

The Human Face of Aid

**A study of recruitment by international relief
and development organisations in the UK**

**INTERNATIONAL HEALTH EXCHANGE
and
PEOPLE IN AID**

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PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to describe the number of people employed by UK aid agencies in the UK and developing countries and to present a picture of the professions of expatriate staff.

The study was carried out by the charity International Health Exchange and People in Aid, a project formed by a group of aid agencies working to ensure best practice in the recruitment and management of aid personnel. Both are involved in recruitment and training and were surprised to find an absence of data on recruitment by the UK aid sector as a whole. This study investigated:

- the number of people employed by UK aid agencies and working within the UK
- the number of indigenous country staff employed by UK aid agencies
- the number of expatriate appointments made by UK aid agencies in 1995 and the type and length of contracts offered
- the professions of expatriate staff
- future likely demand for staff in the UK, and in developing countries

Questionnaire

A four-page questionnaire was devised and piloted with a small sample group. Following revision it was sent in June 1996 to 153 agencies (see definitions) identified from available directories and lists. The agencies were asked a range of questions relating to the employment of UK staff and/or volunteers, expatriates and indigenous country staff, during their previous financial year. 116 organisations responded to the survey - a response rate of 76%.

Definitions

Aid agency an 'aid agency' is defined as a voluntary sector organisation based in the UK providing long-term development, humanitarian relief and/or support for general or specific overseas aid programmes. The exception was the Overseas Development Administration, which was also included. Private consultancy groups and universities were excluded, although it is acknowledged that a significant number of personnel are employed by them for aid programmes.

Expatriates are those not working in their own countries, including overseas volunteers.

Volunteer (overseas) refers to workers who receive accommodation, airfares and an allowance.

This study focuses on the people working for human development in Third World countries. It is the first of its kind to describe overseas aid in terms of the human investment in developing countries made by UK relief and development organisations:

- more than 63,900 people were working for UK aid agencies last year in the UK and in developing countries - the majority were indigenous country staff:

58% indigenous country staff

14% expatriate posts

22% UK staff

6% UK volunteers

- there was a total of 8,915 expatriate posts, with 2,603 expatriates recruited last year
- expatriate staff are skilled, experienced people, recruited for their expertise in a wide range of fields
- health professionals were the largest expatriate group appointed
- volunteers made up one fifth of the UK workforce

Aid agencies working to improve the lives of people in countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe and other regions are doing so in an increasingly complex environment. As our study shows, almost half the 116 agencies who responded are now working in humanitarian relief as well as for long-term development. At the same time, standards of performance are under the spotlight, with aid agencies attempting to ensure high quality assistance with fewer resources.

In this context, the need to recruit the right people has become all the more important. The study shows that aid agencies seek skilled and specialised people from a wide range of professional backgrounds - from health, engineering, agriculture and social work through to community and institutional development and disability rights, to name but a few.

With agencies receiving over 3,000 enquiries *per week* about work opportunities, there is clearly huge public interest in helping developing countries. Yet a third of the aid agencies were unable to fill 372 posts. The problem appears to be that the help offered by people interested in working overseas is often not the right kind.

THE HUMAN FACE OF AID - SUMMARY

Clearly, more needs to be done to inform the public about actual recruitment needs, so as to encourage those with the right kind of experience to apply.

This study takes a first step towards describing the rich diversity of people working for overseas aid. Its underlying message is that the people working for aid organisations are their most valuable resource: it is they, in their day to day work, who turn humanitarian values into action. We hope that the study will stimulate aid agencies to work together to ensure that those working for them are as effective as possible in a challenging and fast-changing world.

Isobel McConnan
International Health Exchange

RESULTS

Types of Agencies

Agencies were asked to define their broad area of work. Almost all reported that they are working for long-term development, but a significant number are also working in humanitarian relief:

- 50% (58) of the agencies said they worked only in long-term development
- 39% (45) said they worked in both development and humanitarian relief
- 8% (9) of the agencies reported working only in humanitarian relief
- 3% (4) organisations said they provided advice or support to other agencies but were not directly involved themselves

Posts in the UK and in Developing Countries

Overall, there were 63,948 people working for the 116 aid agencies who responded to the survey.

RESULTS

Expatriate posts

The agencies in our survey stated they had a total of 8,915 positions for expatriates last year - in other words, 14% of all staff.

Views on the likely demand for expatriate personnel over the next five years appear to be fairly evenly divided. An increase in demand is expected by 32% of agencies, while 38% expect no change. 23% of respondents thought that fewer would be needed, and 7% of agencies did not express a view.

Last year the majority of agencies (51 out of 75 agencies responding to this section) recruited people for their first assignment overseas.

Expatriate appointments in 1995

Agencies were also asked how many expatriate appointments they made in 1995 and to describe the professions of the people recruited. The picture that emerges is one of a diverse range of skilled and specialised people, with expertise in many different fields.

