



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

In 2019, the Fair Internship Initiative (FII) created the first ever UN Internship Programme Quality Index based on data collected in its 2019 survey of interns in the UN system. The objectives of this index were to raise awareness about the strengths and weaknesses of UN internship programmes, as well as to encourage and applaud positive reforms. Since the publication of the 2019 Quality Index, several organizations have reviewed their internship programmes and/or begun providing stipends to their interns.

FII is pleased to present an updated Quality Index, based on the responses to its 2021 UN-wide intern survey.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

Data collection for FII's 2021 intern survey was conducted between July and October 2021, and the survey was open to current UN interns at the time as well as to former interns who had completed a UN internship in January 2020 or later.

The survey was designed to assess internship practices against the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)'s benchmarking framework for good practices in internship programmes. It includes questions which pertain specifically to the benchmarks set out in the 2018 Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report entitled "Review of Internship programmes in the United Nations system". The JIU report recommends the adoption of these benchmarks in order to create reliable and equitable internship programmes across the UN system.

The survey questions that pertain to JIU benchmarks enable measurement of the extent to which different organisations within the UN system have implemented these benchmarks in their internship programmes, by assigning numerical values to the possible responses and aggregating these across all of the respondents from a given organisation. For example, for the question "*Do/did your internship's terms of reference and/or work programme have specific learning objectives?*" respondents could select from the following options: "Yes" (which was assigned a weight of 5); "*To some extent*" (assigned a weight of 2.5); or "No" (assigned a weight of 0).



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

The JIU report divides its recommended benchmarks into four areas, and FII's UN Internship Programme Quality Index accordingly assigns a score to each of these four areas by averaging the scores of the questions that pertain to benchmarks within a given area. The four areas are:

1. Fairness and transparency of the application and selection process, including pre-departure administrative support
2. Support for interns through the onboarding and internship period
3. Completion of the internship and career development
4. Equal opportunities (alignment of internship programmes with the values of United Nations)¹

A full specification of the assessment areas by JIU benchmark can be found in the Annex.

The scores for the four benchmark areas are compiled to produce an overall score measuring the inclusivity of an internship programme. These overall scores can then be used to produce a ranking of UN internship programmes², and to track improvements (or deteriorations) in a given entity's internship programme practices.

All scores range from 0 to 5, with scores in the interval [0-1) being considered 'Very Poor', and scores above 4 considered 'Very Good'.

Scoring Mechanism

0-1: Very Poor

1-2: Poor

2-3: Mediocre

3-4: Good

4-5: Very Good

¹ As the JIU report notes, "inclusive strategies to support opportunities for youth are at the core of United Nations values on dignity, human rights, decent work and sustainable development".

² Only those internship programmes which were reviewed by at least three respondents in the survey are included in the ranking.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The table below shows internship programmes' positions in the ranking and their overall scores (in parentheses), with icons to indicate which internship programmes have moved up or down in their grade level since 2019.

Poor	Mediocre	Good	Very Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ 17: UNESCO (1.87) ■ 18: UNRWA (1.79) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ 12: FAO (2.89) ● 13: IAEA (2.85) ■ 14: ITU (2.75) ● 15: ICC (2.74) ■ 16: UN Secretariat (2.56) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 3: WIPO (3.95) ■ 4: IOM (3.74) ▲ 5: WHO (3.72) ▲ 6: UNICEF (3.58) ■ 7: UNOPS (3.44) ■ 8: UNHCR (3.34) ▲ 9: UN Women (3.27) ■ 10: WFP (3.25) ▲ 11: UNIDO (3.08) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ 1: ILO (4.34) ▲▲ 2: UNDP (4.01)

Key:

- ▲▲ up three grade levels from 2019
- ▲ up two grade levels from 2019
- ▲ up one grade level from 2019
- same grade level as in 2019
- ▼ down one grade level 2019
- not reviewed in 2019

- In 2019, there were four programmes which received scores in the 'Poor' range: UN Volunteers, UNRWA, UN-Women and UNDP. UN Volunteers does not feature in our 2021 index (they have largely replaced their internships with funded volunteers since 2019), and UNRWA remains in the 'Poor' range. However, UN-Women and UNDP—both of which have introduced stipends for interns since the publication of the 2019 index—have seen considerable improvements in their scores: UN-Women jumped from the 'Poor' to the 'Good' range and has risen 13 places in the ranking; while UNDP has rocketed into the 'Very Good' range, rising 17 places to rank 2nd overall.
- On the other hand, UNESCO was in the 'Mediocre' range in 2019 but has slipped down to the 'Poor' range in 2021. The only other programme to move down a grade



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

level as compared with its 2019 results is FAO which has slipped from ‘Good’ to ‘Mediocre’, while conversely WHO, UNICEF, and UNIDO have moved up from ‘Mediocre’ to ‘Good’.

