

CDO GUIDE TO CAREERS IN PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW

Last updated November 2023

Table of Contents

Introduction to International Law	1
Public International Law Specializations	2
International Organizations and Institutions	8
Networking and Professional Development	9
Job Search Strategies	10

Introduction to International Law

International law involves a broad spectrum of legal norms, treaties, and agreements that govern interactions between countries, international organizations, and individuals on a global scale. This guide will give you a foundational understanding of public international law careers.

Understanding International Law

Public International Law focuses on disputes between nations, and citizens of different nations. Public International Law is governed by various inter-governmental organizations, such as the United Nations, and other sources of law such as treaties and customs.¹

Private International Law deals with disputes between private citizens of different countries. Also referred to in common law jurisdictions as “conflicts of law.”²

Public International Law Careers

- **Diplomat or Foreign Service Officer:** Represent your country in international negotiations, diplomatic relations, and work to advance your nation’s interests in foreign countries or before international organizations.
- **International Human Rights Advocate:** Defend human rights by working for organizations, firms, or other entities that address issues like gender equality, refugee rights, freedom of expression, and more.
- **International Trade Lawyer:** Navigate complex trade regulations, negotiate trade agreements, and resolve disputes arising from international trade and investments.
- **International Environmental Lawyer:** Address environmental challenges on a global scale, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development.
- **International Criminal Lawyer:** Work for international tribunals or non-governmental organizations to investigate, prosecute/defend individuals, or help adjudicate cases at atrocity crimes of crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, and/or aggression.
- **International Arbitrator/Mediator:** Resolve disputes between states, organizations, or individuals through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.
- **Consulting and Advisory Roles:** Provide legal advice to governments, NGOs, and international organizations to shape policies and strategies.
- **Advocacy Campaigns:** Lead or contribute to advocacy campaigns related to human rights, environmental protection, or other global issues.
- **Policy Analysis:** Offer insights on the legal implications of international developments and assist in crafting informed policies. Positions are often located in NYC and D.C.

¹ *Libguides: Public International Law: Introduction.* Introduction - Public International Law - LibGuides at UCLA School of Law - Hugh & Hazel Darling Law Library. (2023, July 20). <https://libguides.law.ucla.edu/publicinternationallaw>

² *Libguides: Private International Law: Introduction.* Introduction - Private International Law - LibGuides at UCLA School of Law - Hugh & Hazel Darling Law Library. (2023a, May 18). <https://libguides.law.ucla.edu/privateinternational>

Public International Law Specializations

There are numerous international law specializations that cater to specific legal issues, areas of expertise, and global challenges. As you explore potential career paths, consider these specialized fields that offer unique opportunities to make a meaningful impact.

Criminal Law

International criminal lawyers handle cases related to international crimes, such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression. International criminal law is enforced by international courts and tribunals, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as domestic courts with jurisdiction over these types of crimes. Further, there are many NGOs, academic institutions, and intragovernmental organizations working in this field, albeit in different ways. Some responsibilities include:

- Working for and litigating in international criminal tribunals or domestic courts.
- Investigating and prosecuting individuals involved in grave human rights violations.
- Providing legal representation to victims or defendants.
- Working closely with human rights organizations to promote justice, accountability, and the protection of human rights on a global scale.
- Collaborating with investigators, witnesses, and experts to build cases.
- Advising governments and international bodies on matters related to international criminal law and justice.

If you are interested in litigating international cases, it is very helpful to gain domestic trial experience in prosecution or criminal defense. A substantial number of attorneys who litigate in international tribunals first build their skills domestically.

Associations and Resources

- [International Criminal Court Bar Association](#)
- [ABA International Criminal Law Practice Project](#)
- [ACLU, International Criminal Defense Attorneys Association](#)
- [Association of Young International Criminal Lawyers](#)
- [American Society of International Law, Criminal Law Interest Group](#)
- [ABA's Atrocity Crimes Initiative](#)
- [The International Criminal Court Project](#)

Internships and Fellowships

- [International Criminal Court Internship](#)
- [The United Nations Careers](#)
- [United Nations, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals Internship](#)
- [International Bar Association Legal Internship Program](#)
- [American Bar Association's International Criminal Court Project](#)
- [Human Rights Careers - Tips for International Law Internships](#)
- [Coalition for the International Criminal Court](#)

Diplomatic Law

Diplomatic law governs the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of diplomats and diplomatic missions. It is a branch of international law that aims to facilitate international relations by ensuring the smooth functioning of diplomatic activities and maintaining cordial interactions between different countries.

