

IHRP Final Report

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The International Organization for Migration – Geneva, Switzerland

I spent the summer working at the International Organization for Migration's head office in Geneva, Switzerland. The IOM is the main organization responsible for migration in the world, with offices and operations across the globe in over 140 countries. Although it started out specifically to help solely with the facilitation of migration – helping countries – the IOM's mandate has expanded dramatically in the past decade. Nowadays, its resources and wide array of projects contribute to its reputation as an expert on migration, sought after for a wide variety of functions. My specific unit was the International Migration Law Unit (IML), which was part of the International Cooperation and Partnerships division. Although it is a small unit, the IML works with countries around the world as an advisor – instructing states on how to best comply with their obligations under international law – a source for the latest information on migration law, and a provider of training and capacity building for government officials, civil society, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and IOM staff. Over the course of my internship I have been able to see how this small team of legal experts has performed each of these functions.

Because of IML's expertise, it will often be involved in helping states and regions develop their migration legislation. There is no codified set of migration laws, and so the Unit helps in curating the various sources of international law to determine where migration is involved – for example consulting the Convention Against Torture and figuring out which parts apply to migrants. States will often send their draft legislation to IML, who will see if there are any inconsistencies between the legislation and international law. IML is also involved in proposed international instruments, such as proposed laws for migrant workers, or environmentally-displaced persons. For these responsibilities I helped with reviewing the documents and looking for areas in which specific provisions on migration could be added.

I worked on several other projects as well. On the research side, I conducted instant research to answer discreet legal questions posed by various people to IML. I also did more substantive research on the principle of *non-refoulement*, a crucial legal convention that prevents States from sending a migrant to any place where they would face death, torture, or other forms of degrading or inhuman treatment. I was charged with updating the IOM's current info note on the topic and reading recent legal scholarship, for the purpose of publishing the information in an upcoming book. I also helped out with an upcoming publication on the 'rights-based approach,' which will hopefully serve as the IOM's code of conduct going forward. Lastly, I did research on the current migration landscape, and wrote three pieces for the IML's newsletter, which was distributed throughout the organization.

On the training side, I worked with fellow IHRP fellow Nour Bargarch on an upcoming training presentation on migrant children. Again, we consulted available materials, updating what the IML previously had, and helped craft a presentation that both provided a complete lay of the legal land, but that was also focused on the particular narratives of migrants – connecting the law with its practical implications. I reviewed other presentations as well, making sure they were coherent with an engaging flow. Although we all went to law school at the IML, it was important to make sure all of the material we were putting out was accessible and engaging for everyone.

In my final few weeks, in addition to the above duties, I drafted a report for a UN body, which outlined what the IOM was doing on the topic of rights for domestic migrant workers. Hopefully, this report will allow the IOM to stay involved as this important piece of legislation – which would be the first UN convention dealing specifically with migrants – goes forward. I also helped out one of the lawyers with her presentation in Germany, a seminar to a university in Germany. For this, I helped create various activities, such as crafting or presenting scenarios involving migrants, where students would learn about the various legal issues involved. This was a great summary activity, which really allowed me to try my hand at issue spotting for international human rights law issues.

The IOM is located at the heart of international humanitarian activities, with neighbours such as the International Labour Organization, the World Health Organization and the United Nations. With our passes we have access to all of these buildings, and I have spent time at several. A particularly great opportunity was the ability to attend the Human Rights Council held at the UN. There I attended workshops that dealt with migrants and internationally displaced persons, and also workshops dealing with terrorism and domestic violence. It was interesting to see what was discussed and how (with the 'how' sometimes being much more important). I took notes on the sessions, and drafted summaries of what was said and the relevant connections to migration law. It was great to see the main events, and also the side events which covered a bunch of areas that were and interesting for me. The chance to attend these sorts of talks has been great, and I have tried to take advantage of the academic events all around Geneva, for example at the Graduate Institute.

When there weren't events to go to, I joined some of the other interns to form 'Interns HQ,' which planned several seminars during my time there. Called 'IOM Talks,' each talk would feature a senior member of the IOM, including the Director General, head of the IML, and the Director of the International Cooperation and Partnerships unit (my boss's boss). Each person shared valuable insights for the interns, about the IOM as well as their career. It was a great way to get to know my fellow interns, and learn more about the organization as a whole.

I have always been interested in migration, an interest that I pursued throughout my undergraduate years. It has been very rewarding to round out this understanding of migration by learning more about the legal underpinnings of this quintessential human phenomenon.

In addition to the internship itself, I have loved being in Switzerland. On the themes of migration and citizenship, being here has allowed me to connect more with my Swiss heritage. I have connected with family (old and new) and longtime friends, been to many areas important to my family history, and had a chance to practice my French. A particular highlight was eating next to four large bodies of water in one day – Lac Lemman, Lac Neuchatel, the Rhine River and Thun Lake! It is a beautiful country, with gorgeous natural landscapes, fantastic old towns steeped in tradition and history, and friendly people.

Because Geneva is so central, I was also able to visit different parts of Europe, including Madrid, Vienna, Paris, Giverny (the home of Claude Monet) and Amsterdam. Using easyjet deals and a Eurail pass I tried to minimize costs as much as possible, although there were always the surprises that came with travelling. I usually told myself

that the cost of travelling was cancelled out by the money I was saving on food.

So, from the French, to final reports to Friday night flights, I have had an incredibly rewarding experience, entirely made possible by IHRP. Thank you very much, and I look forward to taking this experience with me in all my future endeavours.



Three U of T fellows in Geneva – Nour (IOM), Sally (Defence for Children International) and myself



A rally during the Human Rights Council



Jill Helcke, Director of the ICP Unit at the IOM, leads a seminar as part of the 'IOM Talks' series