



Vereniging  
**NEDWORC**  
Association

**nedworc** foundation  
*organisation for independent consultants*

# Korte studie naar de mogelijkheden om de kansen voor jonge deskundigen te vergroten

## **Eindrapport**

Ingeleverd op 02.12.2016

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## **Voorwoord**

De opdracht voor deze studie kwam tot stand na een aantal lange en diepgaande discussies die ik met Vereniging Nedworc leden en –medebestuurdersleden en collega consultants heb gevoerd over wat nu precies de drempels en belemmeringen zijn voor jonge deskundigen om te starten in de sector Internationale Samenwerking; discussies waaruit vaak meer vragen dan antwoorden voortkwamen.

Het thema van deze studie spreekt me persoonlijk aan: Niet enkel omdat ik consultant ben en ik in jongerenparticipatie specialiseer, ik zelf nog relatief jong (31) ben en regelmatig het gevecht aangaan om überhaupt in de sector te mogen bestaan, maar omdat ik in mijn persoonlijke en professionele netwerken veel jonge deskundigen zie, die diezelfde strijd ook op dagelijkse basis aangaan. Ons gevecht is soms moeilijk, soms niet, maar altijd waardig en doelbewust.

De strijd om bij de sector te mogen behoren is niet enkel de strijd van jonge deskundigen, maar is een strijd die iedereen die in de sector werkzaam is of wil zijn aangaat. De sector dreigt in Nederland te vergrijzen, waardoor kennis verloren dreigt te gaan en dus logischerwijs de groei en succes van de sector zou kunnen belemmeren. Je zou denken dat de sector naar nieuwe kennis en aanpak hunkert, maar ik ben er - mede door deze studie - nu meer dan ooit van overtuigd dat de sector best discriminerend kan zijn tegenover jonge deskundigen. Dat is spijtig!

Ik vraag me af of alles wat senior deskundigen gedurende lange tijd hun tijd en energie in hebben gestoken, over 10 jaar nog zal bestaan. Of bouwen we, om het cru te zeggen, met elke nieuwe generatie opnieuw de sector op? Hoezo bundelen we nog steeds niet al onze krachten om zo eindelijk ons doel op een relevante, efficiënte, effectieve en duurzame manier waar te maken?

Dank aan de Stichting Nedworc, met name Rolf Posthouwer, en de Vereniging Nedworc onder leiding van Paul Hassing, voor hun steun. Ook bedank ik alle mensen - jong en wat minder jong - die me thee hebben geschonken, hun inzichten met mij hebben gedeeld, open stonden voor mijn vragen en de vragenlijst hebben gedeeld en hebben ingevuld. Gezamenlijk hebben 92 mensen van verschillende instanties, netwerken, organisaties, programma's, de politiek en financierende instanties hun input gegeven.

Ik hoop dat dit rapport een goede reflectie is van onze gesprekken, inzichten en algemene bevindingen.

## Lijst van afkortingen

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| AD            | Assistent Deskundigen                                |
| AFD           | Academics for Development                            |
| ALV           | Algemene Ledenvergadering                            |
| AMID          | Advanced Master in International Development         |
| BNP           | Bruto Nationaal Product                              |
| CBS           | Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek                      |
| CIDIN         | Centre for International Development Issues          |
| EU            | Europese Unie  |
| HBO           | Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs                              |
| ICS           | International Citizen Service                        |
| IS            | Internationale Samenwerking                          |
| IT            | Information Technology                               |
| JPO           | Junior Professional Officer                          |
| JPP           | Junior Professionals Programme                       |
| JTA           | Junior Technisch Assistent                           |
| MBO           | Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs                         |
| MinBuZa       | Ministerie Buitenlandse Zaken                        |
| NGO           | Niet-Gouvernementele Organisatie                     |
| NWP           | Netherlands Water Partnership                        |
| PvdA          | Partij van de Arbeid                                 |
| SJD           | Stimuleringsfond Jongere Deskundigen                 |
| ToR           | Terms of Reference                                   |
| UU            | Universiteit van Utrecht                             |
| UvA           | Universiteit van Amsterdam                           |
| VN            | Verenigde Naties                                     |
| VSO           | Volunteer Services Overseas                          |
| WO            | Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs                           |
| Wageningen UR | Wageningen Universiteit and Research Centre          |
| RU            | Radboud Universiteit                                 |
| YEP           | Young Expert Programme                               |
| YES-DC        | Young Energy Specialist and Development Co-operation |

## **Executive summary**

### **Introduction**

The Association Nedworc and the Foundation Nedworc commissioned this short study on opportunities for young professionals to start in the Dutch sector for international development (henceforth referred to as the sector). The study was based on growing concern of the ageing of the sector, which is also reflected in the Association members' age range.

