

Careers with UN Organisations

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Session Support & Insights

Natsuki Kawai

A Public Health Nutritionist with extensive experience in nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive programme management, research, and capacity development through UNICEF, JICA, and NGOs across Africa and Asia. Holds a Master's degree in Global Public Health Nutrition from the University of Westminster (2019) and is currently pursuing a PhD at LSHTM in collaboration with Nagasaki University. Recently served as a Nutrition Officer (P2) with UNICEF West and Central African office from 2023 to 2025, focusing on stunting prevention, community-based nutrition programming, and multisectoral coordination.



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- Please keep mics on mute unless you'd like to ask a question;
- Use the chat box lots;
- Trouble with sound? Trying leaving and coming back, try a different browser;
- The session will be recorded and put on Moodle under 'Exploring Career Options (Recordings)' - there is a folder specifically about UN organisations.

What we will cover today

- The UN [funds, programmes and specialised agencies](#).
- Some UN terminology.
- Some routes in.
- Example UN organisations: WHO, UNFPA, WFP, UNV.
- Tips, courtesy of Michael Emery (when at UNFPA).
- Next steps?
- Insider insight: Q&A with Luis Felipe & Ahmed Alboksmaty



Before we start...

Current confidence levels regarding knowledge and how to progress career planning for working with UN organisations?



Funds, Programmes and Specialised Agencies

Programmes and Funds include UNHCR, UNFPA, WFP, UNDP, UNICEF

“The **programmes and funds** are **financed through voluntary rather than assessed contributions**. The **Specialized Agencies** are independent international organizations funded by **both voluntary and assessed contributions**.”

This means politics and diplomacy can be very important.

WHO is one of the Specialised Agencies, along with FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) and numerous others.

Systems vary across different agencies/programmes.



Some UN Terminology and its implications

Positions graded as 'P3', 'P4' etc

(P3 usually need 5 years' experience, P4 8 years' experience, PhD 'counts' for half the number of years' experience)

If you have less experience, look for 'P1', 'P2' jobs (see also YPP – next slide)

Duty stations (categories A-E – there is also H for Headquarters or similar)

- A – most secure/comfortable locations (around 10% successful applications will be external)
- E – more remote/risky locations in lower resource settings (eg Yemen, Sudan)

Categories A-C you can be accompanied by family members, not categories D-E.

R&R (rest and recuperation) periods – vary according to nature of posting. In the most difficult settings you get 5 days out of country every 4 weeks.

Some routes into UN: YPP and JPO

[YPP \(Young Professionals Programme\)](https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=NCEWN&lang=en-US)

<https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=NCEWN&lang=en-US>

Entry by examination, application (indicating Nov opening date for 2022, open for 2 months)

- Must be under 32 years before taking exam
- Must be from a participating country (UK is not one) – it is for countries that are under- or unrepresented in the United Nations
- Experience not required (but may be selection criterion)

[JPO \(Junior Professional Officer Programme\)](https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=AEP)

<https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=AEP>

- Must usually be under 32 years (but donor country rules vary)
- Must have at least 2 years' experience
- Must be from participating donor country

Internships (seem to be more available now):

WHO – Global Internship Programme, [info here](#);

UN – [info here](#) (but some separate links to funds / programmes broken);

UNHCR – unpaid ([info here](#))

UNOPS ([info here](#))

Short term contracts.

Consultants roster (UN wide roster).

Salaried posts, maybe via country office first.

Example UN organisation: WHO

Leadership on global health matters and shapes **research** on the health agenda.

Bridge between research, ministries of health and those delivering – for example producing guidelines such as on AMR (something UK asked the WHO to work on).

- Combines 6 health organisations with regional officers who are legally independent of HQ – they hire and fire independently of HQ.
- Can approach the regional offices directly - higher chance of success if you are a national from that region.
- 151 country offices, high turnover of opportunities there.

What do WHO look for?

Breadth and variety of experience and discipline (more than 50% of people come from non-health related backgrounds).

A second language (after English) – French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese or Arabic especially useful (minority languages can be useful too).

Soft skills “you have to work under conditions of mission impossible and accomplish things in spite of those conditions”. Challenge is “global health diplomacy”.

- Teamwork
- Respecting and promoting individual and cultural differences
- Communication
- Knowing and managing yourself
- Producing results
- Moving forward in a challenging environment

Selection process is competency based and starts with the post rather than the person (ie identifying what is needed for that post).

Experience required, and tips for applying

For technical positions: several years of experience in that specialised area. International and developing country experience often required.

For management support: several years of experience in the same area (international experience an advantage).

Average age for joining WHO? 42

Tips for applying:

Apply persistently and repeatedly

Write one page letter highlighting just three points: your experience (other UN experience counts for a lot), your area of expertise (summed up in a sentence), why you would be an asset to WHO.

