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# Talent Outlook '20

Skills gaps & opportunities

March 2020

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UNIVERSITY**

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# Introduction

At the turn of the decade, the international development sector is changing. New technologies – from drones to artificial intelligence – and new actors – including impact investors and the private sector – are transforming the demand for talent. At the same time, the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 has broadened the scope of development with its 17 goals and 169 targets and implementing organizations are under immense pressure to demonstrate results. This means increasing complexity in an already competitive talent market.

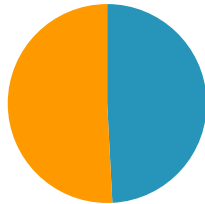
But how exactly will the market change in 2020? What does all of this mean for organizations trying to find top talent? And how can development professionals position themselves for meaningful jobs? Building on online survey data that Devex has been collecting since 2015, this report hopes to help employers and development professionals alike find some of the answers to these questions. The report offers an overview of the latest trends across the market, explores the skills necessary to stay competitive in the future and identifies best practices to find jobs and candidates.

# Methodology

This report is based on two separate online surveys, one targeting development employers and the other development professionals, conducted from January 23 to February 10, 2020. Where data is available, the report references Devex's previous employer and development professional surveys dating back to 2015 for context. To round out our data gathering and provide further insights into this year's Talent Outlook report, we also conducted 10 in-depth interviews with recruiters from across the development sector.

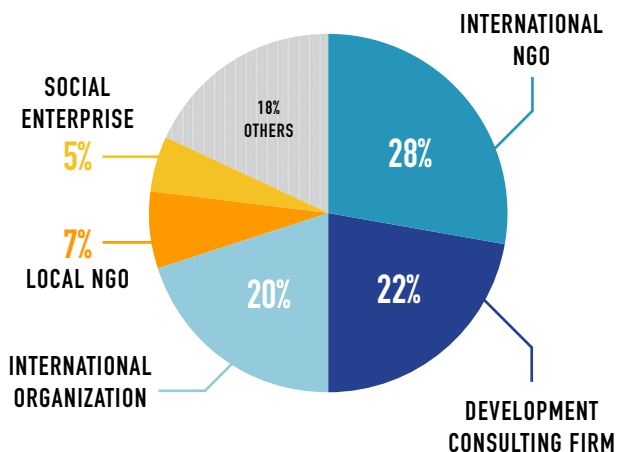
The **Employer Survey** was conducted among development recruiters and employers. Of the **329** respondents:

**51%** work in recruitment, talent acquisition, human resources



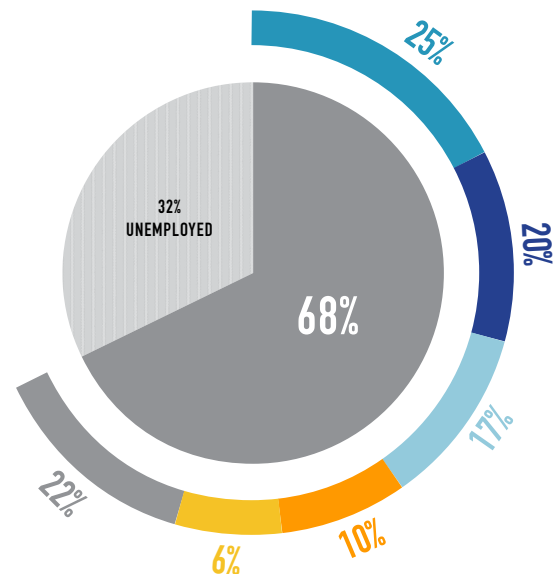
**49%** hold C-suite, director, executive or president positions

And work in a variety of organizations:

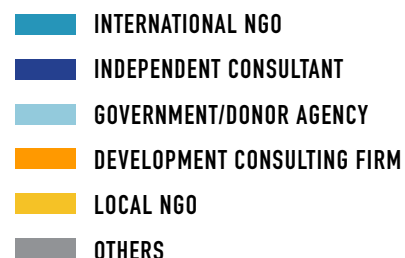


The **Development Professionals Survey** was conducted among currently employed professionals and jobseekers. Of the **1,257** respondents:

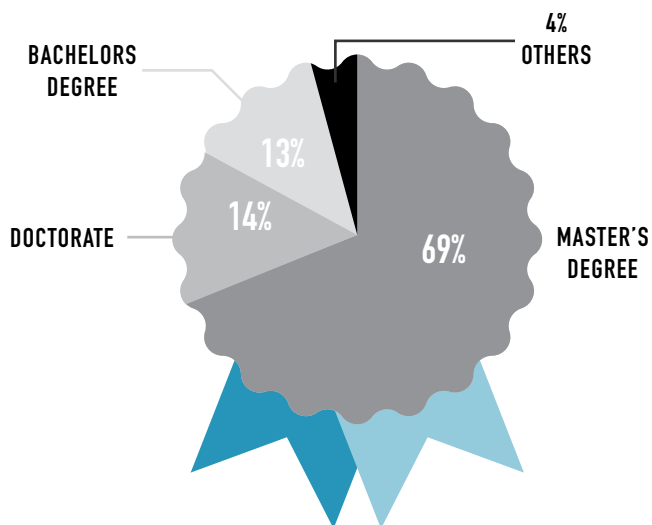
**68%** are currently employed



And work at:



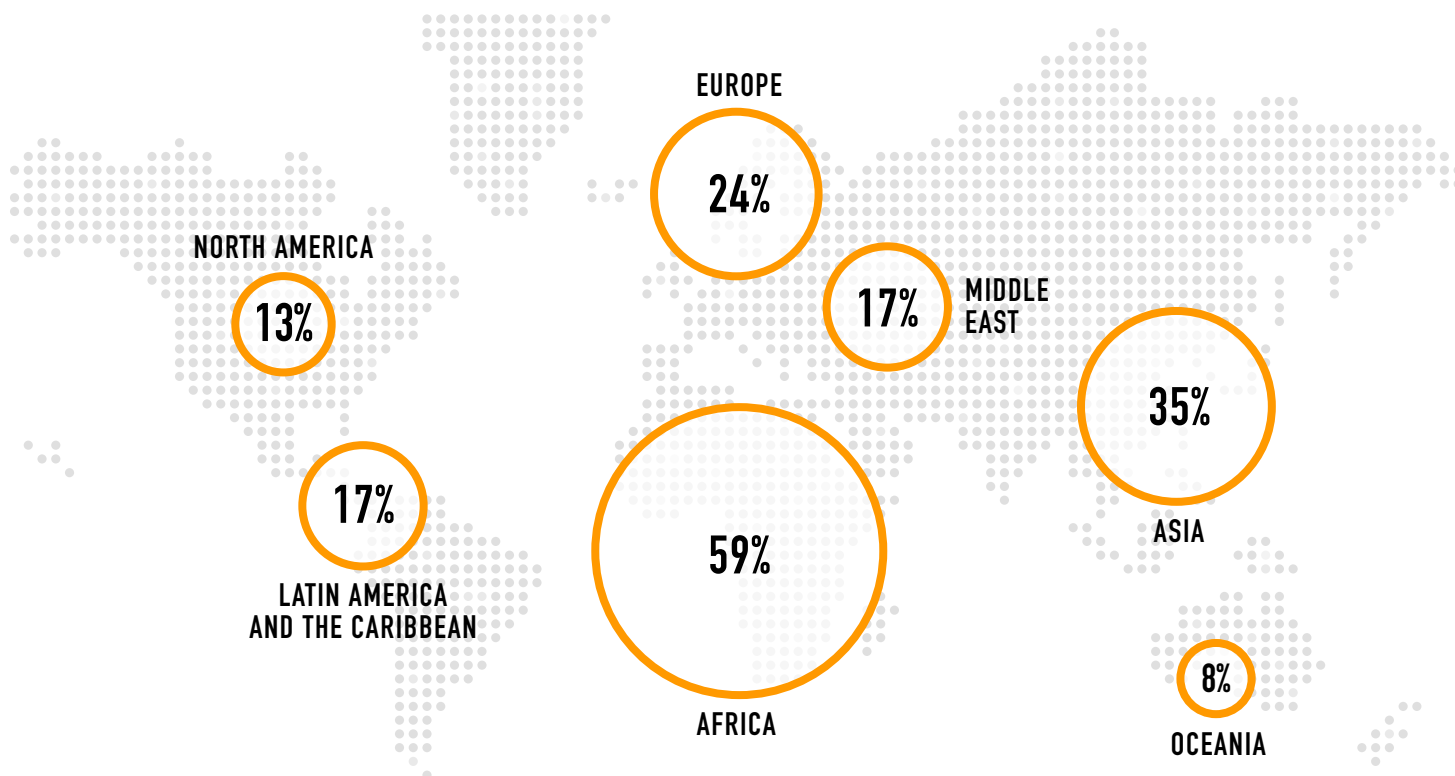
Respondents are highly educated:



