

Portrait of Héloïse Voisin, Conflict Specialist Consultant for the World Bank



Discover the world of international cooperation with Héloïse Voisin, a graduate of the Master's program in International Security. Now a consultant with the World Bank, she brings her expertise to crisis management in West and Central Africa.

What do you do today and what has been your career path so far?

I'm a conflict consultant for the World Bank. After graduating from Sciences Po's Master in International Security in 2019, I gradually specialized in a rather narrow but exciting niche of international cooperation: development in crisis and conflict contexts. I began my career at Altai Consulting on a monitoring project for a European Union stabilization fund in the Sahel. I then joined the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) at its Sahel Regional Office in Burkina Faso to support the operations of its Minka fund dedicated to peacebuilding in the Sahel. I finally joined the World Bank a year ago, to develop tools and methods for adapting to contexts of conflict in West and Central Africa - what we call conflict sensitivity.

What advice would you give to Sciences Po students wishing to work in Africa?

Africa is full of opportunities! The first step is to identify the entry points. The VIA (volontariat international en administration) and VIE (volontariat international en entreprise) are aimed at young graduates and young professionals, and can be a springboard - I myself benefited from one when I joined AFD. For the United Nations system, where junior positions (P-1) are very rare, UNV (United Nations Volunteering) is another opportunity, with certain prospects for advancement (depending on the agencies and donor funding). However, these opportunities are in high demand, and competition for them is fierce. It's worth noting that some UNVs are reserved for nationals of the countries funding them, which considerably reduces the pool of candidates. So don't get discouraged, don't put all your chances on the same job, and persevere!

How have your studies helped you in your different experiences?

My studies instilled in me a passion for international business, and in particular for the geopolitics of Africa. From my second year at Collège Universitaire, I focused all my electives on these issues. Through my courses and my collective Master's project, I had access to leading specialists in international and African issues, who formed my first professional network and helped me to orientate myself towards my first professional experiences on the continent. I finally had the space and freedom to develop my projects, from the publication of my first collection of short stories on Africa in 2016 (Éclats d'Afriques) to the choice of my Grand Oral topic on the conflict sensitivity of humanitarian interventions, which still guides me today in my understanding of my profession and my sector.

What specific skills do you need to work with the African continent?

That depends very much on the context and the sector of activity. In crisis and conflict contexts, the ones I'm most familiar with, you need to have or develop a certain capacity for adaptation and resilience. Humanitarian aid is also more sensitive to urgent timeframes, and you need to be able to produce quickly and under constraints (time, budget...). More generally, you have to be ready to confront other visions of the world, and not have too many preconceived ideas. Reading works by African authors even before I took my first step on the continent enriched me a lot.