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# **The Challenge of Retaining Norwegian Junior Professional Officers in the UN**

A Summary

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# Norwegian JPOs in the UN

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## The challenge of retaining JPOs and increasing the number of Norwegians in the UN system



This is a summary of the report “Norwegian Junior Professional Officers in the UN: The challenge of retaining and increasing the number of Norwegians in the UN system” prepared for Norec.

The summary expands somewhat our presentation of the report’s key findings, on Teams, to the “Nordic meeting on JPO, UNV secondments” at Norec in Førde, 27 April 2023, by adding text to the PowerPoint Presentations (PPTs) to facilitate their interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

The report’s objective was to identify factors that may induce a higher number of Norwegian Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) than today to remain employed in the UN when their JPO assignment ends. However, JPO retention may not — and perhaps should not — only be understood as a direct and uninterrupted work relationship with the UN. Some JPOs leave the UN after their JPO assignment but later returns to the UN. Others would like to alternate between work in the UN and jobs in Norway or abroad outside the UN. Considerations made when people decide whether to enter, and/or to remain in the UN, will revolve around the same factors as those impacting the decisions of JPOs to extend their UN employment. Hence, we think the report’s findings are relevant beyond the challenge of retaining JPOs.

In this paper, the text under the PPTs clarifies the content of the PPTs when required and sometimes expands on the topic raised by referring to additional findings. All numbers in graphs and tables are percentages.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘UNV’ refers to volunteers in the United Nations (UN). JPOs are UN Junior Professional Officers.

# The Norwegian JPO programme

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- Started in 1962
- 310 Norwegian JPOs between 1963 and 1993
- Up to 20 JPOs recruited annually
  
- Currently: 30-35 JPOs funded annually
- Max. 560 JPOs in the years 1994 -2022
  
- Before: 2-year assignments
- Now: usually 3, but up to 4 years



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Currently, a Norwegian JPO is usually recruited for three years – and funded by Norway. The intention is that he or she shall spend two years at a field office or regional duty station followed by a third year at a headquarters.<sup>2</sup> However, this scheme is not followed systematically, and many JPOs spend the first two years at a headquarters whilst others do not move stations for their third year. Furthermore, the Norwegian government may co-finance a fourth year with the employing organization. Our data suggest that only one-half of the JPOs serve at more than one duty station.

To the best of our knowledge, the Norwegian JPO programme has been assessed only once before, back in 1994.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In UN parlance, 'field office' is the term applied to an agency's country office.

<sup>3</sup> MFA (1994). *Evaluation of the Norwegian Junior Expert Programme with UN Organisations. Final Report*, Evaluation Report 2.94. COWiconsult and DanEduc Consulting for the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway.

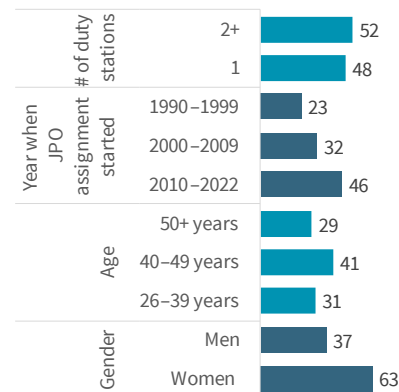
# Methodology

## ➤ Survey

- ❑ 127 current and former JPOs (13 current and 114 former JPOs)

## ➤ Qualitative interviews

- ❑ 7 key informants
- ❑ 2 current and 11 former JPOs



Background characteristics of survey respondents.



The report builds on two main data sources: a questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews.

Firstly, an introduction to the survey: As mentioned, there may have been more than 500 Norwegian JPOs since 1994. However, they were difficult to track down as a complete list of former JPOs did not exist. Consequently, we used a UNDP alumni list, an imperfect list received from Norec, and the private list of a former JPO to construct our own list of 360 names; 174 people accepted being included in our project database; and 127 current and former JPOs completed the web-based survey between 2 November and 13 December 2022.

The graph shows some background characteristics of the survey respondents. As mentioned, about half had served at one and the other half at two or more duty stations. The approx. 60-40 gender distribution in favour of women is roughly the same as currently found for JPOs from other countries. For some countries, the share of women is even higher. For example, 8 in 10 Finnish JPOs recruited in 2010 were women.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly half the respondents had been JPOs since 2010. However, some of the respondents had served up to 30 years back. That would suggest caution when interpreting the data as the experiences of some respondents are ‘outdated’. Yet, we found that the experiences and opinions of respondents, for example on working conditions, were not significantly different across age groups or the period served. The experiences shared in the qualitative interviews lend support to this conclusion.