### YEAR-ON-YEAR DATA LIMITATIONS

We expanded the survey pool for our 2020 surveys to include a larger pool of recruiters, employers, and professionals working on social impact. To ensure that data remains comparable year-on-year, we filtered the collected data to replicate the survey pools of previous years.

And have extensive experience in the following regions:



# How will the market change in 2020?

Development organizations and development professionals alike need to take changes across the development sector into account and prepare for the future, or risk being left behind. To help understand what the talent future will bring, we asked employers and recruiters about their hiring views for 2020. Here is what they say:

## LOCATION

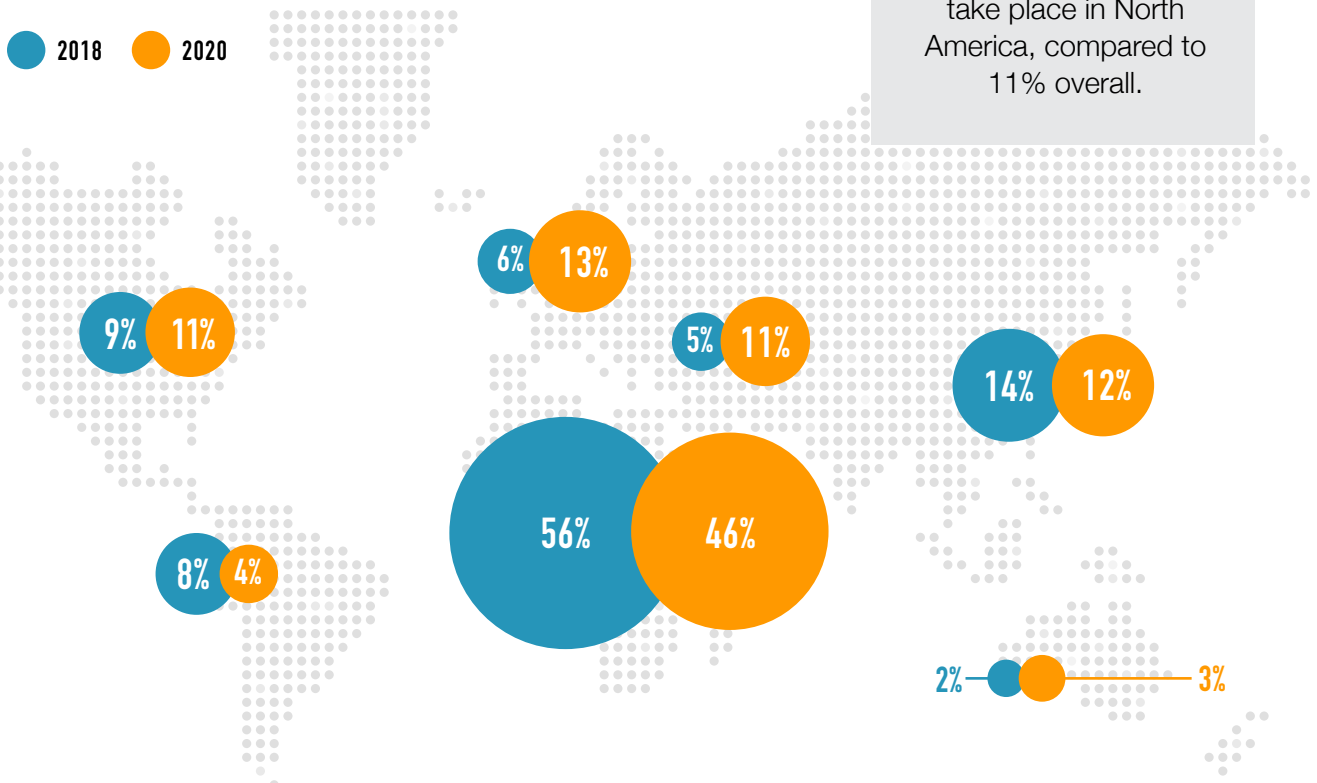
As in past years, most new development hires are predicted for the African continent. Recruiters note that much of this demand is dictated by global aid spending, with Africa remaining the largest recipient of official development assistance, receiving nearly a third of global aid spending or about **\$32 billion** each year. With the capacity and capabilities of local development professionals in Africa improving, recruiters also predict an uptick in local hires. However, overall, employers predict slowing demand for development professionals in Africa with hires predicted to increase in Europe and the Middle East.

### HIRING IS ORGANIZATION SPECIFIC

European organizations say that **26%** of their hiring will take place in Europe, compared to 13% overall.

North American organizations say that **22%** of their hiring will take place in North America, compared to 11% overall.

