

KRISTY VERSTEEG – WFP supply chain officer – Burkina Faso and Afghanistan



What is your educational background and nationality, what made you apply to the JPO programme and what is your motivation to work with your UN agency?

I am from the Netherlands and hold a Master's degree in Supply Chain Management from Erasmus University Rotterdam (RSM). During my masters, the elective Health and Humanitarian Logistics revealed to me that supply chain management could serve a higher purpose: saving and changing lives rather than maximizing shareholder profits. This realization shaped my career ambition.

Breaking into the humanitarian sector, however, proved challenging. For three years, I pursued opportunities with NGOs and the UN (particularly the World Food Programme), while working in the private sector in the Netherlands. In October 2022, I applied for a JPO Supply Chain Officer position at WFP in Burkina Faso. Obtaining that role marked the beginning of my humanitarian journey.

What are the main activities and tasks you are working on?

During the first two years of my JPO assignment, I was based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where I gained broad exposure to WFP's supply chain operations. My primary focus was on the Logistics Contracting team, ensuring timely and accurate contracting for services such as transport and warehousing. In parallel, I implemented a corporate tool that improved pipeline planning. Good pipeline management ensures visibility and control over the flow of

commodities in different stages, enabling us to anticipate needs, align resources, and prevent delays or shortages.

In my third year, I moved to Afghanistan, working primarily in deep field locations. In Herat Area Office, I managed WFP's fleet operations and developed a decision-support tool to optimize the use of WFP trucks versus commercial transporters. Later, I transferred to Kandahar Area Office, where I served as Interim Head of Logistics, overseeing all supply chain activities under the office's responsibility.

[What does a day at the office/in the field look like?](#)

A typical day in the (deep) field varies greatly depending on the country. In Burkina Faso, I had my own car and would navigate the chaotic traffic to reach the warehouse or main office, often dressed in my typical humanitarian outfit of linen pants and Birkenstocks, sweating under the relentless 40+ degree heat. In Afghanistan, daily life is entirely different, I live on compounds that I cannot leave. I am fully covered in hijab and abaya, and I am often the only female staff member in the office.

[What is the biggest motivator for you when it comes to your work and what is the most challenging project that you have worked on/are working on?](#)

My biggest motivator is supply chain optimization. Maybe it's my Dutch side, but I find real satisfaction in making things run as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. Assessing operations, ways of working, and team dynamics, then finding improvements, is what drives me most.

Challenges have been a constant throughout these three years. In Burkina Faso, I arrived completely new to the humanitarian sector and the UN system, without a structured onboarding, and suddenly working full-time in French while still improving my language skills. In Afghanistan, I am enduring long stretches of solitude, sometimes six to seven weeks without seeing a fellow female. I don't mean this to sound negative though, as the past three years have also been incredibly enriching, amazing, and truly life-changing.



What has been the most rewarding experience to date for you at your duty station? (work and/or non-work related)

In Kandahar, I currently manage a team of around 20 Afghan men. Based on news headlines, you might assume that as a young Western woman I wouldn't stand a chance. In reality, they treat me with respect, and I'm truly enjoying this as my first management experience. What I find most rewarding, though, has nothing to do with supply chain activities per se. It is when they approach me one-on-one to share what's on their minds: their worries about daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters, and the economic challenges in the country. Because I am international female staff, they feel they can open up in a way they might not with others. Providing that safe space has become an unexpected but meaningful part of my work. I may not be able to solve their problems, but it is an honor that they confide in me.



If the case, what is your experience with relocation to another duty station?

I've already mentioned the stark contrast between life in Burkina Faso and Afghanistan. I was glad to move to Afghanistan, as I felt I had given my all in Burkina Faso and am learning so much from the completely different context in Afghanistan. Still, it was far from easy. Burkina Faso was my very first humanitarian adventure, and it got under my skin. Not a week goes by without missing it.

How do you feel your JPO assignment will influence your career choices/opportunities within the UN?

The JPO assignment has been the true kick-starter of my humanitarian career. Where I initially struggled to get a foot in the door without prior experience, I am now on several rosters with WFP as well as NGOs. I'm not tied exclusively to WFP and will go wherever feels right in the future, but for the coming year I managed to secure a position in Ghana.

What piece of advice would you give to those who are considering applying to the JPO Programme? What are your lessons learned?

I've already said that the JPO programme has been life-changing for me, and I'll say it again. It gave me the chance to finally enter the humanitarian sector, join the UN system with a trainee status that allowed me to steer my career in the directions I wanted, while at the same time contributing to a better world. It also gave me an adventurous life, amazing new friends, and excellent benefits (which I hadn't expected but turned out to be the case).

One lesson I've learned about applying is that women should approach it more like men. When I first saw the vacancy for this JPO position, I ticked every single box except "fluent in French." For two weeks I didn't apply, convinced that not meeting 100% of the requirements disqualified me. At the very last minute, I realized I was holding myself back in a way many women do, and I applied anyway. The rest is history. APPLY (and learn French)! 😊