
How To Work In International Consulting: An Experience Report From A Unesco Consultant

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Abstract

The Brazilian public administration provides a plethora of opportunities for international consultants through vacancies in prestigious global institutions such as UNESCO, UN Women, and UNICEF, among others. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the opportunities available to lawyers and law graduates to work as international consultants, drawing on the author's experience at UNESCO. Often, these opportunities remain unexplored due to a general unawareness among professionals. Hence, this article endeavours to share a novel experience and act as a guide for those interested in pursuing a career in international consultancy. To conduct this research, descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the calls for applications published in 2023 by 12 global institutions. This analysis identified the demands and professional qualifications sought for consultancy positions. The findings indicated a notable demand for legal professionals with specializations or experience in international law, human rights, environmental law, public management, and public policies. Furthermore, English emerged as the most commonly required language, with French, Spanish, and Portuguese also being significant. The opportunities often featured flexibility regarding the professionals' location, with many roles allowing for remote or hybrid work arrangements. The study further underscored the critical importance for professionals to develop technical-scientific skills and to view themselves as entrepreneurs to effectively operate within this international context.

Introduction

Within public administration, a plethora of official opportunities emerge daily through public notices or calls for tenders in public institutions in Brazil and beyond. These opportunities often remain underutilized due to many professionals' lack of awareness. Specifically, in the legal sector, analysis of the myriad opportunities listed on official websites reveals a significant demand for law graduates, especially to work as consultants for international organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)¹, UN Women², United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI)³, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), World Trade Organization (WTO), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)⁴.

There are numerous opportunities for lawyers, as international institutions seek consultants with backgrounds in fields such as public administration, economics, public health, and environmental science. This multidisciplinary nature is a reflection of the complexity of the projects undertaken by these organizations, which often involve international cooperation and the resolution of global problems. Therefore, professionals who combine technical knowledge in their areas of expertise with cross-functional skills, such as project management and intercultural communication, are more likely to excel in this market.

Despite focusing on various areas, these institutions often collaborate on joint projects involving economic development, financial stability, international trade, labour rights, environmental policies, education, gender equality, children's rights, and cultural and scientific development. This reflects both the interconnectedness and cooperation within the United Nations system and between its specialized agencies.

In addition to academic qualifications and professional experience, participating in conferences, seminars, and events promoted by global organizations provides not only visibility but also access to opportunities that are often not published in public calls. The author's experience demonstrates that such interactions can offer practical guidance on how to overcome initial barriers.

Against this backdrop, this article offers an account of a lawyer's exploration of this market, seeking to demystify the complexities involved in understanding the rules of public administration. This practical testimony aims to clarify the challenges and barriers that often intimidate professionals without direct familiarity with the fields of public law, especially in the context of consulting for global institutions.

In this context, marked by the intensification of international trade and the presence of an interconnected global market, the importance of international contracts has been increasingly recognized. For consultants working internationally, these contracts formalize agreements and serve as strategic tools (Martins, 2015). A main

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

³ Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture

⁴ International Court of Justice

strategy involves structuring an international contract that accounts for the specificities of the consultancy service. According to Silva (2018), the contract must detail the scope of service, deadlines, remuneration, payment conditions, and, importantly, include clauses on conflict resolution and applicable legislation. This is particularly critical in an international context, where differing jurisdictions can significantly impact contract performance.

Experience is a critical element in the learning process (Mussi, Flores, & Almeida, 2021). These authors underscore the relevance of experience reports as an academic modality that facilitates the critical analysis of scientific and professional practices. Furthermore, they present a methodological approach for reports that are informative, referenced, engaged in dialogue, and critical. This process emphasizes the significant role of experience reports in constructing scientific knowledge and contributes meaningfully to education and professional practice by promoting the innovative integration of theory and practice.

This article aimed to identify and analyze global opportunities for law professionals interested in working in Brazil and abroad, whether remotely or in a hybrid format, taking into account different levels of language proficiency. The goal was to map the demands of this diverse and globalized professional scenario in 2023. For this, two specific objectives were outlined: (I) to investigate the trends in demand for law professionals to work in international consultancies, either remotely or in a hybrid format, considering the various language proficiencies required by the contracting institutions; and (II) to analyze the professional profiles outlined by international organizations, identifying the skills and competencies valued within the context of 2023.

