



PROMOS

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Field Report

Intiwawa NGO in Arequipa, Peru

Student: [REDACTED]

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Subject: PROMOS Grant for Internships Abroad

First of all, let me introduce myself. My name is ■■■■■, I am a Spanish student who started her journey at RUB in September 2021, when I began the NOHA Master's in International Humanitarian Action. This is a Europe-wide master's programme made up of 8 universities where students have the possibility of changing destination every semester during the four semesters of the programme. Indeed, RUB is one of the participant universities, and here is where I began my studies. After my first semester there, I moved to the University of Warsaw in Poland, to obtain a specialization period in armed conflicts and humanitarian action. Next, it was the beginning of my second year, where I had to go through an internship period (third semester) and finally write my thesis (fourth semester).

Therefore, in September 2022 I moved to Peru to conduct my internship in a German-Peruvian local NGO named Intiwawa and located in the city of Arequipa, south of the country. My official period of stay was from the 12th of September 2022 to the 28th of February 2023, thus, I had an internship experience of 6 months. The job I carried out here was as a coordinator of the “Madres Luchadoras” project (“Fighting Mothers” in English). This project is a textile training program aimed at empowering vulnerable women through the strengthening of socio-emotional skills and technical capacities, enabling them to achieve autonomy for themselves, their families and the community. Through textile training, the goals of this sustainable project are economic autonomy for the women and the development of leadership skills, leading to an improved quality of life.

The application process in my case was long. I knew from the beginning that I had to find an internship for my third semester of studies, hence I began the search process already in February 2022. For the humanitarian sector, a good website to find internships or jobs is ReliefWeb, and here is where I was mainly looking. Even though I found this vacancy at Intiwawa right from the beginning, it was not until the beginning of May that I really started to consider going there. The main setback was that the position was unpaid, thus this meant that I had to look for external financial support. Anyways, I decided to go through the application process, which was quite straightforward; I just had to send some documents and conduct a couple of interviews online. The second interview, the one I had with the then director general of the organisation, was the one that convinced me of the role I would be playing in the project as a coordinator. I realized it was going to be challenging and time-consuming, but I was ready to see myself in my first real work experience in the field. Furthermore, the main appeal for me was that the project was gender-related, and I have always been sure that I wanted to work on this area within the humanitarian sector, therefore it seemed the right thing to do.

Having in mind that the application deadline for the PROMOS scholarship was 1st of June, I had less than a week to collect all the documents and have them signed from both sides, Peru and Germany. However, I managed to submit everything before the date, and around 6 weeks later I got the confirmation that I was granted the scholarship. So now it was real, I was going to Peru.

The advantage I had when planning my stay in Arequipa was that I already knew a classmate who was going to work with Intiwawa too, but in a different position. While I did not have to be in the country until mid-September, she had to be there around August. Thus, she was of great help when asking about accommodation, weather, or visa, for example. For the latter, the situation in Peru became more complicated following the Covid19 pandemic and more conservative migration policies. Before these, you could enter the country with a tourist visa and stay for 180 days. However, now you can only stay with a tourist visa an amount of 90 days within a 180-day stay period. If you stay longer, as I did, then you have to pay around 1 euro for each extra day you have stayed in the country. Luckily, this is an expense I did not have to deal with, since Intiwawa would pay for the fine.

In any case, I arrived in Arequipa after a very long flight on the 9th of September 2022, Friday. I was meant to start working next Monday the 12th; therefore I had a weekend to recover from the flight, get used to the new time zone and get to know the city. Regarding accommodation, my classmate had already spoken to the volunteers who were there, and they told her that there was a flat that was being renovated and ready to move into when I arrived. The 3-apartment building was owned by the mother of one of the former Intiwawa volunteers, who had been living and working independently for 3 years in Arequipa. This is a good example of the informality that I was going to experience in Peru for the following months. Thus, we have lived together in the same apartment along with another volunteer paying an amount of 600 Peruvian soles, around 150 Euros per month. The flat is located in a quiet area, halfway between Intiwawa and the city centre.



Arequipa is surrounded by three magnificent volcanoes, this one in the picture called Misti. Photo taken on 9 September in a cafe downtown.

Financially, I was funded by PROMOS for a period of three months with almost 3.000€, although my stay was six months long. This meant that I could count on around 500€ per month, with timely financial support from my parents. Although the first month you move is always when you spend the most (airfare, house purchases, telephone...), in general Peru is a very affordable country to live in compared to European standards. Public transport, even though chaotic, is very cheap; food, nightlife, cultural activities, and so on are also economical.

Work wise, I officially started my internship on Monday 12th of September 2022. The idea was to have a three-week induction with the then project coordinator. During that time, she showed me the dynamics of the work, what I needed to know about the mothers in the project, the NGO, who to contact, where to buy if I needed materials, how to register purchases, payments, sales of the products that the mothers knitted, etc. It was an intense 3-week period until she left and I took over the first week of October. Of course, at the beginning I was intimidated, I wanted to do everything right, be just and fair, try not to make mistakes, start to implement my own changes to the benefit of the group and the project, etc., but as time went on I got used to it. On Mondays and Fridays I did not have to go to the NGO, I could do administrative work from home. However, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and even some Saturdays I had to be at Intiwawa from 2:30pm to 5:30pm, which meant that I had to leave home at least one hour before, since there is a lot of traffic in the city and distances get longer. Likewise, at least a couple of days per week I had meetings I had to attend after going to Intiwawa, therefore the amount of work has been quite challenging with little room to focus on my university tasks.

