New Edition updated for the **2026-27** exam:
Development and Sustainability



United Nations
Young Professionals Programme



Manual for Candidates

• All about the Program •
Tips for Every Stage of Selection!

OpenIGO

United Nations

Young Professionals Programme

Manual for Candidates

2026-27 Edition · Free Preview

Updated for the YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability

FREE PREVIEW. This file contains the front matter, the full Introduction and the opening pages of each chapter of the 2026-27 edition. The complete manual is available at www.openigo.com.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to OpenIGO's updated manual to the United Nations Young Professionals Programme!

Working for the United Nations is a dream for many, and the UN Young Professionals Programme (YPP) represents a great entrance opportunity for early-career professionals who are looking to kick-start their career with the Organization. Successful candidates are offered a two-year fixed-term contract at the P-1 or P-2 level, orientation, mobility training and career support, which help them adapt and accelerate their learning period as international civil servants. Because of these incentives, this selection process is highly sought after by young professionals from all over the world – and therefore very competitive. This is the first step on your UN YPP journey, and we are honored to be a part of it. We have prepared this comprehensive e-Book to help candidates succeed in this demanding and prestigious programme.

This 2026-27 edition has been fully revised for the YPP examination cycle whose application period ran from 16 October to 30 November 2026 and whose written examination is scheduled for 2027. The only exam area offered in this cycle is **Development and Sustainability**, and the manual has been rebuilt around it: the job opening, the competencies, the examination chapter and the interview examples now reflect this exam area and the rules published by the United Nations for this cycle.

In order to take part in the UN YPP selection process, applicants must meet certain eligibility criteria and be nationals of the participating countries invited to that year's examination. This manual has been designed to guide you, step by step, through the whole process – this includes defining what exactly the UN YPP is, what the minimum eligibility criteria and the "participating countries" are, and providing an overview of the fields of study and the selection cycle. As we move through the different stages of the process, this manual offers preparation tips as well as detailed explanations and guidance for each stage. It introduces you to the United Nations as the complex international organization it is, to its organizational culture and values, and to the institutional context of 2026-27; it explains how to prepare your online application; it gives you insight into the written examination; and it gets you ready for the competency-based interview.

In the first section of this manual, we start by giving you an overview of international organizations and of the United Nations, so that you can become familiar with the Organization, its mandate and its goals. Although these chapters do not directly concern the YPP, the information they contain is essential in a manual such as this: candidates must understand the organization they are applying to in some depth, especially considering that they may be called on to display this kind of knowledge during the selection process. The second section addresses the YPP itself, aiming to explain everything you need to know about the programme in order to apply and succeed.

Remember that even if you do not plan to apply this year, or if your country is not among the Member States invited to take part in the current YPP cycle, this manual will prepare you to apply in the coming years: the list of participating countries and the exam areas change from year to year. Take notes and use the time you have to strategically develop your career and gain relevant work experience until you are ready to apply.

Although the chapters of the book follow the stages of the selection process, you are not required to read it linearly. Read it in sequence or skip around, whichever way best suits your needs. If a section does not explain a point in detail, there is likely to be a note directing you to the chapter that does.

In this manual, you will learn/understand:

- What the UN System is, and how the United Nations is changing in 2026-27
- What the UN YPP is and whether or not you are eligible to apply
- What the stages of the selection process are and how to best complete each of them
- How the screening of applicants is carried out
- How to use the UN Secretariat's recruitment platform – Inspira
- The best way to structure your cover letter and fill out your application
- What the Development and Sustainability examination covers and how to prepare for it
- What competency-based interviews are and how they should be handled
- What happens after you are successful – placement on the roster, consideration and selection of rostered candidates

Important – OpenIGO and the United Nations

OpenIGO is an independent organization. It is not affiliated with, endorsed by or in partnership with the United Nations, and no private company has access to "inside" information about the YPP. The United Nations itself warns candidates that for-profit companies sell YPP-related services and that it does not collaborate with any of them.

The United Nations does not charge a fee at any stage of the recruitment process, and all official information about the YPP is published free of charge at https://careers.un.org/ypp. Use this manual as a study companion – and always check the official job opening and the YPP page for the rules that apply to your cycle.

Here's an overview of the chapters you will find in this e-Book:

Chapter 01 – International Organizations: Concepts and Reflections

A brief chapter that presents basic aspects of international organizations, covering their main concepts, structures, processes and historical background. Find out how the first intergovernmental organizations emerged and how they influenced the foundation of the United Nations decades later.

Chapter 02 – The United Nations and the UN System: Understanding the Organization

Provides an overview of the United Nations through the presentation of its history, organizational goals and main organs. Introduces the UN System and the myriad of funds, programmes, agencies and bodies it encompasses, and explains the institutional context of 2026-27: the UN80 Initiative, the financial situation and the transition to a new Secretary-General.

Chapter 03 – The United Nations Young Professionals Programme: An Overview

Presents the YPP in detail: eligibility criteria, the stages of the selection process, the estimated timeline of the 2026-27 cycle, the roster, career prospects, pay and benefits.

Chapter 04 – Understanding the UN Working Areas and the UN YPP Job Opening

Explains how the United Nations organizes its staff working areas, how this relates to the YPP exam areas, and walks you through every section of the 2026 job opening for the Development and Sustainability exam (Job Opening ID 285586).

