

**Erasmus+ Traineeship 2017/18**  
**Humanitarian Organization, Spain**  
**Student Report**

Introduction

I am currently studying to receive a NOHA Master's Degree in International Humanitarian Action from Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. This is a two-year master's program with four semesters, and for the third semester students are to choose between two different types of mobility. The mobility can either be with a partner university or with a humanitarian organization, the latter giving students the opportunity to work at an internship in partnership with their master's studies. I chose to do an internship at a humanitarian organization with offices in Spain and other European countries. In this report I will detail how, in my role as Communication Coordinator, I have been able to live in Madrid and get to know a new city and culture, while also learning about new aspects of the humanitarian field.

Before the Placement

Before this internship began, I was doing an Erasmus Study Abroad at the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain. As the NOHA Master's is an international program, the second, third, and fourth semesters allow students the option to attend partner universities, complete internships, and additionally to work in different cities. After completing my first semester in Germany, I moved to Bilbao in January of 2018. Moving there was my first real introduction to Spanish culture, with their late dining hours, bright colors, and loud singing that always carried through the apartment windows. Spanish people are known for their passion and strong will, and this was certainly proven to me firsthand while I was living in Bilbao. One could always find protests and rallies being held in the city center, and it was clear that the Spanish valued their right to freedom of speech. The more I learned about the Spanish language and its history, the more I became interested in Spain and the diversity it had to offer for expats such as myself. Spain is as interesting culturally as it is historically, and I wanted an opportunity to stay in the country longer than one semester to learn more about it. Thus, my search for an internship in Spain began.

Why Opting For an Internship

When I was initially searching for an internship, my main qualifications were simply for it be in Spain and for English to be the working language. This ended up being more difficult than I thought, but luckily I was able to use the resources NOHA provided to find a perfect match. The internship application process was fairly straightforward, as I applied directly on the NOHA internship platform and was later contacted via email about the position I had applied for. In my time before this master's, I received a bachelor's degree in Journalism and worked as an English teacher for six years on three different continents. This previous experience helped me to be qualified for the position of Communication Coordinator, which I would have for seven months.

Preparation and Expectations

As I prepared to move to Madrid for my third semester, I spoke with my future boss a few times via Skype and, in this way, was introduced to the dynamic and goals of the organization, as well as his own expectations for my internship. The organization is a small start-up, with workers who have decades of experience in the humanitarian field. This was a very appealing aspect to me, as I hoped that this experience would serve as a teacher for me so that I could learn from people who had actually done field

work. Additionally, I hoped that working for a small company would allow me to be able to gain more experience and have more one-on-one time with my coworkers to establish relationships. I expected that with this internship it would be a mix of old and new knowledge for me, as I had some years of experience with field of Communications, but had virtually no experience working in the humanitarian field. My future boss made it clear that he valued creativity, and encouraged everyone to share and learn from each other's ideas. He described the organization as being a communal working environment, with everyone contributing something in helping to further the overall mission of the organization. It seemed like a great but rewarding challenge, and I couldn't wait to start the new experience.

### During the Placement

During the first days of my placement, my boss was actually traveling so I was welcomed and had orientation at the office by other members of the staff. Everyone was accommodating and patient with me, as I was the "new kid" in the office. Within a few days I had gained some insight into my tasks and was working on things relatively independently. My initial tasks were to direct and enhance all social media accounts, create blog posts to be posted weekly, approve CV's for the website, assist with writing and editing grants and proposals, and to reach out to users to learn about their personal stories of working in the humanitarian field. These stories were later used and turned into blog posts that appeared on the website. As the internship continued, I undertook much more responsibility, such as creating newsletters, emailing our users with job postings that they were qualified for, editing all content for the website, and assisting with a Crowdfunding campaign.

Throughout the internship, I was living in an apartment in Madrid with one of my coworkers, and I was fortunate to find an apartment only 20 minutes walking from the office. I had never visited Madrid before moving there, and I was surprised how much of a sprawling and spread out city it was. My apartment was within walking distance to many of Madrid's most historical sites, such as Retiro Park, many museums, and its famous luxury shopping. For me, my time in Madrid has been an ideal living situation and, as I am currently finishing my internship, I plan to continue living in the same apartment even as I begin with my thesis.

### Reflections After the Placement

After completing the internship, I have had some time to reflect on what my expectations and personal goals for the internship were, and if I was able to aptly fulfill my duties as a worker. One area that I was able to acquire a vast amount of knowledge in was different office programs. My boss was an excellent teacher and very patient with me as he taught me how to efficiently use all of the necessary programs, and this is something that I know will be helpful to me in my future endeavors.

The most challenging part of this internship was actually dealing with people and the complaints and negative feedback that they would sometimes give. As the organization is a platform originally designed to help humanitarians connect with other organizations to be hired, a lot of users would become frustrated if they had been on the platform for a while and still hadn't been hired. In essence, I would get emails or rude comments on Facebook saying that the platform had been useless to them and was a waste of their time. I would always follow up with these people and normally I would see that their profile had not been fully utilized and filled in. In these cases, I would help them to add their CV to the platform, update their profile information, and add verifications to their profile in order to increase their chances of being hired. In the end, almost all people would be very appreciative and thank me for offering individual attention to help them improve their profile, and hopefully their negative opinion would be reversed. Even

so, I tended to take it personally when people weren't satisfied, and this was something I had to work on during the internship with reminding myself that people will always find things to complain about, even if you feel you are trying your best. It was a good lesson to have people who made critical responses, because it helped me to not be so sensitive to a response and instead to focus and try to understand what could be done to help the person with what they needed.

### Conclusion

In closing, I am grateful for the experience I had in being able to have an internship in a field that I am interested in, and that I was able to learn something new every single day. I felt challenged and also gratified by the work I did, and also inspired by the team that I was a part of. It was a fortunate experience to be able to work in an office where everyone else had the same core goals and ideals, and wanted to do something to make the world a better place. From moving to a new city, to sharing and learning about the culture of Spain, to improving my Spanish, this was more than an internship and it became a valuable seven months that changed my life. I am fortunate to call my coworkers not only my friends, but also people with whom I respect. One of my greatest goals for the internship was to learn enough to make me feel more comfortable entering the humanitarian field, as my previous experience had been limited. It was a relief to find that not only did I learn from the work I did, but I also enjoyed it and was glad that it would be part of my future career. For me, I thought an internship was the best option for gaining valuable work experience in the humanitarian field and I am glad that it was able to fulfill all of my expectations.