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Are you a qualified Swiss professional in your area of expertise, interested in working for the UN? Find out what a career with the UN entails, and find out what *cinfo* can do for you.

## International Cooperation **A career with the UN**



# Content

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Center for Information,  
Counselling and Training for  
Professions relating to  
International Cooperation



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# 1. Is the UN for you?

## 1.1 UN Staff Worldwide

Today, some 40,000<sup>1</sup> staff members of the United Nations from 192 Member States serve at different locations around the world. 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.

In contrast, the Headquarters is 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.

Work experience should be relevant to the job for which a person is applying. A Masters Degree is generally a must.

### Areas of Skills/Types of Posts

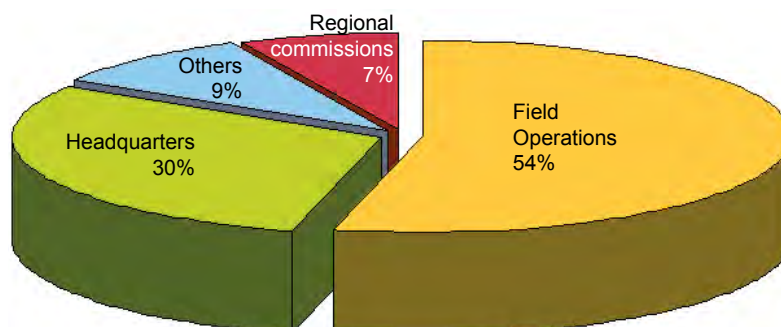
Among its ranks, UN staff members can monitor disarmament, support the organisation of elections, coordinate relief in humanitarian crises, raise funds for educational projects, and provide administrative as well as logistical support to carry out the complex mandates. These are just a few examples.

In principle, almost any qualified professional with operational or technical skills can find 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

Under the label «United Nations» there falls 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, also named 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.

UN agencies such as UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF are funds/programmes reporting directly to the UN General Assembly, one of the five active principal organs of the United Nations system.



Repartition of Duty Stations of UN-Staff

With a base of 1,600 United Nations employees as well as 8,500 additional staff working for the Organisation, Geneva is one of the largest duty stations outside of New York City.

## 1.2 UN Professional Profiles

Many of the posts for qualified professionals have high-level requirements with strong academic and professional backgrounds including several years of international experience in their area of expertise.

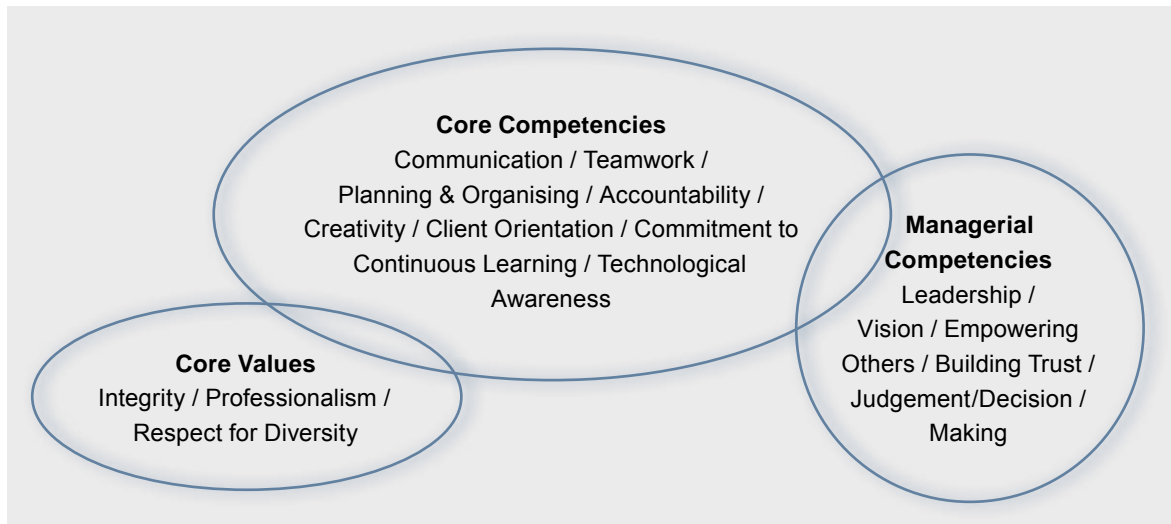
and climate change experts, UNICEF may need child protection and nutrition officers.

