



A Career with the United Nations

Are you a professional with qualification or experience in your area of expertise, interested in working for the UN? Find out what a career with the UN entails and how cinfo can support you.

cinfo 

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UN Photo: UNOCI Head visits
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**Working with the UN:
a fulfilling challenge for Swiss nationals as well**

Switzerland contemplated membership of the UN for a long time before it finally decided to take the step. Nevertheless, it has now been ten years since the Swiss delegation, amidst much applause, took their place among the international community in the General Assembly hall. I was Foreign Minister at the time and had the honour of being a member of the delegation. The emotion I felt in that moment has remained one of the most moving of my political career. As is typical for carefully thought-through decisions, this step is connected to many positive aspects for Switzerland.

I was already then convinced that a job with the UN belongs to the most challenging, but also the most fulfilling tasks a career can have. That is why I did not hesitate for a second, when I was asked by the Federal Council whether I would like to stand as the Swiss candidate for the Presidency of the UN General Assembly. When in December 2009 the good news came from New York, I nearly felt like a newly elected Federal Councillor. The honour, but also the adventurous aspect, especially for a Swiss – I thought by myself – almost overwhelmed me.

During my presidency I got acquainted with two important dimensions of working with the UN. Firstly, for every person, whatever professional qualification he or she may have, it is challenging and fulfilling to make a career with the UN. Secondly, this holds true for Swiss nationals as well as for other nationals. Those who have had the courage to take this path have not been disappointed. Some have come a long way and have proved that there is no task at the UN that does not fit to a Swiss person.

This is why I would like to support cinfo – the Centre for Information, Counselling and Training for Professions Relating to International Cooperation (IC) – in its task, to motivate fellow citizens for a job with the UN. I encourage all interested people to embark a career in international cooperation.

Joseph Deiss
Former Federal Councillor and former President of the Swiss Confederation
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly

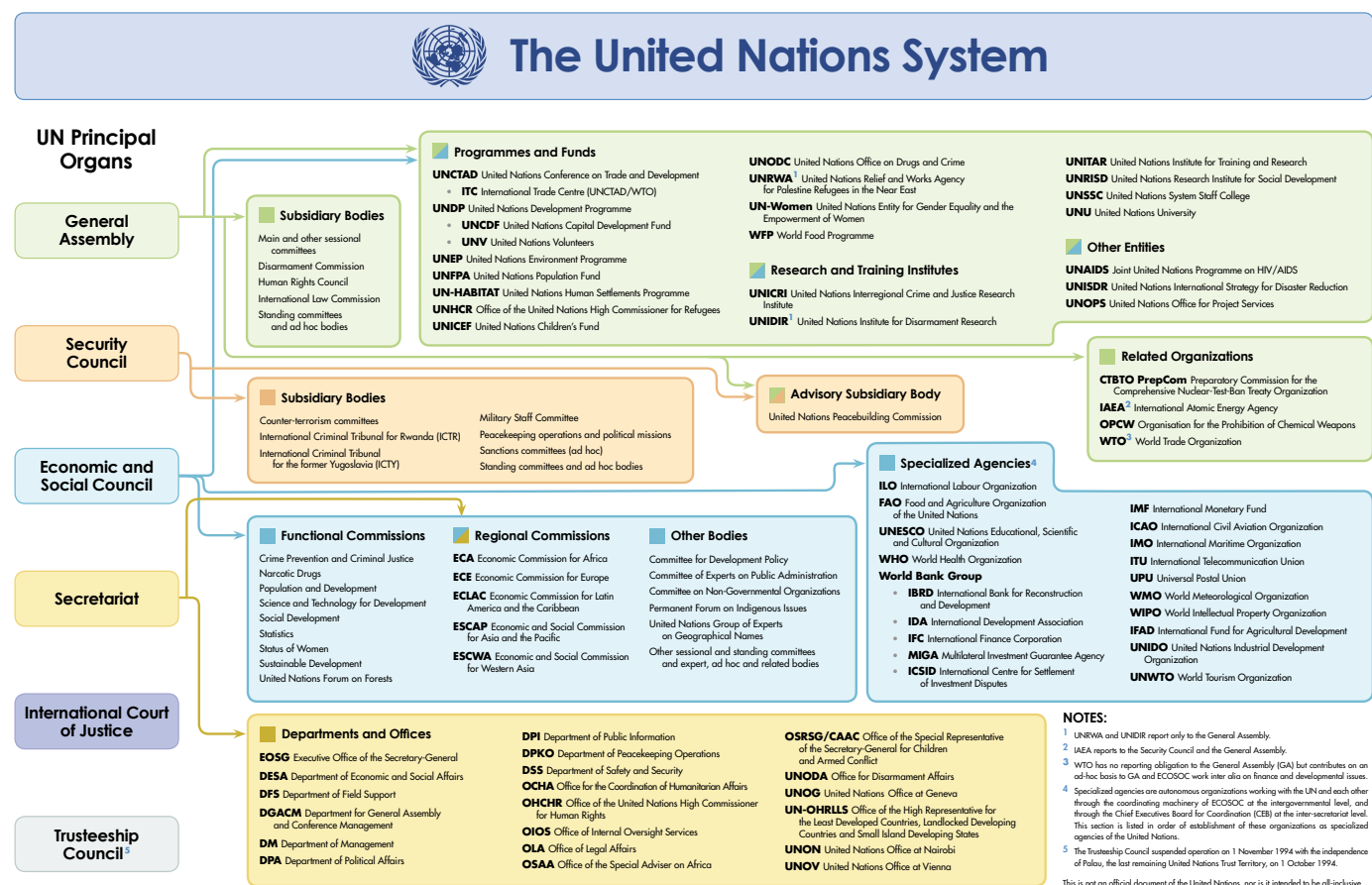
1. Is the UN for You?

The label «United Nations» includes a wide network of organisations dealing with different mandates and areas of interventions, which offer a broad range of employment opportunities with the most diverse professional requirements, aspirations and aptitudes.

The United Nations (UN), or the United Nations Organisation (UNO), was founded in 1945, after the second World War to seek solutions to the three thematic areas outlined in its Charter: peace and security; the protection and promotion of human rights; and human development. The UNO then, over the years, created the United Nations system, representing a network of international organisations, treaties and conventions. Today, the work of the various UN organisations touches every corner of the globe with its humanitarian, development and political activities (Graph 1).

