CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS

Description of the Field
Multilateral organizations, with the United Nations as the largest and most influential, are tasked with the many responsibilities that no country can address alone. This is a very diverse field, with its professionals working in a wide range of careers, including bettering living standards and human rights, maintaining international peace and security, promoting social progress, and developing friendly relations between nations. International organizations (IO) work throughout the world and employ people with diverse backgrounds and work histories. Those wanting to join a multilateral organization must recognize the many challenges of the field, but also the great work achievable through cooperation between countries and peoples.

Types of professional positions for which international organizations often recruit:

- **Administrative** - Organizations need administrative experts with advanced degrees and a second language. Mid-level positions are often filled internally. Those employed in this field are usually specialists in personnel, accounting, budget, finance, procurement, and management analysis.

- **Agriculture/Forestry** - The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has a demand for agriculture, forestry, and food experts. This agency normally requires at least a master’s degree and foreign language proficiency. Typical vacancies are for agronomists, animal production specialists, plant pathologists/geneticists, rural development specialists, and agricultural economists.

- **Demography** - An advanced degree in the social sciences with a major in demography is usually required.

- **Development** - This field requires an advanced degree in business, social sciences, or economics, with specialization in finance or development economics, in addition to field experience and strong foreign language ability.

- **Economics** - This is one of the fields most sought after by IOs. An advanced degree and specialized work experience relevant to the organization are almost always required (e.g., development economists for the UN Development Program (UNDP); labor economists for the International Labor Organization (ILO); agricultural economists for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); and trade economists for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the World Trade Organization (WTO)). Field experience and working knowledge of French or Spanish are often required.

- **Engineering** - The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN development agencies, and others have a need for engineers. An advanced degree, field experience, and a second language (often French or Arabic) are typically required.

- **Information Systems, Computer, Electronic Data Processing (EDP)** - Organizations need qualified computer specialists with server, desktop, and networking experience. Applicants generally must have a degree in computer science, statistics, economics or accounting, and a minimum of three years’ experience on large-scale computer systems.
- **Legal** – General administrative legal staffs are relatively small, with slow turnover. Few vacancies occur for persons whose main experience has been in US civil, administrative, commercial, or penal law. Vacancies arise more frequently for positions relative to the specialization of the organization, such as in patent and copyright law, labor and international law, and in the immigration, human rights, and refugee fields. French or Spanish language proficiency is often required.

- **Political/International Affairs** - Opportunities for international relations specialists or political scientists, with no other field of expertise, are limited, and candidates greatly outnumber the positions available.

- **Public Health** – *World Health Organization (WHO)*, the *Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)*, *The Global Fund (TGF)*, and the *International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC)* regularly recruit for health professionals such as epidemiologists, sanitary engineers, and health educators. An MD or public health degree, developing country experience, and language skills (usually French) normally are required. There are few openings for doctors, nurses, dentists, and others wanting to provide clinical care.

- **Public Information** - Vacancies in this field are limited and competition is keen. These posts usually call for substantial experience in the fields of information media – press, publications, radio, film, and television. International media experience related to the work of the agency is desirable, as well as language skills.

- **Social Welfare** - Some opportunities are available in the field offices of specialized (and refugee-related) agencies.

- **Statistics** – The UN Secretariat, as well as agencies such as the *World Food Program (WFP)*, the *UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*, the *International Labor Organization (ILO)*, and the *UN Population Fund (UNFPA)* seek statisticians with strong quantitative and modeling skills. Language skills may also be desired.

- **Teaching** – Vacancies, such as those in the *UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* often involve designing, developing, promoting, and coordinating educational programs, as opposed to teaching. They call for an advanced degree and substantial experience in the field of education.

- **Telecommunications** – Positions in this field are limited. Applicants for posts in the *International Telecommunications Union (ITU)*, at either the headquarters in Geneva or in the field, are required to have an advanced degree in electrical engineering or electronics and substantial practical experience in the telecommunications field (e.g., network planning, microwave, radio relay, and telephone switching).

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**Career Paths and Entry Salaries**

There are few clearly marked career paths in the United Nations. The diversity of occupations and multidisciplinary mandates means that one may not only change functions, departments, but even organizations or fields of work. While such shifts require learning, time, and effort, they also provide valuable experience, broader perspectives, and challenging work. Geographic mobility is yet another way for one to positively affect one’s career in the UN. Career progression to the senior levels relies, in part, on evidence of mobility, including service in difficult locations. One’s career path is a reflection of one’s aspirations and decisions about one’s professional development, where one plays the leading role.
The organization plays a supporting role putting effective systems in place to enhance and support one’s career decisions (https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=BG).

UN salaries and benefits are comparable to those of the US Civil Service, as well as include a defined benefit package pension plan. Salaries are higher at other international organizations, with earnings from both the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development earning nearly 30% more than the UN (Carland and Faber, 161).

**Demand**
The future United Nations workforce will have a core of career international civil servants performing long-term functions, supplemented by others who will join and leave the organization for shorter periods of time when needed. A key part of this core will be the staff required to meet the demands of urgent peacekeeping and special political missions. Experienced staff who are able to be deployed rapidly and work effectively under pressure in unfamiliar circumstances will be in constant demand. Competition is keen, with special efforts being made to hire qualified women (www.un.org/reform/investinginun/chap1.shtml).

**Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field**
Most employees of the United Nations and other international organizations are experts in their respective fields and have extensive technical experience. The large majority of professional and senior positions require an advanced degree; a significant number of years of recent, relevant, and specialized work experience; some field experience in developing countries; and fluency in at least one of the official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) and a strong working knowledge of another, usually French or Spanish. Appointments to translator or interpreter posts require passing a qualifying examination. It should be noted that there rarely are suitable openings for students or recent college graduates who lack pertinent experience or language skills.

**Future Challenges of the Profession**
In addition to the global challenges that the United Nations faces, including global warming, nuclear proliferation, and committing to humanitarian assistance, its international organizations must also address staffing issues. Qualified professionals will need to be recruited and retained, despite lengthy hiring procedures and more lucrative opportunities elsewhere.

**Sample Group of Employers**
- International Monetary Fund (IMF) – www.imf.org
- World Trade Organization (WTO) – www.wto.org

**Resources for Additional Information**

**Internet Resources**
- For US Citizens: Employment Opportunities in the UN and Other Organizations – www.state.gov/p/io/empl
- International Jobs – www.intljobs.org
- UN Jobs – www.unjobs.org
World Health Organization – www.who.int/employment/en

Publications