- While in 2019 no UN internship programme received an overall score in the ‘Very Good’ range, in 2021 both ILO³ and UNDP cleared the threshold for this level. ILO already topped the ranking in 2019 and should be commended for continuing to lead the way in the implementation of quality standards, while recognising that they still have room for improvement. UNDP’s radical transformation from ‘Poor’ to ‘Very Good’ in the space of 2 years sets a strong example for other UN entities and proves that where there’s a will, there really is a way.
- It is worth noting that a grade of ‘Very Good’ merely means that an internship programme is close to having implemented all of the measures recommended by the JIU in order to create inclusive internship programmes that are aligned with the core values and mandates of the United Nations, and are mutually beneficial to interns and to the organisation. In the FII’s view this ought to be considered a **fundamental** standard for internship programmes within the UN system to meet, and every programme ought to be scoring five out of five.

³ It is important to note that some internship programmes, including that of ILO, were suspended in response to the COVID19 pandemic. Scores could still be computed for some of the programmes that were suspended because the 2021 intern survey includes responses from interns who completed their internships as far back as January 2020. None of the respondents from ILO started their internships later than March 2020, and this should be kept in mind when comparing to UN internship programmes that continued recruiting interns throughout the pandemic, e.g. UNDP. That said, most of the questions used in the index pertain to the formal procedures, policies, and mechanisms in place, as opposed to more qualitative or subjective aspects of the internship experience which would be more likely to be affected by the exceptional conditions of the pandemic.

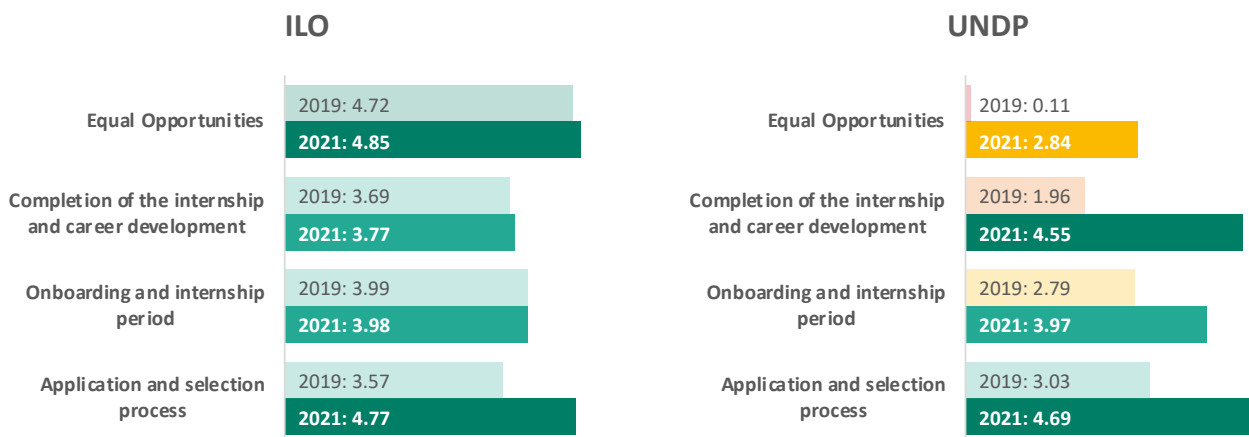


UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

FURTHER ANALYSIS AND BREAKDOWN OF SCORES

To facilitate a comprehensive view of the performance of different programmes with regards to the four JIU benchmark assessment areas (please see the Annex for their full specification), the charts in this section show for each programme the breakdown of scores across these four areas, both based on the 2019 survey results and the 2021 survey results.

Very Good Overall: ILO and UNDP



The top-ranked organisation in the 2019 index was **ILO**, which once again is the highest scoring organisation overall in the 2021 index.