Secondly, some facts about the altogether 20 qualitative interviews. Seven of them were with key informants — experts currently or previously operating the JPO programme or developing policies for it. They were mainly from Norway, but we also included informants from Sweden and Denmark, and one informant from the JPO service centre in Copenhagen. The interviews covered issues like

<sup>4</sup> The proportion of female applicants that year, as in previous years, was somewhat lower, but it seems female applicants did better in tests and interviews than male applicants, and thus were hired. White, Pamela, Maaria Seppänen & Päivi Ahonen (2011). *Evaluation. Junior Professional Officer Programme of Finland*, Evaluation report 2011:5, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

cooperation with the UN and selection of JPO positions, recruitment procedures, national follow-up of JPOs, possible obstacles to retainment such as the Nordic welfare system and labour markets, and the UN work culture. In addition to providing very useful data, these interviews informed the design of the survey.

Next, we interviewed 13 current and former JPOs selected with maximum variation in mind, considering gender, age, UN organization, year as JPO, and current employment. The interviews concerned motivation for UN work, work experiences, follow-up by Norwegian authorities and the UN, work benefits, work-life balance, and the situation of partners.

It should also be mentioned that the survey included two open-ended questions, which requested the respondents to share their opinions on what could be done to enhance the number of JPOs remaining at the UN and to increase the number of Norwegians working in the UN more generally. Ninety-four per cent responded to these questions, many quite extensively.

All numbers in the graphs of this report pertain to Norwegian JPOs and are taken from the survey.



# JPO retention statistics (1)

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- UNDP 2019 (retained 6 mths later/still working with the UN)
  - ❑ Sweden: 51% / 23%
  - ❑ Denmark: 52% / 20%
  - ❑ Norway: 41% / 15%
  
- Sweden
  - ❑ 37% still working with the UN (2021)
  - ❑ 57% ever worked at the UN after the JPO assignment (2022)
  
- Norway 2023
  - ❑ 27% currently working with the UN
  - ❑ 57% ever worked at the UN after the JPO assignment



Norway seems to have lower JPO retention than other countries. Here are some statistics:

The UNDP has regularly compiled data on whether people who have served as JPOs in the UNDP and a few affiliated UN agencies have remained UN employees after their JPO assignment.<sup>5</sup> The most recent report covers the period from 2004 to 2018 and presents statistics for each country participating in the JPO scheme.<sup>6</sup> It defined 'retention' as still being employed by the UN six months after finishing the JPO assignment and showed a general 56 per cent retention rate. However, the study found that 23 per cent had since left the UN and were working elsewhere. Hence, merely 33 per cent of all JPOs were employed by the UN when the survey period ended.

Among the Nordic countries, Denmark had the highest JPO retention rate, which, at 52 per cent, was close to the average for all countries at 56 per cent. However, more than one half of them had since left the UN, and at the time of the survey, merely 20 per cent were still working in the UN. The retention of Swedes was comparable to that of the Danes. The result for Norway was below average, with 41 per cent of JPOs retained six months after the JPO assignment came to an end and only 15 per cent remaining employed in the UN (UNDP) at the end of the reporting period. Finland was among the countries with the lowest UNDP retention rate (34 per cent of JPOs retained six months after the JPO assignment).

Two recent reports shed light on retention amongst Swedish JPOs. The first report draws on data from a questionnaire survey covering individuals who completed their JPO assignment between 2005 and 2016 and found that 37 per

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<sup>5</sup> UNDP has conducted these surveys every three years since 2003. The other agencies are the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Operations Cooperation Office (UNDOCO, until 2018), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, until 2010), and United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

<sup>6</sup> UNDP (2019). *UNDP JPO Retention in the United Nations System, 2004-2018 Statistical Study*, Office of Human Resources, UNDP JPO Service Centre, Copenhagen.

cent were still working in the UN in January 2021.<sup>7</sup> The second report found that 57 per cent of the former JPOs had worked with the UN after their JPO assignment (and that most of them — 45 per cent of all JPOs — had moved directly from the JPO assignment to a new contract with the UN).<sup>8</sup>

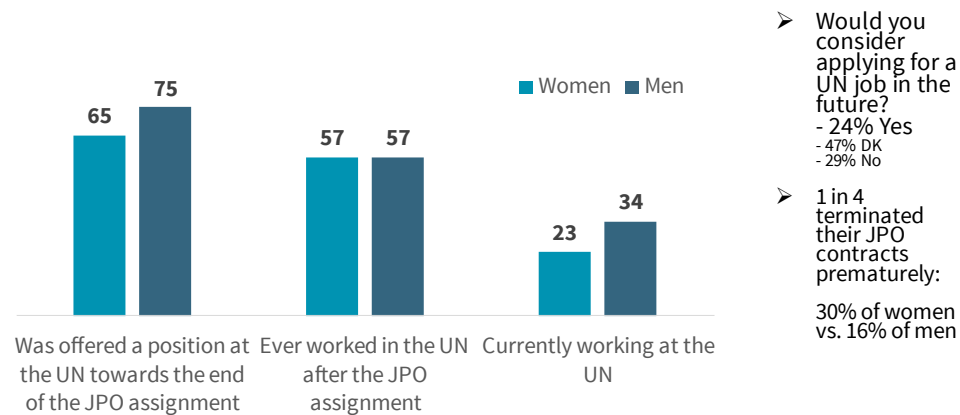
Our survey found that the exact same proportion of former JPOs as in Sweden, 57 per cent, had worked in the UN after their JPO assignment, but that a lower proportion than in Sweden, 27 per cent, were working in the UN at the time of the survey.