As I mentioned, [Intiwawa](#) is a small local NGO with little resources and highly dependant on external fundings. However, its potential to grow and reach more people is very remarkable, since its main goal is to break the cycle of poverty in the area where it is located. To do so, there are many international and national volunteers who work in the different projects conforming the organization, such as education, empowerment and health. The main setback, as I said, is economic, that is why Intiwawa is not able to offer paid positions, which makes long-term staff retention difficult. For coordinators like me, it does offer monthly support for public transport, which normally does not exceed 15€ (50 Peruvian soles). For instance, the wool that the mothers of the project I manage use is material donated by a renowned Peruvian company working with alpaca wool. Likewise, the room where the participants and myself worked was too small to host all of us, the equipment, material and other tools, therefore it became essential to seek funding to build a [second floor](#) and to add additional classrooms and facilities. In any case, I believe all of the volunteers agree that working or volunteering at Intiwawa is a first-hand experience, where we all learn from different contexts, get used to intercultural daily activities and enjoy living in another country, with its advantages and disadvantages.



Thank you picture for a donation of wool to the project. In the photo, the participant mothers and their respective coordinators and directors. October 2022.



Photo of an outing with all Intiwawa volunteers, with the Misti volcano again in the background. October 2022.

The first three months the amount of work was quite heavy, especially October, November and December with the holding of two entrepreneurship fairs. Thanks to the social responsibility part of the company organising both fairs, our project had the opportunity to participate free of charge and to have a stand to exhibit the handmade products made by the mothers. So it was weeks of hard work organising the products, the orders, transferring everything to the fair, registering sales, expenses and income, etc.



A hot December day at the fair “working hard”. The woman next to me is one of the participant mothers, [REDACTED]. Behind us, some of the products on display.

Thus, my daily life was heavily influenced by work, even though I usually had more flexibility on Mondays and Fridays to make plans with friends, as well as weekends. As I mentioned, from Tuesdays to Thursdays I had to go with Intiwawa to attend the knitting classes with the mothers, given them material if needed, conduct some financial classes that took place on Wednesdays throughout November, etc. What I basically did in my free time was to meet up with other Intiwawa volunteers and Peruvian friends, watch movies together, go for lunch or dinner, do trips if the time allowed to... In fact, practically when I arrived here and already at the next weekend, I could visit one of the deepest canyons in the world, the Colca Canyon, very close to Arequipa. Another weekend in October we visited a town in the coast, and even had a swim for the first time in the Pacific Ocean! After that, my cousins visited me for a couple of weeks in Peru, so I could also go to Lima. Also during my stay here, I had time to do some online and on-site courses. One of the on-site courses was organized by Amnesty International Peru in the city of Cusco on the topic of anti-racism, thus I could likewise attend it after permission from my boss to leave the fair for 3 days. After the last fair concluded in Christmas Eve, I experienced what it was like to spend my first Christmas away from home; different but grateful to be able to spend it with people I was fond of too. 2023 arrived, and January was quieter in terms of work, because it is the summer holidays and almost everything comes to a standstill. There was no project at Intiwawa, so I was able to rest and even spend a few days in a coastal town. Late January and beginning of February, little by little we started to resume activities in my project with some meetings and weaving practices.

In general, it has been a remarkable experience. The best aspects of my stay here have of course been all that I have learnt as project coordinator, all the challenging moments I had to learn to adapt to, last minute changes, how demanding it was to work with other people and their contexts, the willingness to be always just and to do the greatest good possible. Personally, I have lived independently, dealing with my time freely, overcoming obstacles autonomously, and I have very much enjoyed this freedom. Nevertheless, I have also experienced more complicated moments, for example when the mothers of the project have opened up to me and I have been able to see all the difficulties they have in their lives, which, inevitably, I often took home with me too. Another challenging moment took place in mid-December and throughout January too, when politically the situation in Peru and especially in the south of the country where Arequipa is located turned a little bit violent and unstable. Those were days of uncertainty, we had to plan carefully whether we could carry out with our normal lives, listening to the news to check whether for example roads were blocked and could move freely. Currently, although not fully resolved, political tension has been considerably reduced. And of course, sometimes it was hard not to feel homesick and fight against the impulse of taking a flight (a very expensive one) to fly home and see your beloved ones, especially at a period such as Christmas. Yet, I would repeat this experience a thousand times.

Finally, I would like to end with helpful tips and links. If you are facing a long stay abroad, first thing I would do is to gather all the possible information about the country: traditions, weather, history, currency, health... Personally, I like to buy travel guides every time I visit a country for a long time, my favourite one is Lonely Planet. I also join Facebook groups which are made up of people living there and who share their experiences and tips. If it is possible, I try to meet up with people who have lived or worked or even just visited the country, which is highly useful since they bring use their own tips based on their personal experiences.