



# How to Prepare for UN Interviews

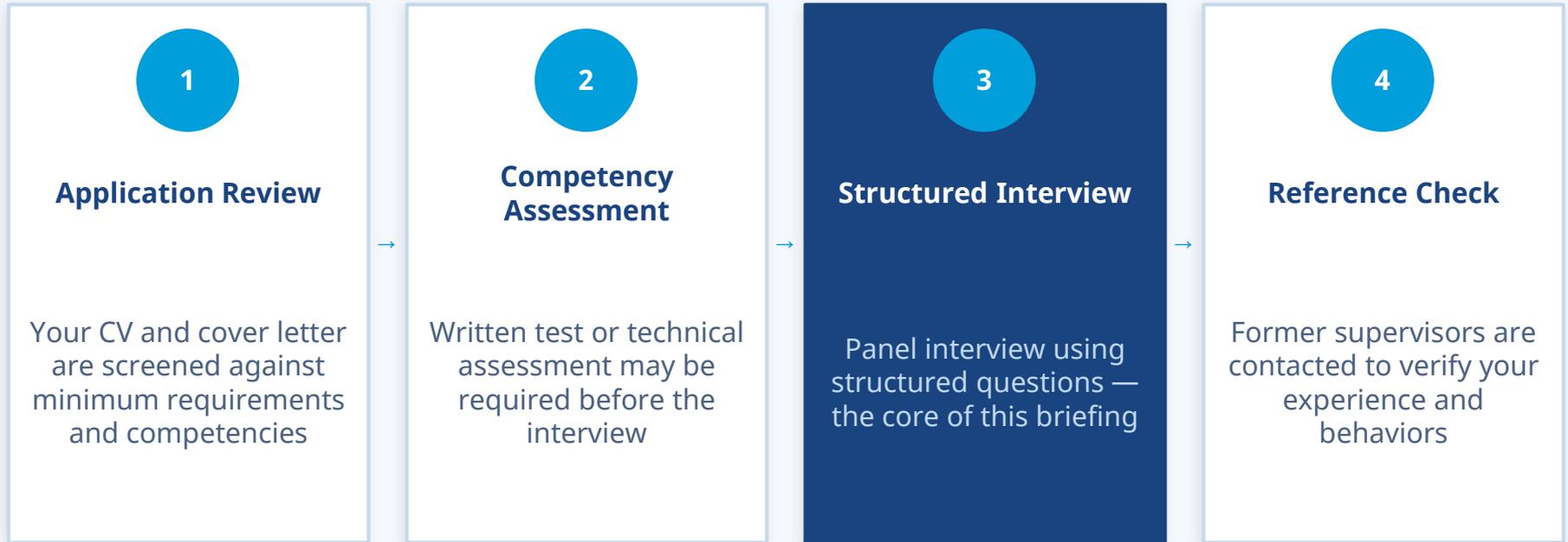
A guide for external candidates

# What you will learn today

- 1 How the UN system conducts interviews
- 2 What Competency Based Interviews (CBI) are
- 3 UNICEF's new Blended Contextualised approach
- 4 How to structure your answers effectively
- 5 Practical tips to prepare and succeed

# The UN Interview Process

What to expect when applying to the United Nations system



 The interview is where you prove your fit.  
Most UN agencies use structured, competency-based interviews — preparation is key.

# Competency Based Interviews (CBI)



The standard approach used across the UN system

## What is CBI?

Competency Based Interviews (CBI) assume that **past behaviour is the best predictor of future performance.**

- Questions ask for specific, real examples from your past
- Focuses on behaviours, not hypothetical answers
- Each question targets a specific UN competency
- Responses are assessed against defined indicators

## Classic CBI Questions

*"Tell us about a time when you had to manage a difficult stakeholder relationship."*

*"Describe a situation where you had to work under pressure to meet a deadline."*

*"Give an example of when you took the initiative to improve a process."*

*"Tell us about a time you had to adapt your communication style."*

# Answering CBI Questions: The STAR Method

A structured approach to giving strong, evidence-based answers

S

## SITUATION

Set the scene. Briefly describe the context — when, where, what was your role? Keep it concise.

T

## TASK

What was YOUR specific responsibility or challenge? Make clear what was expected of you.

A

## ACTION

What did YOU do? This is the most important part. Be specific about your personal contributions and decisions.

R

## RESULT

What was the outcome? Quantify if possible. What did you learn? How did it benefit the team or organisation?

🕒 Aim for 2–3 minutes per answer | Focus on YOUR actions (use 'I', not 'we') | Always share the result

# UNICEF's Blended Contextualized Interview Approach

A more holistic, conversational approach to assessing candidates

## Why UNICEF evolved from pure CBI

Candidates became over-familiar with the CBI approach  
Responses were often polished but not authentic  
Limited space for meaningful dialogue  
Harder to assess future potential

## What 'blended' means for you

Questions can now take different forms  
A mix of question types in one interview  
Questions are contextualised to the specific role  
More conversational — think, don't just recite

## Question types you may encounter

### Contextualised Competency

Competency questions tied to this specific role & context.  
"Describe a time you led a strategy in Birth Registration."

### Technical

Tests your knowledge and skills in your area of expertise.  
"Explain your approach to HACT compliance."

### Strengths Based

What you do best and what inspires you.  
"What kind of work energises you most?"

### Motivational

Why this role, why UNICEF.  
"What draws you to this position at this time?"

### Case Study / Situational

Analytical thinking & problem solving.  
"How would you approach this specific scenario?"

# How to Prepare: Your Action Plan

Practical steps to take before your interview

1

## Know the JD inside out

Read the job description carefully. Identify the key competencies, technical requirements and responsibilities. These will directly shape the interview questions.

2

## Research the organisation

Understand the organization's mission, current strategic priorities (Strategic Plan), and the country programme context. Show genuine motivation for the mission.

3

## Prepare your STAR stories

Identify 6–8 strong examples from your career. Map each story to a competency. Practise telling them in 2–3 minutes using the STAR structure.

4

## Prepare for blended questions

Think about your technical expertise and how it applies to this specific role. Prepare for 'what would you do' scenarios and 'what are your strengths' questions.

5

## Prepare questions to ask

Have 2–3 thoughtful questions ready for the panel. This shows engagement and genuine interest in the role and organisation.

# Top Tips & Key Resources



## Do

- ✓ Prepare real, specific examples from your career
- ✓ Quantify your results where possible
- ✓ Show your genuine motivation for the mission
- ✓ Listen carefully and ask for clarification if needed
- ✓ Think out loud for case/situational questions

## Avoid

- ✗ Use 'we' instead of 'I' — panels assess YOU
- ✗ Give vague or hypothetical answers for CBI questions
- ✗ Over-rehearse to the point of sounding scripted
- ✗ Ignore the contextual details of the role
- ✗ Forget to bring your authentic self

## Key Resources

**UNICEF Careers – 'Get Prepared':** [careers.unicef.org](https://careers.unicef.org) | **UN Competency Framework:** Available on UN system agency HR portals

**UNICEF Strategic Plan:** [unicef.org/strategicplan](https://unicef.org/strategicplan) | **Inspira (UN Secretariat):** [careers.un.org](https://careers.un.org)

# You Are Ready

## Remember:

- ★ Structure your answers — use STAR for competency questions
- 🎯 Contextualise your experience to this specific role and organisation
- 💬 Be conversational — the panel wants to get to know you, not just your prep notes
- ♥ Show your genuine motivation for the mission and the work
- 📖 Check UNICEF Careers > 'Get Prepared' for the latest guidance

*Good luck with your application!*