The research question that guided the study is:

*How can organisations, networks en political parties - together or apart – increase possibilities for young professionals in the sector international development? More specifically, what should the role of the Association Nedworc and the Nedworc Foundation be?*

The study maps opportunities for young professionals to start in the sector as well as barriers that prevent young professionals from entering the sector. An analysis of the difficulties of finding work, consequences of youth unemployment and coping mechanisms provides an overview of the socio-political position of young professionals in the sector. Lastly, the study proposes a set of recommendations for enhancing the chances for young professionals to start in the sector.

The study incorporated opinions, insights and arguments from 92 study participants through semi-structured interviews, an online questionnaire and a workshop. Where available, quantitative data supports quantitative data and insights from semi-structured interviews. The study was, however, limited by a number of factors, which included (i) limited time available for the study, (ii) limited availability of data on opportunities for young professionals abroad, (iii) the difficulty of mapping informal opportunities for young professionals to start in the sector and (iv) limited availability of quantitative data.

### **The need to include young professionals**

All study participants agreed that young professionals have value to add to the sector: Young professionals are said to communicate and share knowledge faster, are curious, approach questions and challenges in a different way and are more advanced in online communication than more experienced professionals. Young professionals are ideally placed to support changes in organisations and the sector as a whole. As the sector is ageing and changing it is important to include young professionals, for the (continued) existence of the sector and for when the sector expands.

The conversation on the need to include young professionals in the sector is ongoing and takes place in various institutions, such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Second Chamber. Though politics is a guiding instrument for the sector, it seems that the conversation on how to include young professionals in the sector seems to not have evolved past the need to provide opportunities and work experience for young professionals. It thus seems that the sector is relatively inexperienced in how best to include young professionals in a sustainable way.

## 1. Opportunities for young professionals

The good news is, however, that there are opportunities for young professionals to start in the sector. These opportunities are important and often work as a stepping stone for young professionals to a career in the sector or as a way for young professionals to build their CVs. Opportunities for young professionals are arranged according to opportunities set up by (i) young professionals themselves, (ii) institutions of higher education or (iii) external organisations. Opportunities for young professionals include:

*Opportunities set up by young professionals:*

- Academics for Development (AFD) is a foundation set up by young professionals and supports a group of students in designing a project for a partner organisation in a developing country.
- AIESEC is a student association at the University of Utrecht and supports participants in self and professional development in preparation for work abroad.

*Opportunities set up by institutions of higher education:*

- Various Masters programmes and research Masters in international development or development studies, offered by, for example the University of Amsterdam, Radboud University in Nijmegen, Wageningen University and Research Centre, etc. encourage students to conduct research in a relevant context.
- Van Hall Larenstein offers students opportunities to work in research projects sponsored by municipalities, though depending on the field of study.
- The Advanced Master in International Development (AMID) offers students practical experience by combining theory and work experience in a Netherlands-based organisation.

*Opportunities set up by external organisations:*

- Nedworc Foundation provides financial support to young professionals during their stay, preferably in a developing country, and in support of a project or programme and the executing senior consultant.
- Shared Value Foundation, associated with the International Development Studies group of the University of Utrecht supports young professionals who go abroad for their Master's research.
- The Young Experts Programme (YEP) supports young professionals in developing their expertise in the water and agriculture sector in developing countries, knowledge institutes, companies and NGOs.
- The Junior Professionals Officer (JPO) programme offers young professionals the possibility to gain work experience in international development abroad.
- The EU Junior Professional in Delegation programme offers young professionals work experience in various topics, including international development, international trade, law and order, agriculture and fishery, etc.
- Heineken asks young professionals to fulfil 3 assignments during a period of 14-18 months. One of the areas the young professional may operate is production and supply chain.
- Internships for students and non-students are offered by various organisations, companies and businesses, which are active in international development. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, offers young professionals internships in the Netherlands and abroad.
- Traineeships are offered at various consultancy firms, such as Ecorys, Ernst&Young, MottMcDonald and others.