### NEW DEVELOPMENT HIRES BY REGION





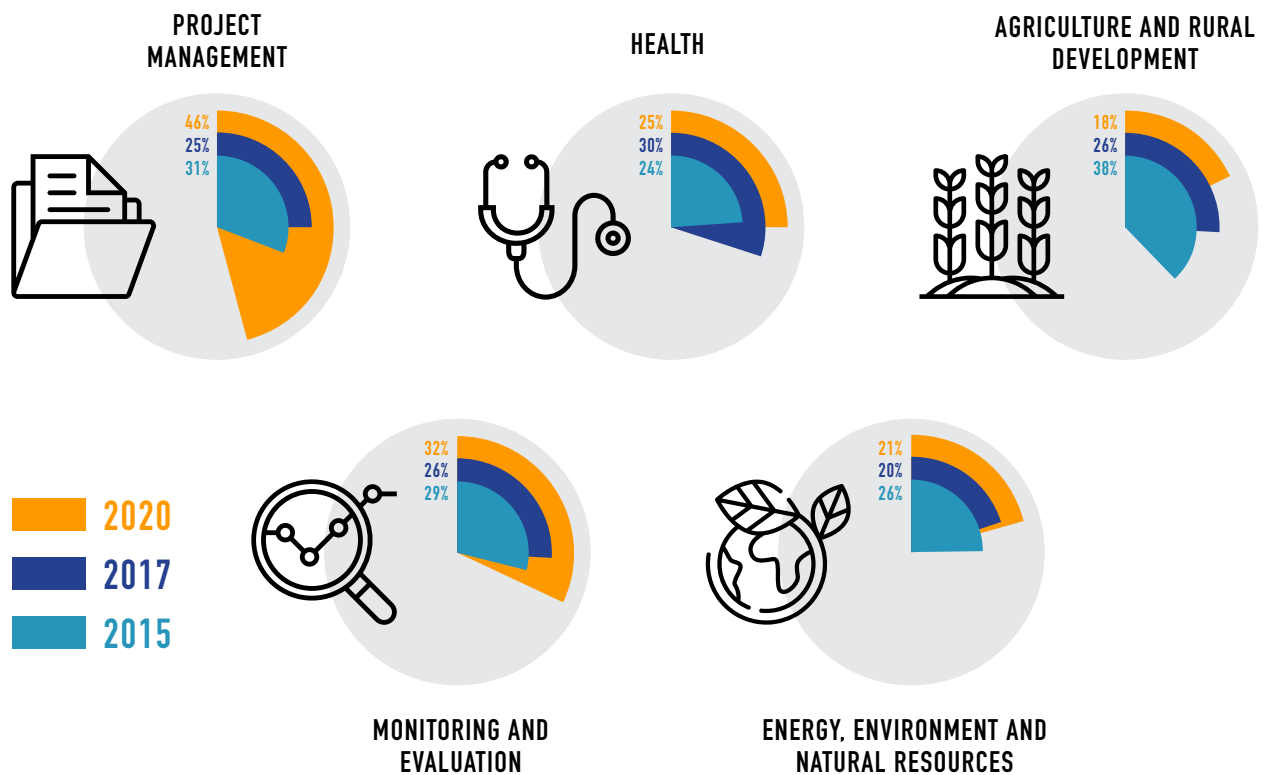
Africa is a growing market of very qualified young people who want to make a difference. Trends show that Africa will have the majority of young people in the near future, and they are becoming more and more educated.

—MICHAEL DAHL, CHIEF OF TALENT MANAGEMENT, UNFPA

## SECTORS

In line with growing demand for development organizations to **demonstrate accountability and development results**, employers predict that hires for project managers will increase in 2020. Demand for monitoring and evaluation specialists remains high too, while the sharpest decline is expected for the agriculture and rural development sector.

### TOP SECTORS WITH MOST NEW HIRING IN 2020



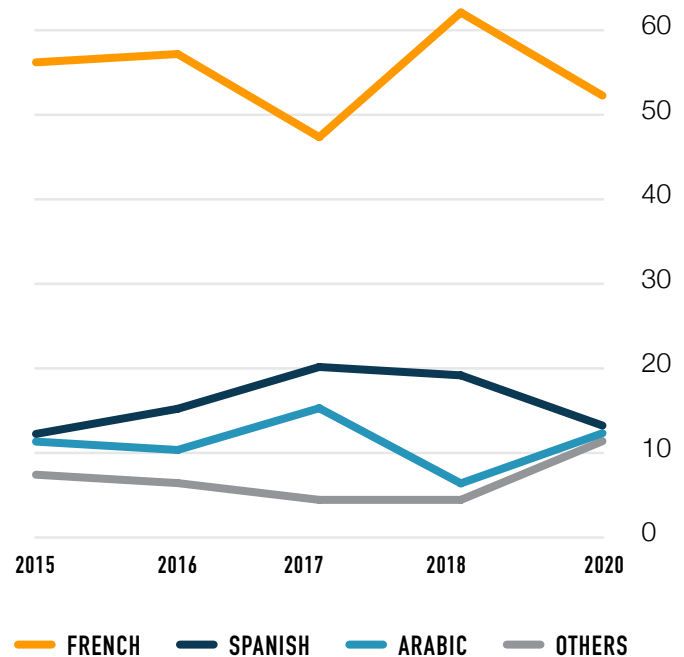
## LANGUAGE

French continues to be the most in demand language other than English in 2020. However, after peaking in 2018, recruiters predict slightly less demand for French while demand for Arabic and African languages – such as Kiswahili and Hausa – is expected to increase.

“There are lots of hiring in French speaking countries in West and Central Africa. If you look at food security and climate change as being two of the biggest issues, there’s a really heavy burden in West Africa and the Sahel region in particular.

—LAURA (RETZLER) WIGGLESWORTH, INDEPENDENT RECRUITMENT CONSULTANT

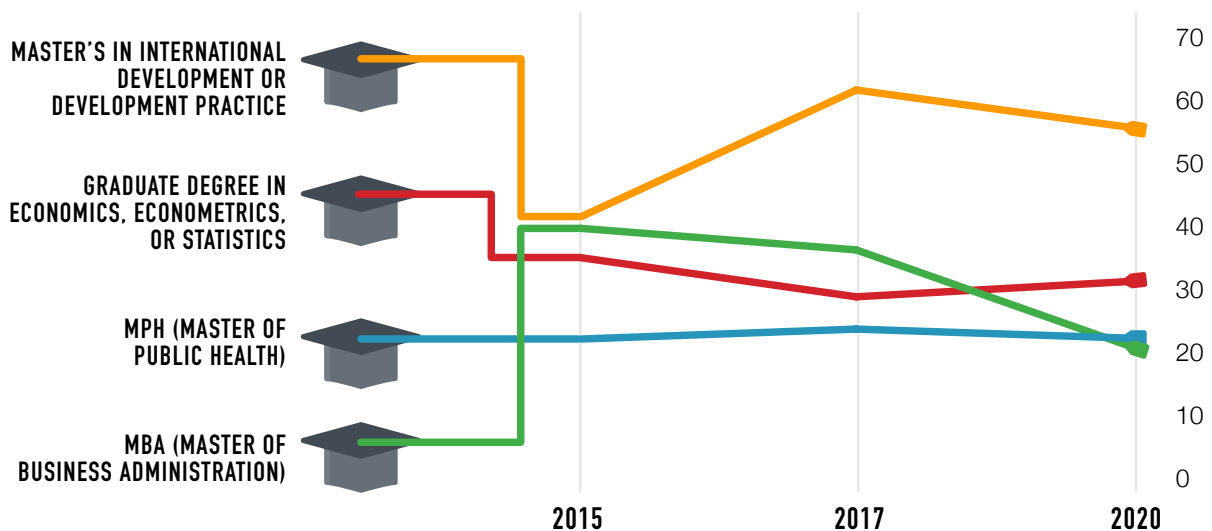
MOST IN DEMAND LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH



## DEGREES

As the history of university degrees goes, development studies is a relatively new field, emerging slowly in the 1990s and only gathering momentum in the 2000s. Fast forward to 2020, and most universities now offer a course in development studies. And with good reason. Employers consistently rate a Master’s in development studies as the most in-demand degree. In fact, the preference for development studies degrees has steadily increased since 2015.

HIRING DEMAND FOR TYPES OF DEGREES



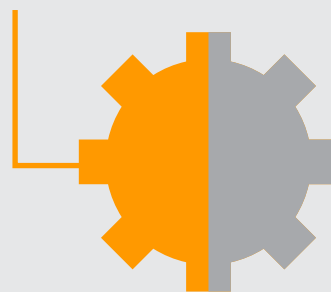
# What are the development skills of tomorrow?