Some agencies serve as funds and programmes reporting directly to the UN General Assembly, one of the five active principal organs of the United Nations system. These include for example the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Childrens Fund (UNICEF). Other well-known agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) serve as so-called «specialised agencies». These also include the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This publication has a specific focus on the following four UN agencies: UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN). The reason is that cinfo has a mandate to support these agencies in their personnel marketing in Switzerland and to assist Swiss candidates in the selection process of these organisations.

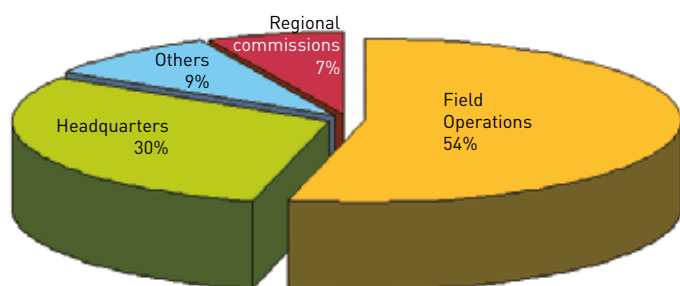


Graph 1: http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/structure/org_chart.shtml

1.1 UN Staff Worldwide

Nearly 16,000 people are employed by the UN Secretariat. The UN System as a whole, the UN and its related programmes and specialised agencies, employs some 63,450 people worldwide. Close to 60% of them are being deployed in the field. This includes a large number of international civilian personnel working for currently 16 peacekeeping operations. In the field, country and field offices are responsible for on the ground implementation of programmes and activities. They are served by Regional Offices that provide technical and operational support and advisory services.

Repartition of Duty Stations of UN Staff



Graph 2: cinfo

In contrast, the headquarters are involved in managerial overview and back-up work. It is also at headquarters level where political and institutional activities relating to the functioning of the UN take place.

While the main headquarters of the UN are in New York, two thirds of the activities of the UN system take place in Geneva¹. Around 8,500 staff work for the UN family in Geneva, making it the largest concentration of UN personnel in the world.

1.2 UN Professional Profiles

Many of the posts available have high-level requirements with strong academic and professional backgrounds including several years of international experience in their area of expertise. Work experience should be relevant to the job for which a person is applying. A Masters Degree is generally a must.

Areas of Skills and Types of Posts

Among their ranks, UN staff members can monitor disarmament, support the organisation of elections, coordinate relief in humanitarian crises, raise funds for educational projects, and provide administrative as well as logistical support to carry out the complex mandates. These are just a few examples.

In principle, every professional with operational or technical skills can apply for a job with the UN. While every organisation always has need of operational staff such as administration and finance professionals, each one has different technical needs according to its areas of intervention. While UNDP may look for governance and climate change experts, UNICEF may need child protection and nutrition officers.

Jobs within the UN system can be found on one of the following websites:

<https://jobs.un.org>

<http://careers.un.org>

<http://unjobs.org>

cinfoPoste: www.cinfo.ch

¹ More information on the United Nations Office at Geneva: www.unog.ch



Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights visits DRC

Soft Skills and Competency-based Interviews

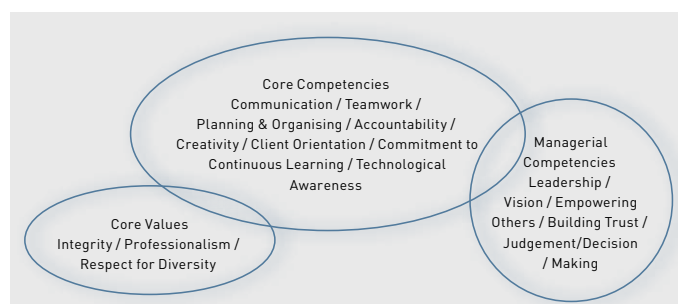
In addition to hard skills, applicants will often be asked to demonstrate a range of soft skills, especially during the interview. Soft skills may include a strong commitment to development, leadership capacities, project management skills, planning and organisational skills or the ability to work in a group. The interview in the UN system mostly takes place in form of a so-called «competency-based interview». This means, that candidates are asked to demonstrate their competencies on the basis of past experiences and ways they dealt with specific situations. For more information about competencies, consult cinfo's publication «[Competencies – communicate them effectively](#)»

UN Values and Competencies

To work for the UN, professionals need to have an excellent command of either English or French, preferably both. The knowledge of an additional language is an asset but not required for all jobs. Besides technical skills, the UN also look for staff showing soft skills such as adaptability and cultural sensitivity. And, with the mobility policy, all staff is expected to move functions, departments, duty stations or organisations periodically after two to five years.

The UN seek staff members who are motivated to make a real difference through their work, and who possess the core values and competencies shown in Graph 3.

UN Values and Competencies



Graph 3: cinfo

Comparative Advantages

Candidates can increase their chance of having their application considered if they have one of the following comparative advantages:

- **Mobility:** It is yet another way for candidates to positively affect their career in the UN. Career progression to senior levels depends, in part, on evidence of mobility, including service in difficult locations.
- **Quotas:** Under-represented nationalities in most UN organisations such as the Swiss are encouraged to apply.

- **Gender:** In 2005 women filled 41.3% of the professional posts and 31.8% of senior-level posts in the secretariat². Although this is a higher representation than in many other sectors, this means that women are still underrepresented. The UN seek to ensure equal opportunity for women. Women are therefore encouraged to apply to available positions.
- **Other UN official languages:** Increasingly there is a demand for competency in one or more of the other official UN languages. For example Arabic, Chinese or Russian are often being sought. Applicants with fluency in one or more of these languages face less competition in their applications.

More details on UN structure, careers and details on employment conditions such as holidays and leave, health insurance and retirement plans are available here:

- www.cinfo.ch → Jobs & Missions → International Organisations
- www.un.org/en/aboutun
- <http://careers.un.org>

Experienced professionals mainly fall under the categories «professional» (P) or «director» (D). The following scheme gives an overview of the years of work experience needed for each of the staff categories:

Entry level professionals

- P-2 minimum 2 years of work experience
- P-3 minimum 5 years of work experience

Mid-level professionals

- P-4 minimum 7 years of work experience
- P-5 minimum 10 years of work experience

Senior-level professionals

- P-6 / D1 minimum 15 years of work experience
- P-7 / D2 more than 15 years of work experience

The UN system offers less and less long-term employment opportunities with stable contractual status. There are, however, more opportunities for interesting assignments and for movement across a unique, global organisation.