Between 2019 and 2021, ILO’s grade has improved from ‘Good’ to ‘Very Good’ in the area of Application & Selection Process, such that it is now the organisation with the highest score in this individual benchmark area as well as the highest score in the area of Equal Opportunities.

However, it is important to note that ILO’s “2021” scores pertain to internships which began no later than March 2020, since ILO suspended its recruitment of interns due to the COVID19 pandemic.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

One organisation that did not suspend its internship programme during the pandemic is **UNDP**, which ranks second overall in the 2021 index; a meteoric rise from its position of 19th out of 22 in the 2019 ranking.

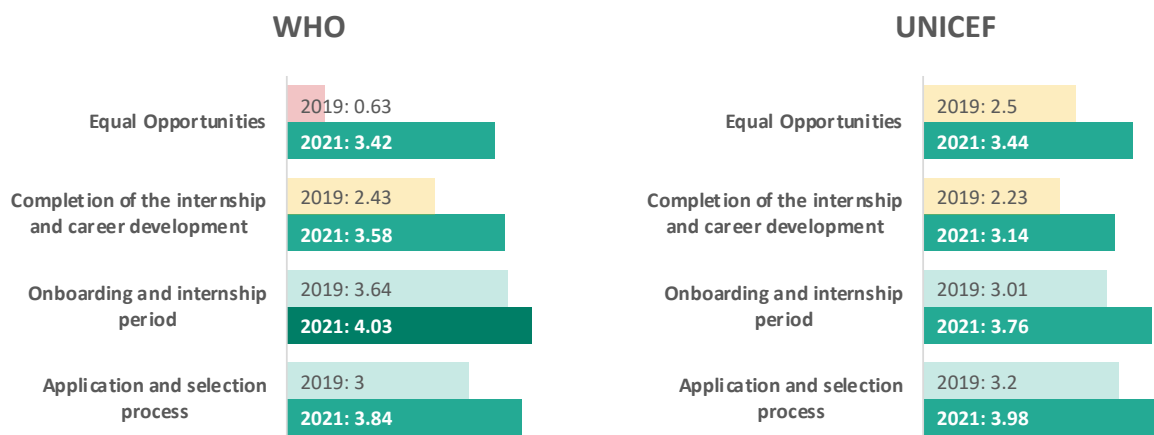
Since 2019, UNDP has introduced stipends for all interns and reformed its internship program as part of its wider “People for 2030” strategy to progressively transform its people management capabilities and systems ([UNDP, 2022](#)).

Between our 2019 and 2021 surveys, UNDP has dramatically improved its scores not just in Equal Opportunities but across all four of the JIU benchmark assessment areas, clearly indicating that their reforms have had a positive impact on the quality of internships at UNDP.

Good Overall: WIPO, IOM, WHO, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNHCR, UN Women, WFP, UNIDO

Of the eighteen organisations assessed in our 2021 index, nine received overall scores in the ‘Good’ range.

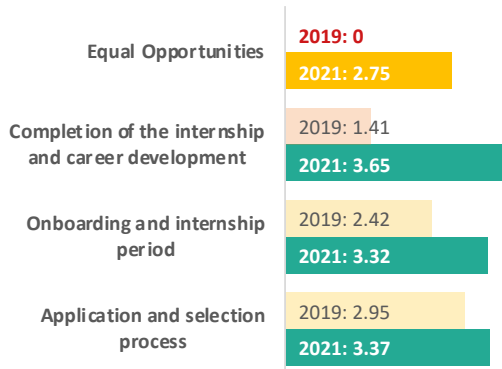
These notably include **WHO**, **UNICEF**, and **UN Women**, each of which have introduced stipends for interns since the 2019 index.





UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

UN Women



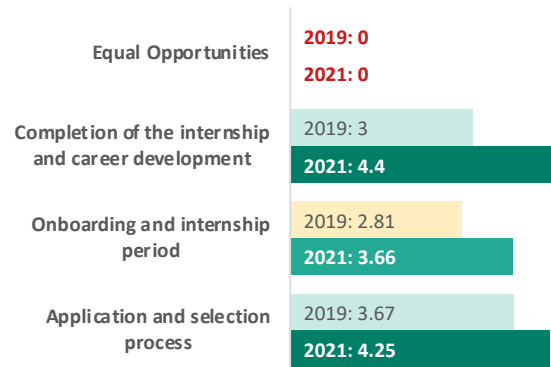
In 2019 WHO and UNICEF both were graded ‘Mediocre’ overall, while UN Women was at the very bottom of the ranking and graded ‘Poor’ overall.