The data analysis method adopted in this study was descriptive statistics, utilized to analyze calls for applications in the legal field published by international institutions in 2023. Descriptive statistics facilitated the synthesis and organization of collected data, offering a comprehensive view of the characteristics and patterns of the notices—which is pivotal for understanding the professional demands and requirements specified.

Exposing these experiences, therefore, enhances our understanding of how to navigate the bureaucratic context often associated with public administration and its procedures. Thus, the report serves as a valuable resource for legal professionals, managers, and professionals in the field of public policy, as well as for those aiming to deepen their participation in international consultancy mechanisms.

Given this context, this research was essential in identifying and systematizing⁵ the opportunities for law professionals interested in working in international consultancies. The detailed evaluation of international calls for tenders and the mapping of demands and professional profiles by prestigious organizations such as the United Nations provide strategies not only for individual professional development but also for preparing these professionals to meet the challenges of the global market.

⁵ Opportunities were identified in the same institutions for professionals in the areas of management, public management, public policy, the environment, business, technology, education, culture, and health.

Methods

Experience reports are a critical link between theory and practice in academic and professional contexts (Mussi, Flores & Almeida, 2021). These documents go beyond merely recording events or activities; they aim to contextualize and critically reflect on the interventions undertaken, with an eye toward pedagogical and professional innovation. The authors underscore that a well-structured experience report should include a detailed description and engage in an analysis that challenges and broadens the existing understanding of the subject.

Additionally, the recommended structure for experience reports encompasses informative, grounded, and critical descriptions, which aids in assimilating and applying the lessons learned. This method enhances the quality of technical and scientific knowledge production and bolsters ethics in research and practice, ensuring all analyses are conducted thoroughly considering their theoretical and practical implications (Mussi, Flores & Almeida, 2021).

In pursuit of the research objective, a search was conducted on the official websites of 12 global institutions for public notices or calls for proposals aimed at legal professionals, regardless of their experience in the field. These institutions include UNESCO, UN Women, UNICEF, OEI, ICJ, World Bank, IMF, IDB, WTO, ILO, UNEP, and WHO. The criteria for selecting the data focused on the availability of information in a public and accessible manner on official websites and the diversity of global institutions to facilitate a qualified and specific analysis for each organization.

Employing descriptive statistics, which aims to summarize and describe the main features of a data set without making inferences or predictions about a larger population (Santos, 2018, p. 15), enabled the analysis of the calls for applications published by these international institutions in 2023. Accordingly, information such as the required training, professional experience, language competencies, and other valuable organizational skills was summarized. Organizing the data collected into tables and figures provided a comprehensive overview of the opportunities and professional requirements specified, making it easier for lawyers and law graduates to discern patterns and trends in the international consultancy market. Hence, the identified consultancy opportunities are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: The opportunities for legal professionals in international consultancies (2023)

Public notice number	Name of institution	Academic background required	Additional training or education	Professional experience	Professional experience	Project area
001/2023	UNESCO	Law degree	Graduate studies in international law	Legal advice on international projects	Minimum of 3 years	International law
002/2023	UN Women	Law degree	Graduate degree in gender or related areas	Human rights, gender equality	Minimum of 3 years	Gender equality
003/2023	UNICEF	Law degree	Specialization in children's law	Protecting children's rights	Minimum of 4 years	Child protection
004/2023	OEI	Law degree	Graduate in public management	Public administration	Minimum of 3 years	Public management