There are basically two types of contracts: Fixed-Term Appointments (FTA) for a period of one to five years, and Temporary Appointments (TA) for less than one year, for seasonal or peak workloads as well as for specific short-term requirements. In general, FTAs are granted for one year. They can be renewed multiple times, as determined by the needs of the organisation. The employment period for a TA cannot exceed two years. It is important to note that one year rarely remains one year. In general, and provided performance is satisfactory, contracts are renewed.

Family Considerations

Many positions with the UN are located in the field, where working and living conditions vary from one location to another: Positions in a humanitarian field operation or in peacekeeping

1.3 UN Employment Conditions

Staff Categories

The United Nations workforce is made up of different categories of staff. Within each category there are different levels, which reflect increasing levels of responsibilities and requirements.

² More Information on: www.un.org

Many UN employees start their career with an assignment in the field.



are habitually in a country or region that is emerging from conflict or an emergency situation. This means that living conditions are difficult and the duty station is often categorised as «non-family», which means that family members cannot join the staff member at the location. Positions in the wider development field, on the other hand, are predominantly located in countries where staff can bring their family along.

Pay and Benefits

The level of pay for staff in the professional and higher categories that are recruited internationally is set by reference to the highest paying national civil service. The base salary as described below is supplemented by a post adjustment which varies according to the cost of living in the duty station and the exchange rate of the United States Dollar. Staff may also be entitled to other allowances and benefits such as education grant for eligible children at school or travel and shipping expenses when moving out of duty station.

Annual net base salary ranges approximately in US-Dollar: (normally exempt from taxes)

- Entry level professionals (P1 – P3): 37,000 – 80,000
- Mid-career professionals (P4 – P5): 67,000 – 106,000
- Senior level professionals (D1 – D2): 95,000 – 123,000

Pros and Cons of a UN Career

Working for the United Nations can have both pros and cons which may have a different impact on each individual:

Pros

- Great opportunities for professional and personal development
- Contributing to a mission beyond economical benefit
- Deep satisfaction to see the benefits of work in many cases
- A challenging, global and diverse environment
- Getting familiar with many countries and their population

Cons

- Non-family duty stations in some locations, especially for humanitarian and post-conflict posts
- Sometimes bureaucratic environment
- Low security contexts
- High mobility policy

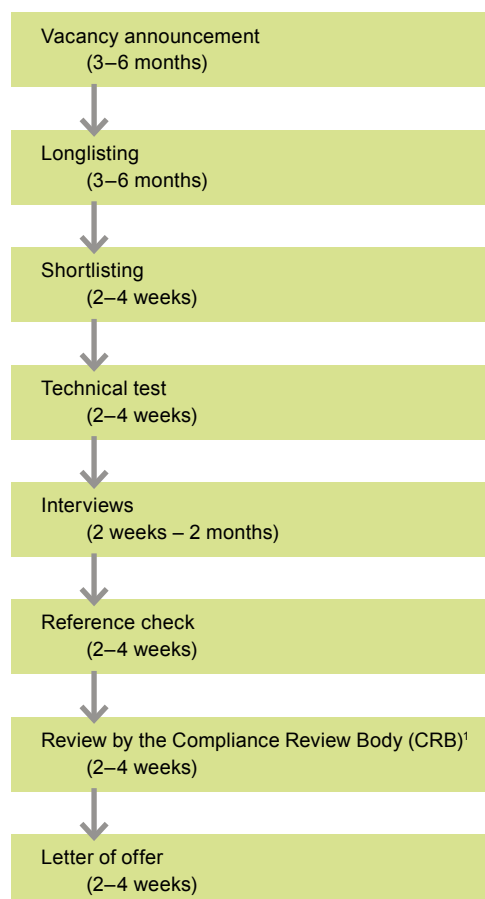
1.4 Entry Opportunities

There are several ways to enter the UN system. Some of them are presented in this section.

Normal Recruitment Process

Every UN agency has its own system of recruitment. This means that the procedure and the timeline might vary from one agency to another. Nevertheless, there are some steps that every agency follows. Graph 4 shows these steps and gives an idea of how long the selection process might take.

UN Recruitment Flow



¹ The Compliance Review Body (CRB) checks whether the recruitment process was transparent and fair. Compliance criteria include gender balance, family relationships, years of required relevant experience, the setup of the panel during the interview, etc.

Graph 4: cinfo

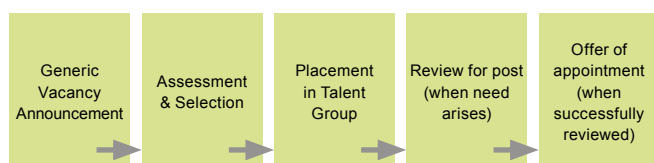
UN and IOM officials
brief on repatriation
of South Sudanese



Talent Groups

UN agencies are increasingly working with talent groups when recruiting new candidates. A talent group is an exclusive roster of pre-assessed experts from which UN agencies can quickly select qualified candidates whenever a post becomes available. Graph 5 shows how this recruitment process works on the example of UNICEF. Generally a candidate first applies to a generic vacancy announcement, which is advertised together with other vacancies. The candidate then goes through an assessment and selection process similar to the one described above. If successful, the candidate will be placed in the talent group. When a relevant post becomes available, the hiring office will review the talent group. If they find a suitable candidate, an offer will be made directly. Talent groups have the advantage that they reduce recruitment time for the agency and that a candidate may be considered for a variety of posts having undergone just one application process.

UNICEF Talent Group Recruitment Process



Graph 5: cinfo, Source: UNICEF

Internships

An internship with a UN agency or the UN headquarters can help especially young professionals to gain valuable first work experience, an understanding of how the UN system functions and important contacts and networking opportunities. The following publications give an idea about whether an internship generally is a «must» in order to enter into the field of IC and how to make the best out of it:

- [Un stage, passage oblig   pour un poste dans la coop  ration internationale?](#)
- [Ist ein Praktikum ein Muss f  r einen sp  teren Job in der IZA?](#)
- [How to make the best of your internship](#)

Internships are advertised like other positions on the [UN careers portal](#). Additionally, some of the UN agencies advertise internships on their own careers websites (for example [UNDP](#)).

