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Haute école de gestion  
Genève

# Relocation services in Swiss universities: Best practices and recommendations



**Bachelor Project submitted for the obtention of the  
Bachelor of Science HES in International Business Management**

by

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## Declaration

This Bachelor Project is submitted as part of the final examination requirements of the Haute école de gestion de Genève, for the Bachelor of Science HES-SO in International Business Management.

The student accepts the terms of the confidentiality agreement if one has been signed. The use of any conclusions or recommendations made in the Bachelor Project, with no prejudice to their value, engages neither the responsibility of the author, nor the adviser to the Bachelor Project, nor the jury members nor the HEG.

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# Executive Summary

Global mobility initiatives have encouraged companies to increasingly turn to international labour markets to source their new talents. Mobility is critical as the knowledge and skills required in some industries are so specific and advanced that the local pool of potential candidates for an opening is way too limited to ensure that companies get the best profiles. This phenomenon also had a significant impact on the mobility of researchers in the academic sector. With the increasing number of agreements between universities, researchers have the possibility to pursue an international career and continue their research in another university.

Relocating abroad is not necessarily a painless experience and it brings its own set of challenges that researchers have to manage and be aware of. Some researchers will come with their families and their relocation will bring even more social, psychological and logistical challenges. These cases are typically characterised by high risk of failure and potentially substantial direct and indirect costs.

Swiss and international universities have been increasingly developing structures dedicated to facilitating the relocation of incoming employees and researchers. In this paper we compare the various relocation services offered by Swiss universities' "Welcome Centers" and draw conclusions on the best practices in terms of relocation of international researchers. While this study focuses on Swiss universities and the creation or development of mobility teams within their organization, our findings will mostly be also applicable to private companies seeking to source talents on the international labour markets. Indeed employees in both sectors will face the same psychological, social and cultural challenges that need to be addressed by global mobility teams. The main difference between academic and private sector will lie in the way cases are managed. While both sectors realize the importance of a successful relocation, the private sector tends to rely more heavily on relocation agencies and other external partners as a way to increase the quality of the service offered.

This study covers and analyzes the various challenges encountered throughout the relocation process. We were able to identify the most critical ones on which Welcome Centers should focus their efforts. Among these are housing, childcare, professional integration of the partner and immigration.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Presentation of the subject

After the end of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations, several major initiatives were implemented to promote freedom of movement across countries and continents. Europeans were among the first to enforce reforms in this area with notably the Treaty of Paris and the Treaty of Rome in 1951 and 1957 respectively. As of today, the Directive 2004/38/EC is effective and allows workers in the European Economic Area to move, live and work freely within member states.

As Switzerland is not part of the European Union, bilateral agreements were signed in 1999 and came into force in 2002. These agreements were subsequently amended in 2004 and 2009 to adapt to the extension of the European Union.

In this evolving legal environment companies increasingly turn to international labour markets to source their human capital. The knowledge and skills required in some industries are so specific and advanced that the local pool of potential candidates for an opening is way too limited to ensure that companies get the best profiles. For these industries the potential gains from worldwide sourcing of human capital go far beyond the added value of increased diversity, as it allows them to maintain the level of innovation necessary to protect their competitive advantage in ever evolving markets.

It should come as no surprise that this phenomenon also had a significant impact on the mobility of researchers in the academic sector. With the increasing number of agreements between universities, researchers have the possibility to pursue an international career and continue their research in another university. Agreements such as Swiss-European Mobility (ex-Erasmus), Horizon 2020, Marie Curie Scholarships, to name only a few, offer the opportunity to young students and researchers to continue their studies and research abroad and benefit from the experience and point of view of other institutions.

In 2008, « Euraxess » program was launched in Switzerland to facilitate the mobility of researchers. Euraxess is an initiative from the European Commission to promote mobility in research, and requests, among other things, that all European universities should have a dedicated « Service Centres » to accompany researchers during the relocation process.

As global mobility became a major subject of discussion for multinational companies, the relocation business started thriving globally. Relocation agencies started their activities

to facilitate the process of moving from an assignment to another, from one country to the other.

The common belief is that moving in a foreign country is a great experience. It probably is. However, moving abroad also brings its own set of challenges that researchers have to manage and be aware of. Institutions need to keep in mind that some researchers will come with their families and that their relocation will bring even more challenges. These cases are typically characterised by high risk of failure and potentially substantial direct and indirect costs.

The voting of the 9th of February 2014 on mass immigration is a threat for researchers of Swiss universities, as they might not be authorized to participate to European research programs anymore. It also means that these researchers might move to another European university to obtain European funding.

Global workers tend to view Switzerland as an «Eldorado» and are often overconfident about the salary offered by the company or institution. Once arrived in Geneva, they realize that life in Switzerland is not as they thought it would be. Rents are expensive, the housing market is saturated, there is a lack of daycare for children that are too young to go to public school, and disposable income is much more limited than expected.

In this context, Swiss universities have been increasingly developing structures dedicated to facilitating the relocation of incoming employees and researchers. In this paper we will compare the various relocation services offered by Swiss universities' "Welcome Centers" and draw conclusions on the best practices in terms of relocation of international researchers. While our findings will help universities globally in the creation or development of mobility teams within their organization they will also be applicable to some extent to private companies seeking to source talents on the international labour markets.

From the perspective of the employee, the need for global mobility, whether in the public or in the private sector, is a function of the number of opportunities offered on the local labour market. This creates divergent dynamics between academia and the private sector as the former generally has a very limited number of potential employers in a given country. For instance, Switzerland has ten universities and two polytechnic institutes.

## 1.2 Litterature review

Existing research concludes that the success of relocation is strongly related to the partner's experience before and after the move. Lilian T. Eby from the University of Georgia and Tammy D. Allen from the University of South Florida analysed the different types of families and their perceptions of relocation services in their paper *Perceptions of Relocation Services in Relocation Decision Making: An Exploratory Field Study* (Eby and Allen, 1998). The partner has also been studied in an article named *The psychological impact of expatriate relocation on partners* (Cieri, H., Dowling, P. and F. Taylor, K. (1991)), in which we learn about the psychological impact of relocation on partners.

We also need to understand what multinationals offer to expatriates when they expatriate a manager. *Training Managers for International Assignments* (Sullivan and Tu, 1993) is about the costs of a relocation failure. This article helps us understand the potential damages for a company.

As the primary objective of this paper is to compare the common practices of relocation services in various universities, different documents concerning relocation in Switzerland and information about barriers and how to overcome them have been valuable sources, such as *The Mapping of Euraxess Service Centres* (CRUS, 2010) or the *Responsible Global Mobility* (Global Mobility Survey, 2015).

## 1.3 Challenges and problematic

Switzerland enjoys a good reputation from the outside: chocolate, mountains, banks and watches are the main associations foreigners make when talking about Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2014). But relocating in Switzerland or in any other country brings many challenges for the employee and his or her family, regardless of the sector.

According to the General Secretariat of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, the foreign media coverage proved that even after the initiative against mass immigration, which passed on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2014 (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2014), the image of Switzerland remains positive and stable. In reality, relocation agencies and human resources had the impression that expatriates did not feel welcome anymore and they were afraid not to be able to integrate in the region. According to relocation consultants, newcomers personally felt attacked and candidates began hesitating about relocating to Switzerland.

International employees will face many difficulties regarding logistics, but psychological and cultural aspects should not be underestimated. Indeed, families need to be prepared to move to another country and make sure to match expectations with reality. Leaving family, friends, colleagues, a job, a house and landing in a completely different environment can bring positive and negative impacts on a family's dynamics.

The person making the family move abroad will have to deal with the issues related to the relocation, and mostly, with his or her new position in the company or institution. In addition to his or her own stress for the move and for the new job, he will have to cope with the fact that he made his family move too, and that they will meet difficulties during and after the entire process.

In order to help the family settling in, human resources, mobility coordinators, relocation agencies or Welcome Centers will offer services to facilitate the logistical part of relocation, in some cases they will also provide support for the partner. Assistance for relocation does not only add value for the relocating family, it also insures that the new employee will be ready to work as soon as possible and go through the on-boarding process smoothly.

Relocation services are also an efficient way to attract candidates, as it proves that the company or institution is willing to provide support for the move. A good integration of the family will insure that the employee and family will stay for the entire length of the contract and eventually after. A failed integration can destroy a family, which will also have negative impacts on the employee's performance. In the case the family decides to move back to where it comes from, the company will have to start over the recruitment process, which is a waste of time and money, in addition to the amounts spent for the relocation and the first months of salary of the leaving employee.

Over the last decade, this issue has moved up on the agenda of Swiss universities, which started offering services for relocation. The largest universities were the first ones to realize the importance of such issues and to start offering academic employees a way to start efficiently in their new environment.

## **1.4 Methodology**

As stated above, this paper will compare the processes in place to help researchers relocate in various Swiss and international universities. Meetings with relocation agencies have proven helpful to compile information about the services offered to expatriates from multinationals located in Geneva but also to get a good overview of

the market of the challenges that are common to all relocation processes and those specific to a relocation to Switzerland.

Discussions with “swissuniversities” allowed to understand the academic environment and to collect information about welcome services in Swiss universities. “swissuniversities”, founded in 2012, is the new organization incorporating the rectors’ conferences that existed at the time (CRUS, KFH and COHEP<sup>1</sup>), to promote a common voice on issues related to higher education and to strengthen collaboration between Swiss education institutions.

The International Relations Office of the University of Geneva also plays an important role in the mobility of students and academic staff, by negotiating international agreements for exchanges. The International Relations Office also welcomes visiting scholars coming with a scholarship from their university to integrate the University of Geneva for a duration of six months to one or two years.

Survey of the clients of the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva have also been useful to measure the level of satisfaction of researchers using this service, but also to understand what can be improved to ensure an optimal integration.

While the main axis of this study is the comparison between the University of Geneva and other universities, it also aims at analysing what multinational companies put in place to manage the relocation of employees. As mentioned earlier, some aspects are very similar for both sectors, but academia and the private sector have very different dynamics and incentives when it comes to the sourcing of new talents.

This study is mainly based on field research consisting of various meetings, videoconferences, calls and e-mails exchanged with people directly or indirectly involved in the relocation process. While academic research papers have provided a solid conceptual background to this paper, they only play a secondary role.

As an employee at the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva, I had direct access to information, data and contact network. The Welcome Center has expressed its interest in the findings of the present study and is considering using it to elaborate a set of best practices.

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<sup>1</sup> CRUS: Conférence des Recteurs des Universités Suisses; KFH: Conférence suisse des recteurs des hautes écoles spécialisées; COHEP: Conférence suisse des rectrices et recteurs des hautes écoles pédagogiques

## 1.5 Theoretical concepts

### 1.5.1 Services

Welcome Centers offer similar services to their incoming employees. These services can cover topics listed below, which will be covered in the « Relocation » part:

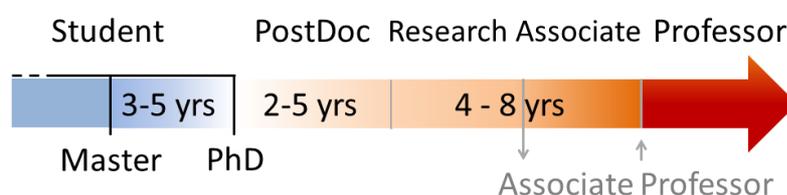
- Visa and working permit
- Housing
- Moving
- Insurances
- Childcare
- Schooling
- Bank account opening
- Professional integration of partners

Welcome Centers do not necessarily cover all the topics listed above. We will see in the « Relocation » section that the level of service can range from basic information to tailored assistance and case management. The « Relocation » section also covers the development of relocation in Switzerland and the added value of such services.

### 1.5.2 Targeted public

To understand the different missions of relocation services providers, it is important to introduce the target groups the services are addressed to.

**Figure 1 – The academic career**



Source: Unifr.ch. (2016). *PhD portal [EN]* » University of Fribourg

Within a university :

- Visiting staff : scholars – invited researchers – visiting professors

Universities' faculties and departments can invite researchers of any levels to follow their research projects for short periods (six months to two years). Visitors can come with scholarships from their current university or scholarships of the Swiss National Science Foundation among other options.

- PhD students :

PhD students (or candidates) own a work contract for a length of three to five years to study on an individual research project. The prerequisite to apply for a PhD program is to hold a Masters degree. PhD students have a status between employee and student, which will have impacts on their relocation when going to another university for an exchange program.

- Intermediary academic functions – scientific colators :

After completion of a PhD project, PhD holders can continue their career in academia by working in a university as a lecturer, a research and teaching fellow or a postdoctoral researcher. To simplify the reading of this paper we will use the term « postdoctorant » for these intermeditate functions.

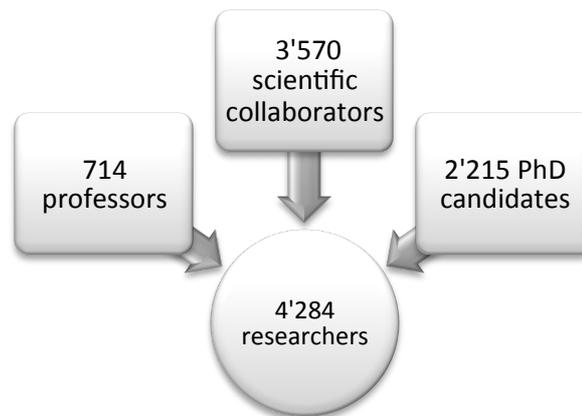
- Professors

After completing a certain number of research programs and a level of seniority, researchers can apply to professorial positions such as assistant professor, associate professor and full professor.

- Administrative staff

Universities also recruit administrative employees coming from another country or another canton. Welcome services will be offered to some of the administrative staff, or to all of them to insure an optimal integration.

**Figure 2 – University of Geneva**



Source : Unige.ch. (2016). *La recherche à l'UNIGE c'est :*

Figure 2 represents the current number of employees of the University of Geneva, by functions. This number includes local and foreign employees.

In the private sector, there is also a distinction between groups of international employees:

- Expatriates: sent to a foreign country for a specific assignment for a fixed period of time (3-5 years), with a contract and an expatriate status.
- Local contracts: nowadays, the expatriate status appears to be less often used, as it is replaced by local contracts for long-term positions with local residence/work permit.