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<sup>7</sup> Nordlöf, Karin, Kaisa Österberg Åström & Åsa Königson (2021). *Former JPO and SARC Tracer Survey Results. Final Report*. FCG Sweden.

<sup>8</sup> Karlsson, Lisa (2022). *Junior Professional Officers (JPO). JPO – vart tar de vägen?* Sida Rapport.

## JPO retention statistics (2)



Two thirds (68 per cent) of the JPOs — and a slightly higher share of men than women — were offered a new UN position towards the end of their assignment. Most of them accepted the job offer; only one in six of those who returned to Norway when the JPO assignment ended wanted to remain employed in the UN.

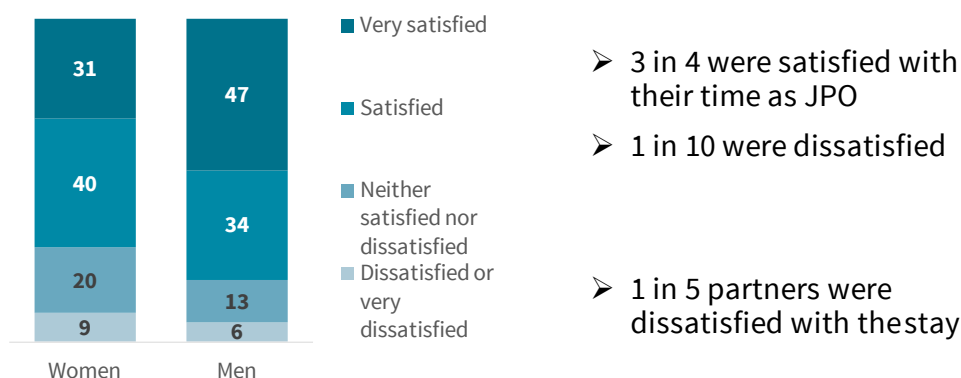
One in four former JPOs terminated their JPO contracts prematurely. The proportion was higher among women (30 per cent) than men (16 per cent). However, not all of them left the UN. The reasons for leaving early were diverse, and several JPOs transitioned into other UN positions before the end date of their assignment. Other reasons were related to security considerations, difficult working conditions, pregnancy and personal matters, and job offers outside the UN, including at Norad and the MFA.

Although a good number of JPOs had quit the UN before or upon concluding their contracts, their motivation for working in the UN, or working abroad more generally, was high: 6 in 10 former JPOs, and as many women as men, had worked in the UN for a shorter or longer time since their JPO period. The proportion is even higher, 7 in 10, amongst respondents younger than 40.

Twenty-four per cent of the former JPOs not employed by the UN at the time of the survey said they would consider applying for a UN position sometime in the future — 28 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women said so.

Also speaking to the motivation of JPOs is the following fact: 7 in 10 female and 8 in 10 male JPOs intended to remain in the UN when they arrived at their duty stations. However, 2 in 10 (both women and men) changed their minds and returned to Norway after their JPO period.

# Satisfaction with JPO assignment

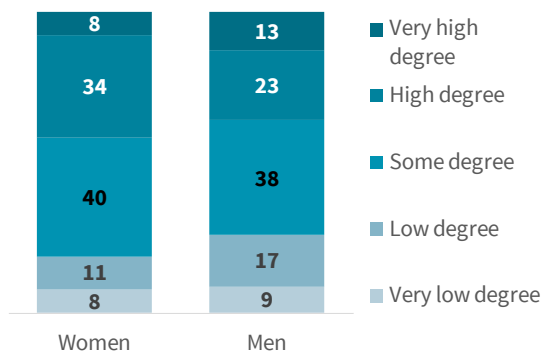


Level of satisfaction with the JPO assignment.

A majority – three in four – were satisfied with the overall JPO assignment. One in 10 were not satisfied. Men were more satisfied than women. One in five of those who had a partner staying with them at the duty station reported that their partners were dissatisfied.

In the qualitative interviews, the informants expressed that the JPO assignment was meaningful; they could contribute and make a difference in many people's lives. Yet, they admitted several challenges with working in the UN system; they learnt of many colleagues who had faced difficulties and often perceived themselves as lucky.

