

# VfS Workshop for early career researchers on “Careers outside Academia: regulatory agencies and international organizations”

**Workshop date & location: September 14, 2025, Annual Meeting of the VfS @U Cologne**

## Workshop announcement:

The VfS has a long tradition of and strong commitment to promoting the careers of young researchers. This workshop aims to provide information about career opportunities outside of universities, where economists face a rich set of possible employment opportunities. Leveraging this year's conference location in Cologne, this workshop focuses on a subset of potential employers: regulatory agencies and international organizations. Together with selected experts, the workshop participants will identify the most important questions and answers about career paths at these employers. The format is interactive and all participants are expected to make oral and written contributions before, during and after the VfS meeting.

Target Audience:      Doctoral students, post-docs, and junior professors

Organised by:          Florian Englmaier (LMU Munich) & Georg Weizsäcker (HU Berlin)

## Content of report:

<b>Working group 1: BEFORE ENTRY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Working group 2: AT ENTRY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Working group 3: POST ENTRY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Participants</b>	<b>8</b>
Members Working Group 1: BEFORE ENTRY	8
Members Working Group 2: AT ENTRY	8
Members Working Group 3: POST ENTRY	9

# Working Group 1: BEFORE ENTRY

**Lead question: How should I build my career and my human capital, to be competitive?**

## Summary

This working group discussed strategies for building a competitive career in regulatory agencies and international organizations, focusing on human capital development and career planning.

### Hard Skills

- **Programming & Analytical Skills:**  
Proficiency in programming languages (e.g., Python, R) and technical skills in econometrics, statistics, and data analysis are often crucial. Which skills exactly are required is highly job-specific. For many jobs, you will need to collaborate with experts from other disciplines. So openness to other research approaches and good communication skills are essential. Also brush up on your Excel and Powerpoint skills!
- **Drafting & Communication:**  
Ability to clearly structure, communicate, and present complex topics in non-academic language is essential. This includes both drafting documents and presentations. Practicing concise writing for non-experts (e.g., 1-2-page briefs containing both problem and solution). The skill to explain technical content to diverse audiences (e.g., policy-makers, colleagues with different backgrounds) is highly valued – practice by explaining your PhD research to family and friends. Get feedback on your presentation skills!
- **AI & Digital Tools:**  
As AI automates some data tasks, familiarity with relevant AI tools and their productive application is increasingly important. However, analytical skills, problem solving skills and logical thinking skills are what makes you valuable.

### Soft Skills

- **Communication & Teamwork:**  
Strong communication and collaboration skills can be demonstrated already in your CV: Internships, coauthored work, and collaborative projects serve as evidence of teamwork and people skills.
- **Leadership, Management, & Entrepreneurship:**  
Teaching experience, team organization (such as managing RAs), or managing research/funding projects show leadership and managerial ability. Frame independent research as entrepreneurial—you have succeeded in identifying topics, advocating for your ideas, and securing resources. Be specific in highlighting these aspects in your CV.

- **Interdisciplinary Competence:**  
Participation in interdisciplinary programs or projects is a valuable asset. Show that you will be able to collaborate with lawyers, engineers, political scientists, etc..
- **Languages:**  
Language skills are important. For international organisations, fluency in English is a must, but consider learning other languages as well (for example through research stays or collaborations).

#### Academic Profile

- **Publication Record:**  
In most public/international organizations, the quantity or quality of academic publications is relevant only for a few specialized roles—practical skills and experience are decisive.
- **Field-Specific Knowledge:**  
Some roles require specific field knowledge and, generally, applied skills are most relevant. For international organizations, a broad understanding of macro and micro econ theory alongside applied skills can be useful.

#### Policy Profile

- **Policy Communication:**  
Publishing policy briefs, blog posts, or similar outputs demonstrates policy orientation and communication skills.
- **Internships & Practical Engagement:**  
Internships (when feasible) signal applied skills, teamwork, and project experience. Alternative forms of engagement, such as founding initiatives or communicating economics to the public, can substitute for internships.
- **Political/NGO Involvement:**  
Experience in political parties or NGOs can be valuable; if showing it on the CV runs the danger of showing political ideology/leanings, you might want to frame it in more abstract terms.