Associations and Resources

- [The American Academy of Diplomacy](#)
- [American Foreign Service Association](#)
- [Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training](#)
- [DACOR - An Organization of Foreign Affairs Professionals](#)

Internships and Fellowship Opportunities

- [U.S. Department of State Internships/Fellowships](#)
- [Council of Foreign Relations Internships](#)
- [Charles B Rangel Graduate Fellowship Program](#)
- [Fellowship at DACOR Bacon House Foundation](#)

Economic Law

International economic lawyers deal with economic interactions and relationships between countries. Relevant practice areas include international transactional business law, international trade and investments, international commercial arbitration, and international intellectual property.

Associations and Resources

- [American Society of International Law, Economic Law Interest Group](#)
- [Society of International Economic Law](#)
- [European Society of International Law, International Economic Law Interest Group](#)
- [Peterson Institute for International Economics](#)

Internships and Fellowship Opportunities:

- [World Bank Legal Internship Program](#)
- [World Trade Organization \(WTO\) Internship](#)
- [International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes](#)
- [International Monetary Fund Internship Program](#)
- [International Economic Development Council Internships](#)
- [Custom and International Trade Bar Association and American Society of International Economic Law Interest Group Summer Fellowship Program](#)

Environmental Law

International environmental lawyers address global environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. They work on legal frameworks to combat climate change, protect biodiversity, and regulate activities with potential environmental impacts. There is also an emerging convergence of international environmental and criminal law in the concept of ecocide. Their tasks include:

- Participating in negotiations for international environmental agreements, such as the Paris Agreement.
- Advising governments on developing and implementing environmental regulations.
- Handling cases related to environmental pollution and natural resource management.
- Collaborating with NGOs to promote environmental conservation.

Associations and Resources

- [ABA, International Environmental Law](#)
- [International Bar Association, Section on Energy, Environment, Natural Resources, and Infrastructure Law](#)
- [American Society of International Law, International Environmental Law Interest Group](#)
- [United Nations Environmental Program \(UNEP\)](#)
- [Environmental Law Institute](#)
- [Earthjustice](#)
- [Center for International Law \(CIEL\)](#)
- [AIDA - Inter-American Association for Environmental Defense](#)
- [Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature](#)

Internships and Fellowship Opportunities

- [Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide Fellows Program](#)
- [Jim Rubin International Fellowship Program](#)
- [Center for International Environmental Law Internship](#)
- [Earthjustice Internship](#)

Global Health Law

Global health lawyers promote health security by strengthening international cooperation to prevent, detect, and respond to public health emergencies. They also help ensure equitable access to vaccines, treatments, and medical resources across countries as well as balance public health interests with data privacy concerns in health surveillance and data-sharing.

Associations and Resources

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [American Public Health Association - International Health Law and Policy Forum](#)
- [World Association of Medical Law](#)

Internships and Fellowship Opportunities

- [Global Health Corps Fellowship](#)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention - Public Health Law Fellowship](#) (This is a US-based fellowship but can be foundational for future public health work internationally)

Human Rights Law

Human rights lawyers focus on upholding the rights and freedoms of individuals and groups. They work to ensure that international human rights standards are respected and upheld by governments and other entities. This practice area involves much more than litigation; it also involves policy work, community building and organizing, rule-of-law work, investigations (fact gathering, witness interviewing), and various forms of advocacy. Note that it is easy to pivot from rule of law work to human rights work. Additional responsibilities include:

- Addressing issues of discrimination, torture, unlawful detention.
- Working on cases involving freedom of speech, expression, and religion.
- Collaborating with international organizations and NGOs focused on human rights advocacy, policy development, and humanitarian assistance.
- Providing legal advice to governments, NGOs, and international organizations on human rights issues, including drafting legislation and policy recommendations.
- Monitoring human rights situations, documenting abuses, and compiling reports to raise awareness and promote accountability.

Associations and Resources

- [American Society of International Law, Human Rights Interest Group](#)
- [International Bar Association, Human Rights Law Committee](#)
- [American Bar Association, Human Rights](#)
- [International Human Rights Network](#)
- [United Nations Human Rights](#)
- [Human Rights Watch](#)
- [Amnesty International](#)
- [International Crisis Group](#)

Internship and Fellowship Opportunities

- [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Internship](#)
- [Amnesty International Internships](#)
- [Human Rights Watch Internships](#)
- [International Commission of Jurists Internship Program](#)
- [United Nations Development Program Human Rights Internship](#)
- [Humanity in Action Fellowship](#)
- [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Legal Fellowship](#)
- [Human Rights Fellowships](#)
- [ABA Center for Human Rights](#)

Intellectual Property Law

Intellectual property lawyers deal with the protection of intellectual property rights across borders. As technology advances and global commerce expands, international IP law is evolving to address new challenges and opportunities.

