

# Working with Paperless Migrants on the Streets of Oslo, Norway

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## OSLO, NORWAY

Norway is a Scandinavian country with a population of 5.3 million people. Its strong social welfare system, funded by petroleum revenues, promotes wealth redistribution and residents' rights to healthcare, education, income, and housing. Oslo is Norway's capital and largest city.

## KIRKENS BYMISJON

### Organization

Kirkens Bymisjon, or Church City Mission, is one of Norway's largest non-profit organizations and works to fill in many of the gaps in Norway's social welfare system. It currently has over 1800 employees working in 40 Norwegian towns and cities. Its vision is that all people shall experience respect, justice and care.

Among its many programs, Kirkens Bymisjon provides support, advocacy, and services to people living on the streets of Oslo. Most of these individuals are migrants who do not have rights to social welfare benefits in Norway.

### Field Placement

I worked with three programs that serve Roma migrants from Eastern Europe:

- **Akuttovernattingen:** An "emergency accommodations" shelter for foreigners without rights in Norway
- **Møtstedet:** A meeting place and café for Kirkens Bymisjon guests to have a safe and warm space to relax, eat, and speak with social workers
- **Tøyenkirken/Byfrokost:** A church offering free breakfast, lockers, and laundry services to foreigners without rights

## OUTCOMES

During my 16 week field placement, I focused on engaging with guests and understanding the position of Kirkens Bymisjon sites in Norway's social welfare system. My accomplishments include:

- Writing a literature review on the factors driving the migration of Roma in Europe
- Assessing the shelter's risk management protocols using EU regulations and publicized best practices
- Learning basic phrases in Romanian and Norwegian to improve my ability to interact meaningfully with guests
- Presenting about opportunities at the shelter to approximately 150 OsloMet social work students
- Evaluating the shelter's volunteer program and proposing recommendations to improve volunteers' experience



"No one is just what you see"

## SKILLS DEVELOPED

- Flexibility and adaptability
- Entering and exiting communities
- Setting boundaries
- Assessment and evaluation
- Intercultural and cross-lingual communication

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Language can be a tool for oppression or for promoting dignity and respect. Kirkens Bymisjon refers to its clients as "guests" and typically charges a symbolic fee for food or shelter at its service sites. Establishing the clients as "guests" means that they have the right to complain or demand better service and establishes more equitable relations between guests and social work staff.
- Cross-border advocacy is an important component of working with immigrant populations. Social workers in Oslo protested the treatment of guests to government ministries in their countries of origin, and connected guests who had been deported from Norway to services in their destination countries.
- As my first field placement involving a direct practice component, I learned to identify and acknowledge the strengths of guests. Doing so enabled me to be a better advocate.

## ADVICE

- Research opportunities to meet people before you leave the United States. I found sports teams, student clubs, outdoors groups, and volunteering helpful for making friends.
- Dedicate time at the beginning of your experience to meeting stakeholders and understanding the organizational and cultural context.

## CONNECTIONS

### Classroom

#### **SW 683: Evaluation in Social Work**

This course taught me how to create evaluation tools, analyze qualitative data, and produce a professional report that synthesizes findings.

#### **SW 651: Planning for Organizational and Community Change**

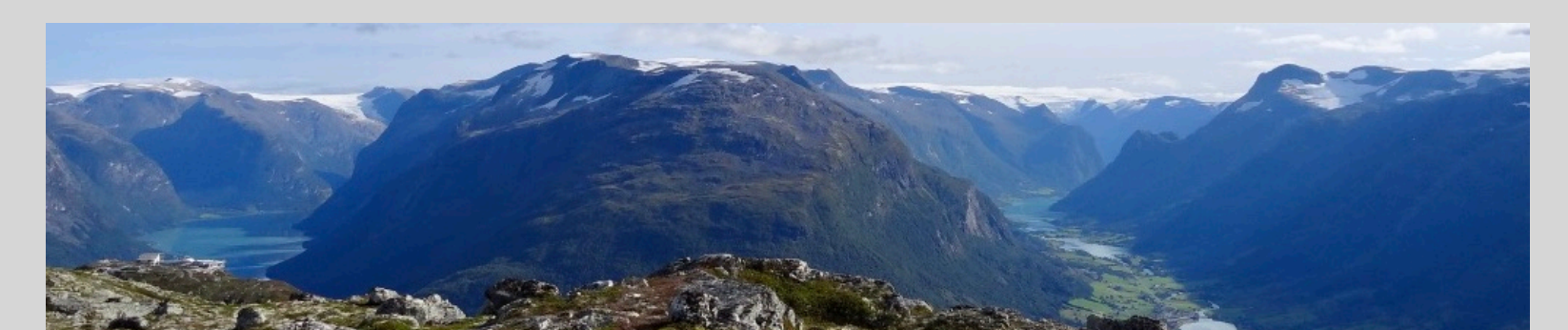
This course taught me best practices for engaging with stakeholders and entering and exiting communities.

#### **SW 648: Issues in Global Social Work Practice**

This course taught me to examine my biases, understand my culture and privilege as an American, and how to address ethical conflicts in global settings.

### Career

Kirkens Bymisjon offered many benefits to its employees with the goal of improving their health, happiness, and social work practice. As a management student, I plan to introduce these ideas to my future workplace. My field placement also strengthened my interest in working with migrant populations following graduation.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the Global Activities Scholars Program for financially supporting my field placement. Thanks to Katie Lopez, Kirkens Bymisjon, and OsloMet for giving me the opportunity to learn from Norwegian social workers. Thanks also to the staff at Kirkens Bymisjon for their patience, guidance, good humour, and friendship. Tusen takk!