Chapter 05 – Understanding the United Nations' Competencies and Values

Introduces the notions of values and competencies, with a special focus on the three competencies listed in the 2026 job opening – Professionalism, Planning and Organizing, and Teamwork – and on the UN Values and Behaviours Framework. What are competencies? What is competency-based recruitment? Can competencies be developed?

Chapter 06 – Online Application Process: Personal History Profile

Presents the online application and the Inspira platform through which candidates submit it. This chapter gives tips on how to complete each part of the application, helping you avoid the mistakes that eliminate many candidates at the screening stage.

Chapter 07 – Writing an Effective Cover Letter for the UN YPP

Explains what a cover letter is, presents its basic structure and helps you write an effective letter for the YPP. It includes a sample cover letter written by a real YPP candidate and new guidance for Development and Sustainability candidates.

Chapter 08 – UN YPP Written Examination

Takes a close look at the Development and Sustainability exam area and explains the structure of the online written examination, how to prepare for it, how exam integrity and verification work, and offers sample questions and answers.

Chapter 09 – UN YPP Interview

Prepares you for the competency-based video-conference interview: how it works, what is expected from candidates, how to structure answers with the STAR technique, and examples built around the competencies of the 2026 job opening.

The OpenIGO team hopes that this manual will be of great assistance to the young and bright professionals who will be taking up this challenge this year or in the coming years. Remember that our team is always available and open to questions and feedback. We are rooting for you, and wish you delightful reading!

CHAPTER ONE

International Organizations: *Concepts and Reflections*

International Organizations: Concepts and Reflections

The objective of this chapter is to present the basic aspects of international organizations – their concepts, history, structures, systems and processes, etc. – that applicants need to be aware of. After you have read the chapter, you will see that these organizations, although they have many similarities with organizations that are more common in a national daily routine (companies, public bodies or non-governmental organizations), have important characteristics that should be considered by any aspiring staff member or international trainee.

These characteristics largely originate from the dynamics of international relations that, throughout history, have crystallized standards of interaction between countries and other international actors. Therefore, the elements that form and permeate the international organizations are, directly or indirectly, the results of international policy – whether resulting from diplomatic processes, sources of international law or power struggles.

Chapter Objective

- To present the history and fundamental concepts of international organizations, in general, and of intergovernmental organizations, in particular.

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. International Organizations: Defining Concepts
2. Intergovernmental Organizations: The Historical Background

Throughout this chapter, you will receive tips on books, articles and/or sites, which provide additional reading on the topics presented. As you will see, the intention is not to fully cover the topic of international organizations in this chapter, but to present a framework, based on key information, for those who wish to plan and are looking to develop a successful career at international organizations.

International Organizations: Defining Concepts

Specialized literature presents different concepts and discussions on the definition of an international organization. In this section of the chapter, the main definitions of this concept will be presented, in order to outline more precise conceptual boundaries of international organizations.

Many terms are found in articles, books and manuals on international organizations. Some of these are as follows: international organisms, agencies, institutions and regimes; transnational, intergovernmental, international governmental, international non-governmental, world and global organizations, and international structures, etc. It is an extensive list. These terms often attempt to restrict the meaning (a political, legal, diplomatic bias, or others) of the organizations, highlighting the character they have; at other times, many are only established with little concern for conceptual precision – which is very common in non-specialized International Relations or International Law publications.

However, conceptual rigor is fundamental, when referring to bodies that have legal and administrative dimensions. Therefore, the terms applied here must be precisely defined. The objective

of the table below is to contribute towards a better understanding of the myriad of terms used to define international organisms.

BASIC CONCEPTS TO DEFINE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS	
Concept	Definition
International Regimes	Are defined as standards, rules and principles related to a specific area of international relations, or what has also been called an "issue area" – whether economic, political or of another order – that shape the international system actors' expectations and decision-making processes. In other words, international regimes are sets of governing arrangements that affect the relationship between these actors. For example, in the environmental area, the contemporary international regime has been configured around pertinent themes, such as climate change, polar regions and the use of natural resources from the oceans, and outer space. However, many other regimes can be cited, such as the case of the international regime of combating drug trafficking, to protect refugees, of intellectual property and human rights, etc.
Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO)	Intergovernmental Organizations (or International Governmental Organizations) are Nation- State constructions (although some also allow participation by private actors and subnational entities), which strive to solve specific problems that were assigned to them by an internationalized society. They should include a basic legal instrument (such as a treaty) that establishes their objectives, structure and ways of operating. The United Nations, The World Bank and the European Union are examples of IGOs. Established as actors, IGOs have relative autonomy in relation to the Member States, and prepare their own policies and projects, besides having a legal personality, in accordance with international public law. Their contribution towards cooperation between the Member States involves the creation of a social, and even physical, space, in which negotiations can be carried out, as well as administrative machinery that materializes these decisions. They also perform important collection, analysis and dissemination of information activities, in addition to the various state monitoring instruments.
International Non-Governmental Organizations	International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are private and voluntary, with members from various countries. They are not established by intergovernmental agreements, but accept members designated by government authorities. They focus on causes, such as human rights, peace or environmental protection, whether militating internationally, in defense of these agendas, or providing specific services, such as humanitarian aid and medical services, etc. Greenpeace, WWF, FIFA, Amnesty International and the Red Cross are examples of well-known INGOs. Relations between INGOs and IGOs have been increasingly intense, as debates defending greater participation of civil society in domestic spheres have intensified, a similar movement can be observed in the international sphere. Today, the main international forums and conferences held by IGOs include the participation of INGOs.
International Organization	This category includes both intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations. Although uncommon, it can also be used to refer to transnational or multinational companies.

