

**My job in international cooperation**

## Rachel Gasser



**Age**

34

**Current position**

Deputy Head of the Mediation Program at the swisspeace Foundation

**Education**

Master's degree in international relations

**Professional development**

Intern UNHCR Jordan (6 month), Research and Training Associate, Casin Geneva (1.5 year); Intern, Swiss Mission to the UN, New York (6 month); Associate political affairs officer, Department of Political Affairs, Office of the United Nations, New York (JPO, then permanent position, 3.5 years)

### My current position

I work at the swisspeace research institute in Bern. My responsibilities are arranged around three pillars. Firstly, to support the peace process in Myanmar, where I visit four times a year. I interact with different actors there, such as ambassadors or victims of armed conflict, support local NGOs in training development, and simulate negotiations between actors in conflict situations. I present external case studies for comparison and document experiences. Secondly, I facilitate training and events in Switzerland and in the field. And thirdly, I undertake research, mostly in collaboration with the University of Basel.

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**«It is illusory to try to eliminate conflict, but developing tools to manage it is essential.»**

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My work in supporting peace processes is an integral part of my identity. As someone who always avoided conflict, I have had to radically change my perceptions. I have understood that conflict is impossible to eradicate or avoid, and that what is essential is developing the tools to resolve it. It's also an illusion to imagine you can be neutral. There is a need for constant self-reflection!

## **The pros and cons**

What I really enjoy is playing a modest role in facilitating change by supporting actors in the conflicts of a country. I find the 'start-up' nature of swisspeace stimulating and enjoy a lot of freedom to be creative and encouragement in developing new initiatives. The 'horizontal' structural hierarchy and the flexibility of the organisation are very rewarding. A difficult aspect of this function is the amount of travelling involved and the fact that field missions cannot always be planned well in advance. It can be challenging to reconcile this with family life, particularly a family with toddlers.

## **My career**

I studied for a master's in international relations in Geneva. Travelling during this period, the desire to learn about different cultures and make the world a better place, led me to the field of international cooperation.

After completing my studies, I got an internship doing fieldwork in Jordan with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I then worked for CASIN, a Genevan NGO active in peace negotiation. After that I completed another internship with the Swiss Mission to the UN in New York, where my boyfriend accompanied me. I embraced wholeheartedly the goals of the United Nations, and got a position as a Junior Professional Officer, followed by a fixed post in the Department of Political Affairs. Four years later, on our return to Switzerland, I founded I wanted more structure and flexibility and to work for an organisation on a more human scale. I found swisspeace. My position provides an ideal balance between family and professional life, something that had become essential to me.

## **My future**

After ten years of an intense professional career, the birth of my child marks a new life phase. My short-term plans involve reconciling the demands of being a new mother with my professional life. When I do undertake infrequent fieldwork, my family is able to accompany me. I hope again in the future to be able to work in peace promotion for various organisations, including government, United Nations and NGOs.

## **My advice to people wishing to work in the promotion of peace and security**

Ask yourself about your real reasons for wanting to work in this sector. What truly motivates you beyond the 'romantic' image associated with the sector? Am I prepared to make the necessary compromises? Finally, while you still have the flexibility, gather as much field experience as possible. These experiences will help to remind you why and for whom you're sitting in front of a computer, when later on you're working at organisation headquarters. Finally, careers never follow linear paths. Remain open to opportunities, allow circumstances to surprise you, and keep an open mind.

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