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Helping young German professionals to join international development organizations: opportunities, shortcomings and reform needs

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Helping Young German Professionals to Join International Development Organizations: Opportunities, Shortcomings and Reform Needs

- German public servants are not appropriately represented in many international organizations. With these organizations increasingly using internal promotion to fill their management posts, the Federal German Government should do more to help young professionals and change from a reactive to a proactive, strategically oriented personnel policy for Germans in international organizations. At the same time, the general conditions for returning professionals should be improved.
- Germany has enough high-quality undergraduate and post-graduate courses and internships to prepare young professionals for work in the development field, but they are not sufficiently geared to occupational integration.
- Many young professionals fail to take adequate account in their career planning of the need, given the very limited number of permanent posts in international organizations, so to structure their training that they also have job prospects in other institutions at home and abroad
- The training provided by secondary schools and universities should be backed by the early provision of careers guidance. In this, schools and universities should cooperate closely with the Büro Führungskräfte zu Internationalen Organisationen (Office for Managers in International Organizations – BFIO) of the Zentralstelle der Arbeitsvermittlung (Central Employment Agency – ZAV).
- The instruments of Germany's international personnel policy at middle, higher and top management levels should be complemented by an instrument to promote the advancement of young professionals that follows on directly from the programme of Beigeordnete Sachverständige zu Internationalen Organisationen (Experts Assigned to International Organizations, or BS Programme, a Federal Government programme that assists young professionals).
- The BS Programme should be expanded. At the same time, Germans working in the United Nations (UN) agencies and European Union (EU) institutions should be linked more closely to Germany and familiarized with the German development agenda through the installation of counterpart structures in the relevant German government departments, through even closer attention from the Permanent Representatives and through the promotion of the development of networks.

Germany is not appropriately represented at international level

As the examples in the following table show, German officials are less well represented in posts corresponding to the higher grades of the German civil service in the UN Secretariat, funds, programmes and specialized agencies or in the World Bank than their colleagues from other countries. Nor is Germany as successful as the countries referred to in the table at familiarizing its nationals in international organizations with its development policy agenda. It also makes little use of the human capital that returning professionals represent.

At first, there were historical reasons for this: the two Germans did not join the United Nations until 1973. In the post-war period Germany, unlike its neighbours, had few experts or managers with international experience. A whole generation of experts with an international profile had been lost

The post-war situation is no longer an adequate excuse for Germany's abstinence in the international sphere, but it has resulted in an unfavourable environment for employment in international organizations. For one thing, many Germans, including German officials, still tend to be inflexible: critics talk of "German provincialism". For another, the material conditions, especially for returning professionals, are less favourable than in neighbouring countries.

Of late there have been growing reports of an emerging "German dip", a decline in the German share of staff due to the fact that the first generation of Germans entering the service of the UN after 1973 is now retiring.

Contribution rates and staff shares of selected countries in international organizations (2002)

International organizations	Contribution rate / staff share (in %)							
	D		F		GB		USA	
UN-Sekretariat	9.85	5.2	no comparable figures					
UNDP	3.53	2.5						
UNICEF	0.8	2.3	1.0	4.6	8.3	6.9	29.1	15
UNHCR	9.8	3.3	6.5	6.5	5.6	4.4	22	8.7
FAO	9.9	6.6	7.5	6.5	8.3	5.6	12.6	22
UNESCO	12.9	4.2	8.6	11.9	7.4	8.6	2.7	n.a.
World Bank	4.49	2.9	4.31	4.8	4.31	6.1	16.41	26.6

This overview shows examples of figures on United Nations (UN) agencies in which most young German professionals (assigned experts = BS) find posts: United Nations Development Programme = UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund = UNICEF, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees = UNHCR, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations = FAO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization = UNESCO

Source: German Foreign Office, data provided by the Coordinator for International Personnel Policy

The other Case: the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The EU and OECD differ from the UN. For one thing, Germany, with staff shares of 12.3% and 6.3%, is less well represented than France (14.8% and 22%), but it scores better than other member states. While the demands made on new recruits in the EU and OECD are comparable to those made by the international organizations, the aims, working methods and working conditions are different. The EU is a supranational rather than an international organization, increasingly performing tasks that used to be a national responsibility. This facilitates the secondment / rotation of national officials and the recruitment of new staff members.