005/2023	ICJ	Law degree	Graduate studies in international law	International legal advice	Minimum 5 years	International law
006/2023	ICJ	Law degree	Specialization in public law	International law projects	Minimum of 3 years	International law
007/2023	World Bank	Law degree	Graduate studies in economic law	Legal advice on development projects	Minimum 5 years	Economic law
008/2023	IMF	Law degree	Specialization in financial law	Macroeconomic policy projects	Minimum of 3 years	Financial law
009/2023	IDB	Law degree	Graduate studies in public law	Public administration	Minimum of 3 years	Public law
010/2023	WTO	Law degree	Specialization in commercial law	International trade	Minimum of 4 years	Commercial law
011/2023	ILO	Law degree	Graduate studies in labor law	Labor rights	Minimum of 3 years	Labor law
012/2023	UNEP	Law degree	Specialization in Environmental law	Environmental policies	Minimum of 3 years	Environmental law
013/2023	WHO	Law degree	Graduate studies in international law	Legal advice on public health projects	Minimum 5 years	International law
014/2023	WHO	Law degree	Graduate studies in public law	International law projects	Minimum of 3 years	Public law
015/2023	WHO	Law degree	Graduate studies in environmental law	Environmental policies	Minimum of 4 years	Environmental law
016/2023	World Bank	Law degree	Not required	Not required	None	Economic law
017/2023	IMF	Law degree	Not required	Not required	None	Financial law
018/2023	ILO	Law degree	Not required	Not required	None	Labor law
019/2023	UNEP	Law degree	Not required	Not required	None	Environmental law

Source: Prepared by the author

The relevant analyses reveal a growing interest in and need for professionals capable of operating internationally, whether remotely or in a hybrid form. Among the 19 calls for tenders observed, all offer opportunities to work on projects that transcend borders, suggesting a flexible working environment regarding the location of professionals. This scenario is underscored by the global scope of the organizations involved and the essence of the projects addressed, which encompass areas such as international law, human rights, child protection, environmental law, economic law, public policy, international trade, and labor rights.

Entrepreneurship with Legal Knowledge

Although many consultants operate in defined roles within international organizations, success in this field often depends on an entrepreneurial mindset.

This encompasses the ability to identify gaps in existing projects, propose innovative solutions, and build collaborative networks. For professionals interested in acting as consultants, considering each project as a micro-enterprise might be a strategic approach. This perspective encourages the creation of additional value, which can range from developing new methods to integrating technological tools that enhance processes.

Entrepreneurs, acting either independently or in affiliation with an organization, are renowned for identifying opportunities and embracing risks in creating and implementing innovations. They stand out through an exceptional ability to generate ideas, characterized by traits such as motivation and responsibility in their ventures (Pasquini, p. 115, 2020).

In the legal arena, entrepreneurship opens up avenues for professionals with a background in law, demonstrating that they can venture into areas such as independent consultancy and engage in mediation, arbitration, and international compliance, all while adhering to current legislation.

An initial point of interest is the work available with UNESCO, the ICJ, and the World Bank, organizations that often require expertise in international law for legal advice on development projects, conflict resolution between nations, and the implementation of global policies. Organizations such as UN Women and UNICEF present opportunities in projects dedicated to human rights and gender equality. Within this framework, specialized professionals have the opportunity to develop consultancies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aimed at enacting programs focused on protecting human rights, defending minorities, and advancing gender equality in various settings. Particularly for UNICEF projects, there is a demand for professionals who specialize in child law and protection. Here, legal entrepreneurs can establish organizations dedicated to child advocacy, provide consultancy on child protection policies, and offer training on children's rights.

Collaboration with UNEP and UNESCO on environmental initiatives introduces another niche for those interested in ecological concerns. Professionals have the potential to establish consultancies specializing in environmental legislation, advising on corporate sustainability, and developing projects for environmental compliance.

Projects associated with the World Bank and IMF often require comprehensive knowledge of economic and financial law. This environment enables professionals to specialize in economic consultancy, oversee financial policies, and develop infrastructure projects that comply with international economic regulations.

Furthermore, initiatives with the IDB and OEI encourage consultancies specializing in public governance, administrative reform, and public policy development. These efforts support projects demanding in-depth knowledge of public legislation and management.

As highlighted in notices and calls for experts, the WTO is searching for individuals skilled in trade law and international trade. This scenario allows legal entrepreneurs to provide consultancy services in trade negotiations, dispute mediation, and adherence to international standards. Legal entrepreneurship in these domains empowers law graduates to offer traditional legal services and innovate by establishing specialized consultancies, NGOs, and training and capacity-building

companies. Such activities enable them to operate both within Brazil and internationally, rendering services to governments, corporations, and other entities requiring expertise to manage complex projects and develop tailor-made solutions under the requirements of international organizations.

