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# Farhasaad Shahid

## Communications Associate

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**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Communications Associate

**Organisation:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency

**Location:** Stockholm, Sweden

### How did you get to where you are now?

After studying Physics and Chemistry at higher level in the International Baccalaureate program in Helsinki, I decided sciences were not exactly my thing. So I decided to take a risk and apply to subjects related to politics and sociology.

Fortunately, I landed onto studying Human Geography through Queen Mary's clearing service. I packed my bags for the UK and what followed were the three best years of my life, after which I was inspired enough to complete postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics in MSc International Migration and Public Policy.

Upon graduation, I was fortunate enough to land an internship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, at the Regional Representation for Northern Europe. After my internship, I got a call informing me that they wanted to hire me –

and here I am!

### Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?

My geography studies were the basis of my career. Because of my inspiring lecturers, I was able to tackle the topics that were of interest to me while getting clear guidance and support from them throughout. I had freedom to choose my dissertation topic which I did on the 2015 'refugee crisis' in Europe, and Finland in particular, which gave me an open door to apply for my quite specific Masters program on migration studies. The modules offered at Queen Mary included a wide range of interesting topics so I was able to build a unique path in the field. My peers, who were from diverse backgrounds, were an amazing part of the whole experience bringing so much more knowledge and passion into the classroom.

Alongside my studies, I was also very much involved in the Students' Union, where I was an elected member for three years. I was also a Geography Ambassador at the department which gave me a chance to learn a breadth of skills, which were particularly important for my communications role!

### What do you do as part of your role?

Our office is the Regional Representation for Northern Europe and it covers eight countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden). As the main person working with digital engagement, I am responsible for managing our eight country websites and social media platforms, as well as analysing the data from them to understand how we can perform even better and get more engagement from our audiences. I deal with organizing events and projects, media pitching as well as many other tasks, all in line with our Global Communications Strategy. Being the only

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)

Finnish speaking colleague in the Communications Team, I am working on a lot of the Finnish projects and with partners who operate in the field of refugee protection in Finland.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I really enjoy the fact that my job can be so versatile; there is never a second when I get bored! UNHCR works a lot like a news agency as well, so whenever there is a big global crisis we have to respond immediately through a press release or write lines for topics in case we get media queries. This urgency keeps me driven, although sometimes it can also be stressful. Most of all, what I love about my job is how rewarding it is to communicate the plight of refugees globally and the struggles they go through every day, despite being people like you and me. Even though I do not get to directly impact the people we work for, I aim to change negative perceptions around refugees and give them a sense of protection through the way we communicate about this topic.

### **What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?**

I would say that you should stay patient and not give up. The international development sphere can be extremely difficult to get into. Gain relevant experience, do internships, volunteer, study relevant subjects, and show that you know how to go outside your comfort zone. International experience almost always helps in nailing a career with organisations like the UN. But it is also important to have particular skills you are excellent in which can help make life a little easier when you are trying to stand out from other applicants.

### **Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?**

Geography gives you such a wide perspective of the world. Why people follow different traditions, why they cross borders, why there are borders within borders – it helps you make sense of this very fascinating social world we live in. Being a Bangladeshi born in Finland, I had a personal reason to try to understand the ideas on cross-

cultural interactions and practices - and I got answers to my life from geography. Geography also gives you a very wide range of transferable skills which can be taken into any career you wish. It really allows you to be an explorer in a way, letting you find yourself within the realm of the subject and beyond. It is the best thing I ever did!

One of a series of profiles of staff and students from Queen Mary University of London.