The EU Commission has its own recruitment programme. Access to permanent posts in the EU is gained through participation in competitions. Since the German Foreign Office began holding preparatory courses for these competitions, the success rate among German candidates has improved significantly.

The OECD is a frequently underrated actor on the development scene and one that should derive greater benefit from the BS Programme in the future.

Helping young professionals is the strategic response to the "German dip"

It is not only Germany that is experiencing this "dip", however. The signs are that there will be an extensive change of staff in the next few years, which will give Germany a chance to increase its share of the staff: as the international organizations are increasingly tending to fill management posts through internal promotion, the member states should expand the programmes they have for helping their own young professionals as strategic instruments of their personnel policies in international organizations.

Some steps have been taken in the right direction. The German Foreign Office set about preparing new generations of Germans for the tasks of classical diplomacy in-house as early as the immediate post-war period, and soon after it was established, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in particular arranged for institutions to be set up to perform tasks in the development field and to prepare young professionals for this work, one example being the German Development Institute (GDI), which provides practical post-graduate training based on development research and consultancy. At the universities a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses geared to international and development needs has evolved. They have been joined by appropriate internships.

These are satisfactory and numerically adequate approaches to encouraging young people. But potential newcomers to the development field lack guidance in choosing the right form of training for them, and the training provided is not sufficiently geared to occupational integration.

The time has come, therefore, to identify the shortcomings in the provisions made for young graduates and to propose changes that will enable a system capable of ensuring an appropriate German presence in UN agencies and EU institutions to emerge from the various approaches.

International organizations as potential employers

International organizations have few posts to offer: some 2500 Germans are employed in international and supranational organizations at levels comparable to the higher grades of the German civil service. As it is becoming increasingly difficult to find permanent posts in these organizations, young professionals need to plan their careers so as to have the prospect of employment in other institutions at home and abroad should they fail to obtain a permanent contract.

This is not so difficult because the requirements associated with a post with an international slant in the public service and the private sector in Germany are very similar to those in the international organizations.

A demanding international qualification profile

A profile of this kind has a professional and an international core. Professional competence accounts for the actual occupation. It also includes sound language skills, professional experience and the working methods commonly used today.

International competence is a vital additional qualification for any international activity. Its most important components are identification with the goals of the international organization concerned and the personal and social skills needed for work in heterogeneous multicultural teams. The core of the activity in international organizations, planning, guiding and monitoring the progress of a wide variety of projects at frequently changing locations, calls for a considerable conceptual and analytical capacity, a sense of responsibility, independence and the ability to cope with conflict. As the numerous examples in the BFIO manual listed in the bibliography show, the qualification profiles of the posts advertised by international organizations, with their highly disparate goals, vary widely, but they always retain the core described here.

What advice should be given to young professionals intent on an international career?

How can they acquire international competence? Not all at once!

Training for an international post begins at school ...

Even at school, young people can be made aware of our increasingly multicultural environment, practise intercultural communication by taking part in school exchanges, travelling abroad and joining transnationally oriented groups and improve their knowledge of languages.

Parents and teachers have the task of motivating young people to look beyond their national frontiers by beginning at a very early stage to give them educational and careers guidance which shows that in an increasingly globalized world national and international career patterns make demands for which they can prepare while still at school.

... continues at university ...

As soon as they can, students should ask themselves what importance they may attach to employment in international development cooperation in their working lives and adjust their studies accordingly. Professional goals should be so chosen that the occupation selected has prospects at home, while leaving open the option of employment in multilateral development cooperation.

Many German universities teach internationally oriented subjects. Almost all of them also offer courses designed to teach general skills: public speaking, writing techniques, language courses, management and leadership courses, conflict management, teamwork, etc. The international content of university studies can also be enhanced through the choice of subjects for dissertations.

... is complemented by travel abroad and internships ...

Dealing with international problems is not, however, something that can be learnt in the lecture theatre, only on the job. Every student looking for an international career should spend a year studying abroad and complete at least one internship with an international slant.

There are three major internship programmes in international organizations: the BFIO Programme, the programme of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Carlo Schmid Programme, which is run by the DAAD in cooperation with the Study Foundation of the German People and the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Involvement in social groups is also important, particularly at a time when young people are said to be bored by politics.

... and can be concluded with practical, post-graduate training.

