

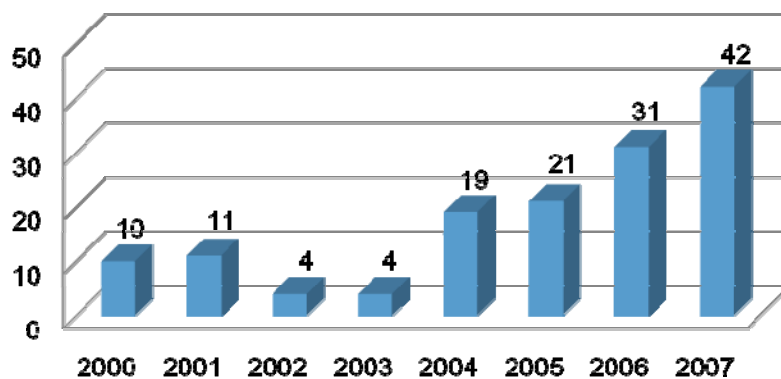
## Four times more Swiss citizens working as UN Volunteers

Since 2001, the recruitment of Swiss men and women into the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) has been the focus of a partnership between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the UNV Programme and *cinfo*. Various measures have enabled the number of new missions carried out each year to be increased from 11 to 42.

Increasing the number of Swiss nationals working at the United Nations has been an important strategic focus of Swiss foreign policy for many years. Various measures have been taken with UN agencies that have been of utmost importance to the Swiss, including the UNV programme. Within this context, an agreement was signed through which, under the mandate of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), *cinfo* took on the role of «focal agency» for the Swiss UNV Programme. Since this date, *cinfo* has endeavoured to encourage the recruitment of Swiss applicants by increasing the flow of information between the different parties as well as facilitating recruitment procedures. Collaboration over seven years has delivered results that have sometimes been surprising, but also encouraging.

### Upward growth over the years

It is immediately apparent that the growth in the annual number of new missions is evidence of a productive collaboration. The following table shows that the measures taken in the context of the abovementioned partnership are already showing results and have led to a growing number of Swiss men and women becoming involved in the Programme.



*Number of new missions carried out by Swiss UNVs year on year*

The years **2000** and **2001** show the situation as it was before the partnership was founded. The average number of selected applicants was then around 10. During this period, Swiss support measures focused on funding so-called «fully-funded» positions, i.e. the annual funding of two or three posts aimed at qualified professionals.

As early as **2002**, *cinfo* realised that it was difficult for people who could not take advantage of this type of arrangement to obtain a post simply by registering on the Programme «roster». To offset this difficulty, a «UNV Internship» programme was set up. This was directed at young graduates and aimed to offer them a first field experience lasting one year. The internships thus funded not only enabled these young professionals to become familiar with activities of the United Nations in countries of the South, but also to make vital first steps towards a future career within an international organisation.

From **2004** onwards, the support measures took full effect with the arrival of the first two waves of «UNV Interns» in the field.

The growth curve continued upward due to the cumulative effect of various measures. Firstly, the SDC progressively increased the number of «UNV Internships» that it funded, from 3 in 2005 to 7 in 2007. These moves were accompanied from 2007 onwards by the support of the Political Affairs Division IV of the Department of Foreign Affairs (responsible for human security measures) in the funding of two additional internships.

Additionally, 2005 marked the launch of annual recruitment drives for the UNV «Special Operations» section. This section is specifically devoted to peacekeeping operations, election observation and the promotion of human rights. It mainly acts in emergency situations and has different recruitment requirements from those of other sections. In particular, these requirements are characterised by the possibilities for involvement of young professionals (1-2 years' experience), a requirement for immediate availability, short-term missions (3-6 months, renewable), as well as non-accompanied missions in crisis situations. These are all restrictive criteria that mainly suit those who are young and flexible. The recruitment drives organised every year by *cinfo* in Bienne enable in this way seventy or so applicants to meet up with recruitment officers from Bonn. «Special Operations» have become the largest source of Volunteer recruits since then, and it is estimated that 43% of the UNVs taken on between 2001 and 2007 undertook their first mission in this section.