# The JPO programme is doing OK



- 4 in 10 believe the JPO programme does a good job in recruiting Norwegians into the UN
- 4 in 10 believe it does a decent job
- 2 in 10 are dissatisfied with the programme

*The degree to which the UN JPO programme, including the Norwegian contribution to it, serves the purpose of creating work opportunities in the UN for former JPOs.*

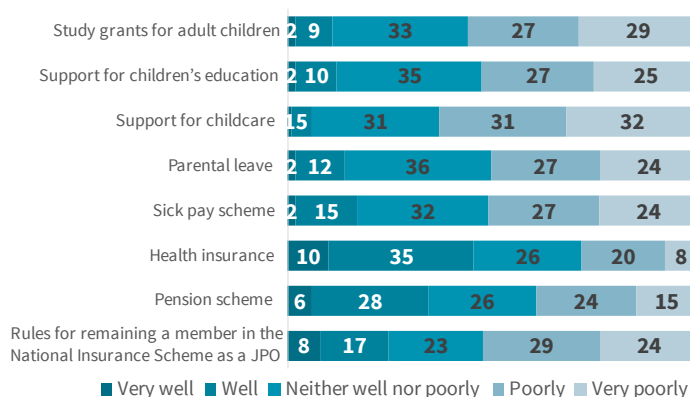


This graph shows the degree to which the respondents think the UN JPO programme, including the Norwegian contribution to it, serves the purpose of creating work opportunities in the UN for former JPOs.

It shows that the JPO programme does all right, but that many former and current JPOs consider that the JPO programme can be improved.

In the following, the report presents the JPOs' opinions on some details regarding their experiences as JPOs.

## Information & preparation



How well the JPOs were informed about various matters before arriving at their duty stations.

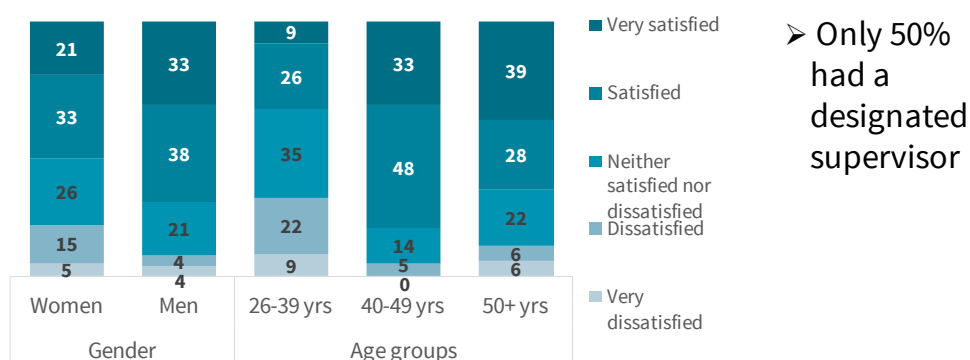
- 60% had attended a course/briefing in Norway before arriving at their duty stations
- 3 in 4 were satisfied with it
- Yet, knowledge of various social benefits is low
- The youngest respondents were less informed than older ones



Three in five JPOs had attended a course or briefing in Norway before arriving at their respective duty stations. Of these, three in four were satisfied with the event and the information they had received there. However, as shown by the graph, their level of knowledge about various social benefits were low. From 3 to 6 in 10 considered their own knowledge of the different items shown in the graph as poor or very poor. For example, 3 in 10 admitted little knowledge about the UN scheme for health insurance, and 6 in 10 were poorly informed about the UN's rules for child support. The youngest JPOs were less informed than the older JPOs about these UN benefits when they assumed their JPO posts.

In the qualitative interviews, JPO informants called for better preparations before starting out as a JPO. They said that the preparation courses tended to focus on Norwegian foreign and development policies, and less on the UN. The JPOs suggested more emphasis on practical aspects of work in the UN, particularly on its hierarchical and bureaucratic structure and smart ways to deal with it. The JPOs suggested that former JPOs share their experience in the preparation course. Furthermore, former JPOs offered to become mentors for new JPOs – someone JPOs may turn to for advice when confronted with challenges in the UN system or support associated with transition into regular UN contracts and postings.

## Supervision at the UN



JPOs' level of satisfaction with the supervisor at their duty station. Percentage of those that had one.

All JPOs are supposed to have a designated supervisor at their duty station. Only half of them had one. This figure is low and compares to 62 per cent in the 1963-1993 period.

The graph shows that 60 per cent of those having a supervisor were satisfied; 71 per cent of men and 54 per cent of women. Twice the share of women as men were dissatisfied. The younger JPOs were clearly more dissatisfied. The level of satisfaction with supervisors (60 per cent) is almost identical to that found in the 1994 study. In sum, there is little to suggest supervision of JPOs have improved the past 30 years.

Turning to the qualitative interviews, a JPO said: 'You don't come to an office where your name is on the door and things are organized and waiting for you.' Several JPOs described how they must take individual initiatives, carve out their own space, and find ways to fill the job with content themselves. In accordance with survey data, supervision appeared to be of uneven quality and totally dependent on the individual supervisor. Some had never learnt who their supervisor was — or was supposed to be.

It was suggested that Norway put more efforts into ensuring that the supervision is effective and working as it should — both when selecting JPO duty stations and during the JPO assignment.

# Follow-up from Norway

Organization	Reason for contact				Would have wanted more contact
	Had contact	Exchange of information	Advice, counsel	Support to remain in the UN	
Norec (Fredskorpset)	17	13	10	2	18
Norad	24	23	9	-	35
Embassy	88	72	25	9	52
MFA	80	53	45	16	57

➤ Systematic contact at regular intervals would benefit both the individual JPOs and the Norwegian authorities

Percentage of former and current JPOs who had contact with Norwegian authorities during the JPO assignment. By organization.