Associations and Resources

- [World Intellectual Property Organization](#)
- [Global Innovation Policy Center](#)
- [International Trademark Association](#)
- [International Association for the Protection of Intellectual Property](#)
- [International Federation of Intellectual Property Attorneys](#)
- [United Nations, World Intellectual Property Organization](#)
- [International Intellectual Property Institute](#)

Internship and Fellowship Opportunities

- [World Intellectual Property Organization Internship](#)
- [International Intellectual Property Institute Fellows and Internships](#)

Refugee and Immigration Law

Professionals specializing in refugee and immigration law deal with legal issues arising from the movement of people across borders due to persecution, conflict, economic, and other reasons. They work to ensure the protection and rights of migrants, refugees, displaced persons, and stateless people. While translators are commonly used, speaking a foreign language(s) is desirable. Some of their responsibilities include:

- Providing legal assistance to refugees seeking asylum and protection.
- Advocating for fair immigration policies and humane treatment of migrants.
- Representing clients in deportation, asylum, and immigration proceedings.
- Collaborating with international agencies to improve the legal status and conditions of migrants.

Associations and Resources

- [International Bar Association, Immigration and Nationality Law Committee](#)
- [International Refugee Assistance Project](#)
- [The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\)](#)
- [International Organization for Migration](#)
- [International Detention Coalition](#)
- [European Council on Refugees and Exiles](#)
- [Refugee Law Initiative](#)
- [American Immigration Lawyers Program](#)
- [International Association for the Study of Forced Migration](#)
- [Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants](#)
- [Norwegian Refugee Council](#)
- [Danish Refugee Council](#)

Internship and Fellowship Opportunities

- [UN Refugee Agency Internships](#)
- [International Organization for Migration Internship](#)
- [European Council on Refugees and Exiles Internship Program](#)
- [Asylum Access Internship Program](#)
- [Center for Gender and Refugee Studies](#)
- [Refugee International Internships](#)

Trade Law

International trade lawyers assist businesses, governments, and international organizations in matters pertaining to trade policies, negotiations, dispute resolutions, and investment protection. Some of their responsibilities include:

- Advising on compliance with international trade agreements, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.
- Drafting and negotiating trade agreements and contracts.
- Guiding U.S. companies doing business abroad and foreign companies doing business in the U.S.
- Dealing with matters related to e-commerce and digital trade disputes.

Associations and Resources:

- [CO Bar, International Law Section](#)
- [ABA Section on International Law, International Trade Committee](#)
- [Customs & International Trade Bar Association](#)
- [Women in International Trade](#)
- [International Bar Association, International Trade and Customs Law Committee](#)
- [International Trade Commission Trial Lawyers Association](#)
- [Federal Circuit Bar Association, International Trade](#)

Internships and Fellowship Opportunities

- [World Trade Organization \(WTO\) Internship](#)
- [United Nations Conference on Trade Development Internship](#)
- [Custom and International Trade Bar Association and American Society of International Economic Law Interest Group Summer Fellowship Program](#)

International Organizations and Institutions

International organizations and institutions play a central role in shaping and implementing international laws. They serve as platforms for diplomatic negotiations, policy development, and the enforcement of global norms. Many of these organizations offer internships and employment opportunities.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations is one of the most prominent international organizations established to promote peace, security, development, and cooperation among nations. It comprises various specialized agencies, programs, and bodies, each addressing specific global issues.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR protects and assists refugees and internally displaced persons, advocating for their rights and ensuring their well-being.

International Labor Organization (ILO)

ILO sets labor standards, promotes decent work conditions, and addresses labor-related issues on a global scale.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

IAEA promotes the peaceful use of nuclear energy while preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and ensuring nuclear safety.

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The IMF promotes international monetary cooperation and exchange rate stability, facilitates balanced growth of international trade, and offers financial assistance to member countries facing economic challenges.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

The ICC is the only permanent international court established to prosecute individuals for the most serious crimes of international concern, including genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression.

Organization of American States (OAS)

OAS promotes cooperation and development among countries in the Americas, addressing issues such as democracy, human rights, and regional security.

World Bank Group

The World Bank provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries for development projects aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable development.

World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is responsible for international public health, setting health standards, and providing technical assistance to improve health and healthcare systems globally.

World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO facilitates global trade by establishing rules and agreements that regulate trade practices among its member countries. It provides a forum for negotiations, dispute resolution, and the promotion of free and fair trade.

Networking and Professional Development

Networking and professional development are essential aspects of building a successful career in international law. Establishing connections, staying up to date on industry trends, and enhancing your skills can open doors to exciting opportunities.

Joining International Law Associations

Participating in international law associations and organizations can provide you with a platform to connect with professionals, access resources, and stay informed about developments in the field.

Consider joining associations like:

- **International Law Student Association (ILSA):** Offers students the ability to study, research, network and participate in the Phillip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition.
- **American Bar Association (ABA):** The ABA has various international law component parts, such as the International Law Section, Criminal Justice Section, the ABA Center for Human Rights, and ABA Rule of Law Initiative.
- **American Society of International Law (ASIL):** Offers conferences, publications, and networking events for international law practitioners and scholars.
- **International Bar Association (IBA):** Provides a global network for legal professionals, focusing on various areas of international law.
- **Young International Arbitration Group (YIAG):** Specifically caters to young professionals interested in international arbitration and dispute resolution.
- **European Society of International Law (ESIL):** Connects professionals across Europe and beyond, fostering discussions on international law topics.

