



# UN careers - FAQs

## Introduction

This document compiles answers to frequently asked questions about careers in the United Nations Secretariat. It is designed to provide prospective applicants, students, and professionals with practical guidance on the UN recruitment process and career opportunities within the Organization.

Given the wide range of roles, recruitment pathways, and eligibility requirements across the UN system, candidates often have questions about qualifications, language requirements, applications, assessments, contracts, career development, and the work environment. This guide addresses these topics in a clear and accessible way.

As requirements and processes may vary depending on the position, duty station, and organizational needs, candidates are encouraged to carefully review each job opening and consult official resources, including the UN Careers Portal, for the most up-to-date information.

We hope this guide helps candidates better understand the recruitment process and prepare effectively for career opportunities within the United Nations.

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## 1. Language Requirements

### **Q: What are the UN Levels of Language Competence?**

**A:** There are four UN Levels of Language Competence:

- UN Level I or Basic Language Competence
- UN Level II or Intermediate Language Competence
- UN Level III or Advanced Language Competence, baseline for the Language Proficiency Examination
- UN Level IV or Expert Language Competence

Each of the four UN Levels is defined by one overall descriptor and four specific descriptors.

The overall descriptor indicates what staff members do and how at every level of language competence. It includes the conditions required to facilitate and promote successful communication and cooperation. The four specific descriptors delve into the four skill areas: reading, listening, speaking and writing.

The UN Levels of Language Competence refer to using the language in three domains: The personal, public and professional domains. The domain defines the area in which the interaction or communication takes place.

The UN Levels of Language Competence build upon each other. Language users can have an overview of the four skills at each UN level or can check the progression in each skill at the different levels. [The video, audio and text samples](#) in different languages illustrate how language users write and speak at different levels.

### **Q: Do I need to speak multiple languages to work at the UN?**

**A:** *The UN has two working languages (English and French) and six official languages (English, French, Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Russian and Spanish). To work in the UN, you need to be fluent in at least one of the working languages (English or French). Knowledge of one or more official languages may be considered an advantage during the recruitment process.*

## 2. Qualifications and Eligibility

### **Q: What is the difference between “required” and “desirable” in a Job Opening?**

**A:** “Required” qualifications are essential criteria that candidates must meet to be considered and not screened out during the initial review.



“Desirable” qualifications are additional assets that are not mandatory but may strengthen a candidate's profile and be considered by hiring managers when making shortlisting decisions.

**Q: Do candidates from certain countries have an advantage?**

**A:** The UN promotes geographic diversity, and candidates from un-represented or under-represented countries are encouraged to apply. The UN also has programmes such as the Young Professionals Programme (YPP), which specifically targets candidates from these countries.

While selection is merit-based, other factors, such as gender and geographic balance, may also be taken into consideration at selection decision, provided candidates have been successful in the recruitment process.

**Q: What are the minimum educational requirements?**

**A:** Requirements vary by position:

General Service roles usually require a high-school diploma.

Professional roles typically require a Master's degree or equivalent degree in an area related to the job opening. Alternatively, a first-level degree or equivalent degree with **two additional years of relevant work experience** may be accepted in lieu of an advanced university degree.

**Q: Do I need previous UN experience to apply?**

**A:** *No. UN experience is needed to apply to UN vacancies. In some cases and depending on the roles, experience in international, governmental, or NGO environments can be an advantage.*

**Q: What type of profile/background/experience are managers at the UN looking for?**

**A:** Managers look for candidates whose profile closely matches the job requirements. This includes relevant academic background, but more importantly, strong professional experience that demonstrates the required competencies. The UN places significant emphasis on core competencies such as communication, teamwork, planning and organizing, and accountability.

The UN has a wide range of job families. For example, within the Management and Administration job family, roles can include Human Resources, Finance, Administration, or Audit. Candidates with relevant experience in these areas, such as recruitment, budgeting, or administrative coordination, tend to be more competitive.



You may also explore the different job families directly on the [UN Careers Portal](#).

### 3. Applications and Job Search

**Q: Can I use AI tools when applying for UN jobs?**

**A:** AI tools can be helpful for brainstorming ideas, structuring content, or improving clarity. However, the final application should always reflect your own experience, voice, and authenticity.

**Q: Can I apply to multiple UN positions at the same time?**

**A:** Yes, you can apply to several vacancies at the same time. Please note that each application should be tailored to the role.