Source: Organized by the author.

It is easier to understand this assortment of classifications, if the history of intergovernmental organizations is understood, and this is presented below.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 01. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- Intergovernmental Organizations: The Historical Background

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CHAPTER TWO

The United Nations and the UN System: *Understanding the Organization*

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE UN SYSTEM: UNDERSTANDING THE ORGANIZATION

The United Nations (UN) is an international organization established in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the central purpose of maintaining international peace and security. Founded in 1945, the Organization is currently made up of 193 Member States and headquartered in New York City.

Considering the complexity of the United Nations and the myriad of agencies, funds and programmes that it encompasses, it is very common for applicants to find it hard to understand how it is structured, what activities it performs and how decisions are taken at this enormous organization. Overcoming this difficulty is fundamental for those who wish to succeed in the United Nations Young Professionals Programme, since knowledge of the Organization, its operating strategies and goals is required throughout the selection process, especially during the written examination. This is even more true in 2026-27, a period in which the United Nations is going through one of the deepest reform processes of its history.

Chapter Objective

- To give an overview of the United Nations, its history, purposes and main organs
- To present the structure of the United Nations System
- To explain the institutional context of 2026-27 that YPP candidates should be aware of

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. The United Nations
2. The UN System
3. The UN in 2026-27: UN80, Finances and Leadership Transition
4. Final Considerations

THE UNITED NATIONS (UN)

In November 1952, the first Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Norwegian, Trygve Lie, announced his intention of resigning from what he called "the most difficult job in the world".[1] Starting the section on the United Nations by presenting this phrase is curious, to say the least, but the aim of this is not to deter anyone who is planning to work at the United Nations but, rather, to highlight one of its most fundamental characteristics: the UN is a political organization. When the Secretary General at the time confirmed that it was the most difficult job in the world, he was referring to the colossal challenge of conciliating the different interests of countries with distinct levels of power and influence. Therefore, to understand the United Nations, first of all, you need to position it in relation to the

[1]United Nations, 1952, "Secretary-General Trygve Lie resigns", United Nations historical timeline (UN70), Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

dynamics of international relations. And, for that, it is essential to talk a little about the history of contemporary international relations and some specific concepts.

Following the human catastrophe of the First World War, the winners of the conflict founded the League of Nations, through an initiative by the United States president, Woodrow Wilson. As the fourteenth point of the democrat's famous speech, the League of Nations was created to be the first world organization to maintain peace and security, for international cooperation and to develop International Law.[2] Although this organization did not successfully achieve its objectives[3] – after all, it was not able to prevent the Second World War – its experience served as a reference to structure the United Nations decades later. Being a collective security organization,[4] the aim was to structure the UN in such a way as to avoid the League of Nations' errors, while maintaining its principles. Thus, Roosevelt, by recovering the League of Nations' project, created an international organization, governed by "four policemen": the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China. These powers would hold all the executive power and be responsible for preserving the peace [...].[5]

The United Nations emerged as a result of the agreement established between United States president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and leaders from other nations that formed the group of allies, on the need to create a world organization that would help to secure peace in the years ahead.[6] Therefore, it is a political organization that has the aim of guaranteeing the construction and maintenance of a peaceful international order,[7] as an essential prerequisite for world development.

On April 25, 1945, the United States president, Harry S. Truman, opened the San Francisco Conference, during which delegates from fifty countries completed and signed the United Nations Charter, considered the UN foundational treaty.[8] In this Charter, the military discourse that prevailed in some declarations, shortly after the war, was removed and, on the one hand, links world peace and, on the other, a certain socioeconomic security of nations. In the Charter's preamble, which formally instituted the United Nations, objectives are listed, such as "promoting social progress and better living conditions, within a high degree of freedom" and "employing an international mechanism to promote the social and economic progress of all peoples."[9]

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[2]Moore Jr., John Allphin; Pubantz, Jerry, 2008, "Encyclopedia of the United Nations", 2 ed, New York: Facts On File Inc.

[3]For a classical analysis of the League of Nations and the reasons for its failure, see the well-known publication by Edward Carr, "The Twenty Years' Crisis" (Carr, 2001).

[4]"Collective security refers to agreements and actions among several states uniting them against an aggressor. Collective security guarantees each state's security; an attack on one means an attack on all; and all nations party to the agreement agree to resist any aggression. It works on the assumption that no state would use force against any member of the collective security system, as any aggression would be met by overwhelming international force and therefore would be fruitless. The United Nations is a 'universal' collective security system, having all of the world's Nation-States as its members" (MOORE JR.; PUBANTZ, 2008, p. 76).