There are many post-graduate courses, but they are almost all academic in nature. Only three programmes offer practical training, including employment abroad:

The supplementary course of the seminar on rural development (SLE) at the Humboldt University in Berlin, the post-graduate course on developing countries (NADEL) at the Technical University in Zurich and the post-graduate programme of the German Development Institute (GDI) in Bonn. Of these, the GDI is the only non-university provider. An international programme of the Robert Bosch Foundation also enables 20 university graduates each year to gain international experience by undertaking a project largely on their own.

Provisional appraisal: an adequate range of training poorly related to working life

In view of the small size of the occupational field, the quantity and quality of the training described here is equal to the task of preparing young professionals to meet the needs of work in the development field in international organizations, even when it is remembered that the institutions referred to above prepare young professionals not only for work in international organizations and the EU but far more comprehensively for activities in bi- and multilateral governmental and non-governmental development cooperation and even for international tasks extending beyond this sphere. The high quality of the training is evident from the above-average results achieved by German candidates in international competitions.

Despite all the available leaflets and websites, the short comings in this sphere lie in the uncertainty of young people as to the course of training and internship they should choose and in the limited attention that most programmes pay to practical needs.

Uncertainty in career planning and finding initial employment

Selecting and training young professionals and their occupational integration should be seen as a unified whole, because not even the best training can make good an error in selection, and even where selection and training have been outstanding, young professionals will fail if they are then employed in the wrong place.

The training provided by secondary schools and universities must be backed by well-timed educational and careers guidance.

Secondary schools and universities should back the training they provide with educational and careers guidance. At secondary schools this might be done by teachers familiar with the requirements associated with an international posting. At the universities the employment offices' university teams and the officials who deal with foreign students and international exchanges would be suitable partners.

In addition, students should wait no later than their graduation from university to apply to the BFIO, which has been in operation since 1971, provides practical careers guidance on request, acts as an employment agency and selects, places and looks after candidates for posts in international organizations. It cooperates closely with the university teams of the employment offices.

Young professionals can join the United Nations by the direct route ...

Young professionals have two ways of joining the UN, by the direct route and by the indirect route. The direct route passes – often after an internship – through participation in a UN entrance examination either directly or after the completion of a trainee programme to what is usually a limited period of employment. For this option the German Foreign Office provides assistance by holding preparatory courses for the difficult entrance examinations. Many candidates are advised by the BFIO in this way. Otherwise, they are left to their own devices. The effectiveness of this route is not

ensured, both because the estimated number of unsuccessful applications is high and because many of the successful candidates are not employed in posts that give them the prospect of remaining in the system for any length of time.

... or via the BS Programme

The BS Programme is the only alternative to the direct route for beginners, and it is also an option which the Federal Government can influence. This programme, which is financed by the BMZ and run by the BFIO, gives young Germans an opportunity of working in an international organization as a junior professional officer (JPO) for up to three years. The programme is successful in two respects: about a third of JPOs are taken on permanently by the UN and its agencies; returning professionals form a highly qualified – though badly underused – pool of potential experts for Germany's international tasks at home and abroad. Young professionals who choose this route are attended to closely by the BFIO and carefully selected, prepared and placed with the assistance of the BMZ and other government departments.

From a reactive to a proactive personnel policy for Germans in international organizations

The personnel policy for Germans in international organizations has tended to be reactive in the past. Germany would find it easier to strengthen its presence if it followed the example of other donors and pursued a more active personnel policy, possibly covering the following aspects:

Working for the UN and EU must be made more attractive

This means, on the one hand, improving the UN's unjustifiably negative image, purposefully disseminating information on its activities and gearing training and preparation more closely to the practical needs of posts in its agencies. On the other hand, a reception structure should be established in Germany to facilitate the reintegration of German professionals returning from international organizations. In particular, this should include the recognition of their years of international service during their subsequent careers at home, equal treatment by the social insurance system and greater opportunities for moving between the public service and the private sector. Helping returning professionals would also be in Germany's interests. Other countries make systematic use of their experience when filling important domestic posts with an international slant; Germany has yet to develop a concept for returning professionals.