A majority of the JPOs had been in contact with an embassy and the MFA (and most of them more than once). A much lower share of JPOs had had contact with Norad and Norec. However, since Norec took over the responsibility for the JPO programme from the MFA in 2021, this picture is changing: amongst those younger than 40, 44 per cent had been in contact with Norec compared with 6 per cent of those aged 40 and older. Except for the MFA, a slightly higher share of women than men had been in touch with the Norwegian authorities.

Contact between the JPOs and the authorities was initiated by JPOs as often as it was by the four organizations. This is an improvement from the early years of the JPO programme. Before 1994, contact between the JPOs and the MFA/Norad was more often initiated by the JPOs (reported by 82 per cent) than MFA/Norad (reported by 38 per cent)

Most of the JPOs had been in touch with the authorities to share and exchange information, while many had also sought advice and counsel on various issues or asked for support to remain employed in the UN.

Many of the survey respondents would have wanted more contact with Norwegian authorities, particularly the embassies and the MFA. The proportion of JPOs who would have wanted more contact with Norwegian authorities is higher amongst women than men for all organizations except the MFA, where there is no gender difference (Norec: 21 per cent versus 13 per cent; Norad: 40 per cent versus 26 per cent; and the embassies: 60 per cent versus 36 per cent). The younger the respondents the higher the percentage of JPOs who would have wanted increased contact with the four Norwegian organizations. Amongst those younger than 40, one in three (36 per cent) would have wanted more contact with Norec.

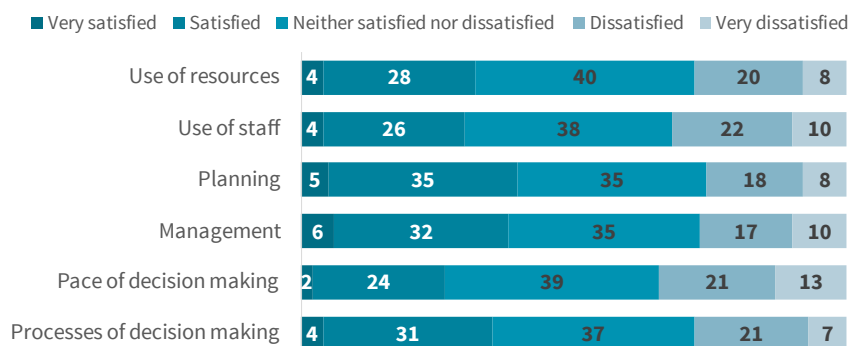
In the qualitative interviews, Norwegian bureaucrats emphasized that Norway has no formal employer responsibility of the JPOs. Yet, the JPO program is a significant investment for Norway, and Norway, therefore, has an interest in its success. To achieve that, our JPO informants suggested that Norway conduct regular check-ins on the JPOs, for example after three months, six months, one



year, and so forth. It was argued that regular contact would benefit both the JPOs and Norway.

Norwegian JPOs had the impression that Sweden and other countries (Germany) were more systematic in its follow-up of JPOs.

## The employing UN agency does OK



Level of satisfaction with various aspects of the JPOs' UN agencies.

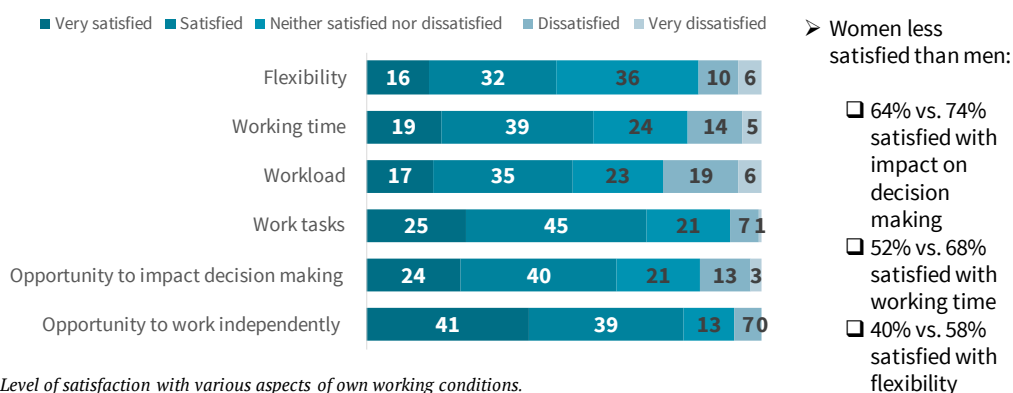
This graph shows that 30-40 per cent were satisfied with various aspects of the UN agency they worked with, while 30 per cent were dissatisfied. Note that this was not a question about the actual duty station, but a general question about the agency. However, there is no guarantee that personal experiences did not impact the answers.

In the qualitative interviews, the JPOs said that they learnt much about the UN system during their JPO assignment: what worked well in the UN system; how the UN organization employing them operated; about cooperation with other UN agencies, local governments, and donor countries, etc.