UN staff and diplomatic missions' staff are also concerned by relocation matters, but with a status close to the one of expatriates that we can observe in multinational companies.

The relocation process of these different targeted groups will have repercussions on the individual case management. Apartments, health insurance, daycare, social integration, and professional integration of the partner will be tackled differently, using different networks and service providers. For example, researchers staying for a short duration will contract a specific insurance instead of the Swiss mandatory one.

## 2. Relocation

### 2.1 Challenges

Since the beginning of the nineties, Geneva has seen the rise of so called relocation agencies, which, at that time, could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Indeed, with the establishment of the World Trade Organization and the arrival of many multinational companies settling in Geneva one after the other, entrepreneurs saw the opportunity to provide support to newcomers during the moving and settling processes. Human resources became more involved in the private dimension of the relocation process and wanted to support families through the relocation by offering them local expertise. The services offered by relocation agencies mainly include, but are not limited to, housing search, assistance for the moving and school enrolment. These agencies developed their offer to meet the expectations of multinational companies, which needed their employees to be ready to work as soon as possible after the relocation process and to make sure the relocation was successful. Today, full relocation packages have become a norm when it comes to expatriation in the private sector for executives. While employees and their families are taking various factors into consideration before making a final decision, it is commonly agreed that relocation packages play a crucial role in sweetening the deal.

Attracting and retaining high profiles is an important mission for human resources. This is equally true for the private sector as it is for universities. Companies have become more and more aware that a good integration is a key factor, hence their increasing involvement in the relocation processes, because a failed relocation can have important financial consequences but also has a potential human and social cost and can alter the company's image.

Once recruited, we want the incoming employee to stay and perform his task in the best way possible. Assisting incoming staff in private life matters may seem as not being the concern of the employer. It is starting to enter in the mentalities that the employer should promote work-life balance. Expatriation significantly alters this balance, for the employee and for the accompanying family. Relocation agencies, or Welcome Centers, can already be in contact with candidates to reassure them, introduce the city and help them project themselves in the new environment. Knowing that the hiring company offers relocation packages and gives importance to work-life balance can trigger the decision of the candidate. A good preparation ahead of the relocation is a key factor of success and will prevent future complications.

From the company or institution's point of view, relocation services are a source of competitive advantage, a useful way of decreasing the risks of a failed relocation and encouraging the integration of the incoming employee and his family. More pragmatically, welcome services allow the newcomer to start his or her position in the best conditions.

Relocation is only viewed as a cost center in a company, but people tend to forget that competitive markets make such services vital, and they become a standard in most international companies and universities. Companies and universities are getting more international thus hiring an increasing number of international employees from all around the world. Within this context, relocation services are essential for international staff.

At the University of Geneva, certain faculties do not have any problem recruiting new researchers. They do not need a Welcome Center to "sell" Geneva to applicants and do not understand why the university would help people in their private life. Indeed, if they receive sufficient applications with high profiles, which are willing to change location for the position without assistance, relocation services are not necessary. Even if for some newcomers the services are not a criteria for accepting the position, the institution still proves to be concerned for its employees and reflects a positive image as an employer.

To insure the highest level of professionalism and service offered by relocation agencies and other players in the relocation industry, the European Relocation Association (EuRA) was created in 1998, followed in 2013 by the Swiss Association of Relocation Agents (SARA). To become a member of these associations, relocation services providers must prove the quality of their services and meet specific criteria.

### **2.1.1 Visa and working permit**

The visa application or the request for work/residence permit is usually the responsibility of the employer. Sometimes the employer also manages the permit request for the family reunification.

The permit request is a lengthy and stressful process for newcomers. This is especially true for non-EU/EFTA resident, as the procedure involves a lot more documents and justification. The trickiest aspect of a permit request is that the Cantonal Population and Migration Office (OCPM) requires that foreigners have an address in Switzerland to apply for the permit. However, in order to find an apartment, applicants are required to

have a Swiss passport or a residence permit. That creates a catch-22 situation that the administration does not seem to care much about.

Certain permit requests are treated at the cantonal level, while others must be submitted to the Federal Administration for approval in particular for citizens needing a long term visa to come to Switzerland.

According to some of the researchers who arrived during the past four years, the permit request is one of the most complicated tasks to achieve when moving to Switzerland. The recent changes in the domain of work permit (safeguard clause to control migrants' flow, popular initiative of 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2014) were badly perceived by the international community.

The time to receive the permit can vary from a few weeks to several months, as this activity depends on the cantonal administration. The long period of time before the permit is issued, creates problems at other levels of the settling in process, as many procedures for incoming people are interconnected. As we will discuss, real estate agencies request a copy of the residence permit when applying for an apartment. To contract a health insurance, insurance companies ask for the social security number (AVS number), which is allocated when the permit is delivered. Public schools' directors require pupils to have a health insurance contract to enroll them. Not being in possession of a valid permit also holds partners back from finding a job; this subject will be treated later.

**Figure 3 – Work permit's implications**



Another difficulty met by incoming families when relocating to Geneva is the family reunification procedure. To obtain permits, families are expected to prove that they have a suitable accommodation, and sufficient revenues. In Geneva, authorities use the following formula: number of rooms  $\geq$  number of inhabitants – 1. It means that a family of four persons has to live in an apartment of at least three rooms (one kitchen, one living room and one bedroom for instance). The Cantonal Population and Migration Office (OCPM) will not issue the permits if the family does not meet these requirements. The applicants need to provide a copy of the lease contract stating the number of rooms of the apartments.

Newcomers have the possibility to live in Switzerland or in bordering countries. In this case, the employee will receive a cross-border permit G, but the partner won't receive a valid permit to work in Switzerland and this may hamper the partner's professional integration in the Swiss labour market.

They can also decide to live in one canton and work in another canton. In such case they have the responsibility to make their permit' requests by themselves without the support of their employer.

### **2.1.2 Housing**

Finding an apartment is one of the major challenges when moving abroad. It is time consuming and it is at this moment that newcomers realize that even with their Swiss salary, they might not find the comfort they are used to in their current residence country. In most Swiss cities, the real estate vacancy rate is extremely low and offers are only posted two weeks to one month before an apartment is available, which makes it very challenging to find an accommodation in advance.

To find an apartment in Geneva, real estate agencies ask applicants for their residence permit if they are not Swiss, the three last salary slips to prove sufficient revenues, and a certificate of non-prosecution for unpaid debts in Geneva. The complications start here, as newcomers cannot present most of the documents, such as the permit and the Swiss salary slips that will only arrive later.

Sometimes, real estate agencies request newcomer to have a Swiss financial guarantor, which can be complicated to find. This requirement is considered offensive for incoming staff, mostly for professors and executives with relatively high salaries.

Once an apartment is allocated to a newcomer, he or she has to open a bank account for the bank guarantee and transfer an amount equivalent to three times the monthly rent. Having these amounts of money at disposal is not the case of all expatriates.

### **2.1.3 Moving**

The move also brings its set of challenges as newcomers have the necessity to find a moving company working across borders. Prices ranges are diverse, as is the quality of service offered. Contracting a move company is something rather unusual to most individuals and they face difficulties in comparing the offer and making sure that the chosen company is reliable and that the proposal includes all the necessary guarantees in case of incident (robbery or damages to the belongings) and also include administrative support for the custom procedure.

According to researchers having arrived in Geneva recently, another challenge incoming people face at the border is customs officers, who tend to ask for documents that are normally not required when passing the border, such as the residence or working permit.

Whether to move a vehicle or not is a question to clarify in advance. Indeed, vehicles need to meet Swiss requirements to pass the technical control. Importing with a move a vehicle that eventually does not meet the Swiss requirements can result a very expensive and time-consuming experience.

### **2.1.4 Insurances**

#### Health insurance

Newcomers in Switzerland have a problem in understanding the specificities of the Swiss social security system in particular as far as health insurance is concerned. Indeed many come from countries where health insurance is part of the employer's mandatory contribution.

Newcomers deciding to live in France have to choose between the Swiss health insurance system (LAMal) or the French "Couverture Maladie Universelle" for cross-borderers.

#### Personal liability and household insurance

To obtain a rental contract for accommodation, a future tenant has to get personal civil liability coverage to be insured in case of damage made in the apartment. This insurance covers damages caused to third parties.

Newcomers are often easy targets for insurance companies who take advantage of their ignorance of the system to sell them insurance contracts they may not need.

### **2.1.5 Childcare**

Childcare is an important issue for incoming families in Switzerland in particular because the offer does not meet the needs. Therefore, almost all daycare structures have waiting lists and apply selection criteria, one of these is the employment of the parents. In many cases with relocating families one of the spouse will not have a job. This means that young children having one parent at home may not be on the top of the waiting list for childcare. This can considerably hamper the social and professional integration of the non-working parent, as he or she will have to stay at home to take care of the children. Furthermore, the family relocating to a new country will most probably no more be able to rely on a family and friends informal network to help them take care of their children. It is important not to underestimate the consequences this can have on the dynamics of the family.

Parents can register their children in the daycare of the city or municipality in which they live or work. This implies that registration can only occur when they have an address in Switzerland, which as mentioned earlier, is not necessarily easy to find early in advance. Other options for childcare, such as “Accueil familial de jour” or nannies at home, also require to know the address of the family.

### **2.1.6 Schooling**

Families coming from a foreign country have two options when it comes to schools: private or public. This decision rests on many criteria and each of them has to be discussed to insure the best outcome. These criteria have been listed in an article published in a website for mobile families (Global Mobility Matters, 2015):

- Location: public schools are available in every neighborhood and accessible by foot, while private institutions are disseminated in all around the canton.
- Financial considerations: Swiss public schools are free, while private education can be quite expensive.
- Resources: state budget for education, class size, activities are factors to take into consideration.
- Admission to primary school: the biggest issue regarding schooling in Switzerland is the entry age for public school. A child must be four years old

by 31st July to be accepted for the coming school year end of August. Cantonal authorities lost their flexibility in this matter with the introduction of HarmoS harmonization system on education<sup>2</sup>. Families coming from other countries such as France where children can join public education from the age of two and a half years old are facing unexpected dilemma.

- International system / diploma: for older students, parents need to consider the duration of the stay in Switzerland and the academic future of the children. If the family wants to be integrated in the long-run, and they want their children to pursue studies in a Swiss university, the Swiss Maturité would be the best choice, whereas a student coming from the U.S. staying in Switzerland two years before applying for a college in New York, the American High School Diploma would be the most appropriate option.

Other criteria such as religion, education styles, special or gifted education are also taken into account for some families.

In Geneva, non French-speaking pupils over the age of six can attend special allophone classes to learn the local language. They stay half the day in those classes and integrate a regular class for the rest of the day. Not all schools offer this system and children may have to change school during their lunch break. While parents usually appreciate this integration service, the constraints related to the commute between two school can be important.

Public schools directors must require a health insurance certificate to enroll pupils. However, to contract health insurance, newcomers need their residence permit and their social security number (AVS), which will only be attributed a few weeks after their arrival. In some cases, the entry of a child is delayed until the permit is issued.

To mitigate the stress related to schooling, certain families will decide to enroll their children in private structures to avoid a cultural shock. Indeed, coming from a foreign country and arriving in a school without even speaking the local language and being the only foreigner can be difficult for certain children. The decision of the school will be important for the accommodation search, as accommodation must be found nearby the future school.

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<sup>2</sup> Swiss system for the harmonization of public education, entered into force the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2009

### **2.1.7 Bank account**

One of the first things to organize before arriving in another country is to open a bank account, which will be used to receive the salary but also to set up a “rent guarantee account” for the deposit. Because of the current issues regarding tax evasion in the U.S.A, Swiss bankers are reluctant to open bank account to U.S.A citizens or residents.

Most banks are also reluctant to open accounts for foreigners in general especially when they do not have residence permit in their possession yet. Not having a bank account obstructs other processes such as the housing search and the payment of the salary. Some banking institutions have proven more flexible and are presented to newcomers as the best banks for their situation.

### **2.1.8 Language barrier**

Official documents and public administration’s websites are not always available in English, which can cause trouble to foreigners not speaking the local language. People working in cantonal offices or in real estate agencies are not necessarily bilingual and cannot answer incoming staff’s queries. This can be troublesome for newcomers and bring inconveniences.

### **2.1.9 Contracts, payroll, retirement**

Newcomers arrive with many questions about their working contract. Depending on the structure of the university or the company, the welcome center or mobility coordinators work within the human resources department and are in charge of all matters related to the contract and the employment in general.

Retirement plans is a subject often covered during discussion with human resources, as it is different from one country to another. Newcomers also want to have projections of their future income as a retired employee and be able to make a decision before signing the employment contract. They also come with other questions, such as social insurances, salary sheets and labour law.

Retirement plans are a major issue when it comes to expatriation. Indeed pension schemes are not harmonized globally and thus not suited for international mobility of workers. Working in many different countries while contributing to different pension funds can create disruption in their pension schemes and be a major issue for the retirement of international employees.

Human resources needs to inform properly their clients and anticipate future concerns. Even if the employee has been working his or her entire life, changing systems will reduce the total contribution in a given country and thus impact the amount available upon retirement.

### **2.1.10 Psychological impact**

Before considering taking a position in a foreign country, families and individuals need to ask themselves a certain number of questions and prepare themselves for the challenges that are to come. The family will leave friends, relatives, current job, social network and a balanced dynamic. They will need to create new relationships, find a new home, go through complicated administrative tasks, learn a new language and integrate in a foreign culture. The partner will leave a career behind and may not be able to find decent job opportunities in the new location. Couples have to discuss the situation of the following partner and be honest with each other. Indeed, the “trailing” partner will become financially dependent, will put into brackets a career and will face many challenges such as loneliness and guilt. “Trailing partner”, as described in the existing literature on the subject, tends to feel guilt for their children as well as for the working partner. Indeed, he or she does not want to be a drag on his or her success.

Children changing school will have to make new friends, learn a new language, adapt to an unknown culture, enter a new schooling system, and in some cases pass a test before starting, with the risks of repeating a school year.