[5]Moniz Bandeira, Luiz Alberto, 2006, Formação do império americano: da guerra contra a Espanha à guerra no Iraque, 2 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

[6]Fasulo, Linda, 2015, An insider's guide to the UN, 3 ed, New Haven: Yale University Press.

[7]Bull, Hedley, 1995, The anarchical society: a study of order in world politics, 2 ed, New York, Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.

[8]Moniz Bandeira, Luiz Alberto, Formação do império americano: da guerra contra a Espanha à guerra no Iraque.

[9]United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations", accessed November 2026, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 02. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section “The United Nations (UN)”
- The UN System
- The UN in 2026-27: UN80, Finances and Leadership Transition
- Final Considerations

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CHAPTER THREE

The United Nations Young Professionals Programme: *An Overview*

The United Nations Young Professionals Programme: An Overview

Understanding the United Nations Young Professionals Programme in detail is the first step to succeeding in the selection process. This highly competitive recruitment initiative is carried out once a year and comprises several stages: an online application, an online written examination and a competency-based interview conducted by video conference.

Candidates who wish to apply must meet basic eligibility criteria concerning nationality, education, age and language skills. Every year, a different list of participating countries is published by the United Nations, so only certain nationalities may take part. An estimated timeline is also published, so that applicants can keep track of the important dates and deadlines of the process.

Accordingly, candidates must have a clear understanding of the programme and its different stages in order to prepare for it. This chapter presents an overview of the YPP as it applies to the 2026-27 cycle.

Chapter Objective

- To present a comprehensive overview of the United Nations Young Professionals Programme and of the rules that apply to the 2026-27 cycle

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Description of the United Nations Young Professionals Programme
2. Minimum Requirements / Eligibility Criteria
3. Selection Process Overview
4. Selection Process Timeline
5. Notification of Results
6. The Roster
7. Career Prospects
8. Remuneration and Benefits

Description of the United Nations Young Professionals Programme

According to the United Nations, the YPP "is a recruitment initiative for talented, highly qualified professionals to start a career as an international civil servant with the UN Secretariat. It consists of an entrance examination process and professional development once those who are successful start their career with the UN."[10]

The YPP examination is held once a year in different subject areas, depending on the projected needs of the Organization. According to the UN, most exam subjects are offered every second year,

[10]United Nations Careers, "Young Professionals Programme", accessed November 2026, https://careers.un.org/ypp. Unless otherwise indicated, the information on the YPP in this chapter comes from this page and from the 2026 job opening.

although this schedule may change. In the 2026 cycle, a single exam area was offered: **Development and Sustainability** (Job Opening ID 285586).[11]

The programme is open only to nationals of participating countries – Member States that are un- or under-represented in the UN Secretariat in a given year – because the YPP is mandated to help ensure equitable geographical representation of all Member States in the Secretariat. The list of participating countries therefore changes from year to year.

Those who are successful in the examination are placed on a roster (a reserve list) from which candidates are selected as relevant vacancies become available across the Secretariat. Candidates selected from the roster are offered a two-year fixed-term contract at the P-1 or P-2 level, as well as orientation, mobility training and career support, which help them adapt and accelerate their learning period as international civil servants.

The YPP represents a great entry opportunity for early-career professionals: P-1 and P-2 positions are entry-level professional posts and do not require extensive work experience. This is why the selection process is highly sought after – and very competitive.

When applying to the YPP, keep in mind that the examination recruits staff for the **UN Secretariat** – its departments, offices and regional commissions. The specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the UN System (such as UNICEF, FAO or UNDP) run their own, independent recruitment processes, and passing the YPP examination does not give a candidate any particular advantage when applying to them.

For the 2026 exam area, the job opening states that positions in Development and Sustainability "are located primarily in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the Regional Commissions", and that positions may become available at various Secretariat offices including, but not limited to, Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, Nairobi, New York, Santiago and Vienna. Successful candidates must be willing to be placed in a position at any UN duty station or field operation.

Minimum Requirements/Eligibility Criteria

As the YPP examination is an annual event, candidates must meet the eligibility criteria of the current cycle. For the 2026-27 cycle, the job opening lists four requirements:

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 03. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section "Minimum Requirements/Eligibility Criteria"
- Selection Process Overview
- Selection Process Timeline
- Notification of Results
- The Roster
- Career Prospects

[11] United Nations, Job Opening 285586, "YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability (for external applicants), P2", Careers Portal, posted 16 October 2026, deadline 30 November 2026.

- Remuneration and Benefits

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CHAPTER FOUR

Understanding the UN Working Areas
and the UN YPP Job Opening

Understanding the UN Working Areas and the UN YPP Job Opening

As a large international organization with multiple activities, projects and goals, the United Nations encompasses a myriad of departments, offices and other bodies. Within each of them, staff members from many different areas of knowledge and expertise work together to achieve the goals of their unit. Every UN body therefore includes professionals from different working areas who take on various responsibilities within the same team.

In the YPP, applicants apply for an exam area defined according to the staffing needs of the United Nations. The description of responsibilities, the competencies sought and the education requirements differ from one exam area to another, and they are all set out in the job opening.