They use electronic pre-screening so make sure your application covers everything they require.

Example: UNFPA

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.

Controversial

- Women's rights (compared to traditions of some cultures) often controversial
- Especially access to family planning, access to abortion.

Employees say key quality needed is courage.

Politics can mean funding is volatile.

Example: WFP

Aim: to eliminate hunger by 2030

Relatively large proportion (for a UN organisation) of employees work in direct delivery, work is relatively 'operational' and 'quick'.

<https://www.wfp.org/careers>

Types of contract:

- International professionals – highly skilled, mid-career, fixed-term, highly competitive
- National officers – usually in your country of origin “the backbone of the organisation”
- Consultants/short term professionals (3-11 month contracts) – usually highly skilled with specialist skills (didn't quite get in as International Professionals)
- JPOs – highly skilled, usually at least 3 years' experience in field, sponsored by donor countries. More than 80% have 3-8 years' experience, 90% have a master's degree, 2% have a PhD
- WFP volunteers (mostly in Rome, but some in country offices) – apply through website
- [Future International Talent \(FIT\) pool](#) (check currently open pools)

Example: UN Volunteers

<https://www.unv.org/become-volunteer>

- International: register for Global Talent Pool (requirements: 25 or over, at least 2 years' professional experience, commitment to values and principles, ability to live and work in challenging settings – how do you demonstrate that?) - details include profiles in demand
- National: minimum age 22, citizen (or refugee/stateless residing there legally) of country where UN is working
- Youth (NEW): maximum age 29 (normally not expected to have over 2 years' experience).

International, national and youth volunteers receive a living allowance.

Also [online volunteers](#):

Many part-time opportunities, including research, writing/editing, advocacy, project development and management

11 general tips for building a career in an international organisation

(courtesy of Michael Emery, HR Director, IOM)

1. Qualifications (agencies vary a little, but many prefer a master's)
2. Documents (get the paperwork right). Be aware that funders such as DFID are increasingly 'results orientated'.
3. Networking is vital
 - Tier 3 'passive networkers'
 - Tier 2 'active networkers'
 - Tier 1 'creative networkers' – be one of those
4. Reputation management (not just your online presence but the way you behave towards colleagues – 360)
5. Competencies (used for recruitment and performance management)
6. Job satisfiers (think about what satisfies you in a job)
7. Values (e.g. could you answer, "What are the three values that are most important to you and how do these values translate into your work?")

11 general tips for building a career in an international organisation

8. 'Opportunity scans' – where are you most likely to find an opportunity?
9. EQ (emotional intelligence) – the ability to fit. How aware are you of your cultural/personality coding?
10. Momentum – most people join in their early 30s (NB WHO suggested 42...), have to build towards that.
11. Luck – “when preparation meets opportunity” (Oprah), “The harder I work, the luckier I get” (Edison)

Core skills: agility, love, diversity, care.

Your situation, and possible next steps



Can you apply for
'in-country' posts in
your country?

Could you
afford to do
an unpaid
internship?

How much
experience do you
already have?

Would you consider
yourself a Tier 1, 2 or
3 networker?

What languages do
you speak?

Are UN jobs what you
thought they were? Are
you keen enough to
persevere on this route?

What steps
would bring
you closer?

Which would be the
most appropriate UN
organisation for you?

Would YPP or JPO be potential
route for you?

What other organisations
could you work for?!

What are your values?
Can you articulate
them?

Other organisations

[Look at destinations info on Moodle](#)

(Marie Stopes International; Terrence Higgins Trust; WaterAid; GSK; KPMG; Boston Scientific; CHAI; Ministries of Health of various countries; MRC/UVRU Uganda Research Unit on Aids; Cancer Research; IQVIA; Anthony Nolan Trust; GOAL; MSF; Merlin; Action Against Hunger; Deaf Child Worldwide, Malaria Consortium...)

Get ideas from LinkedIn (LSHTM alumni)

[Spotlight on selected employers](#) - brief reports on 20 organisations:

Gain experience eg

[CHAI volunteers](#)

[Indigo volunteers](#)

What organisations are working in the area (geographical) or field (topic) that you care most about? What contacts do you have/can you make?

Folder of other resources on Careers with UN organisations – Careers Moodle - [Exploring Career Options \(recordings\)](#).

Also Careers Moodle - [Career insights from alumni, employers and students](#)

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Before we finish...

Updated confidence levels regarding knowledge and how to progress career planning for working with UN organisations?



We value your feedback

<https://forms.office.com/e/4p7U5N14cT>

Please complete
the feedback
form – the link is
in the chat box!

And now let's
move to your
questions.....



What else is coming up?

Check Moodle [Forthcoming workshops and events](#), including:

- **Finding and funding a PhD**
- **PhD Applications**
- **Global & Public Health Careers, Alumni Panel**