Many JPOs felt included as a staff member and were given challenging and interesting tasks and responsibility. For most, the JPO period constituted an instructive and meaningful work experience.

However, some JPOs also had negative experiences, mainly with dysfunctional offices. When challenges became grave, the JPOs had three options: (i) to grit their teeth and endure (but many of them quit when the JPO assignment ended); (ii) to seek assistance from Norway to move office and get a better JPO experience; and (iii) to leave the UN prematurely — as we reported above that a significant proportion of JPOs had done (albeit for a variety of reasons and not only discontent with the duty station).

# Working conditions (1)



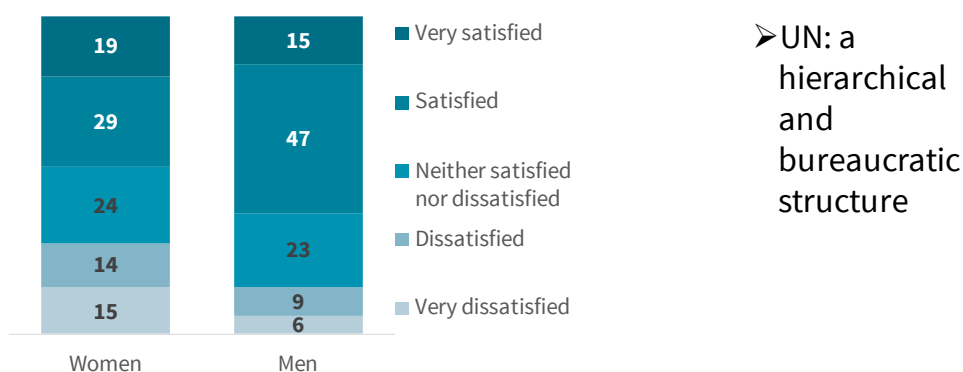
This graph shows the level of satisfaction with various aspects of work at the duty station. Some 50-80 per cent were satisfied with these various aspects. The highest level of dissatisfaction is found for workload (one in four) and working time (one in five). Women were generally less satisfied than men.

The qualitative interviews suggest that a heavy workload and long working hours are not negative work features for all. The JPOs are young and energetic; they want to work hard and get as much experience as possible — and a majority do not have family obligations.<sup>9</sup>

However, over time, the heavy work pressure often found at the UN may not be sustainable for all and suitable for a combination with a family life.

<sup>9</sup> The survey shows that 7 in 10 JPOs who had a partner upon starting their JPO assignment were accompanied by their partners to their duty stations. Amongst those who also had children prior to becoming JPOs, 8 in 10 brought their children with them. Four in 10 JPOs reported that their civil status changed during their assignment: 30 per cent married or started cohabiting whilst 8 per cent became single. One in 10 had one or more children prior to their JPO assignment, and a similar share had children during their assignment.

## Working conditions (2)



➤ UN: a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure

*Level of satisfaction with support from superiors in case of challenges.*

The bureaucratic and hierarchical system of the UN is overwhelming for many JPOs. The system is perceived as ineffective because all tasks need approval from several persons higher up in the chain of decision-making and can be very time-consuming. The JPOs generally learnt how to manoeuvre the system with time but called for better preparation on how to handle the hierarchical bureaucracy. In the qualitative interviews, some JPOs expressed feeling more like interns than professional officers, as some of them were used to much responsibility and independent work with decision-making power in previous jobs.

Experiences differed somewhat between headquarters and field offices. The headquarters at the UN are large and hierarchical systems with several layers of decision-making but may also offer flexibility regarding change of office should that become necessary. In contrast, the field offices are smaller, and the JPOs there have easier access to leaders and management. The JPOs in the field offices often felt more included than the JPOs working in the headquarters and were frequently given more responsibilities. However, the field offices reportedly also generated more negative experiences, particularly related to dysfunctional working environments and work conflicts.

The hierarchical UN system implies asymmetrical power relations. A consequence is that the JPOs constantly must prove themselves. Yearly performance reviews make JPOs very dependent on their superiors for renewal of contracts and advancement in the system, and hence vulnerable to exploitation.

Our data suggest that such vulnerability is higher for women than men. The issue of sexual harassment from managers at the workplace came up in the qualitative interviews. Some women had experienced it personally and others knew of it from colleagues. Although the UN recently has dealt with grave cases of sexual harassment, our informants reported limited support when cases of sexual harassment was reported to the UN ombudsman. Those who brought the cases were mostly advised to drop them, mainly for the lack of evidence. The JPOs commented that the UN's system of temporary contracts was creating space for vulnerability and exploitation.

In the qualitative interviews, it was also remarked that it was easier for male than female JPOs to advance to P-3 positions; some female JPOs remained in P-2 positions for years, sometimes perceiving it as a discriminatory praxis.<sup>10</sup>

The graph reflects some of the findings from the qualitative interviews: about 6 in 10 were satisfied with their superiors whilst 1 in 4 were dissatisfied. However, men were more satisfied with the support from superiors (in case of challenges) than women: 62 per cent versus 48 per cent; and 15 per cent of men versus 30 per cent of women were *dissatisfied* with support from superiors.