Beside regular posts, there are increasing opportunities for consultants intervening on specialised issues.

**Websites with UN posts**  
<https://jobs.un.org>  
<http://careers.un.org>  
<http://unjobs.org>  
[www.cinfo.ch](http://www.cinfo.ch) → *cinfoPoste*

<sup>1</sup>This figure only includes staff from the UN system and its principal organs, it does not include staff from UN programmes and funds such as UNDP, UNFPA or UNICEF or specialized agencies such as ILO.





UN Values and Competencies

### UN Values and Competencies

To work for the United Nations, 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 United Nations also looks 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 (2–5 years).

The UN seeks staff who are motivated to make a real difference through their work, and who possess the following core values and competencies.

### 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 United Nations. 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** Women are encouraged to apply to available positions as there is a drive for gender parity, and to date the UN Global force is still made-up of only 34% of women.
- **Other UN official languages** Increasingly there is a demand for competency in one or more of the other official UN languages (Arabic, Chinese or Russian often being sought). Applicants with fluency in one or more of these languages face less competition in their applications.

### 1.3 UN Employment Conditions

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. Qualified professionals mainly fall under professional and higher categories (P for professional and D for Director).

#### Type of Contracts

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 (FTE) for a period of 1 to 5 years, and Temporary Appointments (TA) for less than one-year for seasonal or peak workloads or specific short-term requirements. In general, FTEs 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,

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

[www.un.org/en/aboutun](http://www.un.org/en/aboutun)

<http://careers.un.org>

[www.dinfo.ch](http://www.dinfo.ch) → jobs & missions



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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 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.

### Pay & 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 (normally exempt from taxes) ranges approximately in US\$:

- 35,000 – 77,000 for entry level professionals (P1 – P3)
- 64,000 – 102,000 for mid-career professionals (P4 – P5)
- 96,000 – 118,000 for senior level professionals (D1 – D2)

### Pros and Cons of an 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 your 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
- Difficult cultural barriers to deal with
- Sometimes bureaucratic environment
- Low security contexts
- High mobility policy



## 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 FDFA (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) 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 (donor funded) junior level positions such as Associate Expert Positions and Junior Professional Positions, while the other is devoted to experienced professionals.

In addition to *cinfo*'s mandates, the section Switzerland's Presence in International Organisations of the Political Affairs Division III is responsible for promoting Swiss candidatures for international positions and for recruiting Swiss personnel for international organisations.

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### 2.1 Recruitment missions of UN agencies and the mandate of *cinfo*

#### «We all need outstanding personalities»

**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 you are working with?

**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 percent 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 UNAIDS, IFAD and the WHO, as well as the WFP, a rather Humanitarian Partner to Switzerland. This is – in short – the justification for our choices.

*You told us why these agencies are important for Switzerland and SDC. Through *cinfo*, you are also promoting careers within them. Is then the representation of Swiss nationals in these agencies an issue – and if so, with whom?*

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



*cinfo*

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



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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 that 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.

*SDC gave cinfo a mandate with the objective to increase the number of Swiss nationals within the mentioned agencies. Why did you give this mandate to cinfo?*

We have had a longstanding and mutually agreeable relationship: we trust your 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 the results of the work SDC and cinfo have been doing in this domain over the last years?*

I think the results in terms of raw figures are not that impressive. But cinfo has been able to really start a new approach and a new attitude especially within these agencies which in turn helps us and our nationals 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 and / or for a Swiss employer.

*If you go beyond figures and look at the perception of UN as an employer: Has there been a change in terms of perception? 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.

*Before, you mentioned that each donor country thinks that things are functioning better if it is well represented inside an organisation. But what – in the case of Switzerland – do Swiss bring to the UN agencies that others don't?*

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 expertise. What we have noticed is that the persons who were selected 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 and UNICEF

The SDC's preferential agencies are UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF. These agencies are especially interested in recruiting staff with the following areas of expertise..

