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FREE RI Careers Interview: “Finance with a Heart”

Dr Rupini Deepa Rajagopalan, Head of ESG Office, Berenberg Wealth and Asset Management talks to Responsible Investor about how she got into ESG and her career to date.



Dr Rupini Deepa Rajagopalan

[country: Germany](#)

[by: RI Careers Team](#)

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Tell us a bit about your current role and the company you work at?

I head Berenberg's ESG Office based in Frankfurt since March 2018 and support our Wealth and Asset Management (WAM) team in their sustainable investment products and offerings. I am also responsible for our ESG policy, strategy, investment positioning, integration, product offering and innovation for Berenberg's WAM division. Berenberg was founded in 1590 and we have been managing sustainable mandates from foundations and churches for many decades. We are a PRI signatory since August 2018 and also manage various sustainable funds in equities, fixed income and multi-asset.

What does a typical working week look like for you? What do you do on a daily basis?

In the last one and a half years, each day has been exciting! As I am developing the ESG office, every day is different and sometimes challenging. On some days, it involves speaking to everyone in the bank from our wealth management team, our portfolio managers and even our support functions to make sure that our understanding of ESG is commonly shared and to create our various ESG policies. On other days, it involves working on ESG requests for investment proposals with the different teams from equities, bonds, and multi-asset. Here, I perform research on the suitability of companies on whether they are ESG-compliant as a portfolio investment. This also means the daily check of ESG controversy reports on companies and also conducting direct engagement with companies. Most excitingly, I just finished writing a paper on the recent changes and updates in Sustainability together with our macro research team which is available here.

Have you always worked in RI/ESG? Tell us about your career path.

Since I was young, I was always fascinated by numbers which led me to choose a career in banking and finance. I completed my bachelor's in 2007 and immediately joined the corporate banking division of an international bank as a trainee. My interests in the banking world led me to work in various departments and banks from Kuala Lumpur all the way to Chicago. After about 5 years of working, I decided to take a sabbatical from my investment banking job at that time to pursue my master's degree at the University of St Andrews. However, it was not until I met Dr. Andreas Hoepner (who is currently a professor at University College Dublin) at the university did I learn about ESG. I was totally fascinated by the fact that we can also do good in finance which led me to pursue my PhD under his supervision and mentorship. Since then, I have been a strong believer

that ESG should be an intrinsic factor in investment decisions. I am able to wake up every morning, feeling excited and motivated that my work has a purpose. I have also launched a Women in Sustainability Network Hub for Frankfurt in November which is a professional network for women who are working to create a positive change for a sustainable future. Link to the website: <https://womeninsustainability.net/hub/frankfurt>

What differences do you see, if any, between Sustainable finance/investments and conventional?

I believe that sustainable finance has a larger impact footprint than conventional finance. By investing only in a conventional manner, at most times it is only financial returns that take precedence. However, in sustainable finance, we care not only about financial returns but also the impact our investments are making in both society and the environment. By investing in this manner our thought process also changes and we also have an underlying understanding of wanting our investee companies to have responsible and sustainable practices. Thus, I like to coin sustainable finance with the term "Finance with a Heart".

What is your understanding of a sustainable workplace?

As a millennial, to me, a sustainable workplace is an environment that is supportive and helps me with my career ambitions. I want to have a work culture that promotes good work-life balance and where I feel motivated and inspired to continue carrying on my work.

If you knew what you know now what would you have done differently when you started your career. What advice do you wish you'd been given when you started out?

I thought about this long and hard and interestingly, I would not have done anything differently. Having worked in the States, in Asia and now in Europe, I am blessed to have gained experiences working in different organizations and learning about different cultures. However, if I could give myself advice when I just started out, is that at times things may not go the way we plan but with positivity and determination something better always comes along and it is important to always keep learning.

What advice would you give to someone starting out today?

Academic qualifications are necessary to help bring us to the starting points in our career but I believe it is just as important to gain practical experiences. Furthermore, with the ever rapid developments in ESG, my advice is that he or she should subscribe to news portals to be up to date on current market information. Additionally, it is important to build networks and have a mentor that can support you and give you advice. Attend ESG conferences whenever you can to learn what the market is doing in terms of advancing ESG and at the same time grow your network and friends!

Looking ahead, where do you see the opportunities or growth areas for career paths in RI/ESG?

A career in ESG is not only rewarding but also satisfying. ESG is already part of nearly most jobs from the finance sector (i.e. asset management) to even companies (i.e. investor relations, sourcing, etc). However, I see a huge need in the future of people who are equipped with data science capabilities/knowledge with ESG.

CV at a glance:

- Berenberg Wealth and Asset Management (WAM), Head of ESG Office, (03.2018 – Current)
- University of Kassel, Institute of Management and Business Studies, Guest Lecturer, (03.2018 -Current)
- University of Hamburg, Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences, Junior professor in Business Administration, especially Social Investment (10.2017 – 03.2018)

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