Career Opportunities in
HUMAN RIGHTS

Description of the field
The international human rights field is comprised of a broad spectrum of
governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations
focused on the alleviation of human suffering and the protection and
promotion of human rights. Careers address the full spectrum of human
rights: economic, social, cultural, political, and civil. The field of human
rights overlaps with key issue areas of peace and security, development,
law, humanitarian assistance, and economic and social affairs.

Work in human rights can be challenging and intense. Organizations use a
variety of disciplines in their approach to social justice, including direct
service, advocacy, policy development, and research. Activities include
research focusing on preventing and ending human rights abuses
throughout the world, monitoring human rights development, conducting
on-site investigations, writing reports on human rights conditions,
engaging in advocacy to publicize and curtail human rights violations,
litigation, lobbying, and promoting human rights practices in social and
political structures. In addition, human rights professionals provide
advisory and educational services, refugee assistance, policy analysis for
national and international institutions, assistance in institution building,
and economic development monitoring.

Career Paths
The field of human rights is broad and multidisciplinary; therefore, there is
no direct or specific career path to follow. Over the past 25 years, the
variety of career opportunities in human rights has broadened to include
grassroots/community organizers, media specialists, grant writers,
educators, financial analysts, journalists, researchers, health care
professionals, and human rights monitors. The energy behind human
rights work is often found in local/indigenous grassroots groups. Support
for these groups can be provided in the form of technical assistance,
research, or training.

Although the field is relatively competitive to enter, there are many entry-
level opportunities for job seekers with a bachelor’s degree interested in
this area of social justice. Possible positions include assistant project
coordinator, researcher, communications assistant, development
associate, and community organizer.

Positions for candidates with a relevant master’s degree are most
frequently in the capacity of monitoring, reporting, administrative, and

QUALIFICATIONS TO
ENTER THE FIELD

+ The skills required to work in the
human rights field vary
depending on the organization
and type of work.

+ Human rights advocates must
be skilled in research, writing,
analytical thinking, public
speaking, and/or grassroots
organizing. Those working in
policy development, legal cases,
or complex international
treaties typically require an
advanced degree in law,
music, anthropology, or
something similar.

+ All candidates should possess
excellent oral and written
communication skills, foreign
language proficiency, cross-
cultural skills, flexibility, and a
willingness to carry out a wide
range of responsibilities with
limited resources.

+ Experience living and working
abroad, especially in a
developing country, is highly
recommended.

+ Internships with human rights
organizations are one way to
gain valuable experience while
also providing professional
contacts in the human rights
community. In many cases,
internships lead directly or
indirectly to full-time jobs.

+ It is also helpful, if not critical, to
be familiar with primary human
rights documents and
declarations such as the United
Nations Universal Declaration of
Human Rights, Covenant on
Civil and Political Rights,
Convention on the Elimination
organizational efforts and can include titles such as program manager, analyst, research associate, writer/reporter, regional monitor, and legal advocate.

Advanced positions can include positions such as executive director, project administrator, senior program director, and legal counsel. Depending on the size and type of organization, senior-level employees can have a salary anywhere from the low-$40,000s to over $100,000. A law degree or a background in an overlapping field is often required for senior-level employment.

Sample Employers

- Amnesty International – amnesty.org/en
- Association for Women's Rights in Development – awid.org
- The Carter Center – cartercenter.org
- Center for Economic and Social Rights – cesr.org
- Center for Justice and International Law – cejil.org/en
- Derechos Human Rights – derechos.org/esp.html
- Freedom House – freedomhouse.org
- Global Exchange – globalexchange.org
- Human Rights First – humanrightsfirst.org
- Human Rights Watch – hrw.org
- Institute for Global Communication – igc.apc.org
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre – internal-displacement.org
- International Center for Transitional Justice – icij.org
- International Refugee Rights Initiative – refugee-rights.org
- International Rescue Committee – rescue.org
- National Network for Immigrant & Refugee Rights – nnirr.org/drupal
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) – nrc.no
- Oxfam International – oxfam.org
- Physicians for Human Rights – physiciansforhumanrights.org
- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) – ohchr.org
- United Nations Organizations – un.org
- US Agency for International Development (USAID) – usaid.gov
- Witness for Peace – witnessforpeace.org

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources
- AAAS Science and Human Rights Program – aas.org/program/science-human-rights-coalition
- Action Without Borders (Idealist) – idealist.org
- Alliance for Conflict Transformation – conflicttransformation.org
- Human Rights Education Associates – hrea.org
- Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems – huridocs.org
- Human Rights Internet – hri.ca
- OneWorld – oneworld.org

DEMAND

+ Paid positions in the field are increasing, but still limited for young professionals. The jobs that do exist can be found primarily with nongovernmental organizations or, in some cases, with the federal government.

+ There are opportunities in other fields which overlap with human rights such as governmental affairs, law, and lobbying.

+ There are also short-term positions for those on leave from other jobs, i.e. lawyers, teachers, social workers, and doctors. Domestic careers in human rights include work with refugees, civil rights, and women's issues.

QUALIFICATIONS TO ENTER THE FIELD

(Cont’d.)

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The People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning – pdhre.org
Relief Web – reliefweb.int
Thomson Reuters Foundation News – news.trust.org/humanitarian
University of Minnesota Human Rights Library – hrlibrary.umn.edu

LinkedIn Groups
Amnesty International – linkedin.com/groups/43780/profile
Human Rights Watch (HRW) Supporters – linkedin.com/groups?gid=62934
Peace & Human Rights International – linkedin.com/groups/2055039/profile

Publications
Human Rights Organizations and Periodicals Directory, Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, published annually.
The United Nations Chronicle – unchronicle.un.org

FUTURE CHALLENGES OF THE PROFESSION

+ The magnitude of human rights challenges today far exceeds the capacity of global institutions to address them, particularly in the peacekeeping arena.

+ The intractable problems of poverty and the lack of health care in both the developed and lesser developed world remain significant challenges.

+ International development initiatives and human rights are increasingly linked, as aid is being tied to issues of democracy and governance.

+ Problems of ethnic conflict, refugee flows, reinforcing political support for human rights, women’s rights, and related issues will remain significant priorities in the human rights field.

+ There are challenges inherent to international human rights work. Living and/or traveling abroad can be both exciting and challenging. Employees may be separated from familiar surroundings and relationships for long periods of time and may be living in austere conditions. For positions requiring extensive travel, it can be hard to maintain family relationships or enjoy regular personal activities.