This chapter explains how the United Nations organizes its staff working areas, how this relates to the YPP exam areas, and – most importantly – walks you through every section of the 2026 YPP job opening for Development and Sustainability. To apply successfully, you need to understand the job opening in depth: it is the reference document for your application, your cover letter, your written examination and your interview.

Chapter Objective

- To explain how UN working areas relate to YPP exam areas
- To give a detailed, section-by-section description of the 2026 YPP job opening (Development and Sustainability)

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Job Family x Job Network
2. The YPP Exam Areas over the Years
3. The 2026 Job Opening: Heading Information
4. The 2026 Job Opening: Description

Job Family x Job Network

The UN Secretariat groups its staff working areas into **job networks** and **job families**. A job network brings together job families with common, related and interrelated fields of work and functions, whose mandates, programmes of work and interests are closely linked. A job family, in turn, groups occupations within a common field of work inside a given network – for example, economic affairs or statistics. This structure makes it easier for staff members to develop new skills within their field and to gain exposure to different parts of the Organization. A job network is therefore broader than a job family.

Each job opening identifies the network and, where applicable, the family of the position. In the YPP, the scope of the exam areas has changed over the years: in some cycles an exam area corresponded to an entire network, in others to one specific job family. In 2017, for instance, the exam areas were defined by job network (Political, Peace and Humanitarian; Management and

Administration; and Public Information and Conference Management), while in 2018 and 2019 they corresponded to specific job families, such as Legal Affairs, Social Affairs, Statistics and Economic Affairs.

The 2026 exam area – **Development and Sustainability** – is a broad area. Its job opening is classified under the **Economic, Social and Development** job network, and the "Job Family" field is left blank. According to the job opening, successful candidates may be appointed to positions in a variety of functional areas, including "economic affairs, social affairs, population affairs, statistics, data science, environmental protection, and related areas of sustainable development".

The YPP Exam Areas over the Years

Exam areas are defined each year according to the projected needs of the Organization, and most of them are offered every second year. Development and Sustainability covers fields that, in previous cycles, were offered as separate exam areas – such as Economic Affairs (2019 and 2023), Social Affairs (2018) and Statistics (2018). This is good news for your preparation: the official sample questions published for those areas in earlier years are useful to understand the kind of knowledge that the Development and Sustainability examination may test (see Chapter 08).

Remember: when applications are open for more than one exam area, you must choose only one area in which to apply.

The 2026 Job Opening

Whenever the United Nations is looking for new staff members, vacancies are published as "job openings" on the UN Careers Portal (https://careers.un.org). For the YPP, the job openings of the current cycle are announced on the YPP page. The purpose of this section is to explain the format of a YPP job opening, using the 2026 Development and Sustainability opening as an example.[12] Here is an overview of all the sections it contains:

Part	Sections
Heading information	Job Opening ID; Job Network; Job Family; Category and Level; Recruitment Type; Duty Station; Department/Office; Date Posted; Deadline
Description	Org. Setting and Reporting; Responsibilities; Competencies; Education; Job-Specific Qualification; Work Experience; Languages; Assessment
Additional information and statements	Special Notice; United Nations Considerations; No Fee

Heading Information

This is what the heading of the 2026 job opening looks like:

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 04. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

[12]United Nations, Job Opening 285586, "YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability (for external applicants), P2", UN Careers Portal, posted 16 October 2026. All quotations in this section come from this job opening.

- The rest of the section “The 2026 Job Opening”
- Description
- Additional Information and Statements

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CHAPTER FIVE

Understanding the United Nations'
Competencies and Values

Understanding the United Nations' Competencies and Values

Most selection processes seek specific competencies that are considered important in future employees. These processes are known as competency-based recruitment. In the case of the YPP, the 2026 job opening lists three competencies: **Professionalism, Planning & Organizing and Teamwork**. They will be assessed throughout the selection process – most explicitly at the competency-based interview – and you should pay special attention to them when writing your cover letter and preparing for the interview.

But what are "competencies"? What is competency-based recruitment? How can the competencies sought by the YPP be understood? How do they relate to the UN Values and Behaviours Framework? Can competencies be developed? A candidate must know how to answer these questions in order to succeed in the selection process.

Chapter Objective

- To describe what "competencies" are
- To present how the United Nations perceives competencies and values, including the UN Values and Behaviours Framework
- To present the competencies required in the 2026 YPP job opening

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Competencies: Introductory Notes
2. The Competencies Required by the United Nations YPP
3. The UN Values and Behaviours Framework
4. Can Competencies Be Developed?

Competencies: Introductory Notes

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 05. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section "Competencies: Introductory Notes"
- The Competencies Required by the United Nations YPP
- The UN Values and Behaviours Framework
- Can Competencies Be Developed?

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CHAPTER SIX

Online Application Process: *Personal History Profile*

Online Application Process: Personal History Profile

Applications for the YPP are accepted once a year. In the current calendar, the application period runs in the last quarter of the year – in the 2026 cycle, from **16 October to 30 November 2026**. Applications are made entirely online through the UN Secretariat's recruitment system, known as **Inspira**.

In Inspira, candidates complete an electronic application – traditionally called the Personal History Profile (PHP) – with personal, academic and professional information. Some information is typed into designated fields (such as work experience and the cover letter), and some must be submitted as attachments (identification document and degree documentation).