A comparison of the 2019 and 2021 results by benchmark area for these three organisations point to substantial improvements across the board, and not only with respect to Equal Opportunities as a direct result of stipends.

These results along with those of UNDP suggest that the introduction of stipends tends to go hand in hand with greater commitments to implement other measures that ensure internship programmes are mutually valuable investments for the intern and the organisation alike.

Credit is also due to **UNIDO**, which has risen from ‘Mediocre’ to ‘Good’ overall by improving its scores considerably across three out of four benchmark areas, though it is regrettable that since UNIDO still does not provide stipends at the time of writing, its relatively high quality internship programme remains inaccessible to those without the financial means to support themselves.

UNIDO

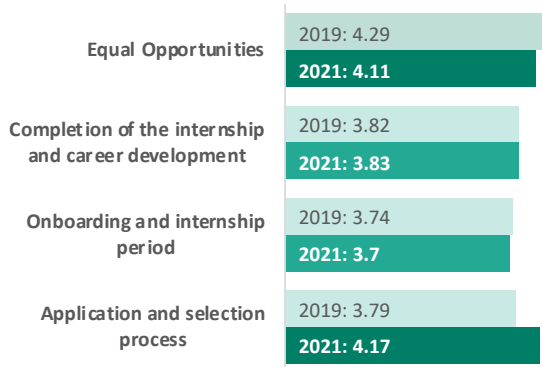


Falling just short of a ‘Very Good’ grade overall and taking third place in the ranking is **WIPO**, whose scores have remained stable since the 2019 index, with improvements in the benchmark area of Application and Selection Process sufficient to cross the threshold for a ‘Very Good’ grade in this area.

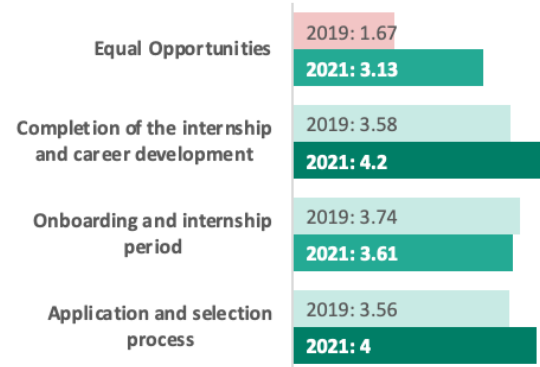


UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

WIPO

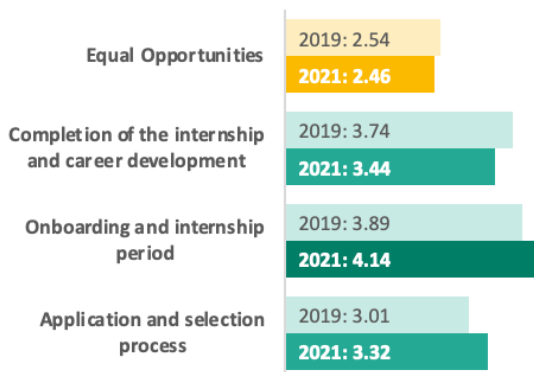


IOM



Meanwhile, **IOM** has moved up in the ranking from 7th to 4th place, having improved particularly in the area of Equal Opportunities, and having gained scores in the ‘Very Good’ range for both Application & Selection Process and Completion of the Internship & Career Development.

UNHCR



Though **UNOPS**, **UNHCR** and **WFP** have all been surpassed in the ranking by the reformed WHO and UNDP programs as well as by IOM, it is worth noting that UNHCR’s is now the best-scoring UN internship program in the assessment area of Onboarding & Internship Period.

