



## Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Stephanie Gonzalez

**Law School:** UC Hastings

**Organization:** Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project

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### Update 1:

This summer, I'm interning with Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project to help provide much needed legal aid to individuals in deportation proceedings. This is an extremely vulnerable immigrant population, which includes women, children, and individuals with mental health issues.

During the past four weeks at Esperanza, I've learned about asylum law, immigration court proceedings, and various other forms of relief available to adults and families released from detention. However, what I've enjoyed the most have been the client interviews. These individuals have endured countless traumas and yet, they remain resilient. They continue to advocate for themselves and their families within a complex immigration system. I'm so grateful to be working for this population alongside the dedicated attorneys and other legal interns at Esperanza.

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### Update 2:

Yesterday marked the end of my seventh week at Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project and I have been thinking about something I mentioned in my last update—that the U.S. immigration system is complex. I believe one reason for this is the structure of the immigration courts, which I've learned about during my internship.

The immigration courts are under the Department of Justice. This means that the Attorney General can affirm or overrule decisions from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), which is the governing body that oversees decisions from immigration judges. Every new administration brings a new Attorney General, and changes to previous BIA decisions.

Recently, Attorney General Merrick Garland vacated *Matter of A-B-*, a ruling from Jeff Sessions that effectively limited the availability of asylum to victims of domestic violence. While this is a decision to be celebrated, it shows how the structure of the immigration courts can create an unstable—and often political—immigration system.

Interning with Esperanza has given me a glimpse into the immigration court system and how its structure gives way for frequent changes in the law. Hopefully, future changes will bring positive outcomes for the immigrant population.



### **Update 3:**

Today was the last day of my internship with Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project and I couldn't be more thankful for the experience I gained this summer. I came in with a business immigration background, but I had no experience with removal defense work. Thanks to my amazing team and supervising attorney, I'm leaving with a better understanding of how the U.S. immigration system affects the most vulnerable individuals, and what remedies are available to them.

In a week, I will be traveling to Guadalajara to learn about the work a nonprofit organization is doing for individuals who have been deported back to Mexico. I'm looking forward to using the knowledge I gained at Esperanza to understand U.S. immigration from a Mexico perspective.

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### **Entry 4:**

Last week, I traveled to Guadalajara for an on-the-ground student program that focused on how migration has impacted the area and its residents. This program was created by The Rhizome Center for Migrants. Tran Dang started the Rhizome Center for Migrants in 2018 and her focus has been helping individuals with deep roots in the U.S. who have been displaced or deported back to Mexico. Tran did an amazing job showing us the multifaceted issues these individuals face once they arrive in Mexico.

Over the seven days, six other law students and I heard from Mexican human rights attorneys, government officials, a representative from the United Nations, and many more. In the U.S., we often think about immigration as a process that ends once an individual is deported. However, we learned that the process continues for many deportees and their families.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The stories I heard and the people I met will stay with me forever. I hope to share what I learned with my peers and use this experience to become a better attorney for future clients. Thank you, Tran.