Prior knowledge of the platform and of the application enables candidates to gather the necessary documents and information in advance and to avoid mistakes. This matters: according to the United Nations, many potential applicants do not pass the screening stage because of incomplete or inaccurate applications.

Chapter Objective

- To present the online application process and the Inspira platform, and to explain how to complete each part of the application

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Getting Started with Inspira
2. Getting Your Application Ready
3. Submitting and After Submission
4. The First Screening Round

Getting Started with Inspira

Inspira is the platform through which the UN Secretariat carries out its selection processes, both internally and externally. Job openings are published on the UN Careers Portal (https://careers.un.org); when you click "Apply" on a YPP job opening, you are taken to Inspira, where you sign in (or create an account) and complete your application.

Who Should Register as an External User?

- **External candidates** – that is, anyone who is not a UN Secretariat staff member – apply through the external job opening using a regular Inspira account.
- **Junior Professional Officers/Associate Experts, consultants, UN Volunteers and interns** are also external candidates for YPP purposes: they must use a non-UN Inspira account, not an account linked to an index number.
- **UN Secretariat staff members** eligible for the "G to N" or "G to P" tracks log into Inspira with their index-number account to see the specific staff job openings, which are not shown on the Careers Portal (see Chapter 03).

If you already have an Inspira account from a previous application, do not create a new one: log in to your existing account and update your profile.

Help Inside the Platform

Inspira offers two official sources of help that you should use before and during your application:

- **The Applicant Guide**, available in the "Manuals" link of the Inspira main menu after logging in;
- **Alba**, the virtual assistant (chatbot) that is activated when you click "apply" on the YPP job opening and that answers questions about the YPP.

Creating Your Profile

Before applying, complete your profile with accurate and up-to-date personal information. Pay special attention to:

- **Your email address.** All updates and notifications about the YPP are sent by email. Use a personal address that you check regularly (including the spam folder) and that will remain valid throughout the process.
- **Your telephone number**, in international format (for example, +55 for Brazil, +1 for the United States).
- **Your nationality.** For YPP purposes, only the field "Country of Nationality" is considered; "Nationality at Birth" and "Other Nationalities" are not. If you have more than one nationality, enter as "Country of Nationality" the one under which you wish to be considered, and make sure it is on the list of participating countries.
- **Your family relationships with UN staff.** You will be asked whether you have relatives employed by the UN. Answer truthfully and check the rule on family relationships explained in Chapter 03.

TIP!

Write long texts – especially your work experience descriptions and your cover letter – in a separate document on your computer, revise them carefully and only then paste them into Inspira. This protects your work against connection problems and lets you check length, spelling and consistency calmly.

Getting Your Application Ready

Your application must show that you meet the eligibility criteria and that you have the knowledge and skills sought by the UN. It should be well structured and contain no grammar, spelling or punctuation mistakes – and, above all, no eligibility mistakes. Before you apply, remember these important rules:

- You can submit **only one application per job opening**, and you must choose only one exam area.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 06. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section “Getting Your Application Ready”
- Submitting and After Submission
- The First Screening Round

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Writing an Effective Cover Letter *for the UN YPP*

Writing an Effective Cover Letter for the UN YPP

As part of the online application presented in the last chapter, candidates are required to submit a cover letter to Inspira as part of their application. The main goal of this document is to give candidates a chance to introduce themselves and explain their motivation in applying to the UN YPP. The cover letter is a very important part of your application, and in this chapter we will guide you through the process of writing and structuring it.

Chapter Objective

- To explain what a cover letter is and its importance
- To clarify which pieces of information should be contained in a cover letter
- To present the structure of a cover letter

In order to achieve this goal, this chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Cover Letter – Overview
2. Structure and Content of a Cover Letter
3. Checkpoints for a Cover Letter
4. Using AI Tools Responsibly
5. Sample Cover Letter

Cover Letter – Overview

As the name suggests, a cover letter serves as a "cover" for the documents you submit for a job or internship application. It should provide a summary of a candidate's skills, professional experience, and qualifications that meet the needs of a job opening, emphasizing why the candidate should be selected. Cover letters are usually seen as a personal marketing tool. Typically, they are meant to "sell" the candidate by showing recruiters the qualities and skills that s/he possesses that are in line with the prospective job. This way, evaluators are able to gain a better perspective on the candidate's attributes and their main motivation for applying. The text should represent the candidate positively and objectively. It should be short, yet contain enough information to keep the reader interested in reading the rest of the application. When well written, such a document immediately demonstrates the participant's abilities in written communication and the organization of ideas, as well as their argumentative capacity.

In the UN YPP selection process, the cover letter (or motivational statement) is part of the online application, serving as an introduction to it. It should contextualize your application and all its information in an objective fashion, highlighting the elements that are in line with the UN YPP exam area. Its main objective is to reinforce the candidate's positive qualities in order to arouse the evaluator's interest and desire to know more about the individual.