Moreover, another survey question revealed that 48 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men had experienced difficult relations to superiors during their time as JPO.

Gender issues has had high priority in the UN since 2017, and gender parity was somewhat achieved in 2023, yet the culture of sexism remains a challenge the UN continuously have to address.<sup>11</sup>

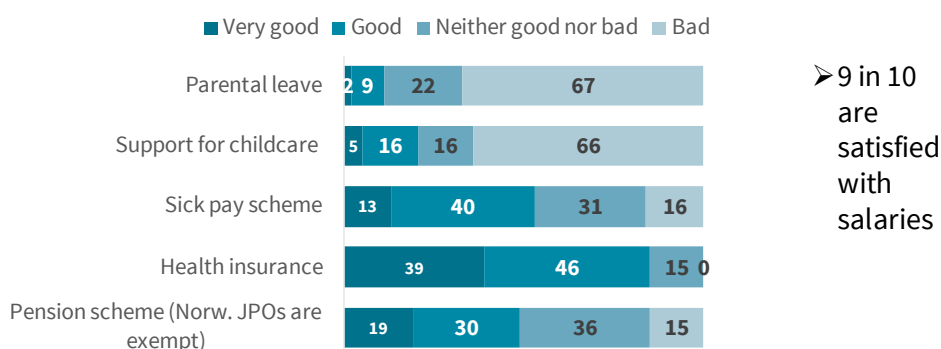
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<sup>10</sup> JPOs serve at the P-2 level. At the UN, the professional levels are P-1 to P-5, two director levels (D-1 and D-2), Assistant Secretary General (ASG), and Under Secretary General (USG).

<sup>11</sup> For international staff at the P-2 level, where JPOs serve, there is a female majority, and at the Under Secretary General (USG) level, gender parity has been achieved. Yet, for all other professional levels, gender parity has not yet been fully reached — the percentage of women at these levels varies from 42 to 48. This means that young female JPOs will often have male superiors, particularly at field offices where the gender parity is only at 34 per cent. UN (2023). UN Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard, <https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard>. Read 8 March 2023.

Late last year, the UN Secretary General António Guterres commended the progress made by the UN regarding gender parity. However, he said that “[w]orkplace culture also needs to advance. [...] And if stereotypes and workplace bias is left unchecked, sexism and racism tolerated, “we will fail the people we serve”. UN (2022). ‘Gender parity, the only path to gender equality: Guterres’, *UN News*.

# Salaries & benefits



Perceived quality of various UN benefits. Percentage of those with an opinion.

In addition to the situation at the workplace, salaries and benefits are central aspects of the JPO contract. The vast majority of JPOs are happy with their salary.

The graph shows the percentage of those who had an opinion on the quality of various benefits. Many answered ‘not relevant’ to some of these questions. For example, only 4 in 10 held an opinion on support to childcare and 3 in 10 chose to answer the question on study grants for adult children.

Very few consider the UN parental leave and the support for childcare as very good or good. Two out of three consider these two benefits as bad. In the qualitative interviews, the JPOs were very dissatisfied with the UN parental leave. However, a reform that applies from 2023, extending the parental leave to 26 weeks for mothers and 16 weeks for fathers, may change this perception. Yet, both parents seldom work at the UN, so parental leave will remain significantly shorter in the UN than in Norway.

The UN’s support to childcare is about 3,000 USD per child per year. This may be sufficient to cover child-related expenses in many countries, but in New York it covers merely one month worth of day-care.

The schemes for sick pay and particularly health insurance get a much better rating. Eighty-five per cent held the health insurance to be very good or good. Although expressing their satisfaction with the UN health insurance and the payment during sick leaves, what concerned the JPOs most (in the qualitative interviews) was the mandatory cancellation of their membership in the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme and the poor information regarding regulations for continued voluntary membership during their JPO period and how to re-enter the scheme upon return to Norway. According to the survey, 32 per cent said they were well informed while 53 per cent were poorly informed; amongst those under 40, only 18 per cent were well informed about the rules for voluntary membership in the National Insurance Scheme.

Voluntary membership is generally too expensive for the JPOs and can cost up to 51 per cent of their salary.<sup>12</sup> Despite the mandatory cancellation of memberships, the survey found that one third were members of the National Insurance Scheme during their time as JPO. The proportion of the respondents who retained their membership in the National Insurance Scheme while serving as a JPO in the UN was lowest amongst those younger than 40 (26 per cent) and highest amongst the respondents older than 50 (42 per cent).

JPO informants worried about future consequences of non-membership in case of serious illness, such as cancer or disability. Non-membership gives JPOs a sense of insecurity. A less costly way to remain members of the National Insurance Scheme during their JPO period was suggested.

Several JPO informants believed that JPOs from some other countries (e.g., Sweden and Great Britain) kept their national insurance.

The assessment of the UN pension scheme is more mixed, but one half considered it as very good or good.