Overall, 2,603 people were appointed, with six groups standing out in particular:

- health professionals (729) were the single largest group, accounting for 28% of all appointments
- managers, administrators and logisticians (682) represent 26% of the total
- teachers and trainers (325) account for a further 12%

followed by:

- engineers (124), transport personnel (42), and religious ministers (25)

675 other specialists and advisers with expertise in a further 19 fields were also appointed:

agriculture	institutional development
building	legal
business development	literacy
community development	media
disability rights	mine clearance
environment	security
evaluation and research	social work
family tracing	translation
forestry	veterinary
government	

RESULTS

However, the specialist nature of many posts has meant that some agencies experienced difficulty in finding the right person for the job: 36 organisations were unable to fill a further 372 posts.

A number of agencies said that posts for doctors, nurses and health visitors were particularly difficult to fill, as were posts for programme and country managers.

Further comments

Several respondents commented on the problems they encounter when recruiting expatriate staff:

“We can’t offer competitive salaries for technical posts, so it is difficult to attract qualified and experienced professionals.”

“It’s difficult to find professionals whose domestic arrangements allow them to go overseas - many have family or financial commitments.”

“We find there’s a shortage of professionals with an additional language (eg French for Rwanda or Haiti).”

Other problems mentioned included the difficulty of recruiting staff for less secure locations, and finding well-qualified people for posts at short notice.

Enquiries about working in developing countries

There appears to be a wide gap between public perceptions of the kind of people sought by aid agencies and the level of skills and experience actually needed.

Aid agencies receive a huge number of enquiries from people interested in working in developing countries: a total of 3,022 enquiries were received *each week* by 100 agencies, with one aid agency receiving a third of all these.

Several agencies commented that enquiries are mostly from people without the right kind of experience. As one respondent said:

“There is still a perception that organisations want unskilled volunteers - the vast majority of enquiries we receive are from people with no relevant professional skills or qualifications.”

RESULTS

Indigenous country staff

Many agencies stated that they will always, or where possible, recruit indigenous country staff before recruiting expatriates, as the following respondents commented,

“We have a world-wide policy only to recruit indigenous staff in the countries in which we work.”

“We intend to increase our local in-country staff base and withdraw expatriate management.”

This approach is reflected in the high proportion of indigenous country staff working for aid agencies: 36,968 in total accounting for 58% of all employees.

Asked about anticipated demand for indigenous country staff over the next five years, nearly half the agencies (46%) said that they thought demand would increase, while 34% did not expect any change. Just 9% of the agencies thought fewer indigenous country staff would be needed; 11% did not give an opinion.

UK-based staff

In the UK there were 18,065 people (28% of all staff) working in paid employment or as volunteers in support of long-term development or humanitarian relief.

Volunteers play an important role, accounting for one fifth of all UK staff.

Anticipated demand for UK staff over the next five years was as follows: 44% of agencies anticipated an increase in numbers of UK staff, while 43% expect no change. 10% thought the number would decrease and 3% did not know.

A third (29) of the aid agencies responding did not employ any staff overseas. This group either provide services to other agencies or work in a supportive capacity with project partners. These agencies employed just 618 staff and rely strongly on the services of 279 volunteers.

Contracts for expatriate staff

Agencies employing expatriates offered three different kinds of contract: ‘volunteer’, ‘salaried’ and ‘consultancy’, with some offering more than one type of contract.

Fifty agencies said that they offered salaried contracts, while volunteer contracts were provided by 39 organisations. Twenty five offered consultancies. Expatriates are generally employed for periods of six months to two years. Most agencies (78 out of 87 responding to this section) said they are looking for people for one to two years, while 30 agencies offer contracts of six to twelve months. As may be expected, many agencies said they offer more than one standard length of contract.

CONCLUSION

This study is a first attempt to describe the number of people working in the UK aid sector. This has been no easy task given the enormous variety of organisations involved, from the tiniest voluntary group through to the largest and most well-known charities, each with its own mandate.

The study raises questions which warrant further exploration for example:

- Indigenous country staff are a large and growing part of the aid sector - we need to know more about who they are and what their needs are.
- Given the demand for qualified, experienced expatriate staff, how can we ensure that demand is met?
- Is it through more competitive contracts or through ease of information about working overseas that experienced professionals will be attracted to this type of work?

Further studies are necessary to identify future trends in recruitment, shortfalls in the professions required and to assist planning for the training, recruitment and development of all staff.

International Health Exchange (IHE)

IHE is a charity helping to provide appropriately trained health personnel for programmes in developing countries. IHE runs a register of health workers, provides short courses for those who plan to work overseas and publishes the jobs and development magazine, *The Health Exchange*.

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People in Aid

The People in Aid project is an inter-agency initiative aiming to improve the effectiveness of relief and development through a *Code of Best Practice in the Recruitment and Management of Aid Personnel*.

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