In order to write a strong UN YPP cover letter it is important to know what the recruiters will be looking for, so here are some of the aspects the recruiting team seeks to evaluate:

- Competencies: Competencies may be understood as the candidate's set of knowledge, abilities, attitudes and values (see chapter 05). It is important for the candidate to show that they have the main competencies the organization is seeking, in the 2026 job opening: Professionalism, Planning & Organizing and Teamwork. Since the United Nations is indisputably a value-driven organization, your personal values and the manner in which they are linked to the organization's should also be highlighted.
- Knowledge about the organization: It is expected that the candidate demonstrates knowledge about the United Nations, such as its mission, its operational approach, activities, and main objectives (including knowledge of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals).
- Cultural fit: Showing sound knowledge of the organization is not enough. The candidate should highlight that there is compatibility between their values, principles, objectives, and understanding of reality with those of the organization.
- Communicative capacity: The cover letter enables the recruiter to evaluate the candidate's writing skills and their ability to structure ideas and coherently defend arguments.

When writing your cover letter, take all of the aforementioned aspects into consideration and make them evident throughout the document when expressing three main things: your interest in working for the organization, the reason you are interested in the vacancy (or in a specific field area), and why you are a strong candidate for the position.

In the next sections, we will present you with an optional model to structure your cover letter around, offer guidance on how to cover each of the aspects mentioned, and advise on what kind of relevant content you can include in it. But, overall, know that a good cover letter should:

- Introduce the candidate;
- Talk about the candidate's motivation for applying;
- Contextualize the candidate's application (linking the information provided and prior experience with the exam area);
- Demonstrate the applicant's knowledge of the United Nations, its values, and the competencies required for the specific job;
- Show the candidate's enthusiasm, but in a professional manner;
- "Sell" the candidate;
- Be written in a formal style with no grammar mistakes.

Structure and Content of a Cover Letter

Choosing what to write in your cover letter can be a challenging task, especially if you have experienced multiple and diverse professional/academical engagements throughout the years. This section will provide you with guidance on choosing the most relevant experiences to expound upon and the best way of structuring them in writing.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 07. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section "Structure and Content of a Cover Letter"
- Checkpoints for a Cover Letter
- Using AI Tools Responsibly

- Sample Cover Letter

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CHAPTER EIGHT

UN YPP
Written Examination

UN YPP Written Examination

The written examination is the second stage of the YPP selection process. After the screening of applications, up to 90 applicants per country per exam area are invited ("convoked") to take it. It is a crucial step: it assesses candidates' knowledge of their exam area, their ability to analyse information and think critically, their understanding of the United Nations, and the abilities needed to work in an international affairs context – and it significantly narrows down the list of candidates.

For the 2026-27 cycle, the examination is planned in two parts: **Part I**, currently anticipated for February 2027, and **Part II**, one to two months later. Only examinees who succeed in Part I are invited to Part II, with a maximum of 60 applicants per country per exam area.[13]

In order to prepare you for this stage of the selection process, this chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. A Closer Look at the 2026-27 Exam Area: Development and Sustainability
2. Preliminary Information and Structure of the Exam
3. Exam Integrity, Proctoring and AI Tools
4. Part I: The General Paper
5. Part I: The Specialized Paper (Multiple Choice)
6. Part II: The Specialized Paper (Constructed Response)
7. Assessment of the Test

A Closer Look at the 2026-27 Exam Area: Development and Sustainability

Before we expound further upon the structure of the written examination itself, let's take a closer look at the 2026-27 exam area and the topics you should include in your study routine.

According to the job opening, the YPP examination in Development and Sustainability "covers a broad range of topics, with a focus on economics, statistics, social affairs, environmental issues, and sustainable development, as well as skills related to technology and digital transformation, and programme management support. It also encompasses other areas within the Development and Sustainability field that are addressed by the various entities of the United Nations system."

Where Development and Sustainability YPs Work

YPP positions in Development and Sustainability are located primarily in DESA, UNCTAD and the five Regional Commissions. Knowing what these entities do – and which reports they publish – is essential both for the Specialized Paper and for the interview.

[13] United Nations, Job Opening 285586, "YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability (for external applicants), P2", posted 16 October 2026.

Entity	Mandate in brief	Examples of flagship publications
DESA – Department of Economic and Social Affairs (New York)	Supports intergovernmental processes on economic, social and environmental issues – including ECOSOC, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly – produces analysis and statistics (including through its Statistics Division and Population Division) and supports countries through capacity development.	The Sustainable Development Goals Report; World Economic Situation and Prospects; World Social Report; World Population Prospects
UNCTAD – UN Conference on Trade and Development (Geneva)	Established in 1964, it helps developing countries benefit from trade, investment, finance and technology through research and analysis, intergovernmental deliberations and technical assistance.	Trade and Development Report; World Investment Report; Digital Economy Report; Technology and Innovation Report
ECA – Economic Commission for Africa (Addis Ababa)	Promotes the economic and social development of its member States, regional integration and international cooperation for Africa's development.	Economic Report on Africa
ECE – Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva)	Promotes pan-European economic integration, including through norms, standards and conventions (for example, in transport, environment and statistics).	–
ECLAC – Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago)	Contributes to the economic and social development of Latin America and the Caribbean.	Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean; Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP – Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok)	Promotes cooperation among its member States to achieve inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific.	Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA – Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Beirut)	Supports economic and social development in the Arab region and regional integration.	–