		<b>World presence and main areas</b>	<b>External recruitment needs and trends for qualified professionals</b>
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme  Staff ~ 8,500	158 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ democratic governance</li> <li>▪ poverty reduction</li> <li>▪ crisis prevention &amp; recovery</li> <li>▪ environment &amp; energy</li> <li>▪ HIV/AIDS</li> </ul>	In all, related to main areas. But particular need for profiles in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ environment, energy and climate change related</li> <li>▪ French speakers, at all levels</li> <li>▪ all profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations</li> </ul> Constantly a need for experts in operations management, including finance
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund  Staff ~ 2,100	121 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reproductive health</li> <li>▪ women's empowerment</li> <li>▪ populations and development strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ technical and operational needs</li> <li>▪ strong need for francophone professionals in public and maternal health with management experience</li> </ul> Profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations in particular need
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund  Staff ca. 11,000	144 countries with employees in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ child survival and development</li> <li>▪ basic education and gender equality</li> <li>▪ HIV/AIDS and children</li> <li>▪ child protection</li> <li>▪ policy, advocacy and partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ social and economic policy</li> <li>▪ gender</li> <li>▪ human rights</li> <li>▪ child protection and adolescent development</li> <li>▪ monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>▪ planning</li> <li>▪ communication for development</li> <li>▪ public-sector alliances and resource mobilisation</li> <li>▪ water, sanitation and hygiene</li> <li>▪ health</li> <li>▪ nutrition</li> <li>▪ operation management</li> </ul> Profiles for difficult, non-family duty stations in particular need

### 3. How can *cinfo* help you?

The role of *cinfo* in the recruitment process is considered an important one, according to several representatives of UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA. Michael Emery, former Head of Recruitment, UNDP, 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 to qualified Swiss professionals

*cinfo* can assist accomplished professionals in their application pro-

cess in several ways if they have a substantive international experience in their field, preferably in developing countries, and are seriously considering joining, coming back or staying with the UN. These include, for example, professionals 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

*cinfo*'s services offer a large range of options which can be combined according to the specific needs.

#### *cinfo* can...

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

A selection of UN vacancies along with other international cooperation employment opportunities are posted on *cinfoPoste*, online job database accessible on *cinfo*'s website.

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

If you wish to discuss and/or validate your career fitness for the international development/cooperation sector, you could benefit from *cinfo*'s longstanding experience in career advice.

... propose you workshops on careers in the international development/cooperation market.

*cinfo* offers workshops that can help you in your job search with the United Nations including CV and job application writing.

... offer 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 may help you identify in which capacity you could propose your skills for a career with the UN.

... provide you information on the application system and interview training.

In case you have not previously had a UN-type interview, *cinfo* offers you an individual recruitment sup-



Marcel Kaufmann





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port during the application and interview process.

*... inform you on selection and application processes including information about requirements and administrative steps.*

Upon request, *cinfo* can make it much easier and faster to understand these processes and procedures which may look difficult if you are not familiar with the UN recruitment system.

If you are especially interested in joining one of SDC's UN preferential agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF or UNFPA, *cinfo* can also:

*... provide you with access to career related networking and information events with these organisation representatives.*

A number of events such as roundtables, moderated workshops and career fairs are organised by *cinfo*, and you could take advantage of one of these.

*... invite you or propose you to UN recruitment missions in Switzerland.*

Once a year, *cinfo* organises a one-day recruitment mission where pre-selected candidates are invited to meet UN Human Resources Officers from these preferential agencies to present their competencies and interests.

*... facilitate qualification interviews with you and UN Human Resources representatives.*

*cinfo* can organise for you interviews with one or several HR representatives of these preferential agencies if your profile fits their needs. This allows you to receive a direct feedback on your profile and qualifications.

*... support 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.

### 3.2 Main tips for qualified 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, and/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.

### 3.3 They did it, so you can

Many professionals finally found a job with the UN. Two of them share their methods and their motivation and talk about how they were successful in their endeavours. For example Rolf Schaller who, as a member of the KPMG management, made a career move to UNICEF in New York. Read about his experience in *cinfo's Annual Report 2009*. Or Patricia Barandun, actually Team Leader, Governance and Gender, UNDP Vietnam – in the following interview.

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

***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 con-

siderations. 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.



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### 3.4 The answers to the five most frequently asked questions

#### 1. How does the UN recruit?

Like other organisations, 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 Galaxy or directly to an organisation and never received a feedback on my application. Why didn't I get a feedback on my profile / 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, respectively 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. Working on humanitarian issues, it is also frequent that recruitments are delayed because of sudden urgencies, institutional or political considerations.



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

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.

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.

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.