Results

The author's experience in sustainability and global development projects exemplifies how interdisciplinary competencies are valued by international institutions. Given an opportunity to work with UNESCO, the integration of knowledge in international law, public policy management, and sustainability enabled the delivery of solutions aligned with the United Nations' Agenda 2030. This case illustrates that professionals who can adapt their skills to global and multidisciplinary contexts excel in the market.

In the data analysis, it was possible to outline the main professional profiles demanded by international organizations, emphasizing the skills and competencies required. For instance, professionals with a law degree are often asked to fill positions requiring specialization in international law, human rights, gender equality, child protection, environmental law, and public policy. In addition to academic training, there is a significant emphasis on professional experience, generally of at least three to five years, in roles related to legal advice, policy development, management, and international projects.

Therefore, analyzing 19 selected public notices and calls for tender made it possible to identify profiles of professionals with higher education in law, highlighting specific skills and competencies, as illustrated in Figure 1.

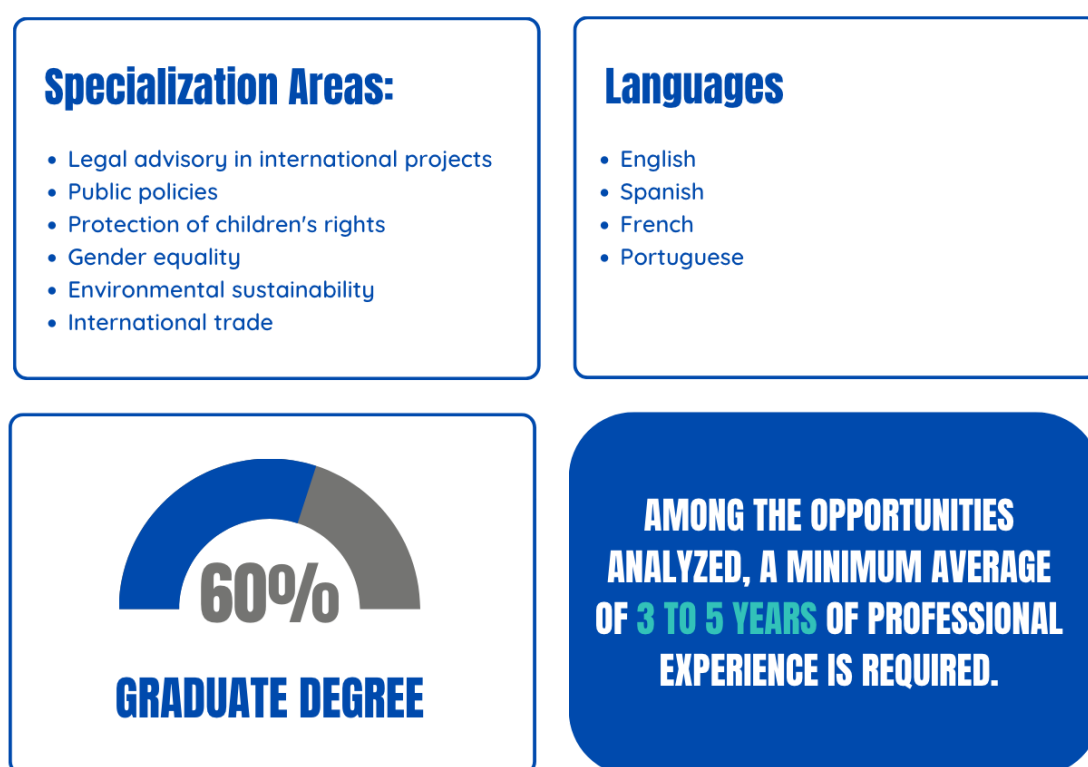


Figure 1. An overview of the opportunities for professionals with a law degree in international organizations (2023) | Source: Prepared by the author

An analysis of the opportunities published in 2023 by selected international organizations reveals a growing trend in the demand for professionals with higher education in law without the requirement of being registered with the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB). This trend can be attributed to the international nature of these opportunities, prioritizing academic training, specific professional experience, and language proficiency over national professional registrations. This approach promotes greater inclusion of qualified professionals from different jurisdictions, thereby expanding the pool of candidates able to meet the demands of these organizations.