Consultancies

Another popular way of getting a foot into a UN agency is by working as a consultant. Consultants, in contrast to short-term employees, are neither staff members nor UN officials, but independent contractors commissioned for a limited period for very specific assignments.

Consultancies at the UN

Once one has made first contacts in a UN agency an excellent way to keep a foot in the door is to ask for consultancy positions. These are not always publicly advertised or easily identified, but some positions may be found [here](#).

What is challenging about consultant positions is the fact that not all of them are publicly advertised and that different UN agencies handle consultancy opportunities and application processes in different ways. The office of Human Resources Management of the UN has, however, compiled a list of various websites displaying employment opportunities and vacancies for contractual work³. For more detailed information about skills, languages and qualifications need, as well as further websites and tips and tricks, please consult cinfo's publication «Consulting to United Nations Organisations».

JPO Positions

Junior Professional Officer (JPO), Associate Expert (AssEx) and Young Professional (YP) positions are interesting entry-level opportunities into a UN agency or other international organisations for young professionals with a few years of relevant work experience. The confusing issue about these positions, however, is that these can be descriptions of very different kinds of positions, funded by different actors. Generally one needs to differentiate between posts funded by the Swiss government that are reserved for Swiss nationals and programmes by an organisation itself that are open to all nationals of the member states of the organisation. You find more information on the different types of JPO, AssEx and YPP on www.cinfo.ch → Jobs & Missions → International Organisations.

Social Media Presence

Many of the UN agencies have a strong social media presence through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Youtube. Subscribing to and interacting with these agencies through social media can help to get an idea of the organisations dynamics and even to get noticed. An example of such a presence is the [facebook page of UNICEF](#).

UNV Specialists and UNV Interns

The United Nations Volunteers programme is the UN organisation that promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. Every year, UNV mobilize close to 8,000 specialist volunteers to work in development assistance projects and in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. While the UNV programme does not guarantee a career in the UN, it does provide an excellent opportunity to combine a volunteer contribution to development and a solid field experience with the UN. Both of these serve as an added value when competing for UN positions with other candidates.

Additionally to the classical option of applying to a UNV specialist position through the UN system, Swiss nationals have a second option: the UNV Internship Programme. This is targeted at graduates, does not require previous work experience and is funded by the Swiss government. For more information, refer to www.cinfo.ch → Jobs & Missions → International Organisations.

³ See <http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/indexpo.htm>



2. The UN and Swiss Nationals

The number of Swiss nationals working in the UN has increased over the past years. Nevertheless, Switzerland is, with the exception of the Secretariat, under-represented in most UN organisations. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) have repeatedly mandated cinfo to provide recruitment-related services to Swiss nationals. One part of these UN-related mandates targets junior level positions such as AssEx positions and JPO positions, while the other is devoted to experienced professionals.

In addition to cinfo's mandates, the Section Swiss Presence in International Organisations of the United Nations and International Organisations Division⁴ is responsible for promoting Swiss applications for international positions and recruitments of Swiss personnel for international organisations.

2.1 Interview: Recruitment Missions and the Mandate of cinfo

Since 2002, when Switzerland joined the UN, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been aiming to increase Swiss representation within several UN Development Agencies. For this purpose, SDC mandated cinfo with the task of conducting recruitment-related activities and outreach. Olivier Chave, Head Division Global Institutions/ Global Cooperation SDC, explains why.



cinfo: SDC collaborates with certain UN agencies and through the mandate to cinfo, directly promotes careers within them. With what criteria did you select the agencies?

Olivier Chave: We have had a long-standing policy of focussing on a limited number of multilateral agencies. There are over 260 multilateral agencies; Switzerland funds a rather limited selection of 12 multilateral agencies,

6 of which being part of the UN family. UNDP is our primary partner, the largest one, which plays an extremely important role as the coordinator of the UN operational system at country level; UNICEF with its focussed mandate on children and their mothers; and UNFPA focusing on population and development. These three agencies globally channel about 70% of the entire amount of the official development assistance expanded through the UN. They are meaningful and essential agencies on a political, operational and financial level. You could add of course the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the International Fund of Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as the UN World Food Programme (WFP), a rather humanitarian partner to Switzerland. This is, in short, the justification for our choices.

Through cinfo the SDC is promoting careers within these agencies. Is the representation of Swiss nationals an issue?

Fundamentally, it's a political issue. The largest multilateral agencies are quite important partners for the SDC, especially

⁴ <http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/topics/intorg/chprio.html>

Voting in Ivorian run-off elections (left)
Parliamentary and Presidential elections in the Kurdistan
region of Iraq. Ballot distribution. (right)

at field level; their leverage, their influence in shaping the developmental approaches and policies in the countries where we operate bilaterally is unarguable. The image of these agencies within the Swiss parliament or public opinion is however rather poor, and a part of our work is to constantly defend these agencies, as well as the critical importance for Switzerland to continue to finance them. In this context, it is important for us to be able to tell parliamentarians or the public that there are many Swiss working in these agencies. It's related to the impression many people have that if there is a Swiss somewhere in the system it must necessarily be functioning better. By the way, you can observe this reflex in many other donor countries.

So, it is mainly a political issue. Or are there other issues as well?

In the longer run and if the number of Swiss nationals within these agencies really grows, that might possibly facilitate some sort of staff mobility. Staff exchanges between SDC and multilateral agencies could be made easier, also on a temporary basis. And the number of development professionals that have a varied institutional experience would increase. We could also imagine that the nature of the relationship between the agencies with Swiss professionals and SDC at headquarters' or at field level would be easier and more intense than it is today. But I recognise that this is a relatively weak argument in the sense that we already have extremely good relationships with these agencies and their staff. And we live and work in an environment where the nationality of a collaborator should not really be a fundamental point of observation, I hope.

So why, SDC gave cinfo a mandate with the objective to increase the number of Swiss nationals within the mentioned agencies?

We have had a longstanding and mutually agreeable relationship: we trust cinfo's way of operating; and we have extremely good feedback from professionals and the agencies.

