



Human Rights & Basic Needs for Economic Migrants in Norway

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KIRKENS
BYMISJON



City/Country: Oslo, Norway

Nestled between the Oslofjord and beautiful green forests, Oslo is Norway's capital and largest city, with a population of around 700,000. Known for its multiculturalism, an estimated 35% of its residents have an immigrant background. While Norway's robust welfare system provides strong social support, the country's immigration policies and membership to the Schengen Area and European Economic Area (EEA) allows for populations without permanent rights (e.g., economic migrants) to reside temporarily in the country. This has created a pressing need to address basic needs and uphold human rights for all residents. Many NGOs are actively engaged in this crucial work.

The Roma Population in Norway

The Roma population in Norway, part of a larger ethnic group spread across Europe and the globe, has a long and complex history marked by migration and discrimination. Traditionally nomadic, many Roma arrived in Norway in the 19th century and later during World War II. Those that migrated during this timeframe are now recognized as national minorities in Norway and receive certain rights and funding towards cultural preservation. Nowadays, Norway continues to receive new waves of Roma people, predominantly for temporary economic migration. However, despite Norway's welfare system, many Roma still face significant barriers including discrimination, limited rights & social services, language barriers, and difficulty accessing employment.

Acknowledgments

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Placement/Project Information

My work at Kirkens Bymisjon spanned different services and included work at the micro and mezzo-levels of social work. I worked at the emergency women's shelter, the neighborhood lunch for elderly Norwegians, the counseling and resources center, with the outreach initiative, and at the community café. Among my tasks, I helped with the check-in process at the shelter, built community over lunch, connected people with resources and basic needs, and helped to prepare and serve low-cost meals.

Agency/Community Partner

Kirkens Bymisjon ("Church City Mission") is an organization dating back to 1855 that provides services across Norway, operating in 50 cities and towns throughout the country. The organization has grown to offer a variety of services addressing a diverse array of needs and populations, including elderly care, child welfare, mental health care, migrant integration, substance use treatment, and emergency shelter accommodations, among many others. Kirken Bymisjon's Akuttovernatting in Oslo is one of the only emergency shelters in the city, and it serves as an integral space for women and couples without permanent rights in Norway and without housing.

Outcomes

During my placement, I engaged in many different activities and tasks. Some of my favorites include:

- Translation of essential resources and survival guides into Arabic
- Presentation on trauma-informed practices in an emergency shelter and with the Roma population
- Combatting the Norwegian "loneliness epidemic" through making Norwegian foods and eating lunch weekly with the neighborhood

Skills Utilized/Developed

- **Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior:** This came in so many forms from using emotional intelligence, navigating ethical dilemmas, and using supervision & interprofessional collaboration
- **Engage Diversity and Difference:** Navigating cultural differences, communication, learning the dynamics of the Norwegian system
- **Advance Human Rights and Social Justice:** outreach, human right to housing and healthcare, accessibility to resources, health promotion

Classroom Connections

SW680: Power in the Global Context

It was helpful to have the theoretical frameworks from this class in navigating my privilege and broader power dynamics at play with the organization and the populations that I was working with. It also helped me to question what I *thought* I knew, who I was learning from, and the narratives being highlighted or silenced.

SW681: Critical Reflexive Global Practices

The many dialogues led by Dr. C in this class were essential in situating myself as a social worker in a global space. This class guided me in reflecting on *why* I want to do this work, *how* I should approach the work, and in *what* ways my different identities will factor into my work and rapport building.

Lessons Learned

- It's important to learn about the influence/role of culture in navigating ethical situations
- Interprofessional collaboration and multiple perspectives provides for a more in-depth and valuable experience
- Communication comes in many forms and may not always be easy, but it is one of the best forms of connection

Career Connections

This summer, I learned a lot about working in a **multicultural and multilingual setting** and navigating my own identities and boundaries within such work. It was also important for me to learn about the different intersecting **policies impacting immigration**, including the Schengen Agreement, the EEA, local/municipality law, and national law. I hope to apply these experiences and skills in my future work with migrant populations. This experience also further emphasized the value in learning **languages**, and has encouraged me to keep up with them for use working with global populations.

Advice

- ☐ **Be flexible:** There are so many moving parts with these experiences. Something is bound to be different than expected. Give yourself grace, be willing to adapt to change, and embrace the unknown – some of the best adventures come from it!
- ☐ **Advocate for yourself:** There are so many people abroad and at U-M that can support you and ensure that you are on track with your academic and professional goals! Just don't be afraid to speak up and communicate what you need.