In the qualitative interviews, the JPOs were very dissatisfied with the pension scheme offered to Norwegian JPOs (who are exempted from the UN scheme) through a commercial Norwegian insurance company, because it provides only an insignificant value upon retirement. The JPOs wishing to continue their employment in the UN lose up to four years of pension-saving during their JPO assignment, which may work against retention since it takes five years to benefit fully from the UN pension scheme.

The JPOs preferred enrolment in the UN pension from the start because that would mean a higher contribution to their retirement pensions than the current arrangement – both for those retained and those who leave. Alternatively, they wanted to remain members of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme and save to their pensions there. Or better still, a combination of the two.

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<sup>12</sup> Voluntary membership in the National Insurance Scheme has three levels of benefits: a) health insurance, b) compensation for loss of income during sick leave, and c) pension. When the employer does not pay employer fees, the cost for a) is 9.1 per cent of gross income, the cost for b) is 13.8 per cent, and the cost for c) is 28.4 per cent. The total cost for alternative a) and b) is 22.9 per cent of the salary, which increases to 51.3 per cent if disability benefits and the pension component are included. NAV (2023). *Trygdeavgift*.

## UN vs. the Norwegian labour market

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- UN salaries higher than most Norwegian salaries
  
- Job life is more than salaries, Norway can offer:
  - Low unemployment = good access to good and stable jobs
  - Easy to change career paths
  - Very good social protection
  - Flexible and family-friendly working conditions
  - Good work-life balance
  - Good opportunity for dual careers

Although the UN salary is better than most Norwegian salaries, the well-regulated Norwegian labour market appear equally, or more, attractive to some JPOs.

This seems particularly so for women: our survey data show that a higher share of former JPO women than men had found work in the Norwegian MFA (24 per cent versus 9 per cent) and Norwegian NGOs (20 per cent versus 5 per cent). This suggests that for female JPOs, the JPO assignment is often a steppingstone for a career in the Norwegian development cooperation sector. It is easy for JPOs to find work in Norway; it is easy to manage dual careers; and Norway can offer better parental leave and more family-friendly working conditions. The 'total package' provides better work-life balance.



# What can be done?

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- Better information from Norec
  
- More contact between JPOs and Norwegian authorities
- More contact between JPOs
- More contact between Norwegian authorities and the UN
  
- Improved working conditions and benefits in the UN

The picture is complex; there is a combination of factors that may induce JPOs to remain employed in the UN after their JPO contract ends, to choose the UN over work in Norway. Our data suggest actions associated with the bullet points above. It could be:

- Better information from Norec about how the various UN agencies are organized, what can be expected in terms of UN working conditions, and rights and benefits at the UN and in Norway while working in the UN. This is practical information. Such information ought to be provided to all JPOs before they reach their duty stations, but this information-sharing may well be followed up during their JPO assignment.
- Increased contact between JPOs and Norwegian authorities such as Norec, the MFA, Norad, and the diplomatic missions. The content of the contact should be a two-way information sharing, support to JPOs when in need, and support with transition from a JPO assignment to a new UN position. The various organizations should be responsible for and initiate at least some of this contact and make sure it has a certain regularity. The number of contacts and content of the contacts may vary by duty station and need, but a certain minimum should be defined. Each individual JPO should know what to expect from Norec and the other organizations during their assignment.
- More contact between JPOs. The experience of former and fellow JPOs is seen as important. Some suggestions under this heading are for Norec to help set up an alumni network; to create a network and a social platform for serving JPOs; to use former and current JPOs in the preparatory courses or briefings before the JPOs travel to their duty stations; to introduce a mid-term course for serving JPOs; and to establish a system for mentoring between former and current JPOs.
- Enhanced contact with the UN. Norec, and possibly other organizations (on its behalf), should hold regular meetings with the UN agencies selected for JPO funding at both central and local levels, to ensure that the UN fulfils all aspects of the agreements regarding JPOs, including assigning a supervisor.

Furthermore, Norec (and other organizations on their behalf if more practical) should have regular dialogue with hosting organizations on the performance of individual JPOs, their potential for UN careers and how a transition into a UN career can be supported.

- Improved working conditions and benefits in the UN. This could be increased work flexibility, more family-friendly working conditions, efforts to improve work-life balance for UN staff, further expansion of parental leave, adjusted child support, inclusion in the UN pension scheme from day one, and adherence to the UN gender policies.

One additional item which is not associated directly with benefits offered by the UN but is very relevant: Full membership in the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme at a reasonable cost while serving in the UN would make things easier for many JPOs and considerably reduce their feeling of insecurity.

# The Challenge of Retaining Norwegian Junior Professional Officers in the UN

This is a summary of Faforeport 2023:16 on the challenge of retaining Norwegian Junior Professional Officers and increasing the number of Norwegians in the UN system commissioned by Norec. The paper expands somewhat a presentation of the report's key findings to the "Nordic meeting on JPO, UNV secondments" at Norec, 27 April 2023. It includes a slightly amended version of the PowerPoint Presentation and comments on each of the slides to facilitate their interpretation.



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