Two weeks ago, I was in New York and met the Head of Recruitment of UNDP; he was obviously delighted with his collaboration with cinfo. He told me that in terms of HR issues, the Swiss are the most attentive and respectful partners; it is a real pleasure for UNDP to cooperate with Switzerland.

What are in your opinion the results of the work SDC and cinfo have been doing in this domain over the last years?

I think results cannot be measured in terms of raw figures. cinfo has been able to really start a new approach and a new attitude especially within these agencies which in turn helps the SDC and Swiss professionals at the point where they develop an interest in a career with these agencies. I understand that there are many other factors limiting a rapid and visible rise in the number of Swiss within the UN agencies. For instance, the fact that there are quotas in terms of nationalities and gender and, that Swiss professionals cannot be easily mobilised. Most of them have difficulties imagining leaving the security associated with working in Switzerland.

Let us look at the perception of the UN as an employer: Has there been a change and do Swiss professionals consider the UN agencies increasingly as an option for their career?

Well, my job is not really to be facing this kind of outside world – people rarely discuss career related issues with me. But I can see that there is a lasting if not increasing interest and that there is a progressive understanding amongst the Swiss population that there are employment opportunities through the multilateral agencies.

Is there something Swiss specialists bring to the UN agencies?

Swiss professionals are very well educated and they most often master languages, in particular French, which is much in demand in Western Africa. But let's be frank. I don't think that this depends much on the nationality. I believe that in general, the development profession is evolving towards more local



South Soudan's Jonglei Communities Sign Agreement

«We all need
outstanding
personalities»

expertise. What we have noticed is that the persons who were selected⁵ by cinfo in the course of the last years and ended up within the agencies are – as far as I knew them personally – outstanding personalities. And that's good for the whole system. In the multilateral system as well as in bilateral agencies such as SDC, the jobs are difficult, challenging and necessary. That's why all of us, we at the SDC as well as our partner institutions, all need outstanding personalities.

2.2 Staff Needs of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN WOMEN

The SDC's main partners of collaboration in the field of the UN are UNDP, UNFPA, UN WOMEN and UNICEF. These agencies are especially interested in recruiting staff with the following areas of expertise:

⁵ cinfo regularly (pre-)selects Swiss candidates for UN agencies on the basis of its mandate from the SDC.

		World presence and main areas	External recruitment needs and trends
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme Staff ~ 8,500	158 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ democratic governance ▪ poverty reduction ▪ crisis prevention & recovery ▪ environment & energy ▪ HIV/AIDS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ french speakers, at all levels Expertise in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ environment, energy and climate change ▪ operations management, including finance Profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund Staff ~ 2,100	121 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reproductive health ▪ women's empowerment ▪ populations and development strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ technical and operational expertise ▪ francophone professionals in public and maternal health with management experience Profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund Staff ~ 11,000	144 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ child survival and development ▪ basic education and gender equality ▪ HIV/AIDS and children ▪ child protection ▪ policy, advocacy and partnership 	Expertise in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ social and economic policy ▪ gender ▪ human rights ▪ child protection and adolescent development ▪ monitoring and evaluation ▪ planning ▪ communication for development ▪ public-sector alliances and resource mobilisation ▪ water, sanitation and hygiene ▪ health ▪ nutrition ▪ operation management Profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Staff ~ 505 (237 in headquarter, 268 in field location)	80 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ violence against women and girls ▪ peace and security ▪ leadership and participation ▪ economic empowerment ▪ national planning and budgeting 	Expertise in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ gender equality ▪ women's empowerment ▪ human rights ▪ civil society ▪ UN coordination ▪ economic security and rights ▪ management and administration (finance, budget, IT, fund raising, HR)

2.3 Experiences of Swiss at the UN

Interviews with three Swiss professionals, working or having worked in a UN entity

Simone Troller, Governance Specialist with UNDP

«Many people with NGO background are working with the UN»

Simone Troller joined the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as Governance Specialist in the field of Human Rights and Civil Society in April 2011. Prior to that, she served close to five years as Senior Researcher with Human Rights Watch, for two years as Human Rights Officer with the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and for another two years as Gender Issues Officer with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Tajikistan. Originally she studied English and Russian literature. She then successfully completed a BA in business administration and a post-graduate degree in development studies.



info: You work as a Human Rights Specialist with UNDP. What are you currently doing?

Simone Troller: Our office is located in Fiji and is called Pacific Centre because we cover the entire pacific region which includes 14, sometimes very tiny, island states. There are two aspects of my work: First I provide advice and support regarding human rights

to governments in the region but also to civil society and UNDP staff. Second I design programmes and projects to advance human rights in the pacific region. Currently I am working for example on human rights impact assessments of trade agreements. This is an emerging area, also for the UN. Then I also work with UN WOMEN on ending violence against women. This work covers on the one hand legislative reforms, including family law, and on the other hand access to justice.

Therefore I currently work with both UNFPA and UN WOMEN to design joint programmes.

I also cover civil society organisations in my portfolio, which are quite weak in the pacific region. That is why I would like to build up their capacity to start documenting and monitoring the human rights situation in their country and to advocate for changes at the national level.

A lot of this work is in the office but I do travel at least once a month because of the coverage of the whole pacific region. Usually travelling is limited to the capitals of the island states though, because of infrastructural difficulties in reaching some islands.

What motivated you to work with the UN, especially with UNDP?

The main motivation to apply for this assignment was that I wanted to go back doing programming work, which includes designing and implementing as well. After having done that already in Tajikistan, followed by some years of rather «typical» human rights work like documentation, advocacy research and analysis – which I loved as well by the way – I wanted to combine again my background in development and management with my human rights expertise.

How did your experiences with Human Rights Watch help you in getting the job with UNDP?

I think my specialist background and my specialist position with Human Rights Watch helped me in getting the job with UNDP. However, a lot of people with NGO background are working with the UN, so I would say it was not an unusual step.

What are the main differences and similarities, in terms of organisational culture, in working with a NGO like Human Rights Watch and with UNDP?

Human Rights Watch is completely independent from government and does not accept any governmental funding. Moreover, it is a very outspoken and public organisation working on the traditional way of naming and shaming governments on their human rights abuses. Working there means working with likeminded people across the board. I think it is an organisation that is extremely effective in how it is doing its work. UNDP on the other hand is an intergovernmental organisation, but it also works across a spectrum of governance actors like civil society or parliaments. UNDP is more hesitant to take public position as compared to Human Rights Watch. Nevertheless, I think UNDP can be just as effective as an NGO, if not more, if its position and relationships are used in a strategic way.