Of above-mentioned opportunities for young professionals, 2 (20%) require self-finance, excluding Master's programmes for which young professionals are expected to

fund their travel abroad. Only 4 (40%) of above-mentioned opportunities for young professionals were partly or completely funded by the organisation or the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most (73%) of above-mentioned opportunities offer work experience abroad and between 1-2 months to 3 years of work experience. Although positive in itself, opportunities, such as internships, traineeships or programmes, offer less than 3-5 years of experience usually (in 56 % of cases) asked for as minimum job requirements.

The PSO Youth Zone programme, Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) programme for young professionals entitled 'Werken aan de Wereld', SNV Netherlands' Junior Professionals Programme (JPP) and Kerk in Actie and ICCO's Together programme were recently terminated due to lack or termination of funding. These possibilities for young professionals accounted for at least 171 positions.

## **2. The Dutch context and supporting structures**

Though there were and are opportunities for young professionals to start in the sector, and though they may strengthen the socio-political position of young professionals, they do not provide enough positions for all young professionals. It can therefore be said that existing opportunities for young professionals fall short of providing the solution for the general inclusion of young professionals in the sector.

Rather, support should be provided by structures that provide the framework for a labour market and socio-political position of young professionals. Supporting structures are not limited to the labour market, but extend to educational institutions. Supporting structures are introduced below:

### **a) Education and the sector**

Preparation for the entrance into the labour market starts with basic knowledge and skills. However, young professionals, guidance counsellors and recruitment programme managers agreed that shortcomings in education lead to insufficient preparedness for labour market demands. A study carried out by the Young Socialists of the Dutch Labour Party concludes that 16% of young professionals say that their education inadequately prepares them for labour market demands.

Weak links between educational institutions and the labour market could be attributed to weak cooperation and coordination between the education sector and the labour market as well as a missing bridging structure.

### **b) Financial pressures for young professionals**

Rules and regulations regarding financial support to students in higher education in the Netherlands were adjusted for the academic year 2015/16. The biggest change to the system was that some students could no longer benefit from financial support. In addition, Master's students living at home now receive €102.77 less per month and students not living at home receive €286.15 less per month than the previous academic year. Due to these changes, many students must seek alternative and additional funding sources.

Though students from low-income households may apply for an additional scholarship, opportunities for further studies are limited for many. Because of the changes to the financial support system and because an additional degree is often considered the norm, young professionals may become even more disadvantaged on the labour market due to financial restrictions.

### c) Supply and demand for young professionals

Youth unemployment in the Netherlands has been relatively constant over the past 2 years at roughly 10%. This rate tends to be 2-3 times higher than unemployment rates for other age groups. Such high comparative unemployment rates are partly accountable to the fact that it may take a while for recent graduates to find a job.

In 2015, 179,000 students graduated from tertiary education. Between 2011 and 2015, 82,556 students graduated from universities that offer relevant Master's studies, such as the University of Leiden, University of Maastricht, Radboud University, University of Utrecht, University of Amsterdam and Wageningen University and Research Centre. In 2015, 825 students registered for studies directly related to the sector.

Related to above figures and based on descriptions given by young professionals and others who participated in this study, suggest that competition for a position with an organisation or company working in the sector is high: The number of applicants for a vacancy is high. Such high competition can be frustrating, which may lead to an adjustment of expectations or loss of motivation to continue applying.

### d) Policy and Dutch labour law

Semi-structured interviews with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Second Chamber suggest that young professionals are on the Dutch political agenda. This is confirmed by traineeship and internships offered by both institutions, as well as financial support by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a YEP.

However, Dutch labour laws scarcely support young professionals in the sector as few laws apply directly to young professionals. Minimum wage must be provided to employees who provide instructive work that adds value to the employer, organisation or business. Unfortunately, both concepts are vaguely defined, which often leaves young professionals subject to pay that is less than minimum wage, thus leaving them in a vulnerable and weak position.

## **3. Socio-political position of young professionals**

Though conversations around the inclusion of young professionals are taking place, the conversation seems to scarcely evolve and quite limited. Young professionals are not yet included in a sustainable and meaningful way in the sector.