**Q: Are UN job openings part of the “hidden job market”?**

**A:** No. All UN job openings of more than three months must be publicly advertised to ensure transparency and equal access for all applicants. While networking can help you better understand roles and prepare your application, it does not replace the formal recruitment process. The UN cannot accept applications that are not formally submitted in its talent management platform, Inspira.

**Q: Besides the UN Careers Portal, where can I search for job openings within the UN?**

**A:** [The UN Careers Portal](#) is the only official platform for opportunities in the UN Secretariat. You can also check the career pages of individual UN agencies and programmes, such as UNDP, UNICEF, and WHO, as these organizations manage their own recruitment platforms.

In addition, [UN Jobs](#) website that extracts vacancy information across the UN system can be useful, but **please note that it is not managed by the UN**. Professional platforms like LinkedIn can also help you stay updated on vacancies and networking opportunities.

### 4. Recruitment Process

**Q: How long does the recruitment process usually take?**

**A:** It can take around **4-6** months. When you apply through the Inspira platform, your application goes through multiple stages. First, the system performs an initial automated

screening. Then, HR professionals review applications for eligibility and completeness. After that, the hiring team assesses candidates based on job-specific criteria. Candidates who are considered suitable may be invited to further assessments. Assessments may include a competency-based interview and/or other appropriate evaluation methods, such as written tests, work sample tests, or etc. At the end of the recruitment process, all applicants are informed of the outcome through Inspira.

**Q: Is it very difficult to get a job at the UN?**

**A:** Depending on positions, it can be a very competitive process, yet achievable with a strong, targeted application and relevant experience. Preparation and persistence are key.

**Q: Do candidates with previous UN experience have an advantage compared to external applicants?**

**A:** UN recruitment is merit-based and open to internal and external applicants, meaning all candidates are assessed against the same requirements, qualifications, and competencies for each role. Selection decisions are made based on how well a candidate's profile matches the specific needs of the position combined with their performance in the various assessments. Gender and nationality may be deciding factors in the selection decision.

**Q : How many candidates typically apply for a single position?**

**A:** It depends on the type of role, requirements and duty station. In general, UN positions are very competitive. Professional level positions often receive a high number of applications, sometimes several hundred per vacancy. General Service positions may receive fewer applications, depending on the duty station and role.

**Q: Why does the Inspira system still show “Under Consideration” even after the recruitment process ends?**

**A:** The recruitment process can take around 4-6 months. When you apply through the Inspira platform, your application goes through multiple stages. First, the system performs an initial automated screening. Then, HR professionals review applications for eligibility and completeness. After that, the hiring team assesses candidates based on job-specific criteria. Candidates who are considered suitable may be invited to further assessments. Assessments may include a competency-based interview and/or other appropriate evaluation methods, such as written tests, work sample tests, or etc.

At the end of the recruitment process, all applicants are informed of the outcome through Inspira. If not, we invite you to reach out by creating a ticket in Inspira through the "Contact Us" option on the homepage.

## 5. Assessment and Interviews

**Q: What does an assessment test for the United Nations consist of? How can I prepare for it? Are there very demanding?**

**A:** Once you have applied, and if your qualifications fit the position, you will be invited by the hiring manager for further evaluation.

To determine whether you meet the technical requirements and competencies of the job opening, you may be invited to complete an assessment. The assessment stage could take place via various formats. For example, it could be a written test using the United Nations Online Examinations and Tests System (UNOETS) platform, an asynchronous (prerecorded) video interview, or a request for work samples (like a portfolio for a photographer or graphic designer position), or an invitation to an assessment center.

Assessments may test the cognitive abilities, situational judgement, personality, integrity, subject or technical knowledge and skills, communication or drafting skills, language proficiency, or any other areas relevant to the evaluation criteria of the job opening.

Our assessments are designed to follow best practices to avoid gender, racial, cultural or any other bias in the recruitment outcomes. The grading is anonymous (i.e., the candidate's identity remains strictly confidential), unless the nature of the specific assessment requires revealing the identity of the applicants, such as in case of interviews, or presentations.

As a final step in the process, you may be invited for an interview with a panel.

Assessments can be demanding, but mainly because they are closely aligned with the actual responsibilities of the role and are often time constrained. Good preparation and understanding of the position can make a significant difference. Usage of AI in written or oral assessment is not permitted and will lead to automatic disqualification.

