

# World Health Organization (EU & Europe Offices)

**Name:** Dr. Sofia Ribeiro

**Job:** Consultant

**Sector:** Public; Research / Health Policy

**Location:** Brussels, Belgium (EU Office); Copenhagen, Denmark (Europe Office)

**Interviewer:** Diogo Martins (LSHTM MScPH 2016-17)

**Date:** 15/05/2017

## Information interview

**Career background:** Academic - graduated in Medicine (2011). Foundation year as a medical doctor in 2012. Public Health Medical training from 2013 to the present, during which was selected for a WHO internship in the EU Office (Brussels) in November 2014. MScPH Public Health (LSHTM 2013-2014). In 2015, started a PhD in Public Health at the University of Maastricht (Netherlands) as an external candidate. Returned to WHO EU Office to work as a Consultant in July 2015 and stayed for one year, combining the work in WHO with the PhD, and teaching at the University of Maastricht. Started working as a Consultant in Policy Wisdom in October 2016.

**Average day in the job:** Every day you have to attend a meeting in any of the EU institutions, for which you are briefed by your supervisors and other technical officers working on the relevant topics (e.g. social determinants of health). The idea is to gather information and understand the position WHO wants to convey on that meeting. Afterwards, you will have to debrief with your supervisor and colleagues, and report back to the technical officers responsible for those areas.

**Most relevant skills:** There are two distinct types of skills needed for this kind of job: technical and soft skills. Technical skills: solid knowledge of the Public Health basics, such as epidemiology, biostatistics and a broader knowledge of what is going on policy-wise in the region you are working for. This is easily covered by the Masters' in Public Health programme. Soft skills: ability to network and to communicate effectively. It is extremely relevant to be able to adapt scientific information and frame differently according to the different stakeholders.

**Most valuable things at LSHTM:** Technical skills acquired during the Master's programme, specially the core modules such as epidemiology, biostatistics and research methodologies. The opportunity to get to know other professionals at different career stages and getting to know them and how they strived in their careers.

**Pieces of advice:** Don't limit yourself to the job description. You need to be able to manage it, but try to think what else you can bring to the position. Contact your professors: don't be afraid or delay the possibility to talking to them. Ask about their experiences and also for any career advice. They will expand the questions you have previously asked yourself, and will guide you to discover paths to a job you weren't considering before. Invest on being good technically, as this is extremely valuable.

Invest in networking. Look for opportunities where you can meet these people and other professionals at the same stage as you are, and exchange ideas with them. Always think ahead and present the best version of yourself. Know yourself (your strengths and weaknesses) and know what differentiates you from other people, and don't be afraid to pursue any job application. Be proactive and plan ahead.

### World Health Organization

*“Bring the best scientific evidence to inform national authorities for the best health policies”*

**General description:** The main aim of the WHO EU Office is to represent and to connect WHO to all EU institutions and meetings happening in Brussels. There is no routine *per se*, as no day is similar to the other. However, there is a constant background work, specially in preparing for the meetings you are assigned to attend. Each person in the office has to cover a series of topics. In emergencies such as Ebola, Zika and Migrations, the office would offer representation at several meetings, thus allowing WHO to be closer to EU institutions and making representation a bit more quickly and affordable. The WHO EU office also carries several research projects and scientific reviews.

**Recruitment system:** Internships: apply online on the website of each office. Consultancies: the process is easier, specially once you had an internship before. You will be added to a WHO database as an external contractor. Whenever work is available, you will be recruited with a specific timeline to complete it. Technical Officers: there is an openly advertised position that follows the usual selection process. This may include a written examination and a personal interview. Internships are fundamental to get contracts as Consultants, since all UN Agencies (including WHO) are a very attractive employers, known for high competition and few places available. It can be determinant if they know you in advance, the skills you have and how well you can deliver. Networking is an important part, as opens space for subsequent opportunities.

**Entry-level opportunities/internships:** Unpaid internships, which last officially from 6 weeks up to 3 months. These can be renewed upon mutual agreement.

**Ideal profile for candidates:** Technical and strong communication skills, for those with less working experience. Knowledge of the EU institutions and how they work, with a clear idea of the stakeholders in Brussels, their positions and how they relate to each other. International experience is also relevant in a sense that it shows you can adapt to different working and living environments.

#### Contacts:

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