

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH LAW

From Ukraine to Sweden - meet
Oleksandra "Sasha" Iordanova



**OLEKSANDRA "SASHA"
IORDANOVA**

Can you tell us a bit about your background and why Sweden became your point of destination when you had to leave Ukraine because of the war?

My name is Oleksandra, I'm 24 years old, and I come from a small town in the south of Ukraine. I have studied law in Ukraine, the United States, and Sweden—altogether for about six years. In 2022, when invasion began, I participated in the Vis Moot in Vienna, driven by my long-standing interest in international arbitration. This experience was not only intellectually enriching but also pivotal: it enabled me to join the "Safe Harbour" project, which was created by Professor Patricia Shaughnessy and was designed specifically for participants of moot court competitions. I had never been to Sweden before that and honestly, all I knew about the country was that it was the land of Vikings, snow, and deer. But this opportunity completely changed my perspective and path.



What were your initial impressions of Snellman and Sweden when you first arrived?

Honestly, I got to know Snellman before I got to know Sweden. My first impression of Snellman was - why do all my colleagues offer me fika every 2 hours, and what even is fika?

Sweden was incredibly welcoming—calm, well-organized, and supportive, even in such a turbulent time. At Snellman, I felt included from day one. My colleagues quickly became more than just coworkers—they became friends who stood by me through challenges. Despite coming in as a trainee from a different legal background, I always felt that my perspective and contributions were truly valued.



“Why do all my colleagues offer me fika every 2 hours, and what even is fika?”



How did your role evolve from a law trainee to an international lawyer at Snellman?

The trainee position allowed me to delve into Swedish legal context and culture. During my position as trainee I completed a master's in international Commercial Arbitration at Stockholm University and learned Swedish. As I gained more experience and demonstrated my capabilities was entrusted with more complex tasks and client-facing work and eventually I was offered a position as an international lawyer.

What have been some of the most challenging cases or projects you've worked on at Snellman?

One of my most challenging but at the same time favourite cases was a BIT claim in the telecommunications sector, where we represented a Central Asian state. I've always found it fascinating to work across cultures on complex cases like this—especially in investment arbitration, which sits at the intersection of international public and private law. What made this case particularly meaningful for me was the opportunity to work not just with a business client, but on behalf of a sovereign state. It added a unique layer of responsibility and complexity, knowing that the outcome could have broader implications, beyond the commercial sphere.

How has the culture at Snellman influenced your professional growth?

Here at Snellman, I learn how to be a team player and a communicator. The firm's culture emphasizes open-mindedness and fosters an inclusive environment for everyone. One of the most impactful aspects of my experience has been the freedom to work at my own pace and be authentic in my approach. I wasn't pressured to be overly demanding of myself, which helped me grow both personally and professionally. Even as an international lawyer, I was entrusted with managing projects independently—an opportunity that strengthened my creativity, confidence, and sense of responsibility. This experience also taught me how to bring people together, delegate tasks clearly, and lead with purpose.





What unique skills or experiences have you gained at Snellman that you believe are distinctive to this firm?

At Snellman, I've learned the importance of taking initiative and speaking up—your ideas are always welcome, no matter your title. I have experienced no hierarchy here.

I've also come to really value commitment and reliability; when you take ownership of your work, people trust you with more. Another unique aspect of the culture is that it's not about competition—everyone is on their own path, and there's space for that. And maybe most importantly, I've learned to take things with a bit more ease—to enjoy the process, not just the results.



How have you balanced your professional and personal life while advancing in your career?

I'd describe myself as a natural multitasker. Since day one at law school, I've balanced working at a law firm with learning Chinese, playing tennis for my university team, and spending time with friends and family. I thrive in a fast-paced environment because it energizes me. I truly believe that when you do what you love, burnout is much less likely to happen. At the same time, I always know when to take a break and go sit in the Swedish forest, or go have a fika.





What has been the most challenging part of your journey so far?

I guess to take a decision to choose Sweden and Snellman—a decision that required a deep commitment. It meant fully dedicating myself to learning the language, understanding the culture, respecting local traditions, pursuing additional education, and opening up to the people here. It was about fitting in, but in a positive and authentic way. I had studied in the US before coming to Sweden, and while I was there, I never felt ready to make that kind of commitment. But the moment I arrived in Sweden, I knew this was my place—and I'm truly happy here.

As a refugee, it's so hard to commit. I was forced to leave; I never planned to move. Many refugees are still thinking about going back and that's why they're stuck in the state of mind to not commit. I decided to stay and commit, even though it was, of course, very difficult—mainly because my family and friends are still in Ukraine.

Besides this, the biggest challenge for me is still to pronounce the word Sju and to understand skånska.

Can you share a memorable moment or experience at Snellman that had a significant impact on you?

I have a lot of them, but there are two I want to share.

First was when I first came to Sweden in 2022, and due to the war, I did not have any graduation party after my Bachelor. At my university we have a tradition to pour champagne on the statue of the university founder so to celebrate. So, my colleagues arranged this party for me and even found the photo of this statue and printed it out so I still can do that in Sweden.

Another one happened recently. Although I joined Snellman only two years ago, I was determined to learn Swedish quickly to apply for the Conversion Course at Stockholm University. Passing the Ci-level TISUS test after just 1.5 years was challenging. I first told HR, but later that day, the Partners announced it at a firm event and congratulated from the stage. It was a memorable moment—I felt truly supported, and my colleagues were genuinely happy for me.

Even though it is a big law firm, they will see you and celebrate you if you accomplish something, at Snellman they make sure to see the individuals.



What advice would you give to someone starting their career in a new country?

Be patient with yourself and stay curious. Embrace the learning curve—both professionally and culturally—and don't be afraid to ask questions. Also, build your network early. Most importantly, believe that your unique background brings value, even if the system feels unfamiliar at first.

Finally, you need to put yourself in the bostadskö as fast as possible and always pick bryggkaffe.