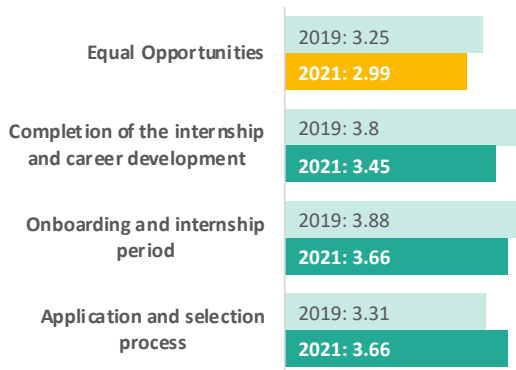
Their consistently ‘Good’ overall scores suggest that the internship programmes at

UNOPS, UNHCR, and WFP can be positive and valuable experiences for those who can afford to undertake them, but all three still have ample room to improve in the area of Equal Opportunities by making these quality internship experiences more equitably accessible through the provision of stipends that are truly adequate to cover interns’ costs of living at their duty stations.

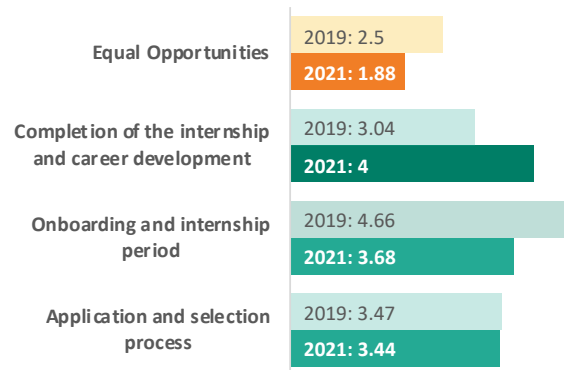


UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

UNOPS

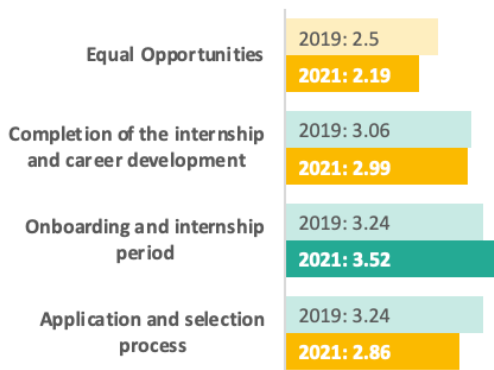


WFP



Mediocre Overall: FAO, ITU, IAEA, ICC, UN Secretariat

FAO

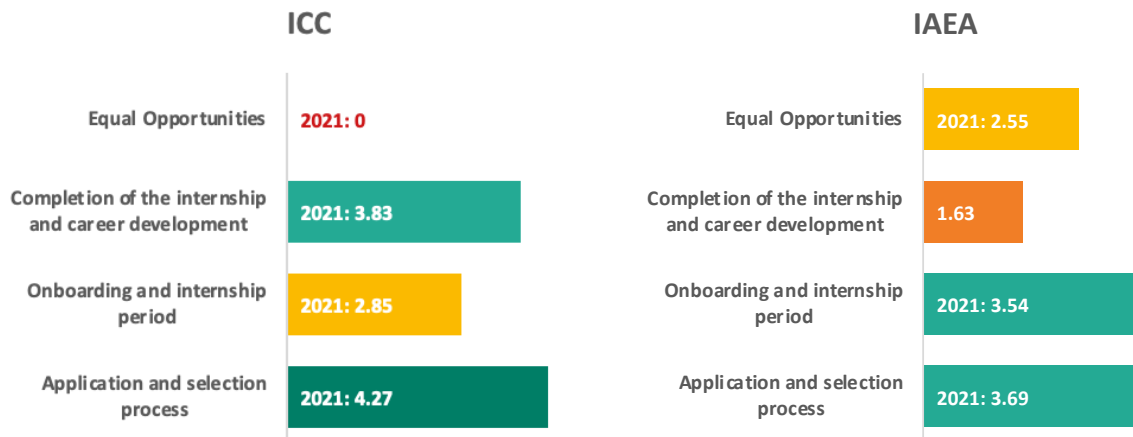


FAO is one of only two organisations that have moved down a grade level between the 2019 and 2021 survey exercises. A marginal improvement in the benchmark area of Onboarding and internship period is not sufficient to outweigh slight deteriorations in the other three benchmark areas, which together have brought FAO's overall score down across the threshold from the 'Good' to the 'Mediocre' range.

