriation experience.

Q16. What is the size of the company you work for?
[ ] Microenterprise (0–10 employees)
[ ] Small enterprise (10–50 employees)
[ ] Medium enterprise (51–250 employees)
[ ] Large enterprise (>250 employees)

Q17. How long have you been in your current position (in years)? [ ]

Q18. How long have you been working for this company (in years)? [ ]

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded!