Internship report
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Introduction

I started looking for an internship, which is mandatory part of my master's programme, in March, 2016 and I began my search with the UN agencies operating in health sphere since it is the main area of my interest with relation to humanitarian action. I saw the World Health Organization as the top priority organisation for my internship and on its website I found that there were open vacancies for different health specialisations in various locations. The application procedure was quite common, namely I filled out an online form and uploaded my CV and a motivation letter. It was possible to choose preferred areas of work and location so I put “emergency relief” and “environmental health” in the region of the Americas. However, to my surprise, I received an offer from the WHO headquarters in Geneva, more specifically, from the department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. Psychology is another sphere I am interested in so the offer seemed to me a good opportunity to expand my knowledge about psychology and mental health and I accepted the offer.
The Internship Organisation

To set up a global health organisation was one of the ideas discussed by diplomats when they met to form the United Nations in 1945. It led to signing the WHO Constitution which came into effect on 7 April 1948 - a date now celebrated as World Health Day. Nowadays, more than 7000 people from more than 150 countries work for the Organization in 150 offices in countries, territories and areas (more than 50% of WHO staff work there), six regional offices, at the Global Service Centre in Malaysia and at the headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. WHO regions comprise African region, region of the Americas, region of South-East Asia, European region, Eastern Mediterranean region, and Western Pacific region. Each region has a regional office. Governance takes place through the World Health Assembly, which is the supreme decision-making body; and the Executive Board, which puts into effect the decisions and policies of the Health Assembly. The Organization is headed by the Director-General, who is appointed by the Health Assembly on the nomination of the Executive Board. As part of the UN system, the WHO has six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. It was established by a 1978 World Health Assembly resolution, thereby adopting a multilingualism policy.

WHO supports Member States by coordinating the efforts of multiple sectors of the governments and partners, including funds and foundations, civil society organizations and private sector in order to achieve their health objectives and support their national health policies and strategies. The areas in which WHO works include health systems (the priority is moving towards universal health coverage), noncommunicable diseases (the diseases are responsible for more than 70% of all deaths worldwide, especially in low- and middle-income countries) promoting health through the life-course (it includes addressing environmental risks and social determinants of health, as well as gender, equity and human rights), communicable diseases (through prevention, treatment and care), preparedness, surveillance and response (in emergencies, WHO leads and coordinates
the health response in support of countries, undertaking risk assessments, identifying priorities and setting strategies through provision of technical guidance, supplies and financial resources and monitoring the health situation. WHO also helps countries to strengthen their national capacities to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies due to any health-threatening hazard), and corporate services (enabling functions, tools and resources that makes all of this work possible).
Tasks & Activities of the Internship

The main project I worked on was the Global Survey on Alcohol and Health. I did quality check of countries’ responses and translated some of them from Spanish and Russian into English. Data entry in the online platform and preparing Excel documents to monitor the survey progression in the different WHO regions were also amongst my duties. Besides that, I was involved in the qualitative analysis of responses to a specific question.

Another project I helped with was a project on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Particularly, I supported the preparation of psychological assessment instruments via translating the content from Russian into English and formatting the versions of different languages.

Also, I was involved in systematic comparison of Russian, Spanish and English versions of Internet portals on alcohol and health, entered data collected for a questionnaire on field testing of international treatment standards, and did literature search on a variety of topics such as the relation between child marriage and suicide; inter-personal therapy.
Supervision of the Internship

As my supervisor worked in two teams (suicide prevention and substance abuse) and was quite busy, we had meetings once in several weeks. Despite this, she always replied promptly and was ready to help if needed. There was also a consultant who worked with me on a daily basis. She was a very friendly person, always willing to help and answer any of my questions. Also, I really appreciated the friendly environment and positive working atmosphere within the whole department. I think it is very important and can largely influence interns’ motivation, results and the overall impression of the internship. So my general impression of the supervision is very positive. I never felt abandoned or helpless.
Living Conditions

It was a real challenge to find accommodation in Geneva since the demand was very high. I was a member of various Facebook groups about accommodation and regularly monitored a number of websites. Luckily, after three weeks of searching I found a room on the website for expats in Geneva called glocals.com.

With regard to financial conditions, Geneva is a very expensive city so even with Marco Polo grant it was quite difficult, especially because accommodation there is extremely expensive. Although, I was lucky and found a room for 500 CHF, the average price, I would say, is around 700 CHF. Another option is to live in France, just across the border. It is a bit cheaper but at the same still easily accessible from Geneva.

Generally, Geneva is a touristic, worth visiting place. It has world famous sights such as the Lake, the fountain, the UN area and many others. In my free time, my friends and I did a lot of walking and sightseeing, went to Lausanne, went for hikes to Saleve mountain and to Chamonix and sometimes went out. Unfortunately, I did not travel a lot because transport in Switzerland is very expensive.
Conclusion

Due to my internship, I have gained unique experience of working in the UN system, improved my organisational, research and communication skills via working on the projects mentioned above and interaction with people from different countries and with different professional and cultural backgrounds. I have also expanded my knowledge of mental health, countries’ health systems, and public health issues related to alcohol.

In addition to the points made above, during my internship I have also got a better understanding of the WHO role in the UN system and in the global health, in general. Besides that, I attended a number of events such as lunch-time seminars and the mhGAP Forum which expanded my knowledge on the psychological response in emergencies, cardiovascular diseases, the WHO response to the Ebola crisis, and various topics, tools and therapies related to mental health. Also, I had an opportunity to network with other organisations in Geneva such as the IFRC which is also a valuable experience for me.

There are a number of strengths I would like to mention. Firstly, the WHO provided a perfect opportunity for networking which is very important for personal and professional development. Secondly, seminars offered by the WHO also contributed to the expansion of knowledge on the variety of topics related to health. Also, the WHO had a relatively big interns’ community. It provided a good opportunity to meet new people and make friends in a new country.

There are a couple of more things I would like to point out. Firstly, due to high living standards in Geneva, it was financially challenging to do an unpaid internship, even though I received a Marco Polo grant. Secondly, as mentioned above, accommodation was a big issue, therefore I
think it would be very helpful for prospective interns if the WHO could provide some allowance and help with housing.

Overall, my internship was very interesting and enjoyable. It was another valuable experience which contributed to both my personal and professional development.