According to the notices analyzed, all of them require a university degree in law as a minimum. Additionally, 60% (11 out of 19) also require a graduate degree in specialized areas, such as international law, public law, public management, environmental law, and human rights. When it comes to professional experience, this is considered an essential requirement, with the demand varying from 3 to 5 years, depending on the institution's needs. The most valued areas of specialization include advising on international projects, public policy, protecting children's rights, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and international trade. This diversity reflects the broad range of opportunities available.

Regarding language requirements, a significant variation was identified among the calls for tenders, directly affecting the inclusion of professionals with different levels of language proficiency:

1. English: The most frequently required language, present in 90% of the calls for proposals analyzed.
2. French: Required in 32% of calls (6 out of 19), mainly for projects linked to UNESCO, ICJ, and WHO.
3. Spanish: Required in 16% of the calls (3 out of 19), particularly in projects from UN Women, IDB, and ILO.
4. Portuguese: Present in some IDB and UN calls for proposals, reflecting the importance of working in Portuguese-speaking countries.

English stands out as the standard language required, although several calls for proposals also stress the need for proficiency in other languages, such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The language requirement varies according to the project's region and the predominant language. For instance, relevant calls from the ICJ and WHO often require fluency in both English and French, while opportunities at the ILO may require knowledge of both Spanish and English, depending on the country of operation.

Project management is a systematic approach to efficiently planning, organizing, controlling, and managing resources to achieve specific results within predefined deadlines and budgets (Silveira et al., 2009). The inclusion of Portuguese in some calls for proposals, particularly from the IDB and UNESCO, underscores the need for professionals capable of working in Portuguese-speaking countries. The language requirements indicate the importance of professionals who can communicate

effectively in multiple languages, promoting the inclusion of candidates with varying levels of language proficiency.

Lastly, the findings presented herein can lead one to conclude that these opportunities reflect a trend toward balancing efficient communication with valuing linguistic and cultural diversity among professionals. It should also be noted that professionals' technical and scientific development can lead to opportunities beyond public administration. The possibility of working on projects can broaden the perception of the value of professionals with a law degree. This development unfolds through specialized consultancies and employment with NGOs and international private companies.

A recurring challenge highlighted by analysis and practical experience is the linguistic barrier faced by professionals wishing to operate in an international context. Although English is often the standard language, organizations also value proficiency in other languages, such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese. Therefore, learning a second or third language not only increases employability but also promotes adaptation to diverse cultural contexts, which is essential for working effectively in international teams. The author's experience demonstrates that investing in language skills is one of the most strategic decisions for those aspiring to act as global consultants.

Final Considerations

This article investigates the international opportunities available for consultants within global organizations, emphasizing professionals holding law degrees. Through the lens of a legal consultant's experience, it has been possible to identify the dynamics of public administration and to underscore the crucial strategies needed for navigating this market. The analysis of public notices and calls for tender, conducted as part of this study, has revealed a demand for legal professionals who specialize in various fields. Additionally, these positions often require academic training and professional experience ranging from 3 to 5 years, depending on the project's purpose and the institution involved.

Starting a career in international consulting can be daunting, yet each step, from identifying opportunities to submitting applications, contributes to the construction of a solid trajectory. In the case of the author, the first project with UNESCO resulted from a combination of academic qualifications, technical skills, and networking. This initial experience provided not just technical learning but also the necessary confidence to explore other international organizations and expand operations in various areas of expertise.

Furthermore, the study points out that the market has opened up not only to those with law degrees but also to bachelors in other fields, professionals without previous experience, and even those who do not speak foreign languages, with the exception of Portuguese. Legal entrepreneurship is also emerging as a promising avenue for professionals who seek to provide independent advice, exploring specific niches such as compliance, international law, human rights, child protection, environmental law, and public policy.

Therefore, this study significantly contributes to the knowledge base on international consultancy, offering insights into the opportunities available for professionals across various specialties. By systematizing the demands and professional profiles sought by international organizations, this article delivers essential guidance for preparing lawyers and law graduates aspiring to work internationally. Additionally, it underscores the importance of training, emphasizing the need for technical-scientific knowledge and skills, particularly in languages, in order to excel in this highly competitive field.

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