The skills required to succeed in the modern workspace are changing fast, and international development is no exception. Our survey shows that over 83% of development professionals believe that the skills required to thrive in a development career are constantly evolving. However, the sector is facing some serious challenges.

**67%** of employers say that there is a skills shortage among job applicants

Soft and technical skills are in equally high demand.

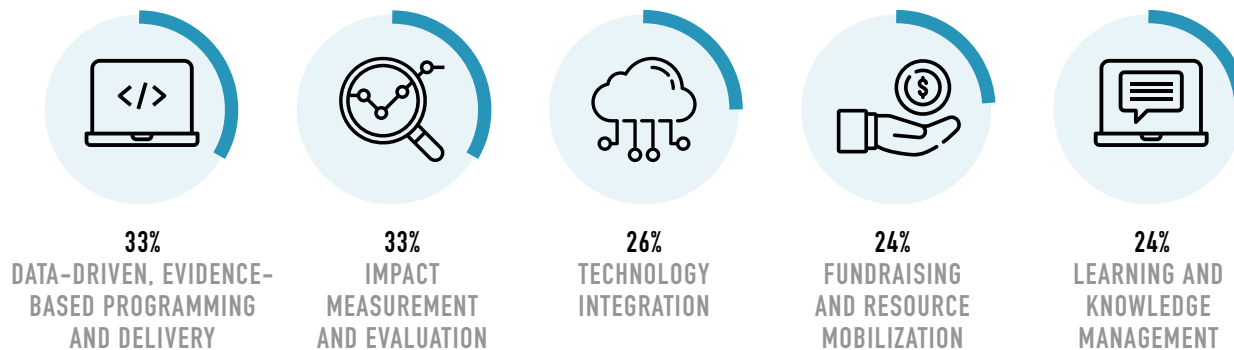
**50% of employers say that technical skills are in short supply.**



The other 50% believe that the lack of soft skills is the biggest challenge.

Recruiters say that in some cases, the skills of development professionals fail to keep up with the fast-changing development landscape. Katrina Sam-Prescod, director of human resources and administration at the Caribbean Development Bank, notes: **“Some of the positions that we would have traditionally been growing talent for have become less of a focus because our the Bank has gone into new areas. This means we have had to acquire this talent externally, competing with other players in the market and at times facing difficulties filling these types of specialist positions.”**

## THE TOP 5 HARDEST-TO-FIND TECHNICAL SKILLS OR EXPERTISE



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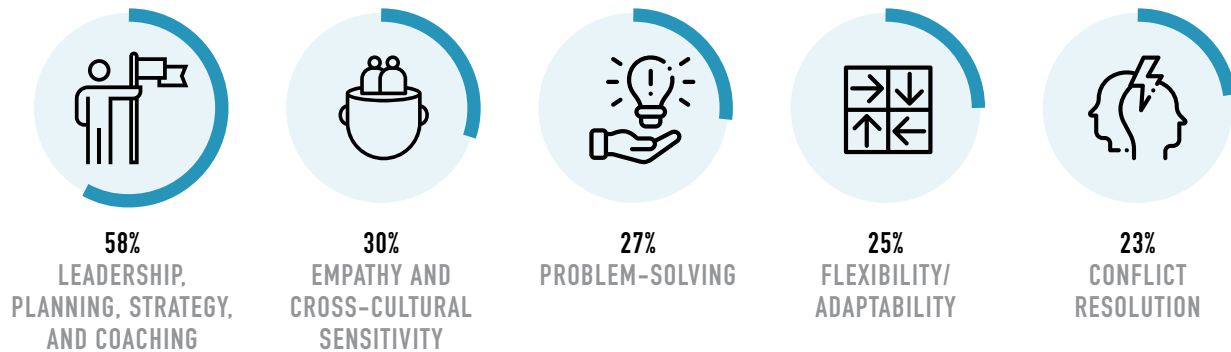
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— JOHN THOMAS, CHIEF OF AFFILIATE PARTNERSHIPS AND RECRUITMENT, UNHCR

### THE TOP 5 HARDEST-TO-FIND SOFT SKILLS



Demand for both technical and soft skills is high according to the development recruiters we spoke to. Implementing organizations are under immense pressure from donor agencies to demonstrate that their programs are evidence-based and impactful. At the same time, there is a drive toward technological integration, fueling demand for technical expertise. But recruiters also stress the importance of soft skills, which they say need to go hand-in-hand with technical knowledge. Political, environmental, and health emergencies, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, means professionals need to be agile to quickly adapt to rapidly evolving circumstances. To succeed, development professionals must possess leadership, cross-cultural sensitivity, and problem-solving skills.



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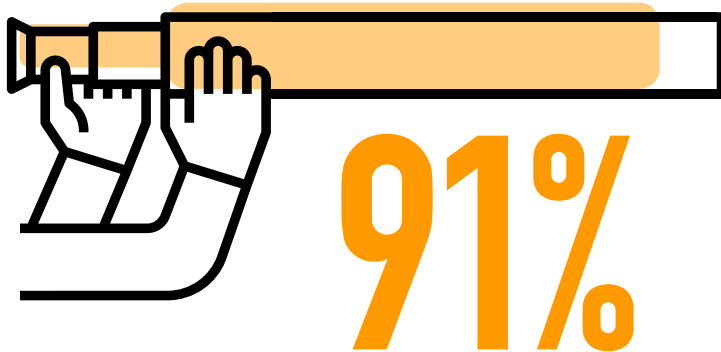
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Particularly in the humanitarian setting, which is a growing focus area for a lot of U.N. agencies, soft skills are extremely important. When we send people out to coordinate refugee camps and emergencies, they need to be able to work under high pressure, have empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity, leadership skills, planning, strategy, et cetera.

— MICHAEL DAHL, CHIEF OF TALENT MANAGEMENT, UNFPA

As a result, employers say they are increasingly looking at candidates with nontraditional backgrounds, including professionals from tech companies and other parts of the private sector. Recruiters believe that candidates with such backgrounds are likely to offer new, innovative solutions and approaches and that they help fill positions for specialized roles, including risk and data management.



**91%**  
of recruiters and employers predict that in the future, there will be similar or greater interest in candidates with “nontraditional” backgrounds.



International development clients are keen on innovative solutions for implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Bringing in candidates from other sectors with strong base skills and a fresh perspective can offer that.

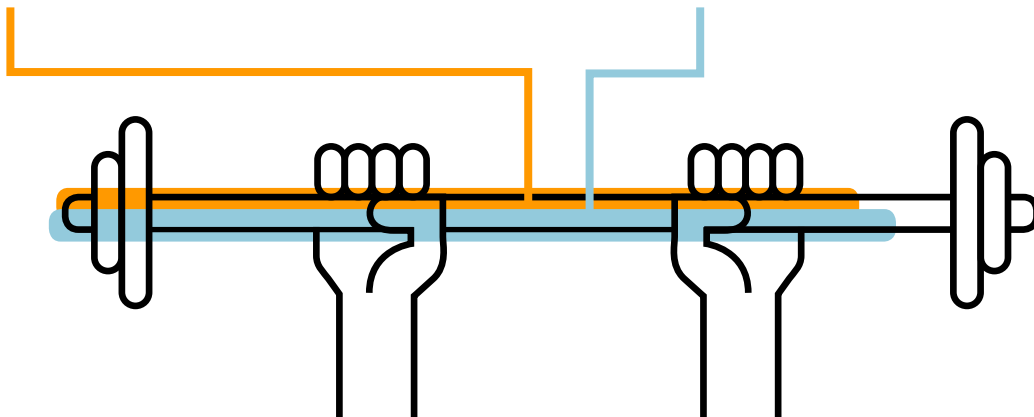
—ERIN CROSS, DIRECTOR OF RECRUITMENT, SOCIAL IMPACT

Only 9% of recruiters and employers predict there will be less interest in candidates with “nontraditional” backgrounds.

