

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Social workers can work internationally, abroad, or in one's country of origin. Look for entities that have international concerns. For example, there are international opportunities in:

- United Nations and other international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including social service agencies, foundations, and educational institutions
- Government and governmental agencies
- Corporations
- Banks
- Media

Strong social work experience/education grounded in an understanding of human behavior in the social environment are first steps in launching a career in international social work. You must develop an area of expertise and also acquire knowledge and understanding of:

- World history
- World geography
- Economics
- Politics
- Culture
- Language (your own and at least one other)
- Literature
- The arts
- Social behavior/customs
- Social welfare policy
- Program development and evaluation

It is important to have lived and/or worked abroad even if you seek an international job in your country of origin. You can gain international experience abroad through:

- Internships
- Volunteerism
- Travel
- Language, or other study

Living and working abroad is exciting and challenging. To succeed in international work abroad you must:

- Be flexible, adaptable to change and difference
- Love to travel, despite discomfort
- Enjoy meeting people, making strong ties even though they may be short-term
- Like being alone, for at times you will be or simply will feel so

In seeking international work, employ traditional job-search techniques. Expect to fill out complicated application forms. Be sure to check with the embassy of any country where you intend to work to find out about legal and medical requirements/restrictions for doing so. Once you are on the job:

- Scope out the formal and informal ways of getting things done
- Find a mentor
- Create learning opportunities for yourself (join local organizations)
- Document your experiences

(International Federation of Social Workers: <http://www.ifsw.org/>)

Prepared by the Core Group of the Career Development Directors in Social Work Education, 7/99