

# **Internship Experience Report**

## **Introduction**

I am a student at Ruhr University Bochum currently in the fourth semester of the NOHA (Network on Humanitarian Action) Master's program in International Humanitarian Action, specifically within the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV). The NOHA program lasts four semesters, comprising an articulate curriculum with the objective of providing training in humanitarian action. The first semester is undertaken at the home university, followed by a specialization semester at a host university. Subsequently, the third semester is called the “contextualization period”, during which I opted for a work placement to gain practical insights into humanitarian work. This led me to embark on an internship with the Italian humanitarian organization INTERSOS.

Through funding provided by Erasmus +, I had the opportunity to undertake a six-month internship, organized as three months at the organization's headquarters in Rome and a further three months in a field mission at the coordination office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. This experience with INTERSOS provided me with hands-on experience and reinforced my commitment to a career in humanitarian action.

## **Internship Search**

Securing an internship with INTERSOS was a significant achievement for me since I found it very difficult to receive a response from the hundreds of applications that I sent during the period from February to June 2023. Despite all the challenges, I persisted in my pursuit, as I understood that it would have been essential for me to find an internship that included at least a part of field work, to really understand the extent of the knowledge that I acquired during my studies and to make sure that the humanitarian work was the right choice for my future career.

Finally in July my application for the internship in the West Africa region was met with success, and I was offered an internship opportunity in the Programmes Department at INTERSOS headquarters in Rome.

## **Preparation**

As a student enrolled in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree Programme in International Humanitarian Action, I was sure that during the first two semesters of studies I had been able to acquire the theoretical knowledge necessary for working in a humanitarian organisation. Although my academic background provided me with a solid foundation in understanding complex

humanitarian situations and developing effective interventions, I felt the need of spending my semester doing a work placement since I felt I lacked the practical experience.

The preparation phase of my internship at INTERSOS involved many challenges linked with finding an accommodation in Rome and with acquiring specific knowledge on INTERSOS' operations, especially in the West Africa Region. With limited direct contact with my supervisors before the beginning of my internship, I had to rely on my research skills to gain insights into the organization's operations and mandate. This preparation proved invaluable as it helped me understand the humanitarian work provided by the organisation as well as the various types of intervention in the different context in which the organisation operates.

### **Accommodation**

Arranging accommodation in Rome for just three months was very challenging, considering the size of the city and the lack of good public transportation (the Metro breaks down very often and finding an accommodation close to a Metro stop sounded impossible at the beginning), but also the high demand for rooms and the rental prices in Rome which are extremely high. However, I managed to find a suitable living arrangement only 30 minutes by foot from the office, which for being in Rome was extremely close! I was also in one of the nicest areas of the city, Rione Monti, which allowed me to have quality free time walking around the wonderful oldest part of Rome, close to the Colosseum and the Fori Imperiali.

### **Implementation**

#### **Internship Experience in Rome**

My internship experience at INTERSOS headquarters in Rome was characterized by diverse and meaningful tasks. I was placed in the West Africa office under the guidance of the Deputy Regional Director of the West Africa Region and the Regional Grants Officer. Their mentorship proved invaluable as I challenged myself to understand the dynamics of a humanitarian organisation first, and then to have an overview of the various departments and projects carried out. One of my primary responsibilities involved the organisation of the information management platform, where all project-related documentation from the six countries in the region was stored. This task required attention to detail and effective communication skills to ensure coordination among the staff from all the countries. Additionally, I was deeply involved in the revision of project reports, this allowed me to understand donors' requirements and to delve into the various activities and indicators related to the projects. Moreover, I provided support in project proposal writing and I also actively participated in presentations to key stakeholders. Beyond administrative duties, I embraced the opportunity to

engage in MEAL activities, recognizing the critical role they play in ensuring accountability and learning within humanitarian initiatives. Finally, I had the opportunity to collaborate closely for a short period of time with the Protection Advisor and with the Localisation Advisor, which gave me firsthand insights into the intricacies of safeguarding vulnerable populations in crisis settings.

### **Field Mission in Burkina Faso**

Transitioning from the headquarters to the dynamic landscape of the field operations coordination office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, marked a significant juncture in my internship journey that I was looking forward to experience. Throughout my role of Assistant to the UNHCR Project Manager, I assumed multiple responsibilities spanning project planning, administration, implementation, and evaluation. Central to my role was the tracking of project activities, ensuring a good communication with the field team, deployed in 5 regions of the country, to guarantee the timely execution of activities in alignment with the strategy of the organisation and donor expectations. I also contributed to the formalization of logistical arrangements and supported the Project Manager in the planning and implementation of trainings and meetings with the stakeholders, and I was lucky enough to be involved in trainings at the UNHCR Burkina Faso headquarters. Furthermore, I was engaged in administrative functions to support the Project Manager and the Team, including the budget forecasting and the indicator tracking, which equipped me with a holistic understanding of project management dynamics. I actively contributed to reporting activities in support of the Grants Officer, thanks to the abilities that I acquired during my time in HQ.

Beyond professional pursuits, I seized every opportunity to immerse myself in the vibrant culture of Burkina Faso, and the multicultural environment provided me with invaluable exposure to working collaboratively with colleagues from different backgrounds, enhancing my interpersonal and teamwork skills.

### **Challenges and Learning Opportunities**

Throughout my internship with INTERSOS, I encountered various challenges that tested my resilience and adaptability. From navigating complex bureaucratic procedures to managing competing priorities in dynamic environments and adapting to the new context of Burkina Faso, considering that French is my third language, each obstacle presented an opportunity for personal and professional growth. I feel that this internship provided me with many important personal and professional tools that helped me to have an amazing experience. Moreover, witnessing firsthand the impact of humanitarian interventions reaffirmed my commitment to pursuing a career in the humanitarian sector.

## **Conclusion**

My internship with INTERSOS was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of humanitarian action and equipped me with invaluable skills for the future. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to contribute to INTERSOS's mission and look forward to continuing my journey in the humanitarian field with passion and dedication.