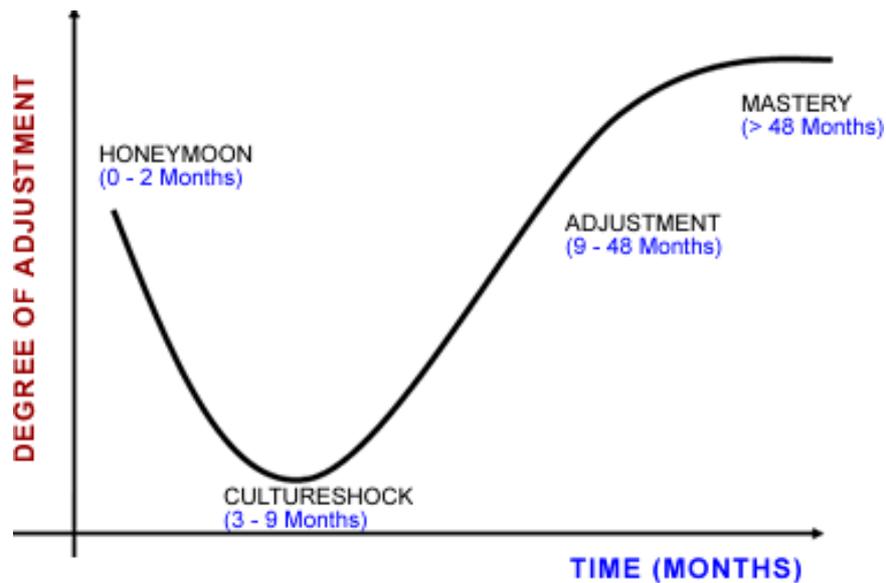
Families need to find alternatives, such as waiting a few months before joining the working partner, live in the country that offers the most advantages and weigh every decision to make sure to make the good one. Living in France or in Switzerland has consequences on the education or daycare of the children, commuting time of the incoming employee as well as the professional and social integration of the partner.

Families will also be confronted to other ways of doing things, which can be handled differently in their home country. For instance, an Italian family, which had lived many years in the U.S.A was shocked about the violence in their children’ school. For people living in Switzerland who have never been exposed to other cultures, we would tend to disagree with this family and say that there is no violence in Swiss schools. We need to keep in mind that countries are not similar in terms of the services they offer to their citizens, such as daycare and schooling. Families moving from a country to another will be concerned by these differences and will have to adapt.

### 2.1.11 Cross cultural adjustment

The U-Curve of Cross Cultural Adjustment developed by the Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955 highlights four main stages of integrating into a new environment:

**Figure 4 – U-Curve of Lysgaard**



Source: (Expats2singapore.com.sg, 2016)

- Honeymoon: The first phase after relocation is characterized by the excitement of the new experience and the discovery of the new environment. This phase includes finding a new home, moving, settling in and getting a way around.
- Culture shock: Once the logistical activities are dealt with, families will start to feel home-sickness and miss the familiarity of their former home. In this phase families also start missing the culture of their previous location. It is the depression phase, in which newcomers start expressing doubts about the relocation's experiences and having prejudices about locals and reject the hosting culture. The partner will feel empty and lost at this stage, and it is the moment of highest risk of relocation failure. Welcome Centers and all those in charge of the integration of incoming families need to be very careful during this stage as it is the most critical point of the adaptation process.

- Adjustment: Newcomers build tolerance towards things that bothered them previously and try to experiment local culture with more confidence. This improvement depends on the ability of each member of the family to adapt and keep an open mind.
- Mastery: This is the final phase where incoming people start enjoying the new environment. People finally understand local traditions and customs, meet and spend time with locals instead of staying only with other expatriates.

These phases will be more acute for the partner. The working partner and the children will be busy at work or at school respectively and will focus on other aspects than the relocation. Furthermore they will have a chance to socialise with colleagues and other pupils. Meanwhile, the other partner will not necessarily have activities to help him or her to focus on something else and will have more limited opportunities to socialize.

### **2.1.12 Other subjects**

During the interview of the Welcome Centers and relocation agencies other subjects such as transportation, learning the local language, national culture, sports and cultural activities or family activities were matters that seemed to preoccupy the newcomers.

These Welcome Centers and relocation agencies regularly face very specific requests such as a pet they want to bring, specific pedagogic methods for children, extremely precise criteria for accommodation, or a request about elderly home for a client's parent.

## 2.2 Dual career couples

### 2.2.1 History

Academic studies have shown that partners are the ones having the most difficulties to cope with the change resulting from relocation. As the rest of the family, they lose friends, social networks and habits, to name only a few. But in addition, they also leave a career behind, to become a “trailing spouse” and lose their financial independence.

In the past, an expatriate couple was often made of an employed man and an unemployed woman who was following her husband in his professional assignments.

At the time, several initiatives were launched to welcome these spouses quite often by the spouses themselves, such as the American Women’s Club or similar clubs or associations. These associations were mainly proposing leisure and social activities and also some volunteer activities.

Nowadays, an expatriate couple is very often a dual career couple and the career of the partner is one of the key factors to consider in the relocation process. Employers have become more and more aware of this matter and initiatives are being implemented to support the professional integration of spouses.

The “International Dual Career Network” (IDCN) is a non-profit organization aiming to facilitate job search for mobile employees’ partners. A group of companies including Nestlé, Philip Morris International, Ernst & Young and the Vaud Chamber of Commerce created this association in the Lake Geneva region in 2011. It was then globally expanded in 2012 to ten cities such as London, Copenhagen, Singapore and New York, and has been joined by new corporate members including Unilever and L’Oréal. The members can either be multinational companies, universities or NGOs. Membership in this association allows companies to access a pool of qualified talents and to position themselves as being a dual career friendly organization.

Associations or start-ups were created with the sole objective to assist foreign workers in their professional integration (Découvrir, Spouse Career Center).

The University of Geneva was the first University in Switzerland to launch a Dual Career Program and create a dedicated position. The program consists of:

- Individual counselling and coaching
- Assistance in diploma recognition process
- Proof reading of CVs and other documents

- Identification of and connection with relevant professionals in the professional domain of the spouse for more in-depth and specific advice
- Workshops on topic related to professional integration
- Active networking
- Assistance in the search for daycare solutions
- Social events

Dual Career Couple services are a new activity and there is a need for theoretical input and analysis of lessons learnt. The European academic network Euraxess recently created a working group to draft best practices for the concerned institutions.

### **2.2.2 Dual career couple: the difficult path to professional integration**

Partners need to start thinking about the possibilities for a career or training in the new place as early as possible. Questions have to be asked, and the couple needs to consider different options taking into account the professional perspectives of the partner. The most important factors to take into consideration are whether the partner speaks the local language and if the partners' career can be pursued in the new country of residence. For example, a primary school teacher from China or a medical doctor from Brazil will find extremely hard to pursue their career in Geneva.

Before moving, a partner needs to know what he or she wants, what he or she is planning to do and consider possible alternatives. A relocation process can be an opportunity to reorient one's career or resume studies to get further qualification. The Dual Career Couple (DCC) program manager at the University of Geneva requests that partners prepare a one-page biography in order to help them in this introspective process.

The professional integration of the partner is closely related to the duration of the stay. Indeed, short or long-term assignments abroad are not managed in the same way. For short-term assignments, partners often wonder if any professional project is worth the effort. Experience proved that even in such cases it may be worth making the effort of integration. Indeed, even for short stays, partners can feel lonely and quickly become bored once the logistics of the move is over and the rest of the family has a routine. Furthermore, career breaks can have a detrimental effect on future career developments. For longer stays, partners should understand that a successful professional integration takes time, one or two years depending on the case and is a

complex process. To ensure integration in the professional environment at the new location, partners need to be proactive and, as already mentioned, start the thinking process in advance.

It is important to start the networking effort early on in order to meet people living the same experience and to find external support in order to get a good understanding of the local labour market, position oneself in this market and identify a possible need for additional education.

The social and professional integration of the partner is closely linked to the challenges mentioned previously such as permit requests, school and daycare. These challenges have been overcome, to enable the partner to be successful in his or her professional integration. Being financially dependent on the working spouse can be psychologically difficult, create tensions in the couple and be destabilizing. Couples have to be clear about this subject and keep the dialogue open to avoid difficult situations. The person following his or her spouse is already making a lot of sacrifices and it is clear that being dependent can be a major change. A budget has to be allocated for the professional integration of the non-working partner, to ensure he or she can take language courses, participate in workshops, and develop his or her professional and social networks.

Relocation can provoke a professional disruption to trailing spouses, and can alter their professional pathway. Finding a job is a complex endeavour for everyone, but when moving from a different country, without mastering the local language and without a network of professional contact this process can become extremely grueling. Furthermore, potential employers can underestimate competences, professional achievements and work experiences when these were made in a different country. Refusals, deception and loss of confidence can be painful and discouraging. At this point, advising and coaching for a few months can be an added value to motivate and help the spouse get out of the impasse.

Before finding a permanent job, newcomers can explore options such as volunteering activities or short-term missions, to gain visibility, build a network and be involved in the community. Having such activities on a resume can only add value and help partners in their discovery of the local market. It creates new opportunities and the newcomer can feel useful again and have an objective for the months to come.

### **2.2.3 Why should employers care about dual career couples**

As mentioned before a good integration of the entire family is a key retention factor of a company's employee. But dual career couples can also be a great opportunity for a

company or a region. On several occasions, the Dual Career Couple program of the University of Geneva experienced a successful integration of the partner within the institutions. Indeed, some of them have learned French within two or three months, while being proactive to meet people and build a network. Others have done volunteering activities for associations or for the school attended by their children. We have seen good examples of successful integration, but also examples of failures, such as the one presented below.

## 2.3 Case study

An Italian family with two children of one year and three years old took the decision to accept a position at the University of Geneva. They lived previously in Paris, where the older child went to school « Maternelle » and the second one to daycare. When they arrived in Geneva, they learned that the older child could not go to school as she was going to turn four in August, when the limit in Geneva is the 31st of July. The Welcome Center made a request for exemption to the Education Department of the State of Geneva, but did not win their case. The family tried to relocate to Vaud, as Vaud was supposed to be more flexible concerning the age limit but this attempt also failed, even though the Welcome Center tried their best to win the case. The couple considered the option to register the two children to daycare, although this option would mean deschooling the older child, who already learnt a lot at school. However, they could not find any structure with availabilities.

Eventually, the family decided to live in France. It was in this case the best option for the children. However, it meant longer daily commutes for the father and complications regarding the professional integration of the wife. Indeed, Swiss employers are more willing to hire people who already have a work permit, to avoid the administrative burden of requesting a permit.

This family experienced the complications related to daycare and the rigidity of the Swiss education system. Furthermore, their relocation process was stressing and time consuming. We can also learn from this lesson that each relocation is different and have many variables to take into account when deciding where to live, hence the need for in-depth counselling. In some situation, the family needs to make a sacrifice and unfortunately, it is often the career of the women that is put into brackets for the first year. Hopefully, once the two children will be in school, the family could consider moving to Geneva and the partner could consider starting looking for a job. Welcome Centers have to be attentive to the families' concerns and priorities and help them finding solutions that suit the best their situation.

Another impact of living in France instead of Geneva is distance. Isolation is an enemy for everyone, even more for a person who decided not to work anymore to take care of children. In a known environment, where the partner has friends and family they can meet, this life-style can be appreciated. However, in a new country where the family does not know anybody and the partner spends the day at home taking care of the house and the children, solitude comes around and can create tension in the couple.

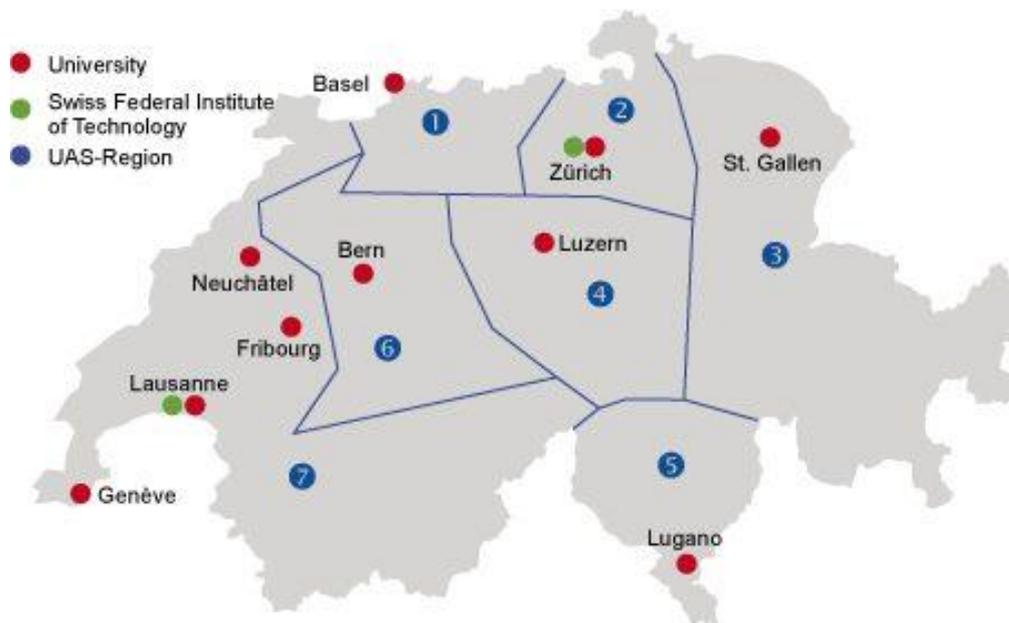
The DCC program manager also has to be conscious of all the variables of the situation and listen to what the partner wants to do, without expressing any judgment. In some cases, such as this one, we know that the integration of the partner will be compromised, but we cannot take the decision for the couple. It is sometimes hard for Welcome Center's employees to keep a certain distance and not get personally involved. Employees have to be willing to help and show empathy to their clients, but have to retrain of showing too much personal implication. Indeed, certain families live very complicated situation and being too much involved into all families' concerns can be consuming. Personal and tailor-made services while keeping an emotional distance are key to be a good mobility consultant.

