



Moving from Latin America to Germany: Culture shock and challenges faced by a geoscientist family

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Geoscientists are often highly mobile, making them attractive candidates for academic positions. Nevertheless, changing your country of residency can be very challenging, and such challenges are amplified if one has small children, and especially if both parents are active researchers. We are both geoscientists, with specialties in paleolimnology and geophysics, and have a 2-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter. We are originally from Guatemala and Germany, and our children were born in Mexico, where we worked for seven years before moving to Germany.

Culture shock is often expected to be severe when moving from Europe to a developing country, like Mexico or Guatemala. In our case, however, we experienced serious cultural shock when we moved from Latin America to Germany. It became apparent that conditions were harsh for couples that try to live equitably at home and at work, and attempt not to neglect either family life or science. We identified multiple challenges in our daily life, such as: (1) the well-known lack of sufficient childcare options in Germany, (2) cultural differences at work, such as family-“unfriendly” scheduling of important meetings, (3) a lack of flexibility with respect to financial support for families whose members participate in professional symposia or fieldwork, and (4) policies of granting institutions that sometimes, unintentionally, preclude family-friendly work in academic research.

Our personal experiences may help to elucidate why the gender disparity in science is larger in wealthy, central European countries such as Germany (28.0% female researchers, UNESCO 2018) than in many Latin American countries, such as Mexico (33.0%) and Guatemala (53.2%). By identifying key issues, we hope to improve the situation for parent researchers - both female and male. Changes will be required of universities in Germany and elsewhere in Europe that intend to improve the quality of research and teaching at their institutions by attracting young, talented, international scientists. We acknowledge that every case is different, but encourage universities that are building strong programs through internationalization of the faculty to consider the needs of families of incoming foreign researchers, and actively support dual-career professional couples.