LSE International Organisations Day, 11 Nov 2017, UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund).

UNFPA advocates for a world where every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. They promote the use of population data to reduce poverty and they provide life-saving support in humanitarian contexts. There is quite a lot of work with data, so they like statisticians and demographers. However, there is a lot of negotiating and diplomacy needed in this organisation as its work is highly controversial – quote “A law degree is the best degree to have for the UN”.

The UNFPA’s three mandates are:

* Ensuring every pregnancy is wanted
* Supporting maternal health
* Helping young people fulfil their potential

Of these, most emphasis is on universal access to family planning (ensuring every pregnancy is wanted) and promoting safe childbirth (supporting maternal health).

The UNFPA’s work relates particularly closely to 3, 4 and 5 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>). A lot of work is being put into strategic planning, with three four-year plans. For example, if you invest in a 10 year old girl, keeping her in school and out of child marriage, in the long term that will improve her outcomes significantly. Those in child marriages are six times more likely to die in childbirth than the rest of the population. Access to family planning is also very significant for women’s health, education and economic prospects. In Somalia only 11% have access to family planning. The UNFPA is also working to end gender based violence (GBV) and are working on a joint programme with Unicef for ending FGM.

One in five maternal deaths is caused by unsafe abortions. In countries where abortion is not legal the UNFPA promotes compassionate after-abortion care (because abortions still happen). Where abortion is legal they promote safe abortions.

What are the UNFPA looking for?

* Innovation
* Agility (intellectually, professionally, geographically)
* Loyalty (to values, both personal values and UN values). NB ‘millennials’ tend to jump around quite a bit. It costs $60,000 to employ someone internationally so the UN is wary of 30-40 year olds who appear to jump around a lot from job to job
* Humility (arrogance is the biggest derailment factor in people’s careers).
* Ability to work in multi-cultural teams (example of possible interview question: “What have you learnt about yourself and how you are culturally coded?”.)

Employees say the key quality you need is courage.

For leadership/professional positions the ‘leadership pool’ is currently advertising. This offers a staff contract and a good package. These posts are minimum P3 level and require 3-5 years’ experience and a masters. However, for many, consultancy is a more likely entry point. Consultancy work is available to those who are a recognised authority in a specialist field in an advisory or consultative capacity.

“A trial period is the best predictor of success”.

Valuable experience – something like the Peace Corps is great, also UNV (UN volunteers). For UNV they like you to be at least 25.

Internships are available, if applying for an internship “come with a good idea”. Interns are only sent to a ‘family duty station’ (A-C duty stations, see <https://icsc.un.org/resources/hrpd/mah/HC01012017.pdf>). There has been a lot of discussion in the UN about paying interns and recognition of the problem of not doing so. 9 UN organisations do now pay and Unicef is about to start doing so, but a decision to pay interns depends on all the nations funding that UN organisation agreeing on this policy. UNFPA were trying to establish payment for internships at just the point when the US withdrew funding from them, which has set that agenda back.

Internships do not count towards a required minimum period of experience because they are so varied – an internship could be half a day a week. There is a bit of flexibility on amount of experience required if you are young, but all procedures in terms of recruitment are subject to a ‘compliance review’ board’ so guidelines have to be adhered to.

Recruitment process:

Online application, written tests, video interviewing (be aware this starts recording as soon as you open the link), competency based/potential interviews, assessment centre.

For consultancy there is a roster and you can upload your CV. This process varies between UN organisations, for example in the UNDP all roles have to be advertised.

It is quite typical to spend 10 years on non-staff contracts (as the speaker did).

The UK (London) office doesn’t run programmes but is a ‘liaison office’, working with the UK government, DFID, parliament and the media.

Tip on UN organisations where you can have the most impact:

UNFPA for sexual and reproductive health experts; WHO for epidemiologists; Unicef for paediatricians.