Attending Conferences and Seminars

If feasible, attending international law conferences, seminars, and workshops can be an excellent way to gain insights, learn from experts, and expand your professional network. Look for events organized by international organizations and industry associations. Some notable conferences include:

- **Global Legal Skills Conference:** Focuses on enhancing legal research, writing, and advocacy skills within an international context.
- **International Bar Association Annual Conference:** A major gathering of legal professionals, providing opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange.
- **American Society for International Law Annual Conference:** The ASIL hosts an annual Spring conference in Washington, D.C. Students are encouraged to attend.
- **International Law Weekend:** The International Law Association American Branch hosts an annual three-day conference in New York City featuring over 30 panels and many of the world's leading international lawyers and diplomats.

Seeking Internships and Fellowships

Internships and fellowships with international organizations, law firms, NGOs, and government agencies can provide hands-on experience and valuable contacts. We recommend applying for school year and summer internships throughout law school. Note that some fellowships are already funded while others require you to have your own funding.

- **United Nations Internship Program:** Offers internships across various UN bodies, providing exposure to the work of the organization.
- **Law Firms with International Practices:** Many law firms have specialized international law practices that offer internships to law students.
- **NGOs and Advocacy Organizations:** Organizations like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Greenpeace often have internship and fellowship programs focused on international law and human rights.

Job Search Strategies

Navigating the job market in international law requires a strategic approach that considers the diverse range of opportunities available across various sectors. Whether you aspire to work for international organizations, government agencies, law or consulting firms, NGOs, or academia, these job search strategies can help you find and secure the right position for you. While students should have a good sense of what they are interested in before applying, it is important to be flexible and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

International Organizations

International organizations like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and International Criminal Court offer rewarding career paths for those interested in global affairs. To pursue a career in such organizations:

- Research the organization's mission, structure, and current projects.
- Monitor their official websites for job posting and internship opportunities.
- Tailor your resume and cover letter to match the organization's requirements.
- Emphasize your language skills and any relevant international experience.
- Be prepared for a competitive selection process that may involve multiple rounds of assessments and interviews.

Government Agencies

Many governments have departments or agencies dedicated to international affairs and diplomacy. To secure a position in a government agency:

- Research your country's foreign affairs department.
- Look for positions related to international law, diplomacy, or policy analysis.
- Tailor your application to highlight your legal expertise and relevant skills.
- Network with current government officials and diplomats to gain insights.

Law Firms

Law firms with international practices offer opportunities to work on cross-border legal matters, including international trade, corporate law, and more. To secure a position:

- Research law firms with strong international law practices.
- Customize your resume to showcase relevant legal skills and international experience.
- Highlight any language proficiency and familiarity with international legal frameworks.
- Consider reaching out to alumni or lawyers practicing in the field for advice.
- Be prepared for interviews that assess your legal knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and cultural sensitivity.

[Chambers and Partners](#): Chambers global provides rankings and reviews of law firms and lawyers worldwide. Use this to identify international law firms and their areas of expertise.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs focused on human rights, rule of law, international justice, environmental protection, and humanitarian aid frequently seek legal professionals with international law experience and expertise. To land a position:

- Identify NGOs aligned with your interests and values.
- Explore their websites for job postings and internship opportunities.
- Showcase your commitment to their mission in your application materials.
- Highlight relevant skills such as research, advocacy, and international law expertise.
- Demonstrate how your legal background contributes to the NGOs' work.

Academia

If you are interested in teaching and conducting research, pursuing an academic career can be fulfilling. To enter academia in international law:

- Pursue advanced degrees (LLM or PhD) to strengthen your academic credentials.
- Publish research papers in reputable journals and present at conferences.
- Apply for teaching and research positions at universities and research institutions.
- Develop a clear research agenda and expertise in a specific area of international law.
- Network with professors, researchers, and scholars in the field of mentorship.

Additional Resources and Career Opportunities

- [United Nations Careers](#)
- [Inspira HR system](#)
- [European Union Careers](#)
- [International Criminal Court Jobs](#) (defense teams within the ICC typically hire directly)
- [DevNet: International Development and Consulting Jobs](#)
- [Human Rights Careers](#)
- [Public International Law and Policy Group](#)
- [ABA Rule of Law Initiative](#)
- [Twitter: @Intllegaljobs](#)
- [World Bank Careers](#)
- [DevEx](#)
- [Indeed](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [U.S. Aid](#)
- [ATLAS \(Women in International Law Network\)](#)