**United Nations’ Specialized Agencies, Their Respective Focus Areas, and Hiring Tips**

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This document provides key hiring insights from four prominent United Nations agencies: **UNEP, UNHCR, UNICEF and UNOPS**. Each section outlines hiring priorities, critical skills in demand, and tips for standing out during the application process. These insights are aimed at helping candidates successfully apply to roles within these organizations and align their qualifications with the agencies' missions and objectives.

**I -** [**United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)**](https://www.unep.org/who-we-are/about-us)

**Focus Areas and Hiring Tips:**

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is the leading UN agency on the environment, dedicated to inspiring, informing, and empowering nations to improve the quality of life without compromising the well-being of future generations. UNEP focuses on addressing the root causes of the triple planetary crisis—climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—while helping countries transition to low-carbon, resource-efficient economies by advancing environmental governance, protecting ecosystems, and providing science-based data. UNEP job opening are published on [careers.un.org](https://careers.un.org/jobopening?language=en&data=%257B%2522aoe%2522:%255B%255D,%2522aoi%2522:%255B%255D,%2522el%2522:%255B%255D,%2522ct%2522:%255B%255D,%2522ds%2522:%255B%255D,%2522jn%2522:%255B%255D,%2522jf%2522:%255B%255D,%2522jc%2522:%255B%255D,%2522jle%2522:%255B%255D,%2522dept%2522:%255B%252222302230%2522%255D,%2522span%2522:%255B%255D%257D). Staff vacancies are open for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 45 days, and applicants can apply through [Inspira](https://inspira.un.org/) application portal.

Here are key tips from UNEP's hiring process and what recruiters are looking for in top candidates:

1. **Focus on Data Analysis and Digital Transformation:** UNEP is increasingly seeking candidates skilled in data analysis and digital transformation. As a science-based organization, UNEP relies on data-driven insights for policy decision-making. Candidates with backgrounds in data analysis, whether from formal education or work experience, are highly valued, as they are crucial for translating complex data into actionable insights for member states and beneficiaries.
2. **Adaptability to UNEP's Values:** UNEP's organizational culture emphasizes the U.N. Values and Behaviors Framework, which includes humility, humanity, integrity, and inclusion. Successful candidates should demonstrate their ability to adapt to this culture and work well with a diverse group of colleagues and stakeholders.
3. **Understanding the Recruitment Process:**
	* **Application Stage:** All job openings are listed on careers.un.org and open for a minimum of 30 days. Candidates should apply via the Inspira portal.
	* **Screening Stage:** Initial screening is done through AI to check minimum requirements, followed by manual review for relevant experience.
	* **Assessment Stage:** Selected candidates may undergo a technical assessment and competency-based interview. The process can take up to four months.
4. **Growing Focus Areas:** UNEP is expanding its focus on environmental sustainability areas like climate change, plastic pollution, and biodiversity. Future hires will prioritize roles related to these disciplines, particularly in newly forming divisions like the climate division.
5. **Diverse Workforce:** UNEP values diversity in its workforce, both in terms of technical expertise and cultural backgrounds. The ability to work in global, multicultural teams is essential.
6. **Reading Job Descriptions Closely:** Many UNEP roles may seem generic, like “Program Management Specialist,” but the specific duties and requirements can vary significantly between departments. It's crucial to carefully read the job descriptions to ensure the role aligns with your skill set.

**II -** [**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**](https://www.unrefugees.org/about-us/?SF_monthly=701Rf000004DYWGIA4&SF_onetime=701Rf000004DeQRIA0)

**Focus Areas and Hiring Tips:**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a global organization dedicated to protecting and assisting refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people. Established in 1950, UNHCR works in over 130 countries to provide life-saving assistance, safeguard rights, and help people rebuild their lives. The agency also advocates for durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement in third countries, supporting millions in their transition to safety and security while upholding international protection standards.

Here are key tips from UNHCR’s hiring process and what recruiters are looking for in top candidates:

1. **Focus on Global Challenges**: UNHCR seeks candidates with expertise in areas like climate action, environmental engineering, and humanitarian aid. Experience in data analysis, infrastructure, or project management will be highly valued, as these roles support solutions for global crises, including refugee movements and climate-induced displacement.
2. **Humanitarian Passion**: UNHCR seeks individuals passionate about the refugee cause. Make sure to convey this passion in your application by emphasizing your commitment to humanitarian work and refugee protection.
3. **Soft Skills Are Key**: Beyond technical expertise, UNHCR values critical thinking, collaboration, and agility. Candidates should familiarize themselves with the UN's competency framework and prepare relevant examples to highlight these skills in interviews.
4. **Transferable Skills:** UNHCR looks for skills in project management, legal work, protection roles, and inter-agency coordination. Expertise in finance, logistics, partnerships, and fundraising is increasingly sought. Candidates from diverse sectors, including the private sector and NGOs, are encouraged to apply.
5. **Mid-Level Hiring Focus**: UNHCR is actively hiring mid-level professionals (P2 to P4 levels), particularly in management support roles like finance, HR, and communications. Project management and procurement roles are also in demand, especially with global challenges requiring swift and effective solutions.
6. **Internships and Volunteering Count**: UNHCR values experience gained through internships, volunteering, or field work with NGOs. These can be counted towards required professional experience and are particularly important for young professionals starting their careers.
7. **Customizing Applications**: Tailor your UNHCR profile by carefully reading the job description and highlighting relevant skills and experiences. Although optional, the cover letter is highly recommended to stand out, especially in competitive selections.
8. **Flexible Contract Types**: UNHCR hires through various contract types, including short-term consulting and emergency response roles. Be open to applying for temporary or retainer roles, which can offer valuable field experience and potential for permanent placement.
9. **Field-Based Interaction**: Many roles require direct interaction with refugees. Highlighting experience in working with vulnerable populations or in emergency settings can give candidates a competitive edge.