On the strength of these combined efforts, the number of UNVs departing for the field doubled between 2005 and 2007. It is nonetheless important to stress that young professionals are the main beneficiaries of these combined measures. They are mainly young graduates who take advantage of various types of experience acquired in Switzerland or abroad in the form of practical work experience, junior programmes, and fixed-term contracts of various sorts.

### **A group made up mostly of women with a background in human sciences**

The structure of the volunteers has been investigated by means of a survey carried out among 50 former UNVs. From this research it has been found that a large proportion of women make up the Swiss volunteers going out into the field, twice as many as men. The average age is 28. As far as academic background is concerned, about 30% of the volunteers questioned studied international relations and 20% social sciences. Slightly fewer than 15% studied law, 12% political sciences and 5% the other social sciences. The remainder of the participants are distributed between areas of study such as economics, engineering, natural sciences, architecture, etc.

About 85% of the people participating in this study joined the UNV Programme after their application was supported by *cinfo*. Only 15% of Swiss Volunteers found a way in themselves, either by registering on the UNV online database or through personal contacts.

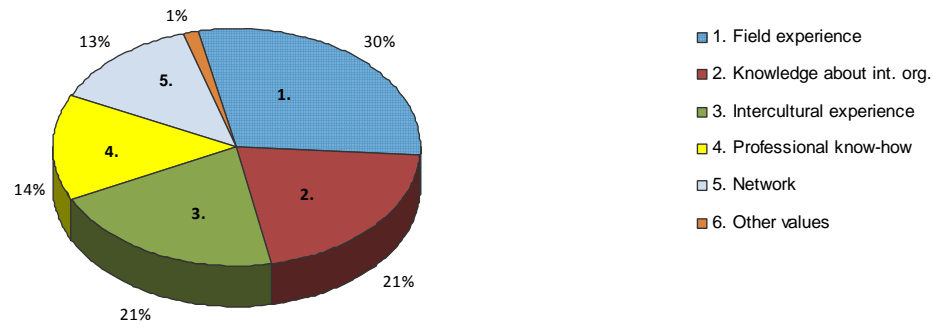
### **Missions within various «host organisations» throughout the world**

Virtually no United Nations Volunteers work directly for the UNV Programme but for «host organisations», in particular within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

On average, a UNV mission lasts 12 months, notwithstanding substantial differences on an individual level. The shortest missions are about 3 months, while the longest may last up to 27 months. As described above, this range of 3 to 27 months is in part determined by the type of mission concerned, (UNV Fully Funded, UNV Internship, UNV Special Operations).

## Multiple advantages combined with numerous challenges

Generally, the missions accomplished bring a high level of personal and professional satisfaction. As reflected in the chart below, 80% of participants see their field experience, the precious intercultural experience gained and their «inside» knowledge of how a UN agency works as additional advantages in following a career in international cooperation. In addition, professional know-how is enhanced and a network created.



