

# International policy and development

Working in this sector involves developing policy, coupled with practical implementation, that empowers people across the globe to improve their lives.

Practice areas are diverse and they encompass governance, healthcare, education, gender, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, livelihoods, human rights, and other associated issues.

You could be working in a think tank that seeks to address issues of global concern; in your country's foreign service to formulate and implement international policy; in the civil service of a regional organisation such as the EU; as a researcher in a political risk or international development consultancy; or in an international organisation (IO) such as the UN or World Bank. Alternatively, you could work for

a global charity (see the charity sector briefing for relevant advice). As this is a popular sector, competition for employment can be intense, but it offers rewarding careers for those who persevere.



## Getting in and entry points

Entry straight from an undergraduate degree can be difficult, as most organisations value specific expertise or transferable experience – whether in the

private, public, or charitable sector. However, there are some graduate schemes available, such as the UK Diplomatic & Development Civil Service Fast Stream.

Direct recruitment into a permanent role is also possible into NGOs and think tanks, but most require at least a master's qualification, and sometimes one or two years' work experience. The precise master's course title doesn't always matter, but the course content/modules do. When making applications it's important to highlight the most relevant modules taken and to illustrate that you have very good knowledge of the subject, research techniques, technical skills, geographical regions, and relevant languages. Research-driven organisations and many think tanks may require that you have undertaken further study to the level of a doctorate, as well as having several years of professional experience.

You can spend time at Oxford building up insights into the sector and its range of organisations – both to increase your chances of securing a job and to help you work out which areas and employers are for you. Most think tanks are open to students undertaking short internships with them. These are not always paid, so you may need to try to set up shorter traineeships that you can combine with other paid work. The EU offers longer five-month paid traineeships to recent graduates. Internship schemes with larger international organisations are normally reserved for postgraduate students. Masters' or DPhil students may also be able to find paid part-time consultancy work within international development, or political risk consultancies and think tanks – especially those students with sector-specific knowledge, expertise, and language skills.





You can enhance your ‘insider’ knowledge of the sector and hear of upcoming opportunities by following our networking advice. Talk to speakers and employers at careers events and seminars, and network through LinkedIn, or college development offices.

### Extra-curricular ideas

Spend as much time as you can gaining international experience and knowledge. Spend a summer on the Careers Service’s Summer Internship Programme working on a relevant project, building your language skills, and getting to know a region. Also:

- Write relevant articles for student newspapers, journals or blogs, to demonstrate that you can use research to inform and influence opinion.
- Take a course at the Oxford University Language Centre, to develop or improve a second language.
- Join university societies related to development.

### Next steps

[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-development](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-development)  
[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-law](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-law)  
[www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-organisations](http://www.careers.ox.ac.uk/international-organisations)

A thesis project or one or two longer internships are a great way to set foot into the sector and show how you can add value to an organisation. Top skills required are: empathy; curiosity; creativity; flexibility; frustration; tolerance; and humility.

*Janita Bartell, Monitoring Specialist,  
UNICEF*

### Alumni profile

# Janita Bartell

**What:** I support the UNICEF regional and country offices in Latin America and the Caribbean to collect, report and strategically use data about the situation of children and the programmatic work we do to address child rights deprivations.

**Why:** I thoroughly enjoy making data speak to non-data people to help them base their work on evidence. That’s all. Seeing how this eventually helps teams to think outside the box to identify new areas of work or new approaches to make this world a better place for children – I could not ask for more.

**Career path:** I have lived in a diverse set of countries and worked for a range of organizations. This ranged from volunteering in a remote mountainous village in Tanzania, studying abroad in Peru and working for a local NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) – to gaining a global perspective on discourses by working for WFP and UNICEF in headquarters positions. My “career path” so far felt more like a never-ending field research, allowing me to explore the field of international cooperation and learn how I can contribute with my skills, experience, interests and convictions.

**Top tips:** First, get your hands dirty! Work and live with the local communities that you will eventually serve with your work. This might not render you a fancy job title or a brand name on your CV. But ultimately, it will make you a better professional. Second, know the organization you want to work for. The mandate of a UN organization is very different from that of a local NGO and hence the work will be very different, although they work in the same sector. And lastly, learn what you are curious about and develop your own profile to reflect this.



### Position

Monitoring Specialist, UNICEF.

### Background

MSc Sociology, St Hugh’s College, 2014.

## Alumni profile

# Yujie Shen

**What:** I work in the social dimensions of climate change team at the World Bank. My work focuses on climate change and environmental issues, such as identifying mechanisms to facilitate private investment in renewable energy in emerging markets, and supporting governments to design and implement policies that support a green economic transition.

**Why:** I started my journey in development without realising what I did was in fact development work. Driven by a desire to understand more about the society and people around me, I started volunteering with a grassroots NGO that works with children of rural migrant workers in my home city in China when I was at high school. By the end of my bachelor's degree, I decided to join a start-up social enterprise working on rural development in China.

At the World Bank I work on an area that got me started in development: building social resilience and inclusion with communities.

**Advice:** Start small and start early. Volunteering with local NGOs helps you get outside of your comfort zone, interact with people you might not otherwise encounter, and develop skills in communication and fundraising which every organisation in development values.

Identify an area you can add the most value. Development work is broad and diverse, encompassing many sectors and thematic areas, such as agriculture, education, governance, and gender equality to name a few. Speaking to professionals working in these areas helps you understand what their work entails and where you can add unique value.

Be clear and specific about what drives you to work in this industry. Having the experience of working on the ground with grassroots organisations and communities can help sharpen your thinking. You can also learn more about the industry by networking with professionals and reading international news. Give yourself time to reflect and clarify your goal.



### Position

Young Professional, World Bank Group.

### Background

MSc Sociology, Linacre College, 2021.