With increasing competition across the sector, development professionals need to be **lifelong learners**. To stay abreast, upskilling is key.

**88%** of employers say it is important in hiring decisions that candidates demonstrate engagement in regular skills training.

**93%** of development professionals say that regular skills training is important.



### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING?

**Upskilling** is about improving skills to do a current job better. It develops employees' skills in their current role and amplifies their profile in the workplace.

**Reskilling** is learning new skills to help with a new job or career.



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Development professionals say it is critical to keep their skills up to date, possess an awareness of new ideas, and follow the latest innovations and trends. Upskilling is key for all of this. Regular skills training also demonstrates to potential employers that an applicant is motivated, driven and interested in learning and personal growth.

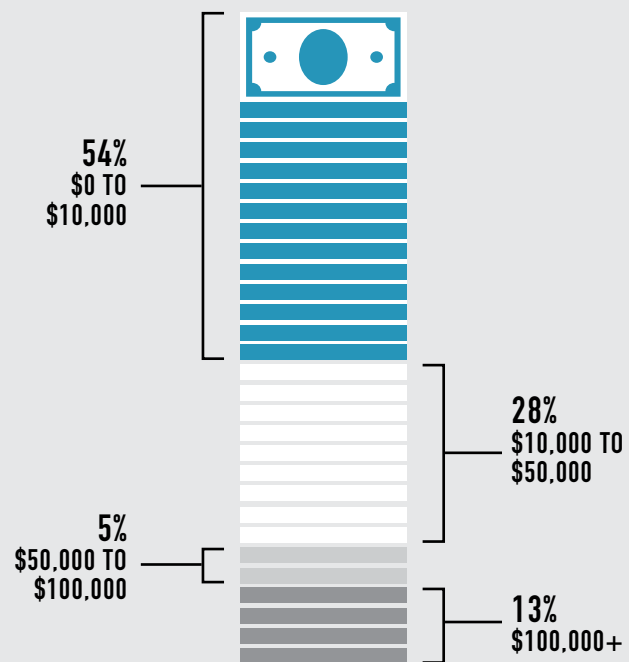
Outside of the development field, organizations such as PwC are already **dedicating billions** toward transforming their workforces to drive productivity, innovation, and growth. While development organizations have fewer resources available, over 62% of development professionals say that their current employers invest in staff development and training. They also note that skills training opportunities are an important factor when choosing an employer.

# 86%

**of development professionals say that they consider skills training opportunities to be important when choosing an employer**

Training budgets differ significantly from one organization to another. Over half of the employers we surveyed say that their annual training budget does not exceed \$10,000 per employee. But larger organizations — international organizations and foundations, in particular — generally have larger budgets.

## DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION'S ANNUAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION BUDGET\*



\*indicative figures based on answers of employers that offer training opportunities to employees.

And most development professionals are satisfied with their current employer's investment in staff development and training.



# 77%

of development professionals are very or somewhat satisfied with current employer investments in staff development and training

“

Continuous learning and skills training should be increasingly available and accessible. Because the world is changing faster and technology is moving very fast, it is becoming increasingly hard to keep up.

—LINDA AINES, CEO AND PRINCIPAL RECRUITER, AINES INTERNATIONAL

“

If it's self-driven, the fact that somebody is doing something for their own self, their career, for their own professional growth and professional trajectory, says a lot about that person, a lot about the interest that person has in doing a good job, in growing professionally, in contributing, adding value, and making a difference.

—MARTA FERNANDEZ DE MAZARAMBROZ, RECRUITMENT OFFICER, OSCE

## Not all heroes wear capes.

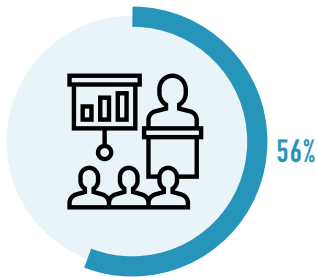
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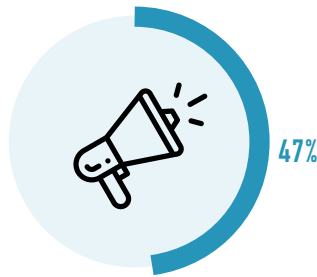
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To fill the skills gap, most development employers offer a range of different training opportunities to employees. The most popular include:



ON-SITE TRAINING



OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTEND SEMINARS AND CLASSES



ONLINE TRAINING

However, 52% of employers also say that they hire new candidates with specific skill sets to fill roles. The reason for this is simple: **Training is expensive and takes time.** For employers and development professionals alike, the top three obstacles to upskilling are costs, time, and limited options. As a result, many look to training platforms that offer accessible high quality courses. For example, **Philanthropy U** is a training platform that provides free, practical online courses that help make social impact professionals and organizations more effective in their work.