### 3. Welcome Centers

#### 3.1 Swiss universities

To collect information about the welcome services offered by Swiss Universities, we first had to identify the right contact persons. Once these persons were identified, we contacted them via email with a first set of questions. After this first contact, we called all of them to discuss about the services provided, the level of implication of the team, the targeted audience and the institutional structure. In order to highlight possible areas of future development for Welcome Centers in Switzerland, we asked the following question to all of them: « what project or development plan would you pursue if your Welcome Center were to be allocated additional financial resources? ». We discuss their answers at the end of each individual section.

Figure 5 – Swiss universities map



Source: (Visual.ly, 2016)

##### 3.1.1 Universities currently developing a Welcome Center

The EPFL (Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne), the University of Fribourg, the University of Neuchâtel and the USI (Università della Svizzera italiana) currently offer welcome services through the human resources departments or directly with the help of secretaries of departments, institutes or faculties. Indeed, these institutions

have not yet created centralized Welcome Centers for all employees coming from another country or another canton. The University of Fribourg and the USI, have mentioned during our interviews that their universities are too small and do not have enough foreign researchers coming to justify the creation of such a service. However, they are not indifferent to this problematic and propose documents and information on their websites. The University of Neuchâtel created a website for their Welcome Desk, which is currently a project being developed by the human resources department. The person in charge of these activities currently gives information to the few newcomers arriving in Neuchatel on a case-by-case basis. For now, there is not a high demand as the university is still small.

### **3.1.2 University of Lucerne**

The Welcome Centre of the University of Lucerne directly reports to the International Relations Office. The latter initiated in 2013 the creation of a “virtual welcome centre” in the form of a website. The person in charge of the Welcome Centre dedicates 30% of her working time to the International Relations Office while she spends the rest of her time working on other projects. She mostly gives information via email and over the phone about the various topics of relocation. The services are available for professors, postdocs, invited researchers and PhD students.

The University of Lucerne administers a shared two bedrooms apartment, that can be used by incoming employees staying for short periods of time. For now, there are no events specifically organized for new researchers and professors but they are welcome to attend events organized for students. As the university is still small and does not have enough new employees to organize welcome days for this particular public it is currently their best option.

As the demand for advice and assistance is increasing, the Welcome Centre would use additional funding to hire people to create a team and set-up an info desk with the goal of increasing the awareness of the Welcome Centre inside the university. The person welcoming new international employees estimates that having a larger team would also allow them to engage in activities that will make their services more visible outside of the university. For instance this would help them in building a network of professional contacts in the housing market such as landlords and real estate agencies.

### **3.1.3 University of Basel**

The Welcome Center of the Basel University reports to the International Office, which is part of the Vice-Rectorate for Education. Its services are offered to professors, postdocs, PhDs, academic guests (visiting scholars, delegation of the Rectorate, invited professors) and new administrative staff member. The Welcome Center also provides help to international students and does not refuse local students. However, their questions are usually simpler and not so frequent. The Welcome Center also gives advice to staff and students leaving the University of Basel and is thus developing a departure-checklist.

It started its back office activities in October 2014, but at the time, the responsibilities of the person in charge of the Welcome Center were to create a website and its content and to develop a toolbox for newcomers. The official launching date of the Welcome Center of the University of Basel with its personal services was in February 2015. Currently, the person in charge of welcoming newcomers works at 70% (50% Welcome services and 20% Dual Career Advice).

Beside the website, the Welcome Center provides newcomers with welcome-packages including University documents, USB-stick with further information, templates of required documents, maps on Basel, information on Switzerland, Germany and France. The welcome-package also includes a Welcome letter, a Welcome flyer, a checklist for the relocation process, and extra documents adapted to the situation of the family such as translation of official cantonal templates, application for childcare, school registration, transportation, and so on. The Welcome Center of Basel is currently organizing its first Welcome Day for all new employees with a working contract at the University. This event will take place in September 2016 and henceforth will be held once per semester.

The Welcome Center proposes a standard offer, but the focus is always on the individual needs, which are naturally diverse. Each case is different and requires specific information. Concerning the flat-hunting, the Welcome Center explains how to search, gives information, sends a support email or makes a phone call to the agency, helps with filling out the application sheet, and follow-up the case; it can also arrange meetings for the newcomer.

The particularity of the Welcome Center of Basel is that people can decide whether to live in Switzerland, France or Germany. This increases significantly the knowledge required by the staff of the Welcome Center as they should be able to advise on the three countries and evaluate which would be the best option for a single person, a

couple or a family. The decision of the country will depend on many aspects, which we have mentioned earlier.

The University of Basel, through the Guesthouse Foundation, rents out twenty-six furnished apartments to lecturers, postdocs and guests who are staying temporarily in Basel. The contract is for at least one month and is a great asset for the Welcome Center, even though it does not cover all their needs.

### **3.1.4 University of St. Gallen**

The Welcome Services of the University of St. Gallen, which belongs to the HR department, has been advising new professors on relocation matters for the past three years.

One full time employee is in charge of dealing with all relocation issues, besides other HR activities. These include: being the person of reference for new professors during their recruitment, helping them navigate through their relocation process and assisting them on various administrative tasks and paperwork. As a starting point, this employee usually sets a meeting where she will answer questions about life in Switzerland and St. Gallen and give information about the different procedures to follow. She then sends professors a complete checklist and the various links and documents to download to help smoothing the process. She is also in charge of keeping the various documents available on the website up to date. As part of her activity, she visits apartments for professors, meets housing agencies and sends personalized lists of apartments or houses. In 2015, the University of St. Gallen's Welcome Services assisted six professors settling in the region. So far, due to a lack of resources, the Welcome Services of HSG could only have a reactive approach to relocation of new professors. They were only helping those coming to them with specific requests and not systematically dealing with all new professors. An increased headcount would allow them to contact actively newcomers and meet them more often at their workplace. They could also organize events such as Welcome Days, or information session after the first year, to remind people about certain topics, and inform them about what is new in Switzerland and what has changed. The improvement of the Intranet and the Internet platforms is also an objective of development for the next few months, as the Welcome Services will open to all international employees. The academic administration and the Mobility office are welcoming PhDs and students, while invited professors are being helped directly by the inviting institute.

### **3.1.5 University of Zürich**

The Welcome Center of the University of Zürich, which is actually named Support Center, is attached to the International Relations Office. It offers a specific package of documents to newcomers containing documents on the most frequent topics discussed with people coming from abroad, such as health insurance, special forms, entry in the country and the Support Center's flyer. Its services are opened to PhDs, post-docs and scholars. The Department of professorship is helping new professors, to which they directly report, while the Department for students and the International Office welcome students. In the near future, the Support Center of Zürich is going to open its services to Master's students.

The Support Center does not only help people settling in Zürich, but also employees already there having questions or issues. Their door is always opened to give information, advice, and they also send flat advertising and make some phone calls to support the application, or arrange appointments with the agencies. But unfortunately, there is not enough time for more tailored services.

The Support Center is composed of two people working 80% and started its activities in February 2016. Before its creation, the supervisors of the newcomers, the secretaries or the division and the International Relations Office managed the activities of the Support Center.

The Housing Office of the University of Zürich, has several apartments that are made available to PhDs and students. Depending on the availability, these apartments can be used to accommodate other newcomers for short periods of time.

As for the hypothetical increase in budget from the Rectorate, the Support Center of the University of Zürich would use it in priority to develop a small pool of furnished apartments that would be rented to visiting scholars as well as to newcomers who require some time to settle in Zürich. This increased budget would also allow them to organize more events like tours of the city and the Zürich area, welcome days and other social activities.

### **3.1.6 ETH Zürich**

At the ETH in Zürich, the process is slightly different. Incoming researchers are firstly welcomed by the department or the institute hosting them and can be redirected to the Welcome Center whenever the secretaries cannot answer their queries. The Welcome Center of ETH Zürich was developed three years ago within the human resources department. It is opened half a day per week to provide information and advice to PhD

fellows and postdoctorants. Outside this half-day the person responsible for the Welcome Center activities is available via e-mail or by appointments. The Welcome Center's activities represent 20% of her position in the human resources department. Most information required by new researchers at the ETH can be found on the very comprehensive website of the Welcome Center. The information covered includes many topics such as working contract, taxes, accommodation and language. Newcomers can contact the Housing Office of the University of Zürich and ETH Zürich, which offers assistance to students and employees. In terms of dual career couples service, partners can seek assistance at the ETH Career Center, where they can acquire a better understanding of the Swiss labour market.

The reception of newly hired professors is the responsibility of the Office of Faculty Affairs, which will offer personalized services for professors during the relocation process.

With additional resources the ETH Zürich could develop events for incoming researchers such as a presentation covering topics related to the institution and the relocation, followed then by an aperitif. These resources would also allow the recruitment of a second employee who could provide support for the integration in Zürich and Switzerland by organizing visits of the city and the Zürich area.

### **3.1.7 University of Bern**

The Welcome Center of the University of Bern was an initiative of the International Office of the university and has been attached to it since then. After an initial project phase of eight months, the Welcome Center was approved and launched as a permanent unit of the university in early 2009. Its services are offered to all employees from PhDs to professors. At the moment, it does not take care of students, but does not reject them either. The services provided by the Welcome Center are the same for every employee; there is no distinction between a PhD student and a recognized professor.

The person responsible for the Welcome Center sends checklists, links and PDF documents in accordance with newcomers' requests. The service is personalized, even if it consists mostly of information.

The Student Home of the University of Bern manages four studios and three apartments, which are rented by the university. Those apartments can be made available to the clients of the Welcome Center for periods not exceeding one year.

The mandate for a client is considered as fulfilled once he or she is settled and all of his questions have been answered.

The Welcome Center organizes workshops named “Hello Bern”, during which practical themes are covered and tips about life in Bern are given. Once a year, the Welcome Center also hosts an intercultural workshop to familiarize newcomers with the Swiss culture.

Only one person, working at 90%, who is also in charge of the reception service for Swiss Government Scholarship holders, manages the Welcome Center. In addition, a student comes every week to help the person in charge of the Welcome Center updating a housing data base available on the website of the university.

Thanks to its success, the Welcome Center advises between 130 to 160 newcomers every year. As an optional service, not all newly hired people request help from the Welcome Center, which could represent a growth opportunity. In order to extend their services and offer in-depth and tailored relocation assistance, the Welcome Center would need to hire a second person. This would also enable them to guide newcomers throughout their housing research. At the moment the Welcome Center only provides them with general information and lists of apartments available in the region.

### **3.1.8 University of Lausanne**

The Welcome Centre of the University of Lausanne was officially launched on the 27<sup>th</sup> October 2014 by the Vice-Rector for Junior Faculty Development and Diversity and is part of the International Relations Office. Before the creation of the team, the International Relations Office ran a service called “Accueil des chercheurs”, which was already doing some of the activities of the current Welcome Centre.

The University of Lausanne offers a vision that differs from what we can see in other universities. Its targeted public is the international staff, visiting scholars and researchers invited by UNIL. Professors hired for permanent position are taken in charge by a private relocation agency mandated by the human resources department. This functioning is also interesting as professors will receive a more extended support for the housing research, which is one of the most complicated issue for them and their families.

To host visiting staff, the International Relations Office rents, under its name, four studios/apartments, which are being managed by the team of the Welcome Centre.

The documents provided by the Welcome Centre are edited by the team, the Confederation, the Canton of Vaud, the City of Lausanne and the University. The team of the Welcome Centre also sends links and information concerning specific questions the researcher may have on various subjects. There are also documents and links to online pages with valuable information for newcomers available on the university's website.

The Welcome Centre organizes events called the “Midis du Welcome”, twice a year, during which departments' secretaries, human resources employees and the Welcome Centre's team can meet and discuss topics that concern them all and find answers to their questions related to relocation and the welcoming of incoming staff. The team is composed of two full-time employees working on relocation services and on the Dual Career Couple program.

The University of Lausanne is a member of the International Dual Career Network (IDCN), an organization created to help partners networking with HR from big companies of the Lemanic region and other partners seeking to make new contacts. Partners and incoming researchers are also invited to events organized by the “Chambre Vaudoise du Commerce et de l'Industrie” (CVCI), through their initiative “International Link”. International Link organizes events such as “Reloc'coffee” and “Welcome days”, with the aim of introducing life in Switzerland and in Vaud to newcomers, and present topics such as health insurances, schools and Swiss culture for instance.

With more financial resources, the Welcome Centre would have the opportunity to rent more studios and apartments for the researchers they welcome, as this public mostly needs furnished apartments for short periods and that the ones available on the market are managed by agencies at a premium. The Welcome Centre team would also organize more events to give newcomers the opportunity to meet other people newly arrived and have a chance to socialize outside of working hours.

### **3.1.9 University of Geneva**

The creation of a Welcome Center at the University of Geneva was an initiative of the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Professor Jean-Louis Carpentier. The Faculty of Medicine is closely linked to the Geneva University Hospitals. Indeed a medical executive position at the hospital is usually binded with an academic position at the Faculty of Medicine. Both institutions are therefore involved in the recruitment of high profiles from all around the world for research, teaching, and medical care to patients at

the hospitals. At the time, the Faculty and the hospital met difficulties to recruit and retain talents in Switzerland, but it was even harder to attract people coming from well-known hospitals from all around the world. Competition is fierce in the research sector, but is fiercer in the medical domain which suffers from a chronic lack of highly qualified personnel.

Once a position was open, there were applications, but only few of these met with the requirements. Quite often, candidates withdrew their application for family reasons and there were cases of selected candidates declining the job offer or appointed professionals resigning few months after they took up their duty. These difficulties to recruit and retain highly specialized and senior medical staff caught the attention of the Dean, who decided to address this situation. Professor Carpentier set up a Welcome Center with the mission to attract, recruit and retain high profiles at the Faculty of Medicine and the Geneva University Hospital.

The goal of this Welcome Center was also to reduce as much as possible the burden of the administrative procedures. For such positions, these procedures are quite heavy for the following reasons :

- Multiple employers (university and hospital)
- Strictly regulated professions with heavy procedures both at federal level and cantonal level for the diploma recognition and the authorization to practice medicine.