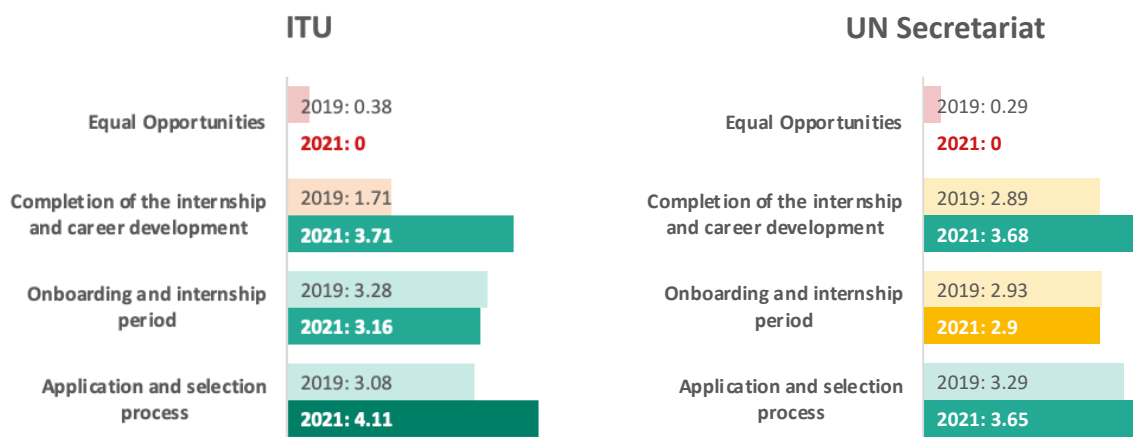
As well as FAO, four other organisations received overall 2021 scores in the 'Mediocre' range.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021



ICC and **IAEA** did not feature in the 2019 index since we did not receive enough responses to our survey in that year from interns at these organisations. Their 2021 scores are a mixed bag: ICC is in the ‘Very Good’ range for Application & Selection Process, but scores zero for Equal Opportunities; while IAEA fares comparatively much better in Equal Opportunities since it does provide some financial support to interns, but scores in the ‘Poor’ range for Completion of the Internship & Career Development.



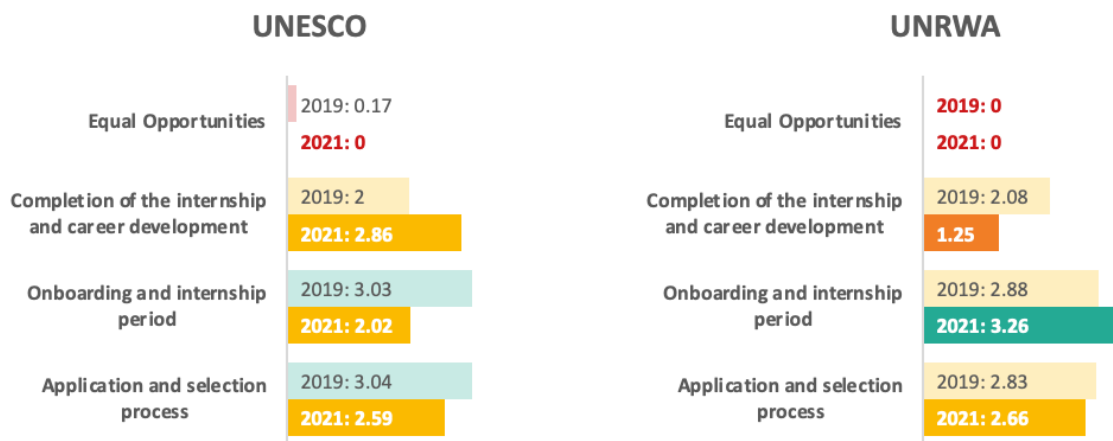
ITU and the **UN Secretariat** both scored in the ‘Mediocre’ range overall in 2019 and have remained there in 2021.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

Though both organisations have improved their scores in the areas of Application & Selection Process and Completion of the Internship & Career Development, despite these welcome improvements their overall grades have not increased due to their continued failure to provide allowances to interns to assist with basic subsistence costs.

Poor Overall: UNESCO and UNRWA



UNESCO scored in the 'Mediocre' range overall in 2019, but dropped down to the 'Poor' range in 2021, with reductions in its scores across three out of four benchmark areas⁴.