Source: Organized by the author based on the job opening and on the websites of the entities.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 08. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section "A Closer Look at the 2026-27 Exam Area: Development and Sustainability"
- Preliminary Information and Structure of the Exam
- Exam Integrity, Proctoring and AI Tools
- Part I: The General Paper
- Part I: The Specialized Paper (Multiple Choice)
- Part II: The Specialized Paper (Constructed Response)
- Assessment of the Test

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CHAPTER NINE

UN YPP
Interview

UN YPP Interview

The final stage of the YPP selection process is the oral examination – a competency-based interview conducted by video conference, whose main aim is to find out more about the candidate and analyze their competencies and experience. Interviews are an interpersonal research method used to obtain more in-depth information from someone, using questions and answers (conversation), and observing non-verbal elements such as attitude, behavior, and appearance, among others. Interviews can be conducted using different methods and approaches in order to identify the most appropriate candidate for the vacancy. The United Nations YPP selection process is no different. Therefore, knowing about this important phase of the selection procedure, its exercises and logic, helps the candidate to be better prepared, increasing their chances of being selected for the desired vacancy.

Chapter Objective

- To describe how the YPP interview is carried out and what is expected from candidates
- To present the competency-based interview method and the STAR technique
- To provide tips and examples, built around the competencies of the 2026 job opening, so that candidates are better prepared

In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has been structured in the following sections:

Chapter Structure

1. Interview Convocation and Preliminary Information
2. United Nations YPP Interview Model
3. Preparing for the YPP Competency-Based Interview
4. The Video-Conference Interview
5. Final Interview Tips
6. Interview Assessment

Interview Convocation and Preliminary Information

Only examinees who are successful in the overall written examination are invited to the oral examination. According to the 2026 job opening, "the oral examination will be conducted via online video conference" and "will assess the key competencies for the job family, as described in the Job Opening". For the 2026-27 cycle, the oral examinations are anticipated for **mid-2027**; the estimated timeline of the YPP page places interviews and results between June and August.[14]

According to the YPP FAQ, the marking of the written examination is usually completed within three to four months of the examination, and interviews normally take place one to two months after the marking. Candidates invited to the interview are notified by email, so keep checking your inbox (and spam folder) and keep your contact details updated in Inspira.

[14]United Nations, Job Opening 285586, "YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability (for external applicants), P2", posted 16 October 2026.

Two features of the current process deserve special attention:

- **The interview is the stage where the competencies of the job opening are assessed** – in 2026-27: Professionalism, Planning & Organizing and Teamwork.
- **Verification may take place at this stage.** According to the job opening, part of the final assessment stage – before, during or after the oral examination – may include an element to verify the candidate's answers in the Specialized Paper and the information in the application. Be ready to discuss your written answers and everything you wrote in your application.

United Nations YPP Interview Model

The YPP uses a particular type of structured interview, better known as a **competency-based interview**.

Structured interviews have the following characteristics:

- The questions in this type of interview are pre-prepared, with the interviewer using a script;
- The interviewer plays an active role in asking the questions, while candidates are simply required to answer them;
- The questions are presented to all the candidates using precisely the same wording and format. This allows the candidates' responses, rather than the questions, to be compared, so that the differences between the candidates are reflected; and
- There are pre-established criteria to evaluate the responses given (which may receive performance-related scores).

The YPP interview is conducted by a panel and seeks to analyse the behavioural aspects of the candidate and his or her real competencies. During the interview, candidates must base their answers on the specific competencies listed in the job opening they have applied for.

The United Nations interview mainly seeks to evaluate:

- The candidate's knowledge of the specific UN organization's working areas;
- The candidate's competences and skills;
- The candidate's general and technical knowledge;
- The candidate's cultural fit with the organization;
- The candidate's past behaviors and achievements.

End of the free preview

This is the end of the preview of Chapter 09. In the complete 2026-27 edition, this chapter continues with:

- The rest of the section "United Nations YPP Interview Model"
- Preparing for the YPP Competency-Based Interview
- The Video-Conference Interview
- Final Interview Tips
- Interview Assessment

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GET THE COMPLETE MANUAL

Thank you for reading this free preview of the **United Nations Young Professionals Programme – Manual for Candidates, 2026-27 Edition**.

The complete 2026-27 edition includes

- All nine chapters in full, updated for the YPP Exam: Development and Sustainability (Job Opening 285586)
- The eligibility rules, timeline, roster, contract and pay of the 2026-27 cycle, checked against official UN sources
- A section-by-section explanation of the 2026 job opening and of the competencies Professionalism, Planning & Organizing and Teamwork
- Step-by-step guidance on the Inspira application and on writing your cover letter
- A complete chapter on the written examination, with a topic map for Development and Sustainability, key frameworks, a complementary reading list, a study plan, official sample questions and OpenIGO practice questions with answers
- Guidance on exam integrity, remote proctoring and the responsible use of AI tools
- A full chapter on the competency-based video interview, with STAR examples for each competency of the 2026 job opening
- Attachments with hundreds of competency-based interview questions

OpenIGO

Get the complete manual and learn about our application review, coaching and mock interview services at https://www.openigo.com

OpenIGO is an independent organization and is not affiliated with the United Nations. The United Nations does not charge a fee at any stage of the recruitment process; official YPP information is available free of charge at https://careers.un.org/ypp.