Helping young professionals should form part of a medium-term personnel concept for multilateral development cooperation

This presupposes that the Federal Government defines the items it wants to see added to the international agenda and the organizations with which it intends to cooperate most closely and in which it would like to increase its share of the staff. This might form the basis of a strategic personnel plan for all international organizations, stating which posts the Federal Government would like to fill and which it could fill. The Coordinator for International Personnel Policy at the Foreign Office has set up a website that provides comprehensive information on vacant posts in the EU and UN and is in the process of establishing a database of candidates who might fill these posts. This will create an instrument with which Germany can react to vacancies.

It would become a strategic instrument if it was used – on the basis of a development policy concept for multilateral cooperation – to fill the posts that Germany wanted to fill. For this, however, not only would the database have to indicate vacancies that had been formally advertised: it would also have to be known what posts would be advertised in the future, where applications might be successful and where Germans might be needed. This would be possible if the information obtained from the Permanent Representatives and the insider knowledge of German officials at the UN or in the EU was systematically evaluated – through networks that have yet to be developed. This procedure is methodically adopted by many other countries and is not

inconsistent with the independence of the international organizations, which seek, in the personnel policies they pursue, to maintain balanced geographical distribution and are willing to listen to proposals when it comes to recruiting new staff.

The international personnel policy should involve young professionals more

The international personnel policy embraces many areas of responsibility and many decision-making levels: proposing candidates for international posts is the responsibility of the relevant government departments. With the Coordinator for International Personnel Policy, the Foreign Office performs the coordinating function within the Federal Government and vis-à-vis the UN and EU.

At political level decisions are taken on the nomination of candidates at meetings of the Ministers of State ("Steinmeier Round") in the case of the most senior posts, by an interdepartmental committee for senior management posts and by a selection body representing the government departments and the Federal *Länder* that meets at the Foreign Office every three weeks to consider middle management posts. There is no equivalent instrument for the level between the BS Programme and middle management. If it is agreed that encouraging young people is the strategic answer to the "German dip", an instrument of this kind should be introduced in the near future.

The government departments should draw up establishment plans showing current incumbents and current and future vacancies in "their" international organizations and frame their strategic personnel plans on this basis.

At the various meetings decisions could then be taken on proposals for filling posts through internal promotion, through exchanges of staff between international organizations or between them and domestic bodies or even through the appointment of new people.

Cooperation between the Permanent Representatives and young professionals should be stepped up

The Permanent Representatives already have the task of looking after German officials of international organizations locally and supporting their professional advancement. This presupposes, however, that the officials take the initiative themselves. Consequently, the Permanent Representatives should also encourage young recruits to organize themselves in networks with appropriate objectives. They might support these networks logistically and politically. In cooperation with them they might take note of both current and future vacancies and do the groundwork for the updating of the strategic personnel plans by the government departments and the Coordinator for International Personnel Policy.

The BS Programme should be reinforced

As the BS Programme is currently the Federal Government's only strategic personnel instrument for the international sphere and as middle management posts at that level are filled predominantly by means of internal promotion, the number of young professionals assisted each year should be increased to as many as 70. A second aim of the personnel policy should be to see as many as possible of the new recruits remaining in the UN system and gradually rising to management posts. Following an evaluation in the winter of 2001, the programme is currently being reformed to incorporate these objectives. Particular importance should be attached in this context to careful and systematic selection and preparation, with institutions experienced in the devel-

opment field, such as the GDI, involved. As part of their preparation young professionals must spend time in the appropriate German government departments familiarizing themselves with their counterpart structures so that they may remain in contact with them during their international careers.

Young recruits should take the initiative and maintain contact with the Permanent Representative, the BFIO and the relevant government departments and vice versa. In cooperation with senior partners and mentors and advisers of, say, the Tönissteiner Circle (a network of outward-looking managers that seeks to encourage young professionals and the German presence in international organizations) they should also develop networks in which they make their interests known, inform and support each other, continue the development of their professional and international competence and develop the feeling of togetherness that is taken for granted in most other countries. These networks should cooperate closely with the Association of German Officials of International Agencies of the United Nations (VDBIO) and maintain contact with other networks at the place of employment and other locations and with the counterpart structures in Germany. On completion of their international postings, returning professionals should remain in contact with one another and available to others in a network of alumni.



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Further reading:

Auswärtiges Amt: Internationaler Stellenpool, Website: www.auswaertiges-amt.de/www/de/aamt/job/jobs_io

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