### *Main advantages gained from a UNV experience*

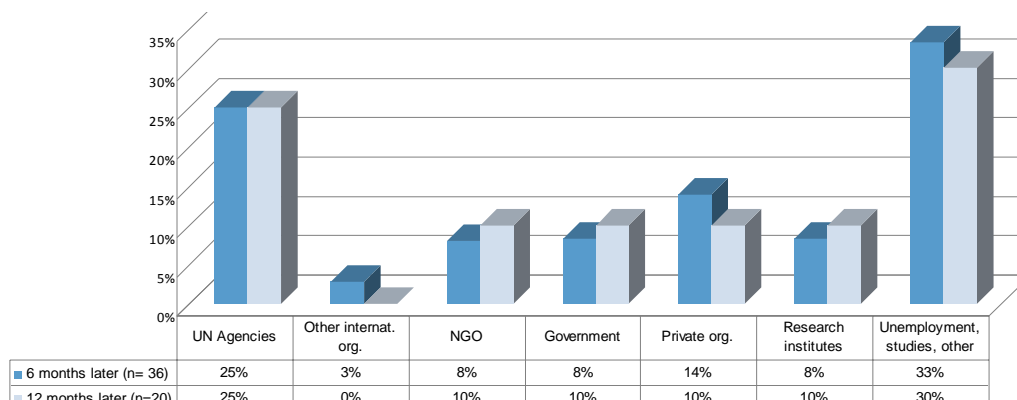
As with all experiences, it is important to bear in mind that the advantages gained from these various missions as well as the degree of participant satisfaction can vary markedly from one assignment to another. Numerous factors influence a mission's nature, such as the type of post, the host organisation, the local context, support, etc. To depart as a UNV entails volunteering in a situation that can often be difficult personally, professionally and interculturally. It is important to be well prepared in order to forestall negative experiences. Experience also shows that the successful outcome of a mission depends a great deal on the personality of the UNV and the flexibility, as well as the ability to fit into a highly managed organisation.

## What are the effects on any future career?

As shown below, almost half the sample is still working in the area of international cooperation two years after their UNV experience. Of these, 25% still work within the United Nations, while the rest are divided among other international organisations, the NGO sector or government organisations.

The other half of the sample is distributed among various more or less related activities in the international cooperation sphere. It is immediately clear that a large part of this group is either in training or looking for work. Surprising as this may seem, this high percentage strongly reflects the current job market in international cooperation, characterised by a high degree of competition, the predominance of fixed-term contracts and a crucial need for continuous training.

And finally, a considerable percentage of former Volunteers move into the private and academic sectors.



**Type of employer after having left UNV Programmes**

## Conclusions and outlook

What conclusions can we draw from this collaboration? Firstly, it is important to highlight the opportunity that is offered to Swiss applicants interested in and qualified for a Volunteer mission. The support of applicants within an extensive framework such as the one which has been set up here (information, funding of posts, recruitment drives, pre-departure services, etc.) constitutes an approach which has already proved itself at both a quantitative and a qualitative level.

The categories of professionals that benefit are highly varied. It is intended that the strategy adopted should be global, through the funding of posts at all qualification levels. Ultimately, it has to be admitted that the main beneficiaries of these measures are still the young professional classes in search of both field experience and a means of entry into the UN system.

These observations notwithstanding, the recruitment measures adopted have led to a clear increase in the number of Swiss nationals within the United Nations and contributed towards establishing a position in this area. More generally, they also enable a larger number of young professionals to broaden their knowledge of the world of international cooperation and to use their skills within other organisations in Switzerland or abroad.

### Activities led by *cinfo* in relation to the UNV Programme

#### 1. Recruitment support

- Annual organisation of recruitment drives for «UNV Special Operations» posts and «UNV Internships»
- Monitoring and support of voluntary applications

#### 2. Pre-departure services and supervision of UNVs

- Free access to the entire *cinfo* services package (seminars, counselling, skills assessment, etc.)
- Pre-departure briefings
- Help with various administrative procedures
- A one-year free subscription to the *cinfoPoste* online vacant positions database

#### 3. Information on the UNV Programme

- Information on the *cinfo* website and at events

## **Overview of a United Nations Volunteer mission**

### **1. Requirements**

- Completed academic training at a university / university of applied sciences
- Minimum of 1 to 2 years professional experience
- Advanced linguistic skills (French, German and English as a minimum)
- Intercultural skills, flexibility and high adaptability

### **2. Characteristics of Swiss men and women on a mission**

- Mission of 3 months to 3 years
- Volunteers placed with «host agencies» (UNDP, DPKO, UNHCR, OCHA, WFP, etc.)
- Average age 28
- Mainly women
- Academic background in the areas of international relations and political sciences (45%), social sciences (20%), law (15%), economics, engineering, natural sciences, architecture, etc.

### **3. Career opportunities for former Swiss UNVs**

- UN (25%), government (10%), NGOs (10%), private organisations (10%), research (10%), unemployment and continuing education (30%).