Assembly Adopts
Consensus Text on
NGO Accreditation
for Rio+20

Did cinfo support you while searching for opportunities with UNDP?

After having applied for my current position I attended an «Information and Networking Mission» and got to know more about the competency-based interview procedures. And, as a coincidence, shortly after that event I was invited for the interview for my position and I felt being a lot more prepared. So cinfo was very helpful even though I did not plan this in advance.

«UNDP can be
very effective in its
work»

What tips would you give to professionals, young or experienced, aspiring to work with the UN?

Most important is to get field experience. It does not really matter with whom or whether this field experience really matches your educational profile or not. A lot of people working with the UN have a background in one area and work in a completely different sector. Field experience also enables you to find out whether this is really the kind of work you want to do. I personally was very lucky and got my first field experience through the NADEL⁶ which helps you to get a post. If you once got your first field experience your career continues much easier, although there will always be some «bumps» because working with international organisations is quite unpredictable. Another tip is to specialise yourself in one country. Get to know this country better and just do what you are most interested in. Build up the experience and the expertise and at some point – because there is no template to work with the UN and there are so many different profiles and agencies – you will be able to qualify. I think it is also important to see the UN once from the outside in order to be critical as well. When working with other organisations and NGOs you are able to do this and to see the strengths and weaknesses.

⁶ NADEL offers a multi-disciplinary course programme to young and experienced professionals working in development cooperation. It belongs to the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH).

**Beatrix Attinger Colijn, Gender Capacity Adviser,
hosted by OCHA**

«The UN offers a wide range of working opportunities»

Beatrix Attinger Colijn has been a Gender Capacity Adviser in Niger since May 2012. Prior to that, she worked as Head of the Sexual Violence Unit within the peace keeping mission MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo for two years, with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for eight years and with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for ten years. She studied political science and public administration in Mexico and history, political science and international law at the University of Zurich.



info: You worked with MONUSCO as Head of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). What are you currently doing?

Beatrix Attinger Colijn:

I am now in a position as a Gender Capacity (GenCap) Adviser and I am hosted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Niger. GenCap advisers are always hosted by a UN agency, and agencies have to request

the deployment of such capacity builders if needed. We are a roster of about 30 people and I have been in there since May 2008.

GenCap advisers usually work with the UN Country Team and stay for 6 to 12 months because they should be present until the main programming for the following year is done. Thus I am meant to build capacities so that the next programme takes gender aspects into account. Moreover, I integrate the so-called Gender Marker to measure whether the programmes are contributing to gender equality. The programme is then submitted to the donors. There are several nowadays, which demand a high Gender Marker in programming otherwise they will reconsider funding.

Coming back to MONUSCO: What motivated you for this deployment?

I would say I am a field person. I have almost always worked in field missions and when having been told about the position in Kinshasa I was very much interested.

«As young professional I would try to find some assignment in the field»

What also motivated me was the fact that coming to the UN means working in a much wider international environment with local people and colleagues from all over the world. Especially interesting is the connection to the UN Security Council. As Head of the Sexual Violence Unit I contributed to reports for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and the Secretary General, thus what I wrote was reflected in the UN Security Council.

What challenges did you encounter in relation to your work and your environment?

The first challenge is the size of this mission, which contains of 17.000 troops, a large number of civilians and huge departments. Moreover, the working environment is very complex: while in the East plain conflicts are going on, development programmes and a big stabilisation programme, linked to the national one, are implemented as well. So a lot of different players with different interests are working on the ground. This leads to interesting working relations and a huge choice of partners, but to some kind of competition as well. The second challenge is the size of the country, which is as big as Europe. For effective programming you cannot consider it as homogenous because populations on the ground are isolated from each other and what applies for one part will not apply for another. So doing programming against sexual violence always includes specific local research on the background of this violence, the status of women and so on. The third challenge includes the military component and language difficulties. When working in the DRC you are most likely working with English speaking military personnel, who are unable to communicate with the local population, the majority of which does not speak English or French.

Sexual violence is a very present topic in the context of the conflict in the DRC. Did you feel that your work had a concrete impact on the everyday lives of women?

I am very honest about that: it is like with every programme of that size. In the end you are in the capital Kinshasa and you are very much into policy and paper work. For all that, the programming is not something imposed from the top, rather projects are designed and developed in the provinces and then go through a long approval procedure up to the national level. This also leads to many opportunities to go on the ground. In July 2011 we did a big tour of two weeks to see all the programmes and I can say that we make a big difference in the sense that the mission is there, it cares and it provides the people with important services. People on the ground are very much dependent on the presence and the work of MONUSCO. However, what these women really need is peace, which the mission cannot provide on its own.

How did you deal with these challenges at a personal level?

In general, you need to find something about the country that you like and people with whom you can enjoy and share this. I am a runner and when I come to a new location one of my first question is always about possible running locations. You need to find some kind of a strategy to keep yourself physically healthy because working hours are long and travelling is often hard. I was also visiting art exhibitions; my favourite place in Kinshasa was the Académie des Beaux Arts. I spent most of my free time and my money on art and got to know some good friends.

Would you like to continue your career with the UN?

You know, I have adolescent girls in Austria and, although I had good opportunities to see them quite often during my time with MONUSCO, I had the feeling that I missed a lot of their lives and how they developed. But the UN is a really good place to work because of the wide range of working opportunities going all the way from the very high political level down to the field. So I think that is what I always will be looking for.

You joined the UN only as a senior professional. What tips would you give to Swiss young professionals?

