

## **Final Report – IHRP Internship at the International Organization for Migration (Geneva & Athens)**

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This summer I had the pleasure of working for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at their headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland as well as their office in Athens, Greece. Splitting my internship between these two contrasting cities enriched my experience tremendously. I was engaged with migration issues, both from the standpoint of the international policy-setters, and from that of a nation struggling to abide by those policies. Moreover, I experienced the contrast between one's perception of an issue from an office many hundred miles removed, and that gleaned through firsthand experience. (Not to mention the different approaches to time – 5 minutes early is considered late according to the Swiss, while 5 minutes late is considered early according to the Greeks.) Together, these two vantage points made for a fulfilling summer experience and helped me develop a deeper understanding of migration law.

My main responsibility with the IOM in Geneva was to write a report outlining the access to justice rights of migrants in various contexts: expulsion, detention, labour disputes and property claims. Since international migration law is such an unstructured and unsettled area of law – it is largely an amalgamation of principles and rules from numerous other branches of international law – it is difficult for migrants, States and International Organizations to understand the law. My final report will be published online to inform migrants of their rights and States of their responsibilities, and thus reduce some of the information asymmetries that prevent migrants from accessing the justice system.

Another main initiative of the IOM's legal unit in Geneva is reviewing States' migration legislation. I had the opportunity to review and comment on a State's draft migration legislation, highlighting areas where it did not adequately protect the rights of migrants. Similarly, I wrote a section of a State-commissioned report analyzing why there has not been wider ratification of the *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families* (only 35 States have signed the Convention, with Canada, U.S.A., E.U., China and Russia among those who have not signed).

At the IOM office in Athens, my work was similar, however I examined migrant rights issues through a narrower, Greek-specific lens. My main responsibility was to write a report comparing Greek migration-related legislation to international standards. One interesting finding was that while Greek legislation often appears to be consistent with international standards, there are frequently contradictory articles in the legislation that make the guaranteed services inaccessible. Compounding the problem is the sheer volume of migrants (an estimated 90% of irregular migrants entering Europe enter through Greece); the growing public pressure to deny migrants public services (led by the neo-nazi party Golden Dawn,

which is the country's third most popular political party); and the nation's crippling financial crisis (overall unemployment is around 27% while youth unemployment is over 60%). Amid such strong societal factors and with inadequate legislation already in place, it appears that the rights of migrants will continue to be marginalized while Greece works through its economic and political challenges.

One of the main activities of the IOM office in Athens is to return and reintegrate migrants into their home countries. Each day dozens of migrants pour into the IOM office and are led through the procedure of returning to their home country. This initiative is especially important considering how the fear of persecution from police and xenophobic vigilantes has forced migrants into the shadows of Athens. For example, the recently launched Operation Xenios Zeus authorizes police to detain anyone who is suspected of being in the country illegally. Those who legally reside in Greece may be subject to humiliation and physical abuse, while those who are in the country illegally are shipped to inhumane detention centers where they are imprisoned up to two years before being deported.

In addition to working on many interesting and challenging legal issues, I used the opportunity (i.e. the very generous European labour laws – 2.5 days vacation per month!) to explore two beautiful countries. In Switzerland, I hiked the alps, developed a taste for wine, and ate as much cheese and milk chocolate as Gruyère's poor cows could produce. In Greece, I explored the islands, took in an opera at the Acropolis, and discovered the magic of phyllo pastries.

It was a wonderful summer, and I am so appreciative of the IHRP for giving me the opportunity. Thank you.