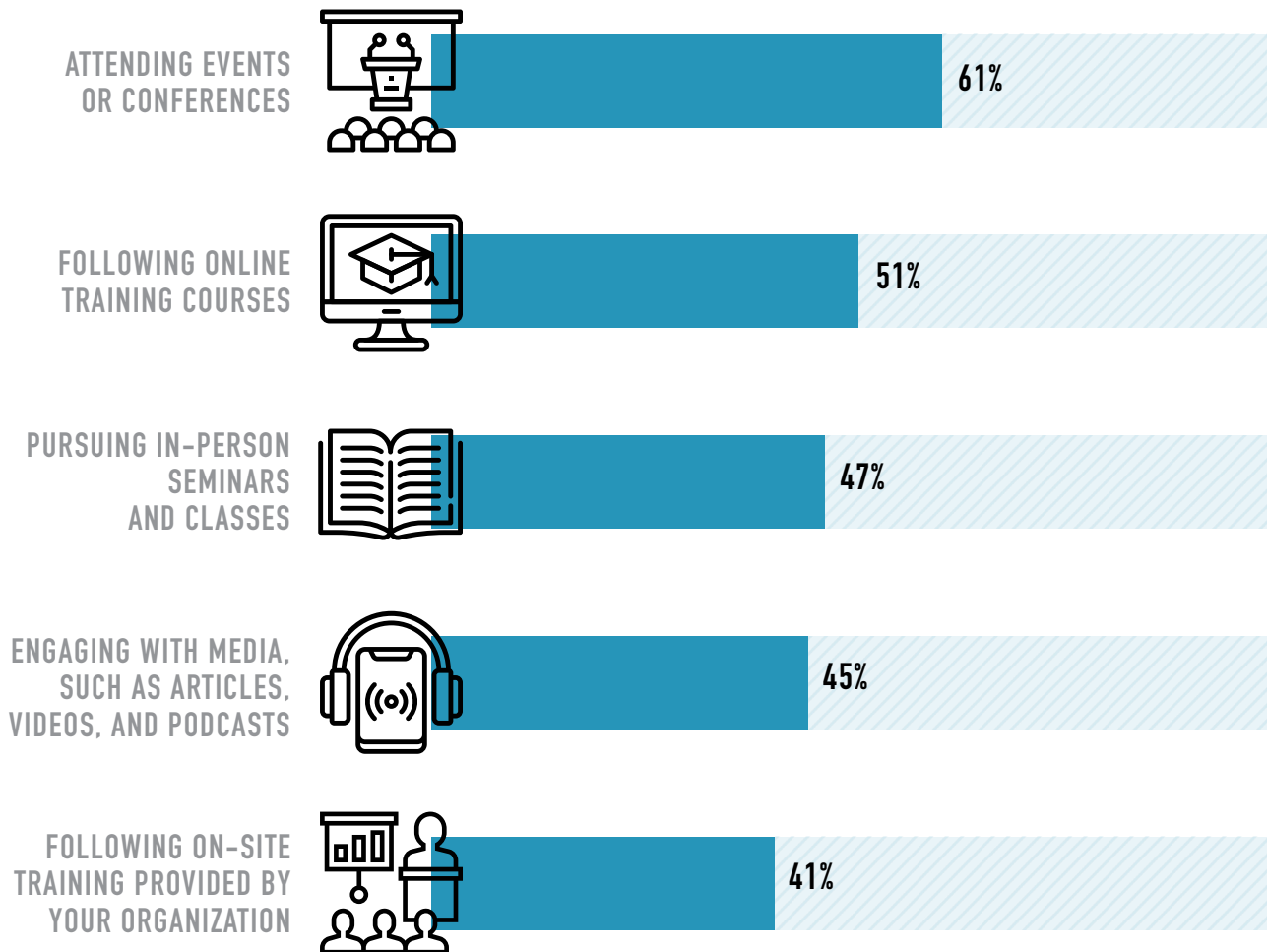


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Development organizations and professionals need to get the most out of limited training opportunities. So, we asked development professionals which type of activities contribute the most to their professional development. Here are the **top five** activities:



Changes in communications technology and a need to reduce the costs of training mean that upskilling is increasingly moving online.



# 84%

of development professionals believe that online training and engagement can help them address critical skills gaps.

“

I need to look for these skills outside. And that is why you see more universities offering international development, migration development, humanitarian development courses. These kinds of studies were not quite available some time ago. Now you see them coming up, but it takes time to mature.

—JOHN THOMAS, CHIEF OF AFFILIATE PARTNERSHIPS AND RECRUITMENT, UNHCR



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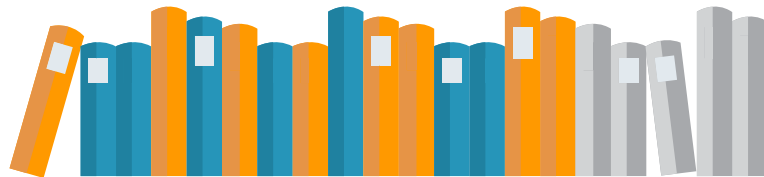
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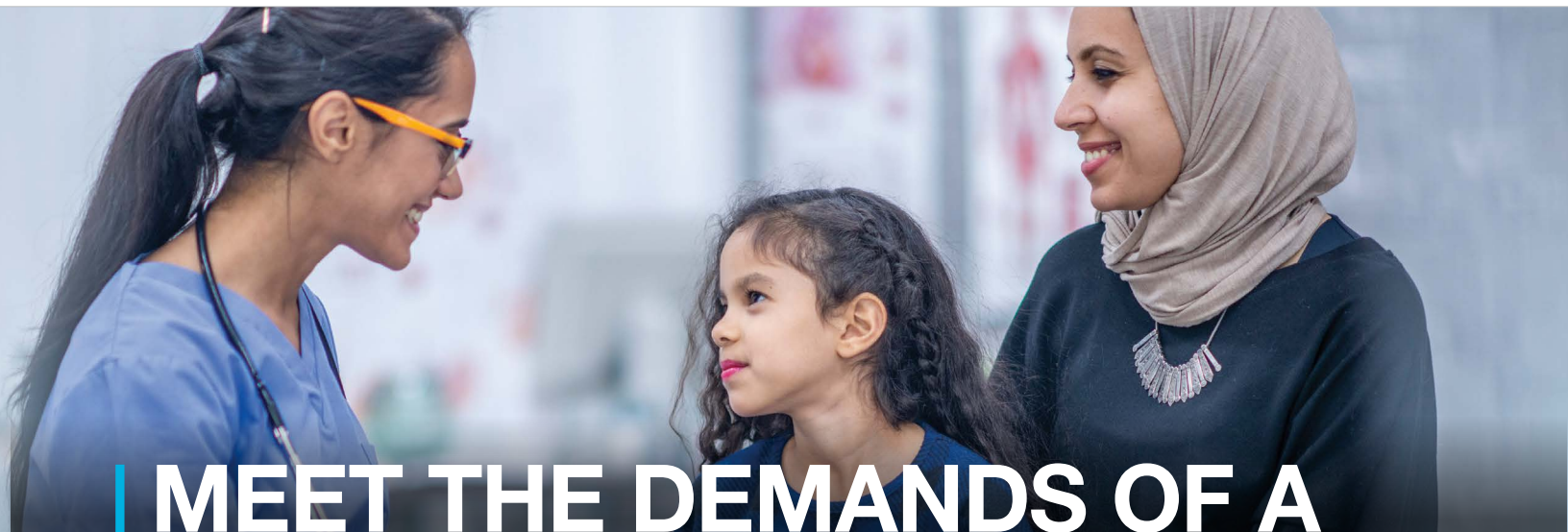


The search for alternative training and upskilling opportunities also comes from the realization that traditional education systems are not always enough for professionals to keep pace with the rapid changes unfolding across the development industry.

**77%** of employers believe that traditional education systems do not prepare students with the skills needed in the workforce



Many universities are adjusting to keep pace with changing demand. Development professionals can now choose between specialized university degrees, short courses, online courses, and other knowledge platforms. For example, **Humanitarian Leadership Academy** provides short-term online courses tailored to aid workers and Harvard Medical School and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine contribute to **SickKids**, a public health nutrition course designed to upskill health professionals.



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**Think about an organization like ours: We operate in 70 countries. You will not be able to have trainers running from one country to another. This means you have to standardize learning and content in a cost-effective way. So, you better deliver it online. That's the way to go.**

—DAVID SSEGAWA, GLOBAL DIRECTOR FOR PEOPLE, OXFAM INTERNATIONAL

### **HOW DO EMPLOYEES AT SOCIAL IMPACT ORGANIZATIONS VIEW THEIR SKILLS?**

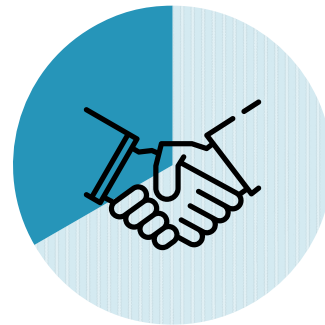
Impact organizations, including NGOs and social enterprises, often struggle with building the necessary capacity to scale operations. So, we asked them how they are doing.



**66%** say they are familiar with the best practices of other development practitioners working in their region and around the world.

The remaining 34%, however, say they are not.

Similarly, over one-third believe that they are not part of a network of highly skilled development professionals.



**33%** note that they do not know where to find help with building the capacity of their organizations.

# How to solve the training challenges holding back your team

Leila Makarechi

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## Upskilling is a hot topic in today's world.

It is often stressed that all teams, including those at social impact organizations, must invest in the professional growth of their staff in order to be more effective.