The Welcome Center was mandated to act as an intermediary between the institutions and would assist clients through the tasks, in order to help them focus on the relocation and then on their new job, as fast as possible.

The Rector of the University was very interested by this project and gave his approval, but under the condition to extend the services of the Welcome Center to all incoming professors of the University.

The project started during the summer 2011, with a team composed of three employees or one and a half FTE. As the Welcome Center is managed by the University and the hospitals, the team also had to represent this particularity. The team is composed of a director (Professor Carpentier), a relocation consultant for the University and another one for the hospitals.

Later on, another person reporting to the Equality Office of the University, joined the team to accompany partners into their professional integration.

At the beginning, the Welcome Center's team had to create checklists, a flyer, a website and collect all the information required for incoming staff, and also to understand all the specificities related to relocation. The services for the Welcome Center's clients are personalized, and clients are accompanied during the entire process from the recruitment interview to the end of the relocation process, which in certain cases can take up to two years.

For professors, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Sciences agreed to subcontract the flat-hunting part to private relocation agencies, in order to offer to the newcomer a high quality service and more chances to get an apartment quickly.

After two years of activity as a pilot project, the Welcome Center extended its services to intermediary academic positions, at the Rectorate's request. Additional resources were allocated to the project (+ 0.9 FTE).

The type and level of services provided by the Welcome Center had to be adapted to this type of public. Professors would still receive "VIP" assistance, whereas intermediary academic positions would mainly receive information.

In reality, as for the other Welcome Centers in other universities, relocation consultants tend to assist newcomers as much as they can with the resources at their disposal. Young researchers with low salaries face much more difficulties to find an apartment. The Welcome Center tries to send apartments advertising meeting the clients' criteria, and follow-up the application with the real estate agency, by sending a support letter, calling the agency to get a chance to promote the application and reassure the agency etc. As mentioned in the Challenge section, newcomers, in particular newcomers from a foreign country, have difficulties to find apartments, as they do not have a complete application file.

The Welcome Center of the University of Geneva differs from the Welcome Centers of other Swiss universities, by its affiliation, its size, more in-depth services and the use of relocation agencies in some cases.

The Geneva University Hospitals own apartments in the city, which are available for newcomers for a maximal duration of six months. These apartments are extremely useful as they leave the possibility for doctors to look for another flat while already in Geneva. It is also useful when the family will join in a second step. The doctor can come to Geneva and start his / her position at the hospital without the stress of the relocation. The family will join the doctor after having visited and found suitable apartments. This scenario is the best one for the entire family, but not everybody has

the chance to arrive in a furnished apartment close to the office. The University of Geneva only owns two large apartments, which only professors can afford. Other researchers need to find a permanent flat when they are still abroad.

The Welcome Center of the University of Geneva is at a critical point. It has faced a constant increase of the number of cases but was not allocated resources to absorb this additional workload. There is a need for strategic decisions from the Rectorate : reduction of the services offered, or reduction of the target group. The Welcome Center staff would like to develop further certain activities such as workshops and information sessions for newcomers, or social activities to offer them the opportunity to meet people.

### **3.2 University of Copenhagen**

The University of Copenhagen has over seven thousand employees and offers academic programs to more than thirty-nine thousand students. This university is larger than the University of Zürich (twenty-five thousand students), which is the biggest Swiss university.

The University of Copenhagen has an interesting structure in place for the reception of incoming researchers. Indeed, it has set up an “International Staff Mobility” department (ISM) in 2008 composed of a team of thirteen full-time mobility consultants specialised in taxation, human resources management, pension and immigration, to name only a few. The ISM is in charge of the employment contracts of the incoming researchers and all human resources activities, as well as providing answers to all the questions related to the relocation process. Indeed, the ISM team will provide support for questions relative to immigration, housing, healthcare, childcare and school, language and dual careers. Concerning housing, newcomers can contact the University Guest House, which provides thirty rooms for students and researchers, for the first days, weeks or months of their stay. As these rooms offer basic facilities, there is quite a high turnover. This option can be valuable for young researchers but is not suitable for professors and families. All professors have the chance to be offered services of relocation agencies for their expatriation.

As all international employees go through the ISM department for their working contracts, they are all supported for their relocation, which is a huge advantage, as it shows no treatment differences from one employee to the other. In 2015, the ISM team has assisted over 500 researchers through their relocation process, from the establishment of the contract to the final questions after arrival.

The major issues for incoming employees arriving to Denmark are housing and integration of the partner. Denmark offers childcare solutions for all inhabitants at low prices. It is the major difference between Denmark and Switzerland. Another point where Denmark is ahead is language courses. The University of Copenhagen offers free Danish courses to incoming staff and their partners, which is very valuable for people staying in Denmark for a long-term period.

The ISM considers itself “on the right track” and feels that the only aspects that could be developed further are beyond their reach. Examples of such improvements are the housing market and the procedure for working and residence permits.

### 3.3 Summary tables

**Table 1 – Target audience**

Institution	PhD	Postdoctorants	Professors	Visiting scholars	Administrative Staff
ETH Zürich	x	x	Office of Faculty Affairs		
University of Basel	x	x	x	x	x
University of Bern	x	x	x	x	x
University of Luzern	x	x	x	x	x
University of St. Gallen			x		
University of Zürich	x	x	Department of Professorship	x	
University of Geneva		x	x	x	x
University of Lausanne	x	x	Human Resources	x	x
University of Copenhagen	x	x	Relocation agency	x	x

**Table 2 – Facts and figures**

Institution	Number of students	Attachment of WC	FTE	Apartments/rooms available	Year of creation
ETH Zürich	15093	HR	0.2	Housing Office (>50)	2013
University of Basel	11360	IRO	0.7	26	2015
University of Bern	14290	IRO	0.9	7	2009
University of Luzern	1851	IRO	0.3	2	2013
University of St. Gallen	8020	HR	1	0	2013
University of Zürich	25618	IRO	1.6	Housing Office (>50)	2016
University of Geneva	14489	Rectorate	2.9	2	2011
University of Lausanne	11062	IRO	2	4	2014
University of Copenhagen	39000	ISM	13	30	2008

**Table 3 – Development plan**

Institution	Hire staff	Workshops/presentations	Info desk	Organize city tours	Furnished apartment
ETH Zürich		x		x	
University of Basel					
University of Bern	x				
University of Luzern	x		x		
University of St. Gallen	x	x			
University of Zürich		x		x	x
University of Geneva	x	x	x	x	x
University of Lausanne		x		x	x
University of Copenhagen					

As the USI, the EPFL, the University of Fribourg and the University of Neuchâtel do not have yet specific structures to welcome international employees, they do not appear in these tables.

## 4. Discussion

Swiss universities provide new international employees with rather similar information. However, the level of implication of the Welcome Centers may vary from one university to the other. The beneficiaries of these services may also differ. The challenges met by newcomers are composed of procedures that people do not live many times in a lifetime and do not have the information to proceed to every steps by their own. Indeed, this is for this specific reason that Welcome Centers provide local expertise and support on matters common to all incoming international employees, as well as specific queries. In the following section we will discuss the current practices at the universities we contacted and highlight best practices.

### 4.1 Before the creation of Welcome Centers

Before the creation of Welcome Centers, the professor or department who was inviting scholars or hiring researchers was in charge of assisting these newcomers in their relocation process. This task was most of the time delegated to the secretaries of the department or faculty.

Common belief was that the employer should not get involved in employees' private life and if employees decide to pursue an international career, it is their responsibility to manage their relocation. Some university employees do not realize the importance of having foreign employees and researchers and are not aware of the complexity of moving in a foreign country. This lack of information brings misunderstandings and frustration: "Why is the institution helping foreigners and not me?", "I also need to find a new apartment, but it is hard", "Why is it always for others, I did not receive any support when I arrived?", "Why should the university pay for such services?" are questions and thoughts heard many times after the creation of Welcome Centers. After a few years, explanations and proofs of the necessity of Welcome Centers have set people's minds at ease. Institutions and companies need to build awareness within the company and communicate the "raison d'être" of such services.

Over the years, universities witnessed an increasing number of international research agreements between universities, according to the International Relations Office of the University of Geneva, which led to a significant increase in the international mobility of researchers. In order to maintain their attractiveness on the international scene, universities have had to facilitate the arrival of these researchers coming from all around the world by offering them welcome services. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced at larger and more renowned institutions. Dedicated positions

to welcome new international staff or visiting staff were created either within the human resources division or the International Relations Office with the aim to centralize the information. Some universities went a step further and launched a dedicated structure (a Welcome Center) composed of at least two employees, depending on the number of newcomers arriving every year.

## **4.2 Organizational attachment**

Welcome Centers of the various universities covered in this paper are not always attached to the same university body. We have seen several possibilities:

- International Relations Office
- Human Resources
- Welcome Center services provided by both HR and IRO
- Rectorate

The affiliation depends on the historical development of the Welcome Center and usually has consequences on the mandate and the organization of the Welcome Center.

As mentioned in the introduction, the International Relations Office is responsible for the transfer of scholars and visiting academic staff, from and to other universities while the human resources department manages the researchers who are employed by the institution (work contract with the institution). In the case of scholars or visiting academic staff, the IRO is responsible for the work permit requests and also deals with the paperwork related to conventions between universities. They also inform incoming scholars or visiting academic staff about various private matters such as health insurance system and accommodation search.

The Welcome Centers affiliated to the IRO, initially provided services to scholars and visiting academic staff. Sometimes their initial mandate was extended to new academic and administrative staff hired by the institution and coming from abroad.

The second option is an affiliation of the Welcome Center to the human resources department. This solution is rather convenient as incoming staff signing a contract with the university will meet the human resources' team and already be in contact with them. However, as stated above, the human resources are not responsible for visiting scholars and as they fall outside of their mandate and a Welcome Center reporting to a human resource department may not be accessible to this specific public.

In some places, the Welcome Center services are implemented by both the International Relations Office and the human resources department with dedicated part time positions assigned to welcome services in both the IRO and the HR department. However, these hybrid structures bear the risk of information and resources duplication. It can be an interesting option for smaller universities with a limited number of international employees. However, from our interviews with the various Welcome Centers it transpires that centralization is viewed as a more efficient option that allows a better alignment of interests between the Welcome Center and their clients.

Centralizing the right information, knowledge and know-how in a single team is a more efficient solution. The services offered by Welcome Centers are related to private life matters. For confidentiality purpose, we believe that Welcome Centers should be as independent as possible from the institution to offer the possibility to newcomers to talk openly of their private lives to find the best solutions for them. In some cases, universities partially outsource this service to private companies. However, the University of Copenhagen thinks that employees can discuss private matters with the human resources, in complete confidentiality and that this will not affect the employee-employer relations. As the “International Staff Mobility” of Copenhagen is in charge of contracts, payroll and administration of all international employees, it makes perfect sense to centralize all the relocation services under the same roof.

The University of Geneva’s Welcome Center reports to the Rectorate. It is therefore independent from the human resources department and the IRO and is responsible for the welcoming of both new employees relocating to Geneva and scholars and visiting academic staff. The advantages of this direct affiliation to the Rectorate is a clear separation of private versus professional matters and the centralizing of the right information, knowledge and know-how within a single team. Although some may argue that the case management of these two populations is very different and does not require the same knowledge and network and that this system adds an additional counterparts.

### **4.3 Targeted audience**

The affiliation of the Welcome Center to a department or the other closely depends on the main goal of the Welcome Center and the targeted public. Some universities want to restrict access to the Welcome Center services to senior researchers and administrative staff with long-term assignment and consider a Welcome Center as a tool to attract and retain high profiles. Others focus on international scholars with short

period assignments. And others include all academic levels in order to attract the new generation of academic (in French “promotion de la relève académique”).

As mentioned in the previous part concerning the organizational attachment, universities could consider separating visiting scholars from employees with local contracts in order to provide services for everyone. The University of Lausanne uses this strategy partially, as the human resources are responsible for welcoming professors, and outsource this service to private relocation agencies. The Welcome Centre, affiliated to the IRO provides support through their relocation process to visiting scholars, invited professors and other guests of the university, but also to intermediary academic positions as well as new administrative employees.

The University of Geneva on the other hand, created a centralized Welcome Center that supports newcomers from postdoctoral to professorial researchers and visiting scholars, on private life matters. Human resources is in charge of the recruitment, the visa and permit request for the employee and the social insurances and retirement plan for incoming researchers with a Swiss contract. The International Relations Office provides support for the visa and permit request, and gives basic information about health insurance and accommodation. These two services provide new employees only with the basic information related to their relocation and address them to the Welcome Center for more personalized support.

The treatment of the different levels of researchers will depend on the main mission of the Welcome Center. Some universities do not make any difference between a full professor and a young researcher, while others offer tailored services for high profiles, and only give basic information, documents and links to the lower end of the hierarchy.

Almost all Swiss universities officially provide support to PhDs during the relocation process. With relatively low salaries, PhDs are in difficult situations, in particular if they come with their families. This group of people is the one who most needs the services of a Welcome Center in their relocation process with personal advice on their specific situation on a case-by-case basis. Supporting this population is often considered as part of the social responsibility of the university.

## **4.4 Housing**

House search is one of the most complicated aspects of a relocation to Switzerland although the level of difficulty varies from one canton to the other. Geneva and Basel are specific. Due to their geographical position, close to a border, incoming employees could decide to live either in France or Germany, which means that the Welcome

Center must be prepared to accompany them in all the relocation aspects in these countries.

House search is a time consuming task and many Welcome Centers, because of resources constraints, deplore that they often cannot dedicate enough time to this activity. Services offered by Welcome Centers vary from giving basic general information, providing specific tailor-made information such as a selection of available apartments meeting certain criteria or organizing visits of apartments and sometimes accompanying the client during the visits.

Obviously incoming employees do not allocate the same budget for their apartment and do not look for the same type of apartment. Employees moving with their families and with a limited budget will experience a much more challenging relocation process.

For researchers coming for a short assignment the best option is a furnished apartment. While many universities worldwide provide them with housing facilities, most Swiss universities usually don't. If the researcher has sufficient financial means, there are numerous possibilities (subleases, specialized companies, hotels...). But these options are not necessarily suited for younger researchers, as they are often quite expensive. Some Swiss universities own or rent apartments for researchers with short assignments but usually their number is not sufficient. These apartments are extremely valuable for visiting scholars and other employees coming for a short duration.