#### Junior Professional Officer Program

- The JPO program was mentioned as a great opportunity offered by the German government for getting into International Organizations after the PhD. It finances the position for up to 3 years, offers career training at the start, and gives access to a large network.  
[JPO-Programm: Stellenausschreibungen 2025 | Bundesagentur für Arbeit](#)

# Working Group 2: AT ENTRY

**Lead question: How does the application process work – how do I get in?**

## Summary

This working group focused on the practicalities of the application process, including prerequisites, selection criteria, and interview preparation.

Familiarize yourself with the application processes (very) early on

- Familiarize yourself with the hiring structure of the organization early on: Some organizations may be closely connected to academia and hire through the academic job market, while others have their own recruitment programs or post vacancies as they arise.
- Check for deadlines if applicable (e.g. program applications). Particularly for structured programs, they may only hire on a yearly basis and the deadlines may be earlier than you expect. Some institutions may require applications almost a year before you will start with the job. Others may have structured programs or hire constantly throughout the year. If this is the case, depending on the organization, you may even want to send an unsolicited application.
- Find out at which stage your target organizations are hiring and what is applicable to you. Some may only hire at the junior level, while at some point, you may be too 'senior' for a junior program. Others may have different job openings.

Signal relevant skills in the application material (CV, cover letter, letter)

- Clear, simple and concise communication (oral and verbal) seems to be key in all jobs. This can be conveyed in the application material in the way the cover letter is written and how the CV is structured. Highlight relevant skills (see also below) and publications that may be relevant to the organization but cover the others only briefly, if at all. If you have an R&R for a paper relevant to a close-to-academic organization, highlight it. For most organizations, publications may not be relevant unless it speaks to the job content. Include in the material whatever example of relevant communication skills you have, e.g., policy briefs, blog(s) articles, podcasts. Programming skills seem relevant, so highlight these, too.
- Highlight also any non-obvious skills that are relevant: Your research may involve project management skills – i.e., leadership skills – if you, for example, work with RAs. Presenting research or teaching makes you give talks in front of large audiences. Most likely, you have worked in teams: Social skills and teamwork are important to any organization and it may not be obvious to practitioners that you have developed these skills. Point them out in your CV and cover letter.
- Your recommendation letters should also highlight these skills. Your supervisors may not be aware of the relevant skills or how to sell them. You may be able to write a draft of the relevant passages / ask for changes in your recommendation letter.

- Highlight maternal leaves and kids: In some structured application forms you may be asked within the form. It is recommended to put them on your CV. A typical location for this information is near your birth date and / or marital status. If you list a maternity leave, include the time period.

#### Prepare for the Interview

- Find your “narrative”: What motivates you (on a broader level), how does this all fit together? Particularly: why are you leaving academia, but why did doing the PhD still make sense? Phrase all of these things in a positive way, as far as possible.
- Familiarize yourself with the job and the institution: Read their latest publications / any form of output they may produce, if applicable. What are legal frameworks that may be relevant? Is there an ORG chart that you can look at? Depending on the organization, it may help to find links to someone and contact them via email.
- Practice talking about your research in an easy way. You can do this by talking to your non-academic friends or family. Being able to convey the relevance and broader implication for society is key (‘why should we care?’).
- Aim to convince the audience that you have all the relevant skills for a job outside of academia. The interview is your chance to showcase your communication skills (e.g., by talking about your research in an easy way - see above) but also your social skills.

# Working Group 3: POST ENTRY

**Lead question: What can I expect once inside, and what are the long-term career prospects?**

## Summary

This working group discussed the typical experiences and career trajectories within regulatory agencies and international organizations.

