

## **What is the IMF looking for in recruits for the Economist Program?**

The IMF is made up of a group of policy-oriented economics professionals. The “bread and butter” work of the IMF consists of interacting with country officials either in the context of surveillance or in the context of Fund financial programs. This interaction offers unique opportunities through high level access to member country policymakers and ability to offer advice on current, topical policy issues facing the member country. The job involves traveling to member countries in teams to discuss their economic conditions/constraints and opportunities with country officials and others. These trips are called “missions”.

In order for us to be able to offer the best policy advice to our member countries, we are expected to stay current in our specialty areas and become versed in new areas, as the need arises. The most important demand is to produce analysis of relevance to the countries and the Fund’s work. In terms of time spent on various activities, during her first 5 years, an economics professional may spend around half of her time analyzing member country developments and policies (including research on issues of interest to the country/region), 25 percent on policy-related research, and about 25 percent contributing to papers prepared by other economists in the Fund on key policy issues through the review process.

Unlike in an academic department where faculty members are more or less in business for themselves and the academic success model is understood well and adhered to closely, the Fund emphasizes—in addition to sharp analytical skills—team work and the ability to analyze real world developments and policy issues.

With this broad brush description of the job, what are some of the characteristics of the “ideal” IMF recruit?

First, the ideal IMF recruit wants to work at the IMF or a similar policy-oriented institution, e.g., the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, understands that policy institutions are different from universities, and values those differences.

Second, the IMF recruit is willing and able to work in teams, making significant contributions to the work of the team, even if it doesn’t result immediately in recognition for the individual. Teamwork includes the willingness to coach junior staff, share information within the team, and work toward the common goals of the team.

Third, the IMF recruit has sharp analytical skills—typically as a strong all-round macroeconomist who works with a clear conceptual framework and is comfortable “navigating” around the different sectors of an economy, seeing the links among them clearly.

The IMF recruit is willing and capable of using her strong analytical skills to write high quality policy relevant pieces—such as working papers but also shorter, targeted notes—to guide the work of the Fund. The ability to add value to a country’s policy choices stems from being able to convince the policy makers using strong technical analysis. The ability to present in writing clear and concise policy messages based on your research or analytical work is a major advantage—the IMF places a very high premium on strong drafting skills.

Fourth, although the intensity of travel varies considerably between departments and assignments, the IMF recruit must be prepared to travel extensively. Foreign language skills are a plus in this regard.

Fifth, while the IMF recruit is expected to be strong in her chosen field of expertise, she must be willing to be versatile and flexible, to put in the effort to learn about and master areas outside her chosen field of expertise, and, on occasions where there is a conflict, to put the needs of member countries above her own interests.