Furnished apartments are also proposed to researchers coming for a long period of time. Spending the first six months in a furnished temporary accommodation allows newcomers to get to know the region, search and visit apartments, and last but not least, give them time to gather all the necessary documents required by real estate agencies.

There are different ways to find a temporary accommodation:

- Hotel: Some hotels offer studios or small apartments for short periods, this option can be interesting as people would receive the services of a hotel, such as breakfast and housekeeping.
- Residence: Certain residences also offer hotel-like services in addition to their basic offerings.

- **Furnished apartments:** Agencies can also manage furnished apartments owned by a third party, with contracts ranging from three months to one year, renewable.
- **Subleases:** subrent the apartments of a person who temporary lives somewhere else.

In case of a sublease, it is highly recommended to contract a personal liability insurance to cover damages on the tenant's belongings or in the apartment in general. This can prevent from conflicts at the end of the sublease and gives an additional layer of protection to both parties.

Sometimes researchers come alone for the first months, and their families join them at a later stage; usually during the summer to avoid changing school in the middle of the year. The option of renting a furnished apartment allows the researcher to take up his or her duty at the university, while postponing the flat hunting until the rest of the family is ready to move.

Almost all the Welcome Centers interviewed mentioned that they would like their university to benefit from more apartments available for incoming researchers. This would allow a much more cost efficient use of the resources allocated to the Welcome Centers and would alleviate the relocation process of the future employees and improve the image of the institution.

In order to facilitate access to apartments on the market, Welcome Centers develop their network, meet landlords and real estate agencies and try to establish cooperation in order to promote the application of University new employees.

## **4.5 Dual career couple**

The Dual Career Couples program was initiated in 2008 by swissuniversities as part of the "Federal Equal Opportunities Programme 2000-2012". It is either managed by the Welcome Center or by the Equal Opportunity Office of the institution, with the aim of providing support for the professional integration of the partner. This integration of the partner has become an essential element in the relocation process and institutions have shown an increasing interest. Partners are being offered advice, coaching, workshops with external speakers, language courses and most importantly, networking. These events help partners build their own network, starting with people living the same situation. Indeed, meeting other expatriate people can be of great support for newcomers to share experiences and seek for advices. The working partner

will have the chance to meet people at work and create links, but the other partners find themselves alone at home and can quickly be depressed and overwhelmed. Although certain non-working partners within the group could be in competition on certain job positions, they tend to help each other and are supportive and encouraging.

Every Welcome Center and human resources department should offer the possibility for partners to meet other expatriates, by organizing events or inviting them to be part of spouses associations for expatriates or international networks. For some newcomers, these activities are sometimes the only outings they will attend to.

In the academic sector, it has been observed that researchers are sometimes married or in couple with someone also working in the academia. Finding a job in the academic sector can also be a challenge, as opportunities in this market are rather rare. People looking for opportunities in the private sector will certainly have more chances of finding a position than those applying to positions at the university of the canton.

As the Dual Career Couple program is a federal initiative, all Swiss universities have a person of contact to support the partner in his or her job search. This starts with stating the personal objectives of the partner, revising the resume and giving information about the labour market and more specifically about the industry. Certain DCC project managers organize events with external speakers and make partnerships with associations such as the one mentioned above.

Coaching is an important part of professional integration, as it helps focusing on setting objectives and developing a plan. Resources and time constraints make it difficult for DCC program managers to provide personal coaching to partners on an individual basis. Inviting partners to join a partner association or giving them information about private coach who have lived relocation, is a good way to help them accessing the labour market. Coaching gives the opportunity to partners to have a rhythm, a dynamic, “homework”, meetings, and *in fine* a goal.

The discussion could go further on the decision to outsource activities of DCC manager or keep them “in-house”. Both strategies have their set of advantages and disadvantages, and a “hybrid” solution would be more suitable. Indeed, having a person of contact within the institution is important, to keep proximity with the hosting institution. The company or university can follow the progression of the case and keep the image of a dual career friendly establishment. External providers offering services such as French classes, professional workshops, cross cultural presentations,

networking events or private coaching are also valuable, as the provider is a specialist of the specific field and can provide the best services.

One of the first things to do when moving to a new country is to learn the local language. Certain universities offer classes for their new employees, while other offer these classes to employees and partners. Companies and universities should offer language classes for their incoming employees, and open them to partners to facilitate their integration in the country. It has been indicated by partners of researchers of the University of Geneva that they could not take French classes because they were too expensive, while others mentioned that the level of the class was too low and not intensive enough. Indeed, we are speaking here of academic partners, with high levels of education in general. Intensive courses for highly educated profiles could complement the offer of the hosting institution and prove useful for everyone.

#### **4.6 Daycare and schooling**

Some companies and universities (and other structures) propose daycare solutions for their employees. These are very convenient as they are usually located close to the workplace. However, the number of places available is limited and subject to waiting lists. Offering daycare solutions for families arriving from abroad and families already living in Switzerland would bring an important relief to parents.

Regarding education, Welcome Centers can provide support for the request for the child to stay all day in the school offering allophone classes to avoid having to shuttle between two different establishments. Welcome Centers can also intervene when schools directors ask the parents for the health insurance certificate ; at this moment contacting these directors to explain the situation of the family could unblock situations. In most cases, a phone call from the Welcome Center to the director is sufficient to register the children in the school if they confirm that the insurance contract will be provided within the following weeks.

#### **4.7 Relocation agencies**

The outsourcing of the apartment search to external private relocation agencies is not common in all Swiss universities. Some of them use relocation agencies regularly for specific positions (professor) in order to provide a high quality service with greater chances of success. Others use them from time to time.

Outsourcing the apartment search to relocation agencies provides the following advantages:

- More attractive package to attract talents
- Reduced need for developing a new competence in-house (professional relocation agencies usually benefit from an extensive network, a solid experience and master all the legal and administrative matters)
- Reduced need for dedicated human resource in-house
- Capacity to absorb a fluctuating workload

But also some disadvantages:

- Possible loss of control
- Limited mandate compared to the support provided by in-house welcome centers which is often unlimited in time and topic
- Cost
- In-house capacity building allowing a university to provide eventually efficient house search services to all the international staff
- Possible excessive multiplicity of intermediaries

Relocation agencies charge clients with either a fixed-price package (between 4'000 CHF to 6'000 CHF in Geneva), or on a pro-rata basis using a multiple of the monthly rent of the accommodation found by the agency. These prices vary according to the contract with the company, what services it includes (housing, immigration, school registration, etc.), the duration of the mandate and how many apartments will be visited with the client.

We advise universities to follow the model of the University of Copenhagen. They outsource the house search for professorial positions but their International Staff Mobility department remains in contact with professors on all matters related to work contracts, payrolls and other administrative issues, while also dealing with matters related to the relocation process.

The housing search for other levels of researchers is executed internally through the Housing Foundation. The University of Copenhagen also benefits from an entire building of thirty rooms dedicated to the welcoming of their international staff.

This model allows a good in-house capacity building, which enables this university to provide good quality services to all incoming staff and to have sufficient know-how internally to monitor closely the companies they subcontract. In parallel, this model provides tailor-made services to their professors.

### 4.8 Events

Organizing events is an activity all Welcome Centers we interviewed in Switzerland would like to develop in the near future. Some universities already organize “Welcome Days” for the incoming staff and students as well as intercultural workshops and practical information sessions on subjects that could be interesting for newcomers and their families. As the pool of new researchers is not always large enough to organize dedicated events, some Welcome Centers consider organizing events open to other groups such as students or even new international employees from local institutions and companies with international employees.

In November 2015, we conducted a quality survey on sixty-four clients of the Welcome Center of Geneva (professors, intermediary researchers and visiting scholars). The survey revealed that there would be a potentially strong interest for information sessions on specific topics. Indeed more than 50% of the respondents indicated that such events would have an added value to the services offered by the Welcome Center. The figure below shows the level of interest in respondents for various types of events that the Welcome Center could organize. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix 1. Clients are most of the time “very satisfactory” of the quality of services offered by the team of the Welcome Center of Geneva. They confirm that they appreciate the information and services provided, the information on the website as well as the support for the housing search.

**Figure 6 – Answers to Welcome Center UNIGE’s survey**



Here is a list of topics on which concrete information and explanation can be given to incoming employees during practical information sessions:

- Health insurance
- Swiss culture
- Taxes
- Salaries and social insurances
- Retirement plan
- Work contract

Some of these topics could be presented with the help and participation of the human resources department or guest speakers, to ensure the reliability of the information.

This would allow both a rationalization of resources and offer newcomers an opportunity to interact with experts.

For instance, the University of Bern organizes events such as “Hello Bern” and intercultural workshops.

Certain universities also offer free of charge language courses to their new employees, while others also open them to the partner. Learning the local language is of great importance to integrate a country and facilitates everyday life. Until newcomers know the language, Welcome Centers can do the effort of partially translating official documents and lease contracts for their clients.

## **4.9 Documents**

Welcome Centers of Swiss universities provide documents, brochures and links to websites where newcomers can find information that will be useful for their relocation. The documents provided are either edited by the Welcome Center, the university, the canton or the Swiss government and most of these are specifically addressed to foreigners relocating to Switzerland or to a specific canton or institutions.

Checklists are very useful to newcomers who want to make sure that they do not forget any steps in the procedure. The website “[www.comparis.ch](http://www.comparis.ch)” offers a very accurate and complete checklist for people moving to Switzerland (Appendix 2), Universities also

developed their own checklists in order to also take into consideration the specific procedures of the canton and of the university.

Welcome Centers advise an increasing number of researchers and families and systematize their processes in order to ensure that a consistent level of service is offered to all clients and to mitigate the risks linked to a missed step.

#### **4.10 Welcome Center's team**

The size of the Welcome Center depends on many criteria such as:

- Number of clients
- Activities of the Welcome Center
- Implication of the Welcome Center

Indeed, giving basic information or offering personalized services change the workload and time spent on each case. It is hard to estimate the perfect size of a team, as it depends on many variables such as the initial mandate and mission of the Welcome Center. It will also depend on the outsourcing of certain activities of relocation.

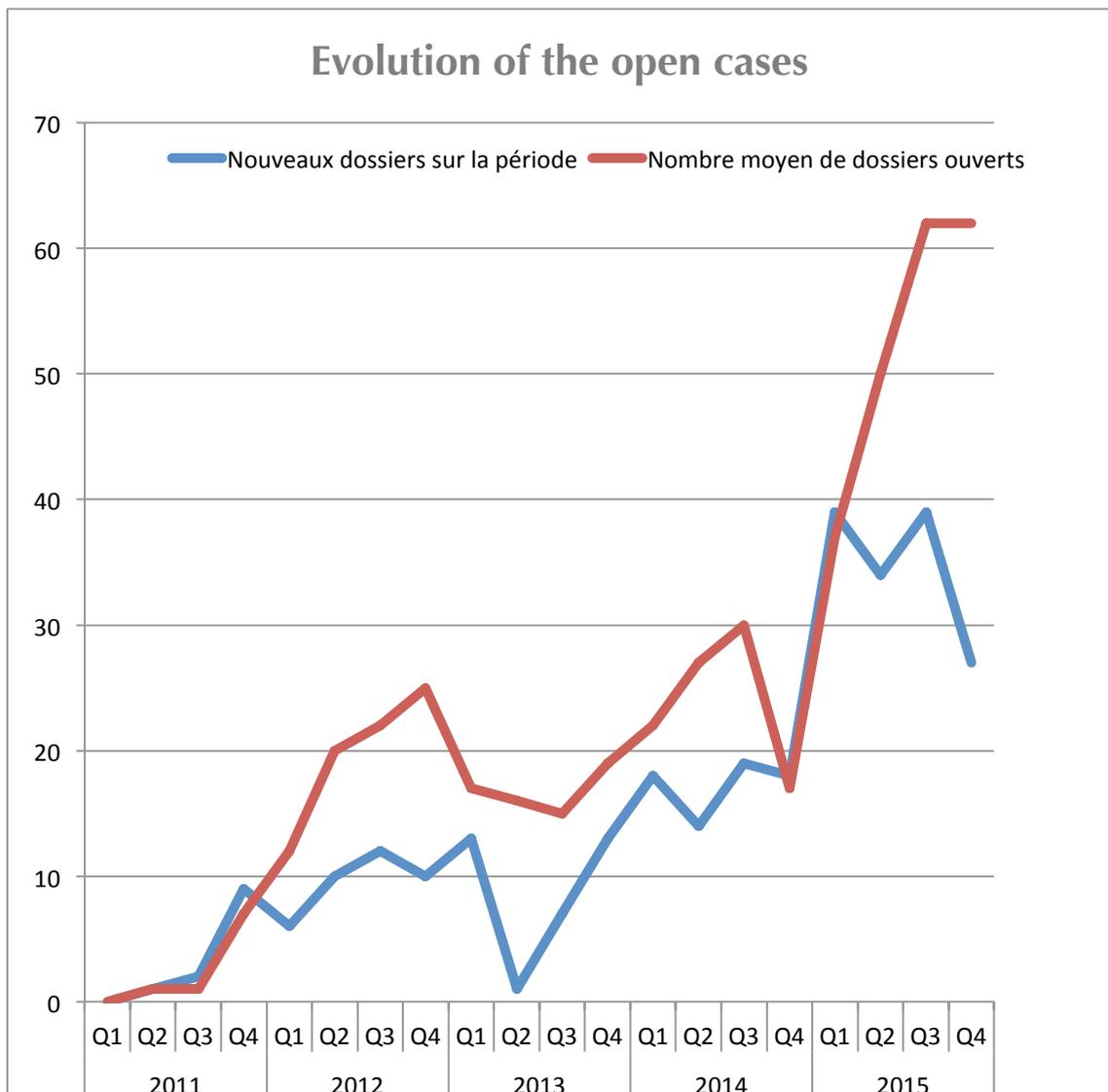
In 2015, the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva accompanied over 150 researchers through their relocation process. Their activities include housing search, counseling on health insurance, children registration to school and daycare, administrative assistance for diverse topics, to name only a few. With a FTE of 2, it means that one full-time employee provided support to 75 families. However, if the services are restrained and more informational, this number can increase.