### Entry Phase:

- Some organizations offer junior-professional or trainee rotations, typically lasting around 6–18 months and involving work across several departments. However, PhD holders are often overqualified for this and may apply directly for specialist roles.
- Formal, structured onboarding is rare. Instead, newcomers are paired with mentors or buddies and learn primarily through on-the-job training and project-based collaboration.
- New hires are expected to adapt quickly. Within roughly 6–12 months, they are generally treated as fully contributing members of their teams.

### Work Activities/Transferable Skills:

- Clear communication is paramount throughout your job tenure: explaining complex economic concepts in precise, accessible language for policymakers, interdisciplinary colleagues, and the public.
- Analytical depth and the ability to “dig deep” into specific questions remain highly valuable.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration – working with lawyers, auditors, and experts from other fields – is frequent.
- In most roles, broad analytical and communication abilities matter most; narrow technical skills are less critical. In research-oriented roles, rigorous empirical methods and coding (e.g., Stata, Python, Matlab, simulation tools) can be directly applicable.
- Day-to-day activities vary widely across departments and agencies. New hires must quickly adapt to each organization’s processes, data systems, and policy priorities.

### Work Culture and Structure:

- Work is highly team-oriented and often interdisciplinary, bringing together economists, lawyers, engineers, and other specialists. Collaboration and cross-team creativity are central to most projects.
- Organizational structures are generally hierarchical, which can be a problem, but the level of hierarchy experienced day-to-day depends greatly on the supervisor and team culture.

- Some organizations and units are shifting toward project-based workflows, which reduce formal hierarchy and provide more autonomy.
- In many roles you will be assigned specific problems to solve.
- If you are in a dedicated researcher role, this may give you greater freedom to define questions within broad policy topics.
- New hires can quickly become the go-to expert on their subject area, gaining influence as they demonstrate expertise and build trust within their teams.

#### Work-Life Balance:

- Work-life balance is generally better than during a PhD, with clearer boundaries and more predictable schedules.
- Standard workweeks are often around 40–41 hours. Some departments follow a classic 9–5 rhythm, while others experience cyclical busy periods with occasional overtime or even long periods of high workload – especially for those pursuing rapid career advancement.
- Overtime is usually monitored and in some settings can be offset later, though formal compensation policies vary.
- Collaborative, team-based work adds variety and can make the job more creative and enjoyable, avoiding the danger of being isolated.
- Some organizations offer practical assistance such as help with childcare or finding schools, contributing to a more supportive environment for employees with families.

#### Career Progression:

- New hires often start in junior economist roles. Both permanent and multi-year temporary contracts are common. Civil-service-style roles may offer strong job security, while temporary contracts can still provide a pathway to long-term employment. Some international organizations have competitive entry processes for permanent positions that can take one to two years so early application is required.
- A typical path leads to an economist role after 3–5 years and a first managerial or team-lead position within about 5–10 years, provided that solid performance and management skills are demonstrated.
- Early promotions are generally merit-based and relatively predictable, often involving automatic step increases or clearly defined criteria.
- Advancement beyond mid-level management becomes more competitive and selective, sometimes influenced by internal politics.
- Optional management and leadership programs help identify and prepare employees for higher-level responsibilities but are separate from initial onboarding.

# Participants

## Members Working Group 1: BEFORE ENTRY

Expert: Dr. Robert Grundke (OECD)

Coordinator: Anina Harter (Hertie School)

