

# UNHCR TURKEY

## HUMAN STORIES

### Junior Professional Officer funded by Germany: Helen Andresen, Associate Resettlement Officer



*Photo of Helen Andresen, Ankara, Turkey  
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Ankara, Turkey - Helen Andresen joined the UNHCR Turkey team in October 2018 as part of the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) programme funded by the Government of Germany. Helen works as the Associate Resettlement Officer in Ankara but conducts missions across Turkey. She is halfway through her assignment. She gives us a glimpse of her experiences so far.

In Helen's words; **"Listening to a refugee who has lost their house or their family you can have a huge impact and for some, you cannot underestimate how important that is"**.

**The JPO programme provides young professionals with opportunities to work in UN agencies.** Helen first heard about the JPO programme, early on in her career. She was working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Germany and knew immediately that it was something she wanted to do in the future.

With a degree in law, Helen worked as a junior lawyer in Germany as well as with NGOs and INGOs focusing on human rights and women's rights in Germany, Kenya and the Netherlands.

Helen says “UNHCR’s work does not stop at refugee law, but encompasses refugee rights, human rights, women’s rights, children’s rights and international criminal law all at once”. For Helen, her previous experience has been crucial for this role, because she learnt how to interact with vulnerable persons.

**Day-to-Day Life: “A normal day for us can be very hectic, sometimes we reorganise our day to accommodate refugees with varying needs”.**

Helen primarily works in the case-identification team within the UNHCR Resettlement Unit. She identifies refugees with varying protection concerns that are eligible for resettlement. The team acts as one of the first points of contact for refugees for resettlement. Helen also conducts face-to-face interviews with refugees referred for resettlement. She emphasises that with the interviews, “you understand much more about the reasons why people are uprooted from their homes and the challenges they face being a refugee. You just cannot compare talking with someone who has had these experiences, with just reading an article or a report about the refugee crisis”.

Many refugees have hopes of being resettled but very few can, over the last year Helen has learnt how to manage the expectations and hopes of the refugees she interviews. In Turkey, only 0.5 per cent of refugees can be submitted for resettlement due to limited quotas available from resettlement countries. As to these limitations Helen is keen to advocate with countries for increased quotas for resettlement and complementary pathways such as third country scholarships, labour mobility schemes or community sponsorships.

**“Sponsoring a group of highly motivated refugees who are also qualified to study or work in third countries can have a huge positive impact on the lives of refugees, their families and communities who host these refugees.”**

Hence, Helen finds the experience of finding solutions for refugees very rewarding. She feels consistently inspired by the refugees she interviews. An inspiring story of hers is from an emotionally taxing interview she had with a Syrian man.: “he had to go through all of the emotions he felt when he lost his family and experience the trauma all over again”. After the interview, he turned to her and said, “Child, are you okay? I am sorry to have burdened you with all of my stories and made your day difficult”.

For Helen, this was a poignant moment. She was amazed that even after taking the time to re-tell his traumatic story, this man could demonstrate such compassion, to someone who in her mind was only doing their job. Correspondingly, Helen feels very strongly about the positive impact that JPO programmes can have.

She thinks that the JPO programme also provides a great opportunity for young people, like herself, to work in in the field they feel passionate about and to represent their country in the global community.

With one more year to go, the future for Helen looks bright. A special thank you goes to Germany. In addition to the flexible and multi-year funding it provides, the JPO programme is yet another way in which Germany supports the UNHCR Turkey operation. Germany is also one of UNHCR Turkey’s key resettlement partners, providing durable solutions for refugees from around the world.

## CONTACTS

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