The particularity of the Welcome Center of Geneva is that all the employees work part-time. It provides flexibility in the schedules and allows the team to replace their colleagues while they are on vacation or on sick leave. Indeed, for Welcome Centers composed of only one employee, the services are interrupted while the employee is not at the office. It is also interesting to mention that all relocation consultants in Swiss universities are women.

In addition, the Welcome Center of Geneva offers the services of one person working 80% for the Dual Career Couples program to support partners through the professional integration. The largest difference in the case management of DCC clients is the duration of the follow-up. Indeed, it takes at least one or two years before finding a position in the region.

As evidenced by the table below, the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva witnessed a significant increase of number of cases since its inception. Indeed, during the last quarter of 2015, the Welcome Center's team opened 28 new cases bringing the total number of cases managed during this period to 64. The team needs to be large enough to offer a high level of services even during activity peaks. With the increasing number of cases, the Welcome Center has to adapt quickly and request more resources to the Rectorate. Without more resources, the quality of the services offered will be harmed and the added value will most likely be irrelevant.

**Figure 7 – Evolution of open cases since the creation of the Welcome Center**



## **4.11 Relocation in private companies**

Contrary to Swiss universities, which are decades or even centuries old, international companies; in particular companies moving their HQ to Switzerland have no internal know-how on Switzerland. They often create a dedicated position usually referred to a “Mobility coordinator”, reporting to the human resources department and privilege the outsourcing to specialized companies of the private part of the relocation process such as house search, assistance with the signature of the lease contract, selection of serious moving companies, school registration, professional integration of the partner and cultural integration. For the same reasons, private companies also subcontract certain tasks requiring a good knowledge of the local administrative and legal procedure such as immigration procedures.

Over the years, and due to the recent economic turmoil, companies have decreased the budget allocated to relocation packages. Nevertheless, the demand for relocation services remains important according to “Welcome Service”, a relocation agency active in the Geneva area since 1990.

At the end of the day it is up to the company to determine the relevance of providing in-house support to their employees during their relocation process or outsourcing this service. There are obviously trade-offs between the two approaches as outsourcing to relocation agencies can be costly and difficult to monitor. A complete cost-benefit analysis has to be conducted taking into account the number of full time employees that would have to be allocated to such positions in the company and their respective costs and weigh that with the potential gains. The company also needs to think about its image as an employer and assess its willingness to facilitate the integration of its international staff.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout this study we have explored and analyzed the practices and structures of the Welcome Centers of the Swiss universities. Our analysis covered the various challenges encountered during the relocation process and allowed us to identify the most critical ones on which Welcome Centers should focus their efforts. Among these are housing, childcare, professional integration of the partner and immigration. Housing issues are common everywhere in Switzerland and more generally in all international cities. Institutions and companies should, to the best of their ability, have apartments or studios available for their incoming researchers and staff in order to facilitate their relocation and integration in the country. From our analysis of the practices of Welcome Centers in Switzerland and abroad it is evident that only a few properties acquired or rented are enough to fulfill the needs of most universities for short term accommodation buffers. This implies that even smaller institutions with equally smaller budgets offer such services to their incoming international staff.

Most institutions worldwide recognize the fact that the success of the relocation of a new employee does not only depend on his or her integration. Indeed it is commonly accepted that the integration of the partner is at least as critical to the success of this process.

As for immigration our study shows that the procedures vary from one country to the other but also from one canton to the next. As illustrated by Figure 3 the permit deliverance process plays a central role and is a prerequisite for many other steps in the relocation process.

On most of these issues, Welcome Centers channel the information they gather on a daily basis from their clients to the highest level of the institution. By doing so they are actively seeking to promote changes on issues that are of vital importance for incoming as well as present employees.

In terms of best practices we have identified the following points of focus:

### Organizational affiliation

We believe that a Welcome Center that reports directly to the Rectorate, like the University of Geneva does, offers the healthiest solution as it allows segregating personal life aspects from professional ones. This structure also allows a centralization

of the information, knowledge and know-how while ensuring a perfect confidentiality of what is shared with the Welcome Center.

### Target audience

Offering relocation services to all employees regardless of their hierarchical level is, in our view, a sound practice that will create long-term value for the organization. These services have to be freely available to employees from PhD fellows to professors but also including visiting scholars and other administrative staff, as facilitating their relocation is vital for their integration. This, in turn, will impact their performance and satisfaction.

### Level of implication of the Welcome Center

The level of implication shown by Welcome Centers should be harmonized between all levels of employees and should go beyond a simple communication of key information. As far as possible, Welcome Centers have to provide their clients with personalized solutions. They need to personally meet their clients when they are still candidates and have not made a decision, convince them to come and answer personal questions and provide specific information regarding the case of the candidate. Services and case management need to be tailor-made and the most personalized possible to insure that the information given is relevant and useful for the clients. This is the point where Welcome Centers can show their added value to attract candidates and offer them high level of services to insure a fast and lasting integration.

### Relocation agencies

For professors, universities need to use the expertise of relocation agencies in terms of housing search and administrative follow-up. This would allow universities to capitalize on these companies' experience in order to maximize the chances of success of the housing search. Relocation agencies can cost up to 6'000 CHF per professor in Geneva, but the quality of service has proven higher with more chance of success when applying for an apartment. Indeed, relocation agencies have extended real estate agencies' network and good relations in the housing market. The use of relocation agencies requires budget allocation, which will prove useful for the institution and its attractiveness when it comes to the headhunting of high profiles and their retaining.

### Institutional housing solutions

Universities can manage a few furnished apartments that would be available for short-term stays. Having apartments and studios available for incoming international staff

gives them enough time to settle in the region and simplifies significantly their arrival. Furnished apartments are difficult to find and often quite expensive. Universities can rent a few studios, which could cost around 1'000 CHF per month each, buy furniture and rent them to newcomers for short periods of time (less than 6 months). As newcomers would pay a rent to the university, the risk of financial loss bears in the possibility of vacancy between two tenants. The rents can be adapted to cover the costs and amortization of the furniture as well as the risk of vacancy of three months per year. Renting furnished flat would be a release for Welcome Centers who could then focus on other activities and services. The main advantage of renting furnished flats to international staff lies on the improved image of the university offering housing options for their incoming employees. The image of a “welcoming” university at the international level is a competitive advantage for the institution.

While this study focused mainly on the academic sector it is evident that some, if not all of our findings are equally valid and applicable to the management of international assignments within multinational companies. The challenges faced by an employee and his family during such assignment is in all respects comparable to those faced by international researchers and academic staff. Furthermore as the challenges and issues faced by the moving employees and their families are mostly of psychological and social nature, their consequences will be felt equally irrespective of the sector and hierarchical level of the employee.

Managements and Rectorates have to keep in mind that relocation services are not an option anymore if they want to be competitive at the international level. Relocation services are considered as a competitive advantage and prove their added value by providing support through the relocation process where the human resources do not get involved as it comes to private matters. The challenges for relocation teams are to prove that their services help attracting high profiles and retaining them on the long-run while offering them the best integration possible and a faster on-boarding process within the institution.

There are still skeptical local employees within international companies or universities who still do not understand the importance of accessing a pool of international employees coming from around the world neither why these incoming employees need support when arriving in Switzerland. I would like to tell them that Switzerland do not have enough highly skilled workers in very specific sectors such as medical care and technology. If we want to keep a good reputation at the international level, we have to

be opened to foreign workers and prove the world that despite all the UDC party's initiative, we are aware that foreign employees are valuable for Swiss companies and universities. Welcome Centers and other mobility actors are present for these newcomers and willing to provide them support when they will decide to come.

## **5.1 Limitations of the study**

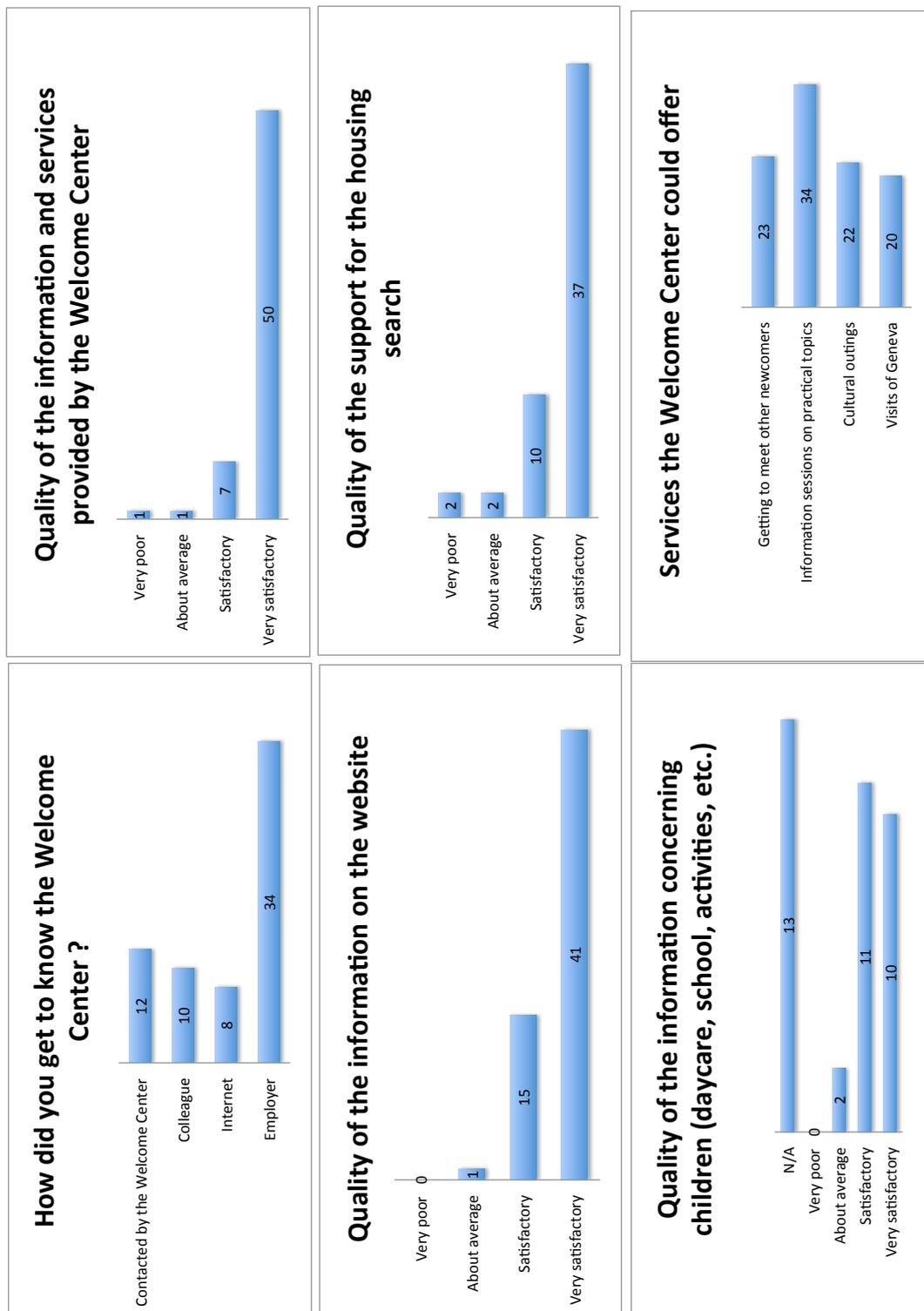
The present study is limited in scope as it focuses only on Swiss Welcome Centers and universities. As a result, the issues treated in this paper are specific to Swiss markets, political system and legal environment. Furthermore while the discussions we had with the various persons of contact in the different Welcome Centers allowed us to gain a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by them, the information gathered was strictly of qualitative nature. A detailed analysis of their budgets and key statistics would have given us more insights into their operations.

As a final remark we can note that this study is mainly the result of interviews and discussion with people directly involved in the relocation of international researchers and university staff. Other discussions with the heads of Human Resources and International Relations could have added an interesting strategic dimension to the analysis, as they would have provided us with another scope and more information such as universities' budget, statistics and also opinions.

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## Statistics concerning services offered by the Welcome Center of the UNIGE



# Appendix 2: Comparis' moving checklist

The most detailed moving checklist for Switzerland

30.05.16 16:04

## Moving checklist

### Step 1 – Plan ahead

**Many things can be settled in advance. Deal with all contractual issues in connection with your dream home and organise a removal van.**

- Find the home of your dreams in the largest Swiss property market: [house-hunting with comparis.ch](#).
- Request a [record of debt collection](#) (most landlords require this along with the application form).
- Sign the agreement for your new home and terminate your current agreement on time. Always send the [termination letter](#) by post as registered mail.  
**Important:** The letter must reach the landlord by the last day before the termination deadline. The date of the postmark does not matter; the relevant date is the one on which the landlord receives the letter. If you give notice prematurely, suggest three equivalent new tenants to your landlord. Otherwise, you will have to pay the rent for the remaining period of notice.
- If you move in with several other persons: agree with your landlord on a contract clause governing contractual amendments (moving in/out of individual parties).
  - Merge [home contents insurance](#) / [legal protection insurance](#)
- Advertise your old home: [property portals on comparis.ch](#).
- Cancel your telephone, Internet and/or TV plan for your old address and re-register for your new one. For more information, visit the homepage of the provider in question: Swisscom/Sunrise/Cablecom
- Re-register your [radio and TV licence](#).
- Dispose of special waste and bulky items.
- Book a means of transport/van as early as possible:
  - [AVIS](#)
  - [Hertz](#)
  - [Mobility](#)
  - [IKEA](#)

### Step 2 – Don't forget anything

**There are things we don't do every day, but only when moving home. We have thought of everything for you: from packing all your belongings to disposing of old medication.**

- Cancel registration at your old place of residence.
- Change of address notification to:
  - health insurance provider
  - car insurance provider (notify new parking situation as it influences the premium: garage or outdoor parking space)
  - district command / civil defence / civilian service
  - employer / update emergency contact information
  - doctors
  - banks/PostFinance/credit card company
  - telephone directory entry ("Directories")
  - schools/kindergarten/institute of further education
- Instruct Swiss Post to [forward](#) your mail.
- Notify your electricity/gas provider of your move and ask them to read the meter.
- Clear out your flat, closets, basement, garage, attic and garden:
  - Dispose of rubbish and things you no longer need or bring them to a second-hand or charity store.
  - Dispose of old or unneeded [medication at the pharmacy or at a collection site](#).
  - Clear out clothes and drop them in a donation bin or take them to a charity store.
- Buy moving boxes / packing material (e.g. at MICASA or IKEA) or procure them somewhere else (ask your friends and family or at local stores).
- Start packing in time.