**Q: What does a job interview for the United Nations consist of? How can I prepare for it? What types of questions are asked during the interview?**

**A:** UN interviews are typically competency based, meaning they focus on how you have demonstrated specific skills and behaviours in your past experience. The interview

is usually structured and conducted by a panel, typically composed of at least three members.

You will be asked to provide concrete examples from your experience, using real situations to demonstrate competencies such as teamwork, communication, planning and organizing, and problem solving. For example, a question could be: "Give me an example of when you had to explain something difficult to someone who did not have your background or knowledge."

To prepare, carefully review the job description and identify the key competencies required. Practice answering **positive and negative** questions using clear and structured examples, for instance by explaining the context, the actions you took, the results, and the lessons you learned. It is also important to be familiar with the UN's work, values, and the specific department you are applying to.

## **6. Contracts, Role Types, Compensation, and Visa**

**Q: What is the entry-level salary? Are the internships paid?**

**A:** Salary scales are available in internet in [ICSC.UN.ORG](http://ICSC.UN.ORG).

UN Secretariat internships are not paid. Some duty stations or specific programmes may offer limited support, but in most cases, interns are expected to cover their own expenses. For this reason and to ensure geographical balance, internships can be done remotely, hybridly or in-person.

**Q: Can the UN support my visa application if I do not have authorization to work in Switzerland?**

**A:** The UN supports visa processes for internationally recruited personnel once they are selected and have received an official offer. Locally-recruited personnel must possess a work authorization to work in the country of recruitment. For more information on Geneva-specific visa requirements, please visit: <https://www.schweiz-frankreich.eda.admin.ch/en/visa-entry-to-and-residence-in-switzerland>

**Q: Are temporary contracts the norm? Am I required to go through a temporary contract before being able to obtain a stable/permanent contract afterward?**

**A:** Temporary contracts are quite common in the UN system, especially at the early stages of a career. However, they are not mandatory. Some candidates are recruited directly into fixed term positions.



That said, temporary contracts can be a useful entry point, allowing candidates to gain relevant experience, build networks, and better position themselves for longer term opportunities within the organization.

**Q : What is the difference between P-staff, G-staff, consultants, UNV, JPO, and YPP? Are consultants considered UN staff members?**

These categories refer to different types of roles and entry pathways within the UN system, with different contractual statuses. For example, P staff and G staff are official UN staff members, while consultants and UN Volunteers are non-staff personnel. JPO and YPP are specific early career entry programmes into the UN system.

For more detailed explanations on the different career categories and pathways, please refer to the [UN Careers Portal](#).

## **7. Work Environment and Career Development**

**Q: What is the work environment like? Do you have flexibility at work, with teleworking for example?**

**A:** The UN offers a diverse, international, and multicultural work environment, where staff collaborate with colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds. The work is often dynamic and mission driven.

In terms of flexibility, many UN offices offer flexible working arrangements, including teleworking. In some cases, staff may work remotely on certain days, depending on the role and operational needs. However, this varies by department, duty station, and the nature of the position, especially for roles that require on-site presence.

**Q: Can I progress quickly in my career?**

**A:** Career progression at the UN depends on performance, experience, and available opportunities. While it is possible to grow, progression is generally gradual rather than rapid. The UN values strong competencies, consistent performance, and relevant experience, and mobility between roles or duty stations can also support career development.

**Q : Is mobility required in order to advance?**

**A:** Geographic mobility is required for personnel recruited internationally on or after 1 October 2023. Cross-functional and lateral mobility is encouraged for all personnel.



**Q: Are there opportunities for training and professional development?**

**A:** Yes, staff have access to a wide range of training opportunities, including workshops, online courses, leadership programmes, and language training.

For example, [Career Tips Thursday](#) offers monthly sessions on topics such as interviews, networking, career development, and applications. The [Career Transition Series](#) also provides practical guidance, tools, and webinars to support career growth and transitions both within and beyond the UN system.

In addition, specific programmes such as [JPO](#) and [YPP](#) include structured training. The UN also offers training opportunities through institutions and platforms such as the [United Nations System Staff College \(UNSSC\)](#) and [Unite Academy](#), which provide courses on leadership, management, digital skills, and UN related topics.