Finding Foreign (non-U.S.) Law...in English, if possible

The NYU Law Library has primary law in paper for only selected non-U.S. jurisdictions and relies upon databases and other regional libraries for certain other jurisdictions. For details, see the description of the collection at http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/collection.html#Foreign

In addition, most of the law from non-English speaking jurisdictions is not translated into English.

At the very beginning, narrow your research question. What country’s law do you need? Are you looking for a case, code, statute, administrative rule or decision, treaty, etc.? What is the specific subject area at issue? Do you want the law in full-text or abstract? How recent is the document? Must you have the latest amendments? What languages can you read?

It is also essential to understand the legal system (common law, civil law, Islamic law, etc) of the jurisdiction. Do not try to find a case reporter in a civil law country. Civil law countries do not recognize stare decisis. They do not have case reporters. Only selected cases are published in civil law country’s legal journals, courts’ newsletter, and international journals.

Think topical when trying to find foreign laws in English. Remember that primary sources of a foreign jurisdiction will never be officially translated into English, just as the U.S. statutes and cases will not be officially translated into other languages. Instead, major academic law libraries in the U.S. buy topical services that contain unofficial translations of selected laws from selected non-U.S. jurisdictions. These subject-oriented services are invaluable sources of foreign laws in English.

If you want to find a constitution, or perhaps codes of civil and criminal procedure, laws of environment, health, family, banking, taxation, social security, intellectual property, bankruptcy (insolvency), commerce, labor, etc of a specific foreign jurisdiction, these might be translated into English. Some of these print services also have an electronic counterpart. Specialized topical databases of foreign laws in English are rapidly growing in number.

If you do not know where to start, and you do not already have a citation to the foreign law, then start your research with secondary sources: commentaries, treatises, legal encyclopedias, articles. These sources may provide a specific citation to a law (name, date, etc.) so that you can search the library catalog. Also, a citation is essential if you have to request a copy from another library through interlibrary loan. Secondary sources may also provide a summary of the law (which is sometimes better than nothing).

You can also start by doing a simple search in JULIUS, the library’s online catalog http://julius.law.nyu.edu/ In the example, below, we are trying to find out if the library has the labor law of France in English. Using the keyword search labor and law and France, you get 40 records. One of the first titles is Commercial Laws of the World. France. In the record for that title you discover that there is one volume containing the commercial code and another volume containing the labor code:
If you can read the language of the jurisdiction, you still must identify the title of the legal publication in the vernacular, or at least the type of legal publication, that might contain the law before you can search for it in a library catalog. You may have to use a legal foreign language dictionary in order to find the legal equivalents from one language to another.

Here are the most important tools for understanding the legal systems of non-U.S. jurisdictions, for finding out the titles of the legal publications of other jurisdictions, and for trying to find translations of foreign law:

I. Guides to Legal Systems and Citations to Foreign Law

Also online (IP access) on the Library’s Home Page under Indexes & Databases
http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/database_type.html


International encyclopedia of comparative law / [issued] under the auspices of the International Association of Legal Science ; editorial committee; R. David ... [et al.] Reference K530. 157. 1973
II. **Foreign Language Dictionaries (Legal and non-legal)**

Ask at the Reference Desk.

III. **Indexes**: [http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/database_type.html#Finding Articles](http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/database_type.html#Finding Articles)

- Index to Foreign Legal Periodicals
- Index to Legal Periodicals
- Current Legal Information
- LegalTrac
- International Law In Brief at ASIL [http://asil.org/asilex.htm](http://asil.org/asilex.htm)

IV. **Dictionaries for Cite-Checking Foreign Abbreviations**

- [World dictionary of legal abbreviations](Buffalo, N.Y. : W. S. Hein, 1991-)
- [http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/index.htm)

V. **Sources for Full Texts of Foreign Law in English**

Identify these by searching JULIUS.

- **Country topical reporters**, treatises and guides may contain or cite legislation. The **Doing Business in** ... series provides summaries or translations of business and business-related laws of a foreign jurisdiction such as civil codes, copyright laws, labor laws, etc.

- **Yearbooks** of different countries contain not only laws but also important cases.

- **International law journals**, such as International Legal Materials, are also a great source. They publish landmark foreign laws and cases or comment on them.

VI. **Foreign Law in Vernacular and in English Translation on the Internet**


**Online databases**

Westlaw and Lexis contain a great deal of foreign law (check by jurisdiction) in vernacular.

Foreign databases published by governments or private vendors are also a growing source [http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl/country.html](http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl/country.html)
Topical databases look at:
http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl/foreign.html
http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl/bankruptcy.html and
http://www.law.nyu.edu/library/foreign_intl/intrade.html such as TaxBase, National Law Center
for Inter-American Free Trade, The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Commerce, ISI
Emerging Markets, etc.

VII. Guides

LLRX.com Comparative and Foreign Law (guides on specific jurisdictions of the world):
http://www.llrx.com/comparative_and_foreign_law.html

About foreign and international law by Genie Tyburski
http://www.virtualchase.com/legalresearcher/foreign.html

Foreign Law in English Translation on the Internet by Lyonette Louis-Jacques
http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/global.html

Foreign Laws: English Translation Sources at Georgetown University
http://www.ll.georgetown.edu/intl/guides/english/

Sources of International and Foreign Law In English by Jane Williams (University of Illinois
College of Law) http://www.law.uiuc.edu/library/home/netsourc/for_ljw2.htm

To read more about how to find non-U.S. law:

“Finding foreign law” by Jeanne Rehberg and Mirela Roznovschi, in Accidental Tourist on the
New Frontier: An Introductory Guide to Global Legal Research. Ed. by Jeanne Rehberg and

“Legal Research on the Frontier of Innovation,” in Toward a Cyberlegal Culture by Mirela
2001

2004