#### Next steps

- Cleaning: who will assist you? Friends and family or a cleaning company?
- Removal: who will assist you? Friends and family or a removal firm?
- Removal insurance:
  - Personal liability and home contents insurance cover for damage caused by helpers during the move.
  - The removal firm's transport insurance covers for damage caused by its employees. Make sure that the sum insured is adequate.
- Fix appointments:
  - moving day: ask your employer for leave (you are usually entitled to one day off. Ask for additional days if needed)
  - handover of old residence together with the landlord

#### Useful information

##### Moving checklist

Moving house can be trouble-free if you plan well. The Moving Guide by comparis.ch accompanies you from the planning stage up to your new residence in five steps.

##### Giving notice

Here we provide you with detailed information on ending your tenancy. In addition, you can download our convenient sample letters of notice for free.

##### Handover and inspection

Here you can find all the information you need for the handover and walk-through, including a sample inspection report.

##### Moving to another canton

We call your attention to the most important aspects to consider when moving to another canton.

##### Moving in together / Moving out

What do you have to bear in mind when moving in together for the first time? Or when one party moves out of your joint home?

##### Insuring removal goods

Who pays for what kinds of damage during the move?

<https://en.comparis.ch/immobilien/umzug/umzugscheckliste.aspx>

Page 1 sur 2

- handover of new residence
- plumber for removal of washing machine (have it installed by a professional)
- possibly workmen for repair work at your old residence

### Step 3 – Last check

**The devil is in the details. Are there tension belts and blankets available for the transport? Has the freezer been defrosted? Our tips below can help you avoid having to grope in the dark. And don't forget to take a few lights with you to your new home, just to be on the safe side.**

- Organise tools and possibly also a battery drill for (dis)assembly.
  - Remove nails, screws and wall plugs.
- Arrange for trolleys, blankets and tension belts for a safe transport.
- Prepare a first-aid kit for the removal (better safe than sorry).
- Who has time to help you on moving day? Look for more helpers if necessary.
- Notify the neighbours.
- Reserve a parking space.
- Prepare 1-2 lamps including light bulbs and extension cords in order to have a first light source in your new home.

#### Cleaning

Ask your landlord how you should leave the rental property: well-swept or thoroughly cleaned? These are the most important things that need cleaning:

- oven, cooker
- empty refrigerator as completely as possible / defrost freezer
- dishwasher and filters
- extractor hood and other air fans or vents
- toilet, shower/bath tub
- radiators, sills, shelves and door frames
- windows (inside and out including double windows)
- garage, basement, attic, letter box and parcel box

### Step 4 – The move!

**Technically, everything should run smoothly today. Hand over your old keys, complete the walk-through inspection report with your landlord and receive the new keys. Welcome to your new home!**

- Compile the inspection report together with your landlord and record defects during the walk-through. If the landlord notes defects during the move-out inspection, the tenant can report this to his/her personal liability / home contents insurance provider. In such a case, the tenant also has the opportunity of cancelling personal liability / home contents insurance within 14 days.
 

**Tip:** the [retention terms](#) for tenancy claims vary. It is worth checking whether the retention applies per move, per room or per damage event.

  - [Cancelling personal liability / home contents insurance](#)
  - [More information at comparis.ch](#)
  - [Download inspection report template](#)
- Hand over old keys (including the additional ones you may have had to duplicate at your own cost).
- Receive new keys.
- Install first lamps in your new home.

### Step 5 – Done. What's next?

**Did you sleep well in your new home? What you should do over the next few days: register at your new place of residence, re-register your driving licence and organise a little something to thank your helpers.**

- Register with the competent authority of the municipality of your new place of residence.
- Notify change of address to various (online) stores.
- Reclaim rent deposit if you have not already done so.
- By all means, report defects on your rental property that have not been noted in the inspection report to the landlord and request for the report to be updated.
- Re-register driving licence and vehicle registration certificate (within 10 days, driving licence can be re-registered online).
- Notify the electricity supplier at your new place of residence.
- Organise a small dinner for the people who helped you.

[« Back](#)

# Appendix 3: Brochure of the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva



L'UNIGE et les HUG se réjouissent de vous accueillir à Genève



Le Welcome Center mettra tout en œuvre pour faciliter votre installation



The Welcome Center will do its utmost to facilitate your relocation



The UNIGE and the HUG are looking forward to welcoming you in Geneva



UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

HUG Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève



**Bienvenue dans nos institutions**  
**Welcome to our institutions**





Contactez-nous / Contact us

Welcome Center  
☎ + 41 22 702 06 30  
www.welc.ch info@welc.ch

**You**



**Vous êtes intéressé-e par une carrière à l'UNIGE et / ou aux HUG**

Le Welcome Center vous informe:

- Procédures de candidature
- Vie à Genève
- Démarches et formalités

**You are interested in a UNIGE and / or HUG career**

The Welcome Center provides you with information:

- Application procedures
- Life in Geneva
- Administrative proceedings

**Votre candidature est présélectionnée**

Le Welcome Center vous accueille et vous présente nos institutions.

Le Welcome Center est à votre disposition pour répondre à toutes vos questions.

**You are short-listed**

The Welcome Center provides you with a presentation of our institutions.

The Welcome Center is at your disposal for any question you may have.

**You & your Family**

**Vous êtes engagé-e**

Le Welcome Center facilite votre installation en Suisse et à Genève:

- Recherche de logement, déménagement
- Vie quotidienne (assurances, soins médicaux, transports...)
- Accueil et intégration de vos enfants
- Loisirs, culture, sports
- Cours de français
- Assistance dans les démarches administratives

**You are hired**

The Welcome Center facilitates your relocation in Switzerland and in Geneva:

- Housing search, moving
- Daily life issues (insurances, medical care, transportation...)
- Welcome and integration of your children
- Culture, leisure, sports
- French classes
- Assistance in administrative procedures

**Your Partner**



**Votre partenaire souhaite poursuivre sa carrière à Genève**

Le Welcome Center l'aide dans ses démarches d'intégration professionnelle:

- Carrière<sup>1</sup>: programme fédéral pour les carrières académiques des conjoints
- Réseaux professionnels pour les carrières non académiques

**Your partner wants to pursue a career in Geneva**

The Welcome Center helps him / her access the labor market in Geneva:

- Carrière<sup>1</sup>: federal program for the academic careers of the partners
- Professional networks for non academic careers

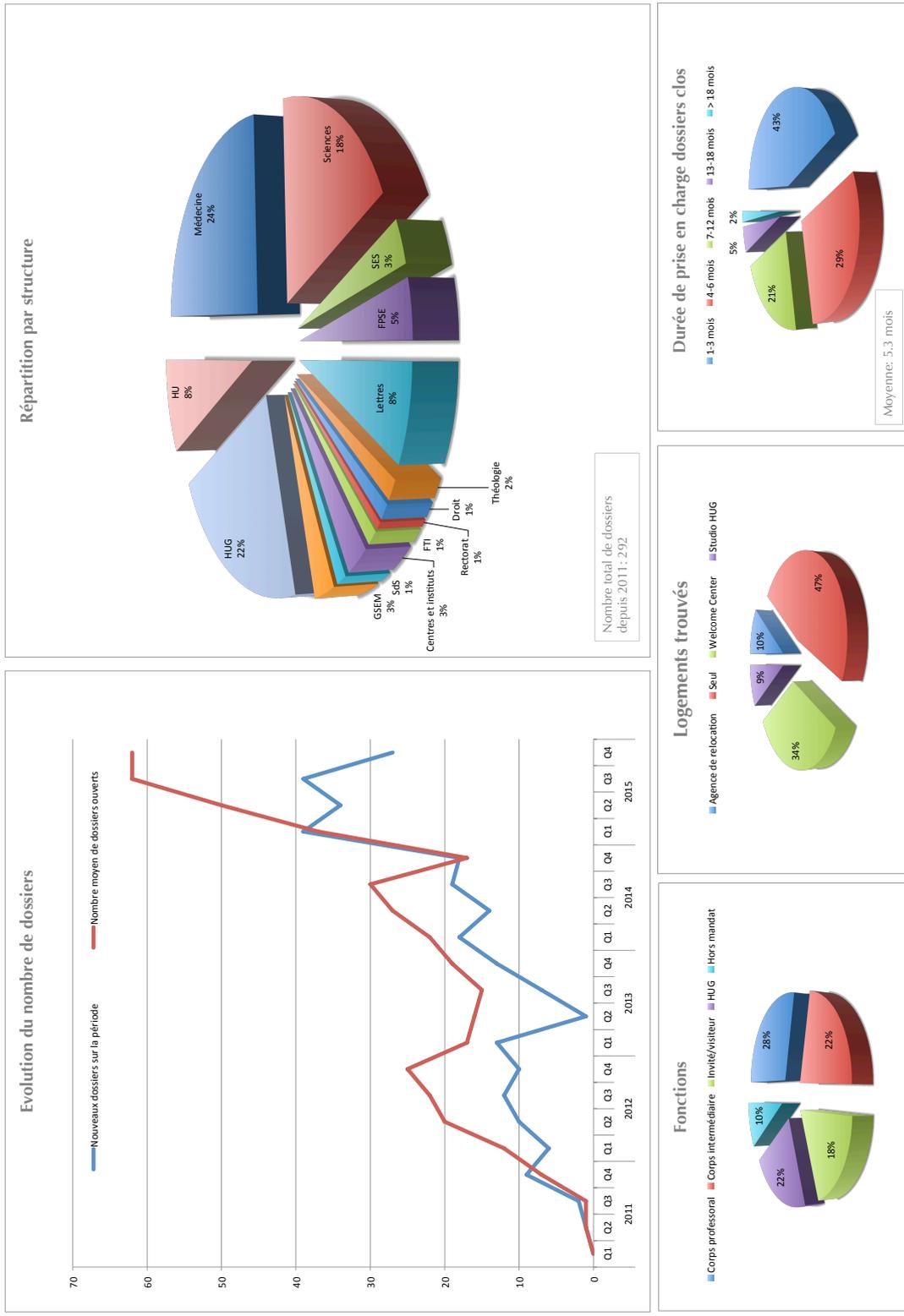
Vos priorités sont nos objectifs  
Your priorities are our objectives




Votre interlocuteur privilégié  
Your privileged interface

# Appendix 4: Statistics for the Welcome Center of the University of Geneva

## Welcome Center



## Appendix 5: Article on relocation services in Switzerland

☺ Child-friendly  
 🔄 Changing table  
 ⚡ Rainy-day activity

⊙ Outdoor ☑ Indoor  
 🚶 Near public transport  
 ♿ Wheelchair accessible

🇬🇧 English spoken  
 🅑 Parking nearby  
 1/A-2 Map reference

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### RELOCATION TIMELINE IN SWITZERLAND

BY CATHERINE BURRUS, WELCOME-SERVICE

**T**ime goes by. The world changes. Companies disappear. Others are created. Concepts that were once dismissed are now highly-regarded. This is true for the field of relocation, which has become an industry. Let's go back in time...

**1990**

Relocation barely exists. Relocation companies can be counted on one hand. They share a relatively small market for a few international companies interested in relocation support for their management.

**1995**

Companies realize that these services are needed as successful relocation requires local expertise. Human Resources become intensely involved at a human level. Employees and their families are usually transferred during summer, making the transition less disruptive. Priority is given to spouses and families.

**1998**

The industry keeps growing. European Relocation Association (EuRA) is created to promote the benefits of professionally-managed relocation and mobility services. Members of EuRA must show credentials and combine expertise and competence with impeccable ethics.

**2000**

There is a surge in the number of short-term transferees. The region enables the implanting of several European headquarters. The housing market dries up. Relocation businesses boom.

**2003**

The Swiss Association of Relocation Agents (SARA) is created to promote the highest level of professionalism and service, as certified by their members.

**2007**

The golden age: international companies flock to the area. One job out of three depends on multinational companies. Demands for schooling exceed capacity.

**2012**

The Lake Geneva real estate market is saturated. Authorities become concerned as the need for premises has fallen in an 18-month period as well as in relocating staff. A significant mutation in the status of clients who are now engaged more with local contracts than with expats.

**2016**

Changes are made in line with ever-evolving relocation specifications and budgets, facing new challenges: tax reforms and immigration policies are indeed creating uncertainty. This said the Lake Geneva region undoubtedly remains attractive and relocation has a bright future ahead.

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[contact@sigmarelocation.ch](mailto:contact@sigmarelocation.ch)

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☺**E** 1/F-6

Offers global relocation service coverage from domestic relocation in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, the US, and Intra-Asia to full international relocation throughout the globe.

10th edition Know-it-all passport © 2017/2018

## Appendix 6: List of persons contacted in each Swiss university

### Welcome Centers: persons contacted for the data collection

Institution	Last name	First name
EPF Lausanne	Musard	Antoinette
ETH Zürich	Arnold	Catherine
Universität Basel	Popovic	Tanja
Universität Bern	Fallahi	Jasmin
Universität Luzern	Zehnder	Uta
Universität St. Gallen	Köppel	Nicole
Universität Zürich	Fountoulakis	Evi
Université de Fribourg	Gorodecki	Barbara
Université de Genève	Galland	Corinne
Université de Genève	Juge	Aline
Université de Genève	Rault	Natacha
Université de Lausanne	Burdet	Catherine
Université de Lausanne	Klaus	Marcelina
Université de Neuchâtel	Gatschet Martinez	Nathalie
USI	Imberti Dosi	Arianna