The socio-political position of young professionals is partly determined by the history of the sector, including funding cuts, opportunities for young professionals in organisations and consequences of youth unemployment. Relevant factors are considered below:

### a) Changing sector

The Dutch development sector expanded rapidly following the Second World War. Since then the sector and related policy has seen changes in relation to political priorities. In 2010 to 2012 the sector experienced huge funding cuts. The budget for international development was systematically reduced from 0.8% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 0.7%, leading to a total of 21% cut in the budget. In 2016, the budget for trade and international development was set at €2.686.906.000. For 2017, the budget has been decreased to €2.246.057.000.

Effects of these funding cuts have been and are still felt by all players in the sector. Organisations are forced to restructure and young professionals have been made redundant. Since funding cuts have been implemented, the sector seems skewed. To



compensate for negative effects of funding cuts, organisations and NGOs could learn from the private sector, specifically in terms of how young professionals can add economic benefit to the organisation and, as a result, be more financially stable.

b) Young professionals seeking employment

The most common reason given by young professionals for why they are unsuccessful in applications is that they do not have enough work experience. Unsuccessful application processes can be frustrating for young professionals and can lead to a demotivation or change in choice of career, which could lead to a loss of potential and talent in the sector and organisations.

Finding employment in the short-term is not akin to retaining employment in the middle or long-term. Though the study process did not provide enough evidence, a potential trend that young professionals who participated in recruitment programmes became unemployed again in the short-term has been identified.

c) Consequences and coping mechanisms

Bell and Blanchflower (2009) argue that youth unemployment often leads to lasting scars brought about by negative effects of youth unemployment, such as a lower sense of joy and happiness, lower job satisfaction, lower wages and weaker health. In addition, youth unemployment seems detrimental to society, leading to increased social and economic costs.

Almost half (44%) of young professionals seeking employment and who stated they find it frustrating that they are unsuccessful in finding employment, said they have lower self-esteem as a consequence. If the young professional is employed, she/he may feel pressure to perform, which may increase the risk of a burnout or other psychological consequences. Such negative consequences may cause premature and long-term health issues.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

Though opportunities for young professionals that allow them to enter the sector exist and are important, they do not seem to offer the solution. Young professionals are limited by structures and a scarcely evolving conversation about the need to include young professionals in the sector.

Young professionals as a topic for focus- and youth in general - is a crosscutting topic, which is not yet adequately supported by policy nor official structures, such as education, labour laws and financial support systems. Recommendations provided below relate to relevant stakeholders, including young professionals, supporting structures, such as political institutions and FNV Young, educational institutions, organisations as well as associations, networks and foundations. Recommendations are:

Young professionals should seek to create their own space in the sector, as based on their power, passions and insights. Young professionals may do this by systematically building relationships with organisations or businesses in the sector and actively seeking ways in which they may fill an existing gap. Young professionals should also seek ways in which they may come together that may allow them to organize themselves. Remember, FNV Young is there to support you and benefit from your insights for lobby and advocacy purposes on the political level.

Supporting structures could play a pivotal role in strengthening the socio-political position of young professionals. For example, they may seek to create a platform on

which young professionals, the public sector, private sector, consultancy firms, educational institutions, FNV Young as well as the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science may share ideas, discuss and formulate approaches in favour of young professionals in the sector. All institutions and organisations should be included to increase a sense of urgency for ethical considerations regarding the inclusion of young professionals in the sector and strengthening their socio-political position.

Educational institutions should consider researching demand and shortcomings experienced by players in the sector and/or evaluations following work experience related to the study. Educational institutions may base curriculum content on outcomes of that research. In addition, educational institutions may consider letting young or experienced professionals share their experiences and knowledge as part of a class or may even consider providing financial support to initiatives set up by young professionals, such as AFD.

Organizations must learn from the private sector. For example, organisations may learn, even adapt, support and mentoring models in support of young professionals. Human Resources may seek alternative mechanisms and procedures for selecting staff members. For example, instead of setting criteria for degrees and years of work experience, they may seek to satisfy specific organisational needs or gaps. To encourage learning and professional growth, organisations may seek to set up an exchange programme for young professionals with field offices abroad.

Associations, networks and foundations can easily combine member's efforts and lobby for a policy for young professionals. Therefore, they may consider expanding the discussion from young professionals in the sector to all young professionals. Associations, networks and foundations may seek to combine their members' experiences and knowledge of the sector and sector needs and use these as a basis for lobbying for specific sector foci and increased specialisation. Networks should consider organising events during which lessons learnt and best practices for inclusion of young professionals may be shared.