As young professional I would absolutely try to find some assignment in the field. It does not really matter with which organisation or NGO. I have seen over the years that the divide between the civil society and the UN became much smaller. International NGOs are very much respected, therefore, starting your career with a NGO and then applying for the UN is a very realistic path. Additionally, I advise Swiss professionals to use cinfo to get a good insight into the mandates of UN agencies, the application procedures and how to apply best. I myself subscribed to the newsletter many years ago. I applied for some generic jobs and was interviewed by several of the agencies as well. Moreover, I would recommend the Swiss Peacebuilding Training Course of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

**«Working with
MONUSCO was
probably the best
job I have ever had»**

Marcel Jullier, Certified Expert for Accounting, Finance and Controlling

«You need to have perseverance when looking for a job»

Marcel Jullier worked for UN WOMEN and UNIFEM for three years as Chief of Finance, Procurement and Administrative Services. Prior to that, he was a staff member of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for approximately 20 years, both in its field delegations as well as at the headquarter in Geneva. He is currently leading the family business Jullier SA, carries out consultancies and plans to continue his career within the field of international cooperation. Marcel Jullier holds a Swiss Federal Diploma in Accounting and Controlling with specialisation in Finance, and is a Certified Internal Auditor.



cinfo: From 2008 to 2011 you worked for UN WOMEN. Why and how did you get there?

Marcel Jullier: I had been working for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for over 20 years of which about 15 in its many field delegations and about 5 at its headquarter in Geneva. Through its mandate the ICRC is working mostly in emergency situations, in countries where there are

conflicts. After all those years I wanted to change to the field of development. Through my many contacts with the UN while working with the ICRC, it was only natural that I applied to UN organisations working in the development area.

The entire process of change took about two to three years. I started applying to different positions in the field of Audit, Finance and Controlling and visited a UN recruitment mission organised by cinfo. There I was interviewed by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA and was accepted by UNDP as an internal candidate. Thereafter I had several interviews for applied positions, with UNFPA and UNDP. However, I also continued to apply to other UN organisations and was finally employed by UNIFEM, the organisation which later became UN WOMEN.

What did you do in this position, in terms of concrete working tasks?

My main tasks were to provide strategic leadership in the financial management of the organisation including grant management, providing effective and efficient financial services, developing and monitoring of UNIFEM/UN WOMEN's budgetary process, its procurement and general administrative services, and ensuring a forward looking information and communication management. I was also in charge to guide, supervise and support UNIFEM/UN WOMEN's field offices and their programmes regarding all financial and administrative matters. Last but not least I was assigned as Security Coordinator for UNIFEM/UN WOMEN's headquarters and to coordinate field security for all sub-regional and country offices.

I also contributed to the preparation of the Management Results Framework of UN WOMEN's first strategic plan, prepared its financial regulations and rules for the adaptation by the executive board, oversaw the advancement of the implementation of the International Public Service Accounting Standards (IPSAS). As Chief of Finance, Procurement and Administration I was the primary interlocutor with the UN Board of Auditor and with other UN programmes, funds and departments. A very interesting and challenging task was to insure and accomplish a smooth transition and change management from the former UN entities into UN WOMEN by integrating different financial, budgetary and information technology systems.

You come from the financial and administrative sector. What do you think was essential for your success in getting the job with UN WOMEN?

Besides covering the educational requirements, one of the key aspects was that I had specific practical experience in financial and administrative decentralisation, experience which I had gained during my previous assignments with the ICRC. UNIFEM was in the middle of such a decentralisation process and needed additional support, specifically in the decentralisation of its procurement, finance and administration processes.

What would you advise to interested people who have similar backgrounds and who aspire to work with the UN?

Besides covering the educational requirements, there are basically two ways to get into the system. Either you start as a Junior Professional Officer (JPO), which in most cases needs the support of the country where the person comes from, or you apply to a UN organisation after you have had several years of practical experience. The most essential to get a job within the UN system is that when you apply for a position, your CV should clearly match the TOR. Only in those cases will one ever be short listed.

Flags of the United Nations Member States



What would you advise especially to Swiss professionals?

When applying to the UN applicants with UN experience have always a strong advantage – although the need for UN experience is seldom directly mentioned in the TOR. In order that outside candidates are still considered to be put on the short list, the applicants need to have some exceptional additional qualification or experience as some kind of comparative advantage. Beside this, a very important point is to have perseverance in sending applications since the application process may take in some cases more than a year. Also, some posts are published even though there are already enough candidates within the UN. Finding a job is sometimes also connected with a bit of luck by applying to the right position at the right time with the right organisation. Moreover, I would definitely advise to take advantage of the support that cinfo can provide through «Information and Networking Missions», where potential candidates can meet representatives of various organisations.

Why did you leave UN WOMEN?

I left UN WOMEN due to personnel reasons and in order to reorganise our family business in Switzerland.

Would you like to continue your career with the UN, or what other options do you aspire?

After the reorganisation of the family business, I definitely like to continue in one way or another to work within the field of development or in the field of humanitarian aid, be it through missions for the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, where I have been accepted as a member, or through its secondments to the UN.

«Do only apply when
your CV clearly
matches the TOR»

3. How Can cinfo Support You?

According to several UN representatives, cinfo is a competent service provider for Swiss nationals and other interested people wanting to join UN agencies. Michael Emery, former Head of Recruitment, UNDP, and currently Director Human Resources at UNFPA, estimates: «Over a number of years, cinfo has been able to identify, support, track and provide UNDP a number of candidates that have gone on to be recruited and thrive in UNDP. It is a very important partnership to UNDP».

3.1 cinfo's Services: Be Informed, Get the Right Network, Get Further

cinfo assists accomplished professionals in their application process if they have a substantive international experience in their field of expertise, preferably in developing countries, and if they are seriously considering joining, coming back to or staying with the UN. These include persons that

- are working for the public sector in environment;
- are a mid-level or senior manager in financial services or consulting sectors;
- work as a human resources officer for a multinational company;
- are programme managers, project officers or executives in a Swiss development institution;
- are public health experts dealing with policy issues.

All services presented below can be combined according to the specific needs.

cinfo...

... provides you with access to selected UN vacancies.

A selection of UN vacancies along with other job opportunities in the field of international cooperation are posted on [cinfoPoste](#), the online job market on cinfo's website.

... analyses with you your career opportunities during a consultation with a job market expert.

If you wish to discuss and validate your career fitness for the international development / cooperation sector or to review your CV, you could benefit from cinfo's longstanding experience in [career advice](#).

... proposes you courses on careers in the international development / cooperation sector.

cinfo offers [courses](#) that can help you in your job search with the United Nations including CV and job application writing.

... offers you a skills assessment.

If you are already working in the field of international cooperation and are considering changing your career in a meaningful way, a skills assessment workshop «[Kompetenzenbilanz und Laufbahnorientierung / Bilan de compétences](#)» helps you to identify in which capacity you could propose your skills for a career with the UN.

