Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) - UNICEF JPO Programme

What is a JPO?

The Junior Professional Officers (JPO) programme provides young professionals with hands-on experience in multilateral technical cooperation and related fields. It offers them the opportunity to work in one of UNICEF’s areas of work, either at Headquarters or in a country or regional office. As such, the programme contributes to the promotion of cultural exchanges and a better understanding among diverse cultures and societies. For recipient countries, the JPO programme provides a continuous flow of technical cooperation personnel and administrative experts from various donors. For donors, it represents a form of development aid implemented through the United Nations system; it provides opportunities for on-the-job training for their nationals; and it can support specific goals of the donor in promoting and advancing development in priority areas and countries. For UNICEF, the JPO programme helps increase professional staffing capacity and gives Country Offices and Divisions immediate access to a pool of young professionals with recognized talent, academic credentials and up-to-date general or specialized knowledge.

What are the benefits of the JPO programme?

The JPO programme offers university graduates interested in a career in development exposure to the broad range of UNICEF’s activities and the opportunity to obtain work experience in developing countries or at Headquarters offices. All JPOs participate in a one-week orientation held at New York Headquarters, which gives them an overview of the organization as well as the chance to network and further develop their personal soft skills. Because the JPO Programme is a learning programme, JPOs are allocated a budget by their respective governments to engage in additional training, both inside and outside UNICEF; the amount allotted varies from government to government. JPOs also have the opportunity to participate in stretch assignments that help them gain additional experience they might need when applying to future posts. Stretch assignments are short-term tasks or projects that go beyond the JPO's job description and require the JPO to learn one or more new skills. They can be performed in the JPO's current duty station or another station. To assist them in their career development, JPOs are given career counselling that includes reviews, guidance on preparation of their P11 (the personal history form used in UN job applications) and an opportunity to participate in mock interviews.

How often are JPOs hired during the year? What is the deadline for applying? How long does the process take?

JPOs are hired throughout the year, based on when governments choose to sponsor posts. Candidates should visit their sponsoring government’s Foreign Ministry website frequently to look for open positions. The application process typically takes between two and six months, depending on the sponsoring country.
Where do I apply to the JPO programme?

JPO candidates apply directly through their sponsoring government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Please see the relevant Donor Government page for access to Foreign Ministry websites, where you will find recruitment criteria and procedures. For the Netherlands, candidates apply directly through UNICEF’s employment website.

Is there an age limit to apply to the JPO programme?

Most governments set the maximum age for applying at 32 years. The age limit for the Government of Japan is 35 years.

What are the requirements to become a JPO?

Most governments require a university degree equal to a Master’s and at least two years of work experience in a field related to the area to which you are applying. For specific requirements, please refer to the relevant job vacancy announcement. These can be accessed via the Foreign Ministry websites of Donor Governments, or, for candidates applying through the Netherlands, via UNICEF’s employment website.

Which nationalities are eligible to apply?

Citizens of these donor countries are eligible to apply for the JPO positions that their governments sponsor. The Netherlands and Belgium also sponsor positions for nationals from other European countries as well as from selected developing countries; please visit their pages (Netherlands, Belgium) for information on eligibility.

Who evaluates and interviews the candidates? Where does this take place?

For most countries, candidates are interviewed by representatives of their sponsoring government and UNICEF. Interviews take place over the telephone.

How long is the JPO programme?

Assignments are generally for 2-4 years.

What functional and geographic areas do JPOs work in? How many JPOs are hired every year?

JPOs are hired in all of UNICEF’s areas of operation, depending on which post their sponsoring government chooses to fund. Throughout the year, UNICEF offices request staff for posts in which they need support. These vacancies are shared with our Donor Governments, who then choose to fund certain positions and advertise them on the website of their Foreign Ministry. These vacancies occur in all of UNICEF’s functional areas (Child Survival and Development, Child Protection, Basic Education and Gender Equality, Policy and Advocacy, Children and HIV/AIDS), as well as Emergency Operations, Communications, Human Resources and other support areas. The number of JPOs hired
every year varies, though at any given time, the agency manages approximately 100 JPOs. More information can be found on UNICEF’s website.

**I have a family; can they join me in my duty station?**

Yes, if you are assigned to a family duty station. A list of non-family duty stations can be found here.

**What type of contract do I get as a JPO?**

JPOs received a fixed-term appointment, usually at the P-2 level. They are subject to the provisions of the United Nations Charter and are governed by the United Nations staff regulations and rules, as well as UNICEF policies. However, there are some exceptions based on specific agreements with each Donor Government.

**Is there any training or orientation? If so, where does that occur?**

Each year, the New Talent Unit hosts a JPO Orientation Programme at New York Headquarters for all first year JPOs. This five-day session engages JPOs in a stimulating environment to gain an in-depth understanding of how the organization functions and carries out its mission around the world. JPOs also participate in a real-life simulation exercise to build a complex country project plan. During this orientation, the JPOs also build networks and relationships and have an opportunity to develop their professional skills and gain personal insights into performance and collaboration.

**Can I choose my duty station as a JPO?**

Yes, you apply to a specific post at a specific duty station funded by your sponsoring government.

**Can I change positions while in the JPO programme?**

With few exceptions, JPOs remain in the post to which they are assigned. JPOs from Norway, Finland and Luxembourg spend part of their assignment in a field office and part at a Headquarters or Regional Office location. Under special circumstances, and on a case by case basis, some other governments will allow a transfer from one duty station to another.

**What happens after the JPO programme is over?**

A UN experience is always considered an asset for future postings. While JPOs are considered external candidates when applying to ongoing positions within UNICEF, about 50% of JPOs obtain fixed-term positions at UNICEF once their JPO assignment is over. They are also free to apply to other UN agencies, where they can further leverage their UNICEF experience. To help in this process, JPOs are given career counselling, including mock interviews and help in preparing their P11 (UN Personal History Form).