Plenty of resources exist to help people build their skills, yet members of social impact teams — often stretched thin, in need of specialized skills, and working in remote locations — may struggle to find training that suits them. Here's how to overcome that.



### Choose practical, bite-sized training over theoretical, high-level workshops

It can be hard to make time for professional development, but **80%** of social impact organizations that have engaged with our online learning platform agree that they now better serve their beneficiaries.

**Tayo Mofikoya** created the Refreshing Spring Foundation to educate and protect vulnerable women. Initially dependent on support from her small network, the foundation soon saw demand outpacing operations, and her team needed to quickly improve its fundraising and advocacy.

After taking three online courses, the team secured funding from three local businesses

and grew its operation to serve 500 families — five times more than before — in rural settlements.

The foundation's success came from choosing quick, self-paced courses that suited team members' busy schedules and covered practical use cases that were quickly put into action.



### Search for online resources that can easily be accessed in the field

Social impact work often happens at the community level, which means employees can be based in different locations. To accommodate this, training needs to have an online component that allows individuals to reference documents, find online communities, or complete learning wherever it is most convenient.

Social entrepreneur **Shrikrishna Hegde Ullane** said that an online community of practice was the only means for knowledge and resources to reach his rural operation, ConnectFarmer.com, in Bangalore, India. At a time when social entrepreneurship was still a relatively new concept in the country, he was able to optimize his e-marketplace by learning online alongside social innovators from across Africa and Europe. With this assistance, ConnectFarmer.com was able to help 1,500 local farmers connect with customers in nearby cities.



## Target learning to address your team's specific needs

Once India demonetized in 2016, there was a high-stakes national crisis at hand. It was obvious to **Vaibhav Lodha** and his team at ftcash, a digital banking social enterprise, that they needed communications training. Without it, he feared his team would fail to convey how its solution could help the underprivileged communities hit hardest by the situation.

Following an online course in storytelling, the team outperformed its goals, secured a \$1 million contract, and even won an award.

Though it was clear in this case, identifying the training that a team is likely to benefit from the most is not always easy. However, there

are assessments — such as Bridgespan's **Executive Team Diagnostic** or Philanthropy University's **customizable training solution** — designed to determine this.

Training may seem like a nice-to-have, but social impact organizations miss out on many more opportunities when they treat it as an afterthought. By searching for learning opportunities that are practical, online, and tailored to their needs, social impact organizations set their teams up for new ideas, increased efficiency, better outcomes, and — most importantly — more lives changed.

Read more learning success stories [here](#).



**Leila Makarechi** is vice president of the enterprise team at PhilU, the premier training solution for social impact professionals. She has over a decade of social entrepreneurship experience as an operator, running an impact fund and advising early stage companies, and is excited by the promise of technology to tackle social inequalities. Makarechi has led teams on five continents, scaled up a health care social enterprise from three people to more than 1,000 across four continents, and has been the youngest member of a United Nations agency. Previously, she led Coursera's government enterprise business to help countries upskill their workforce.



# LOOKING TO FAST TRACK TO BETTER IMPACT OUTCOMES?

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Philanthropy U makes online courses for social impact professionals & teams, on valuable topics like:

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# How to find jobs & candidates?

According to the International Labour Organization's "**World Employment and Social Outlook**" report for 2020, matching job vacancies with the right candidates is a major global challenge. Development organizations are faced with very similar challenges. Over two-thirds of development employers say that finding candidates with the right skills and qualifications is the biggest hiring challenge.



**The biggest hiring challenge is a mix of a lack of qualified candidates and also attracting the right candidates. We get a lot of applications, but they're not necessarily the right ones.**

—MICHAEL DAHL, CHIEF OF TALENT MANAGEMENT, UNFPA

## THE TOP CHALLENGES DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS FACE WHEN FILLING POSITIONS

FINDING CANDIDATES WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS



ATTRACTING DIVERSE CANDIDATES TO APPLY



LENGTHY HIRING PROCESS



UNCOMPETITIVE SALARY AND BENEFITS PACKAGE



NOT ENOUGH APPLICANTS



Employers also say that they find it increasingly difficult to attract diverse candidates to apply. This underscores the increasing value that development employers place on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. However, progress has been slow in eliminating workplace discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or age.

THE TOP 3 REASONS FOR DISCRIMINATION IN THE HIRING PROCESS, ACCORDING TO DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS ARE



ETHNICITY



AGE



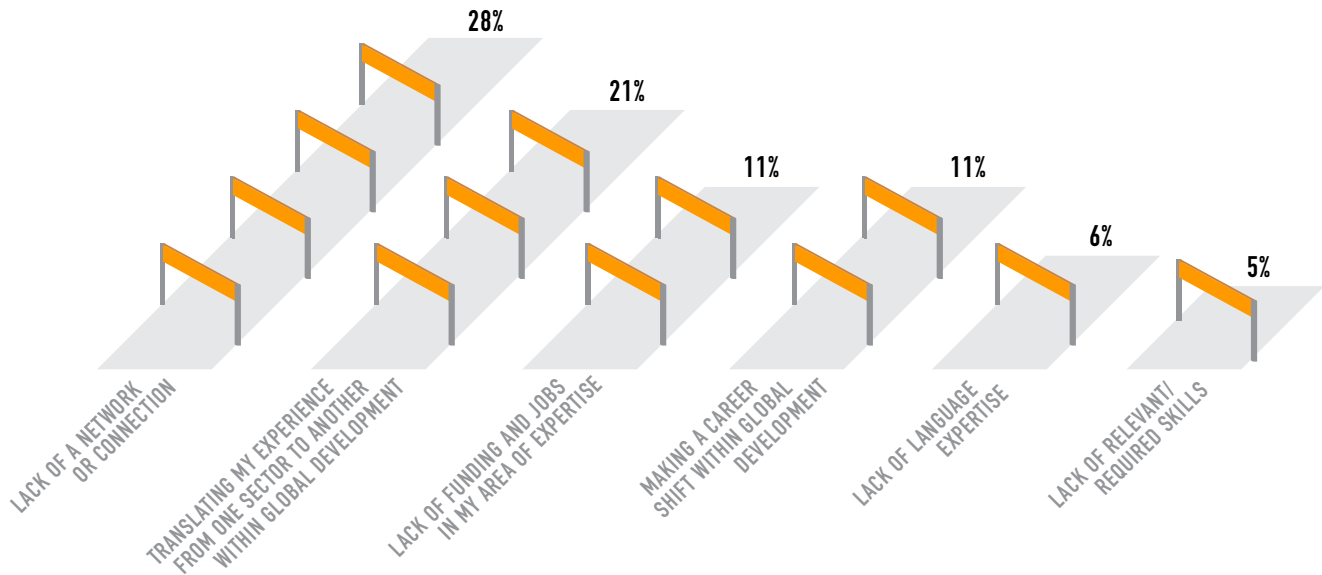
GENDER

# 47%

of development professionals say that they have felt discriminated against when applying for a job.

Even without being discriminated against, finding the right job is challenging for development professionals. Most development professionals say that they lack a network and connections that could help them land the right job.

## THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN FINDING A MEANINGFUL JOB



However, our survey also shows that applying directly to an employer is increasingly important. While only 35% of development professionals say that they found their first development job by applying directly to an employer in 2018, 47% say that their direct application was successful in 2020.