... provides you with information on the application system and interview training.

cinfo offers you an [Individual Recruitment Support](#) during the application and interview process.

If you are especially interested in joining one of SDC's UN partner agencies, which are UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN WOMEN, cinfo also:

... provides you with access to career related networking and information events with representatives.

A number of information or networking events and the specialised fair Forum cinfo are organised by cinfo, and you can take advantage of one of these.



... invites you or propose you to UN Information and Networking Missions in Switzerland.

Once a year, cinfo organises a one-day Information and Networking Mission where pre-selected candidates are invited to meet UN Human Resources Officers from the above mentioned agencies to present their competencies and interests.

... supports you during the application process.

At the different stages of the application process and its different requirements, cinfo can provide you with technical, strategic and networking support on the way to proceed successfully.

For more information about all those services visit www.cinfo.ch

→ Offer for Customers, call us or subscribe to cinfo's [newsletter](#).

3.2 Tips for Professionals

If you want to increase your chances to get a UN job without prior UN experience, here are some useful tips.

1. Undergo an assessment of your motivation and expectations to clarify your career objectives.
2. Follow relevant training to make your profile as attractive as possible.
3. Prepare a strong application that stands out and where your profile matches clearly the requirements of the post.
4. Target difficult duty stations to be more competitive. This is the most frequent recommendation from the UN Human Resources officers to those who wish to work for the UN for the first time.

5. Accept temporary assignments and be flexible to start with.

6. Favour posts where you have a strong comparative advantage, for example where you are acquainted with the culture, the political context, or speak one of the UN official languages other than the official working languages of French and English.

7. Use and develop your networking skills to increase your opportunities to be better tuned to job opportunities.

8. Perform well during interviews addressing as much your emotional intelligence (soft skills) as your technical skills and substantive context knowledge.

Many professionals, after having taken advantage of cinfo's services, found a job with the UN. For example Patricia Barandun, actually Head of the Governance Unit, UNDP Vietnam, who shares her motivation to join the UN and talks about how she was successful in her endeavour.

UNOCI Head Visits School in Bonoua, Côte d'Ivoire (left)
cinfo's Information and Networking Mission 2011 (right)

«I would not have taken a decision for the UNDP Lead Programme without cinfo»



zVg

cinfo: Why did you want to join UNDP in the first place?

Patricia Barandun:

I was always interested in working for a multilateral institution. UNDP was of a particular interest because of its universal and broad mandate.

What type of support did you get from cinfo?

There was a call for applications for a UNDP Consultant Roster and I applied. cinfo then contacted me, indicating concrete career opportunities with UNDP that would match my profile. One of them was the LEAD Programme that I did not know about at the time. cinfo also provided me with the opportunity to discuss personal questions and concerns related to my career with a professional career counsellor. Looking back, this support was decisive. I would not have learned about and taken a decision for LEAD without cinfo.

And in the concrete application process?

In the following formal application process, cinfo's role was less relevant. What was special, though, was the fact that I did not have to compete with other candidates based on my application documents alone, but that UNDP came especially to Biel to meet Swiss candidates. This allowed me to meet them and be interviewed face to face in cinfo's office in Biel.

And now, as a UN staff member – is there still a service which could be helpful for you?

Today, I know that if I need information on UN recruitment policies and programmes I can always get in touch with cinfo. I also know that they would support me with material and training for competency based interviews at any time. But most importantly, cinfo represents a neutral agency for me to discuss career considerations. Having this institution that is disconnected from my own employer but at the same time familiar with it, and with the working environment in the development field at a more general level, is very valuable. I would not know what other Swiss institution could provide me with that kind of support.

3.3 The Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the UN recruit?

Like other organisations, the UN recruits according to needs. Unfortunately, there is no common, harmonized recruitment system for all agencies. While the majority of recruitments are for specific positions there are also so-called generic job openings, which are used to create rosters, i.e. in the field of emergency, for gender experts etc. For candidates, it is important to bear in mind that being a global organisation, the UN recruits at global level. This means applicants compete with professionals from all over the world. This is what makes the recruitment process with the UN particularly competitive.

2. I have applied via inspira⁷ or directly to an organisation and never received a feedback on my application. Why didn't I get a feedback on my profile or on my application?

A high number of recruitments are being processed by a limited amount of HR professionals. This is why the recruitment processes with the UN is widely automated. Only when applicants make it on a shortlist, is their application handled more individually. Alternatively, as a candidate, in order to receive a feedback, you could have your application assessed by cinfo, or by working colleagues. The first step is to try to find out if your qualifications and your experience really match the ones detailed in the job description.

3. How long do recruitments take and why do they take so long?

The reason for the length of the recruitment process is the complexity of the process that involves a large number of steps and different people (refer to the UN recruitment process described in Graph 4) Working on humanitarian issues, it is also frequent that recruitments are delayed because of sudden urgencies, institutional or political considerations.

⁷ Inspira is the UN secretariat's online recruitment system. For more information see: <https://careers.un.org> → Application process



zVg

4. What can I do to increase my chances of a job?

1. Know yourself, know your profile and get to know the agency you are interested in. Learn about the job you plan to apply for and review carefully the responsibilities, competencies and qualifications required for that particular vacancy. Apply only when you are certain that you meet all or the majority of the set criteria.
2. Being open and flexible with regard to positions and duty stations substantially increases your chances of a job. All agencies face challenges in filling positions in difficult, non-family duty stations such as Afghanistan and Sudan. It will, in the long term, also add credibility to your profile.
3. Invest time in building up, maintaining and expanding your network. Networking is an important source of information and knowledge. It is estimated that up to 90% of positions in international organisations are secured through some form of networking. Effective and targeted networking is therefore very important.

5. For how many vacancies can I apply?

You are not limited in the number of vacancies to which you can apply. It is up to each candidate to review the responsibilities, competencies and qualifications required for a particular vacancy before making a decision to apply for an advertised position. It however might be perceived in a negative way if you apply for many vacancies that demand very different qualifications.

cinfo – the Centre for Information, Counselling and Training for Professions Relating to International Cooperation (IC) – is a specialised service provider and the network platform for professionals and organisations involved in the IC job market and for persons who wish to become active in this field.



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