Members: Jakob Alfitian (MPI for Research on Collective Goods); Daniel Altenburger (TU Dresden); Janete Bach (GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften); Daniel Bruns (Leibniz University Hannover); Jonathan Deist (Halle Institute for Economic Research (IWH)); Stephan Eitel (Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg); Ximeng Fang (University of Oxford); Katia Gallegos Torres (IAB - Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung, Nuremberg); Sebastian Hartmann (VfS-Abiturpreis Wirtschaft 2025); Thilo K.G. Haverkamp (University of Kassel); Yasemin Karamik (ZEW Mannheim and TU Munich); Noah Kögel (PIK – Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research); Felix Kölle (University of Cologne); Marina Krauß (University of Augsburg); Joscha Krug (ZEW – Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research & University of Mannheim); Sarah McNamara (ZEW); Benedetta Muraro (University of Cologne); Carina Neisser (University of Cologne); Fidel Petros (WZB Berlin and BSoE – Berlin School of Economics); Prasanta Kumar Roy (Helmut-Schmidt Universität Hamburg); Alessandro Sardone (IWH – Halle Institute for Economic Research); Victor Smirnov (Technische Hochschule Mittelhessen); Alexander Speckenheuer (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen); Franziska Strunz (University of the Bundeswehr Munich); Simon Voss (Freie Universität Berlin); Pablo Zarate (ZEW and University of Mannheim)

## Members Working group 2: AT ENTRY

Expert: Dr. Thomas Müller (Bundesnetzagentur)

Coordinators: Dr. Nathalie Römer (WU Vienna)

Members: Josephine Baako-Amponsah (University of Bayreuth); Frauke Baumeister (ifo Institute); Simon Johannes Bolz (TU Dresden); Sophie Bürgin (University of Basel); Konrad Doliesen (IW Köln & Hertie School); Stohler Fabio (University of Bonn); Johann Fuchs (KOF Swiss Economic Institute, ETH Zurich); Katja Gehr (University of Würzburg); David Gstrein (ifo Institute); Jonas Klärchen (TU Braunschweig); Daniel Klinker (Ulm University); Kumai Kokash (University of Kassel); Linus Kraft (University of Würzburg); Sebastian Kunz (University of Regensburg); Piotr Paweł Larysz (Freie Universität Berlin); Timothy Meyer (Kiel Institute for the World Economy, University of Bonn); Sophia Möller (University of Kassel); Dmytro Oksak (VfS-Abiturpreis Wirtschaft 2025); Pia Pico (University of Kassel); Erik Sarrazin (University of Mainz); Philip Schacht-Picozzi (RWI – Leibniz Institute for Economic Research); Alexander Sohl (Ruhr-Universität Bochum); Florian Stich (University of Basel); Iris Stornik (University of Bonn); Konstantinos Theocharopoulos (University of Siegen); Sebastian Vogler (Leibniz Institute for Educational Trajectories, Germany); Leonie Wicht (IAB – Institute for Employment Research); Pascal Zamorski (ifo Institute)



## Members Working Group 3: POST ENTRY

Expert: Dr. Susanne Hoffmann (EU Commission)

Coordinators: Dr. Raphael Brade (ifo Institut)

Members: Ataberk Atan (TU Dresden); Assme Ben Akil (University of Cologne); Lea Best (ifo Institute & LMU Munich); Sarah Fritz (IWH); Vanessa Graf (VfS-Abiturpreis Wirtschaft 2025); Florian Hack (IAB & FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg); Leandro Henao (RWI); Nils Christian Hoenow (RWI); Till Horstmann (FernUniversität in Hagen); Cankut Kuzlukluoglu (HU Berlin, WZB & BSoE); Jakob Lehr (University of Mannheim); Daniel Lücke (Justus-Liebig-University Giessen); Anna Mader (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen); Laurenz Marstaller (University of Bonn); Alexander Mayer (University of Bayreuth); Benedetta Muraro (University of Cologne); Giang Nghiem (Leibniz University Hannover); Eunseong Park (ZEW and University of Mannheim); Lukas Pohn (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg); Matthias Reich (VfS-Abiturpreis Wirtschaft 2025); Max Schäfer (University of Duisburg-Essen); Jana Schuetz (Jönköping University); Anton Sobolev (University of Mannheim); Leonhard Spaeth-Rodas (Kiel University); Bruno Veltri (HU Berlin); Daniel Weishaar (University of Cologne); Gerrit Wittke (Universität Osnabrück); Eva-Charlotte Zipperle-Mirwald (University of Innsbruck)