When it comes to hiring a candidate or accepting a job offer, the salary remains the biggest stumbling block. Among development employers, 49% say that the main reason for turning down an otherwise qualified candidate is high salary expectations. At the same time, 38% of development professionals cite low salary offers as the main reason for turning down an otherwise appealing job offer.

## HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR FIRST DEVELOPMENT JOB?



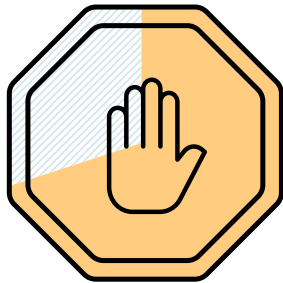
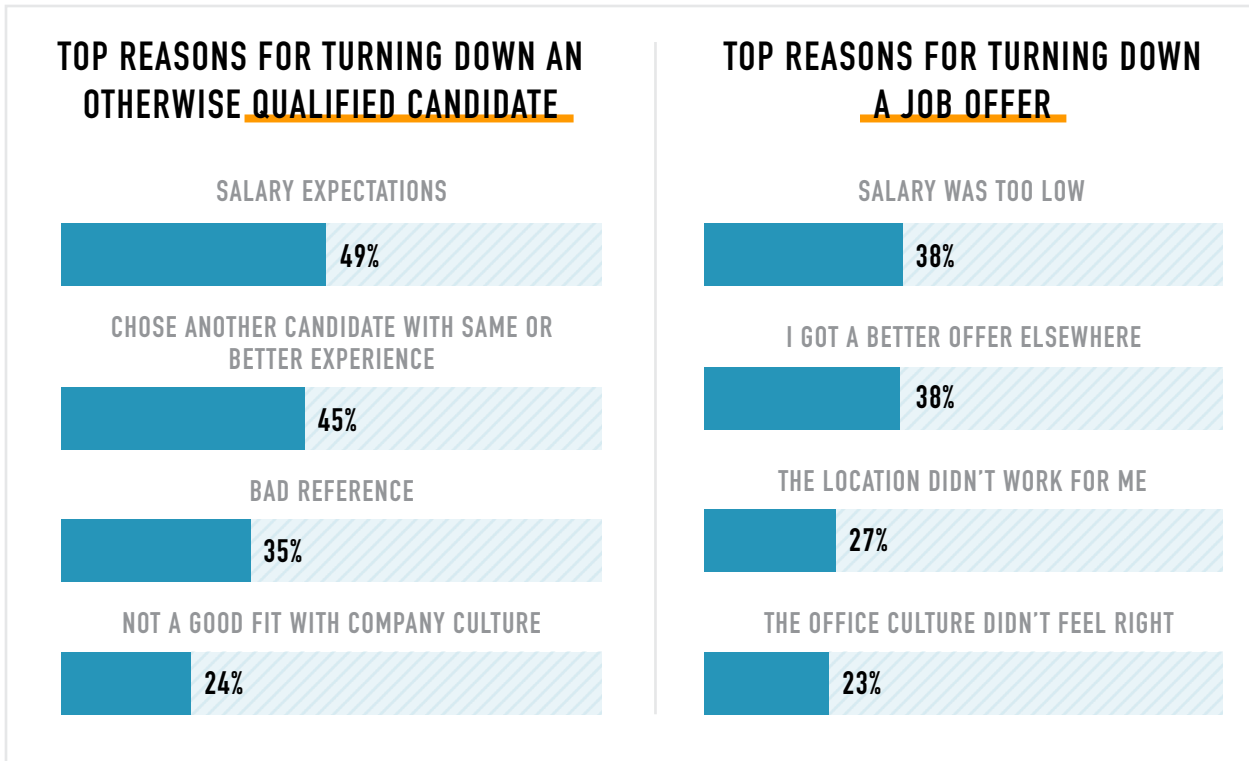
**47%**  
APPLYING DIRECTLY  
TO EMPLOYER



**15%**  
A FRIEND/  
FAMILY CONTACT



**11%**  
VOLUNTEER WORK



Nearly **70%**

of development professionals have turned down at least one job offer in their career.

But a good salary is not the only thing that employers in international development can provide to attract top talent. Here are development professionals' top suggestions:



**18%**  
PASSION ABOUT THE ISSUES/SECTOR THAT THE JOB FOCUSES ON



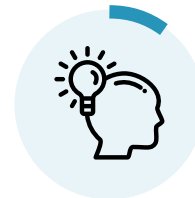
**11%**  
GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES



**10%**  
OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE OR TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY



**10%**  
WORK-LIFE BALANCE



**10%**  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

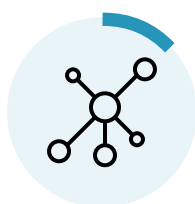
And development professionals have more options to search and apply for jobs than ever before. Here are development professionals' top suggestions:



28%  
JOB BOARDS



25%  
INDIVIDUAL  
EMPLOYER'S WEBSITE



13%  
SOCIAL MEDIA



13%  
WORD OF  
MOUTH



10%  
EXECUTIVE SEARCH  
FIRMS OR HEADHUNTERS

## RESOURCES FOR FINDING JOBS

### 1 CREATE AN AWESOME ONLINE PROFILE

Online profiles are critical for getting the attention of recruiters, headhunters, and employers.

### 2 HIGHLIGHT RELEVANT SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills can be difficult to showcase. It's important to know which soft skills are relevant to the role, as well as when and how to highlight them.

### 3 NETWORK

Networking can be challenging — if not daunting — for some, but it is critical in pursuing a career in development. Learn alternative ways to network that play on your strengths, making it fun and comfortable for you.

### 4 KNOW YOUR VALUE

Many find salary negotiations intimidating and uncomfortable. Learn how to frame your approach, when to bring it up, and what information you need ahead of the meeting. Make a list of possible employer questions and practice your responses.

### 5 COVER LETTERS ARE STILL CRITICAL

A good cover letter can sometimes make or break your application. Help your cover letter stand out by knowing how to address an unknown hiring manager, strike the right tone, and match your skills and experience with the job requirements.

### 6 STAY INFORMED

The development sector is dynamic and evolving. Keep up with the latest information, including in-demand skills, new players, relevant technologies, and the latest developments in low- and middle-income countries.

# Acknowledgements

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**Laura (Retzler) Wigglesworth**, senior executive recruitment consultant, Independent.

**Linda Aines**, CEO and principal recruiter, Aines International.

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# Talent Solutions

As the media platform for the development community and the go-to resource for talent and recruiting needs, Devex is uniquely positioned to link top global development organizations, companies, and agencies with over 1 million development, health, humanitarian and sustainability professionals serious about making a difference in the world.



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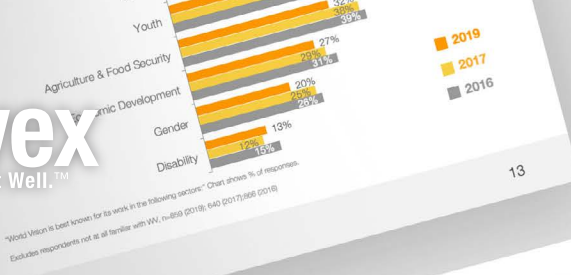


## Struggling to find the right person for the job?

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**Importance of using a fragility to resilience strategy**

Nearly a third of respondents believe that a fragility to resilience strategy is important because it **enables communities to better absorb and recover faster** from environmental and man-made shocks. Respondents also believe that the approach helps stabilize fragile contexts and lays the groundwork for long-term growth.

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- Communicate impactfully on critical issues

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