**III-** [**United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)**](https://www.unicef.org/)

**Focus Areas and Hiring Tips:**

**Overview:** UNICEF is one of the world’s leading humanitarian organizations committed to advocating for the rights and well-being of children globally. Established in 1946, UNICEF operates in over 190 countries, with a strong presence in low- and middle-income countries. The organization plays a vital role in areas such as health, education, nutrition, and protection from violence, working in dynamic and challenging environments.

Here are key tips from UNICEF’s hiring process and what recruiters are looking for in top candidates:

**Key Hiring Tips:**

1. **Roles in Focus:**
	* Over the past year, UNICEF has prioritized recruitment for roles such as section chiefs, managers, and specialists in health, planning, monitoring and evaluation, legal affairs, and climate sustainability. Key roles include heads of offices, shared service center staff, and specialists in risk management and innovative financing.
	* UNICEF is actively seeking to attract more women, particularly in water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH), and ICT roles, to diversify the workforce and strengthen expertise in these areas.
2. **Other Skills in Demand:**
	* UNICEF also seeks expertise in areas such as advocacy, communications, project management, public financing, building partnerships, resource and grant management, risk management, and evaluations.
	* Specialists in climate and sustainability, legal affairs, human resources, audit and investigations, innovative financing, shared services, and monitoring and evaluation are also in demand.
3. **People Management and Multisector Skills:**
	* In addition to technical expertise, UNICEF places great emphasis on strong people management skills, the ability to work effectively in emergency situations, versatile multisector skills, and fluency in a second UN language. These qualities are critical for thriving in UNICEF’s diverse and challenging operational environments.
4. **Consultant Roles:**
	* Consultants aiming for short-term positions should demonstrate a well-rounded skill set, combining technical knowledge with soft skills like communication, collaboration, and task coordination. Providing concrete examples of delivering high-quality results within set timelines and including testimonials from previous clients can make a consultant’s application stand out.
5. **Diversity and Workforce Development:**
	* UNICEF remains committed to diversifying its workforce and addressing gender imbalances, particularly by attracting women to technical roles in WASH and ICT. This diversification aligns with their broader goals of enhancing organizational capacity to meet future challenges in children’s advocacy.

**Additional Considerations:**

* **Holistic Evaluation:** UNICEF looks at more than just technical proficiency. Strong interpersonal skills, management abilities, and experience in emergency settings are critical components that contribute to a candidate’s overall evaluation. Applicants should highlight these qualifications alongside their technical expertise.

**IV-** [**United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)**](https://www.unops.org/)

**Focus Areas and Hiring Tips:**

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) provides essential infrastructure, procurement, and project management services to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Working globally, UNOPS partners with governments, UN agencies, and other organizations to deliver solutions that support peace, security, humanitarian aid, and development. With a focus on sustainability, climate action, health, and renewable energy, UNOPS plays a key role in helping communities build resilience and recover from crises while advancing progress towards the SDGs.

Here are key tips from UNOPs hiring process and what recruiters are looking for in top candidates:

1. **Focus on SDGs and Cross-Sector Experience**: UNOPS prioritizes candidates with a demonstrated commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and values experience in diverse contexts, such as volunteering, interning, or working abroad. Candidates from sectors like project management, engineering, IT, finance, and healthcare transitioning into UNOPS can leverage their skills by focusing on how their past experience aligns with UNOPS' mission to build resilient and sustainable futures.
2. **In-Demand Skill Sets**: There is increasing demand for technical skills in data science, analysis, climate action, environmental engineering, infrastructure, and procurement. In addition, soft skills such as critical thinking, collaboration across teams, and agility are essential. Familiarize yourself with the competency framework in the vacancy announcements and prepare examples of these skills for the interview.
3. **Opportunities in Specific Regions and Roles**: Recruitment is strong in regions like Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Ethiopia, and there is a growing number of remote and retainer positions, particularly in climate action, environment, ICT, health and safety, and engineering. These roles provide flexibility for professionals while offering opportunities to contribute specialized expertise.
4. **Tailor Your Application**: Take the time to carefully read the job description and highlight relevant skills and experience in your UNOPS profile. Although the cover letter is optional, it is highly recommended for standing out, especially when two candidates are closely matched. Use it to explain why you're excited about the position and how your experience is relevant.
5. **Emphasize Mid-Level Experience**: UNOPS is actively hiring for mid-level positions, typically in the ICSC-6 to ICSC-10 grade levels, focusing on management support roles like finance, HR, IT, logistics, and communications, as well as core areas like project management, sustainable infrastructure, and procurement.
6. **Value of Interning and Volunteering**: UNOPS recognizes internships and volunteer work as professional experience. For young professionals, be sure to include relevant internships in your application, as they count towards the required number of professional experience years.

Reference: Interviews and conversations with Head/Deputy Head of Human Resources and Talen Development of respective UN agencies with Devex Reporters.