Finally, the lowest scoring overall of the 18 organisations that were included in the 2021 index is **UNRWA**, which in the 2019 index was also near the bottom of the ranking and graded 'Poor' overall. It is disappointing to see that UNRWA and UNESCO have made little progress since 2019.

⁴ Though ITU, the UN Secretariat, and UNESCO had non-zero scores for the Equal Opportunities assessment area in 2019 and scored zero in 2021, the wording of one of the relevant questions differed in the 2019 and 2021 surveys: in 2019 interns were asked if their organisations provided stipends or discounts, while in the 2021 survey the question referred only to stipends. Therefore, the reduction in their scores for Equal Opportunities should not be considered to indicate a *deterioration* of their performance in this assessment area, but 'merely' a lack of improvement.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

The Fair Internship urges those organisations which have received ‘Poor’ and ‘Mediocre’ grades to reform their internship programmes, and we hope that they will take inspiration from the fact that UN Women has gone from a ‘Poor’ overall grade at the very bottom of the 2019 ranking to a ‘Good’ grade in the top half of the 2021 ranking; while UNDP has gone from ‘Poor’ overall and fourth-from-bottom to ‘Very Good’ and second best. These remarkable transformations prove that change is possible with the necessary political will and leadership.

We are encouraged that the proportion of UN organisations graded at least ‘Good’ overall has risen from 36% (8/22) in the 2019 index to 61% (11/18) in the 2021 index. We hope that those organisations which have received ‘Good’ grades will take note of the fact that ILO, which already topped the ranking in 2019, has seen its score improve enough to upgrade from ‘Good’ to ‘Very Good’. This shows that there is still plenty of scope for those in the top half of the ranking to continue progressively reforming their programmes in line with the recommendations and benchmarks identified in the 2018 JIU report on internships.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

ANNEX: SPECIFICATION OF THE ASSESSMENT AREAS BY JIU BENCHMARK

Applications and selection process

1. Organisations should ensure that applicants are informed about the status of their applications in real time.
2. The selection process should include an interview and, when relevant, a written test. The selection process should be coherent across organisations. Interns should be informed no later than a month after the completion of the interview about the final decision and be given reasonable time to start their internship.
3. Support to interns for administrative purposes related to travel and visa requirements should be provided.

Onboarding and internship period

4. Organisations should provide the intern with an induction package upon arrival, ensure a meeting with the supervisor and clear terms of reference (TOR). TOR should include the learning component of the internship and specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound indicators for the final evaluation.
5. Organisations should prepare generic guidelines for supervisors and mentors as well as midterm and end-of-cycle forms for the evaluation of interns' performance.
6. Organisations should ensure that interns have access to support mechanisms to assist them in the event of abuse or conflict situations during their internships.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

7. Annual leave and sick leave entitlements for interns should be explicitly mentioned in the internship agreements.
8. Interns' professionalism should be recognised by facilitating decent working conditions, such as by providing office space and a regular desk, a corporate computer and a personalised email address. Interns should be systematically registered, upon arrival, in the records of the organisation so as to be included in the event of an emergency evacuation.
9. At least one training opportunity should be provided to interns holding a contract of three months or more.

Completion of the internship and career development

10. At the end of the internship, a performance evaluation of the intern should be undertaken by the supervisor. An attestation letter and/or a certificate should be issued.
12. Interns should be requested to fill out, on a voluntary basis, an evaluation form (common to all organisations) about their internship experience to help internship programs evolve.
13. Internship periods in the UN system should be valued as working experience for former interns, and considered as such for any future application within the UN system.
14. Internship programmes in the United Nations system should be accessible to all candidates that meet the eligibility criteria, giving equal opportunities to all.
15. Organisations of the system should eliminate the mandatory break in service for interns and allow them to apply at any time to open positions for which they may qualify.



UN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME QUALITY INDEX 2021

Equal opportunities (alignment with UN values)

16. Organisations should establish suitable mechanisms to facilitate the availability of resources to cover the living expenditures of interns, such as project resources, ad hoc trust funds and partnerships, with no strings attached. Budget lines and annual reporting of expenditures should be established to monitor the costs related to internships, bearing in mind that each hosting department should provide for the cost of its interns.