

Discussion Paper

By Dan Moxon,
Cristina Bacalso,
Salome Dolidze

Brussels, Belgium
January 2023

The Costs of Unpaid Internships



Table of contents

Discussion Paper

The Costs of Unpaid Internships

Overview	4
Key Facts:	4
Costs of living whilst undertaking unpaid internships	6
Income loss during unpaid internships	8
Non-financial costs of unpaid internships	9
Equality costs of unpaid internships	10
Conclusion	11

Annex 1

Working paper: Estimating the financial costs of unpaid internships to the individual

Introduction	14
Main findings	14
Q1) How much potential income does a young person lose by giving up the possibility of full-time paid work to take on a full time, unpaid, 6-month internship?	14
Q2) How much does a young person have to spend to meet their basic needs whilst undertaking a full-time unpaid internship.	16
Q3) What is the total cost to a young person taking on a full time, PAID, 6-month internship?	18
Summary of results	19

Annex 2

European Youth Forum Internship Survey: Understanding the impact of unpaid internships

Introduction	23
Methodology	23
Findings	24
Demographic profile of respondents	24
Unpaid Internships	24
Paid Internships	26
Conclusions	27
Additional Comments	28
Frequency tables	35

Overview

This paper is produced by People Dialogue and Change as part of the European Youth Forum's advocacy work on ending unpaid internships. It discusses the costs of unpaid internships in the open labour market and who are most affected by these costs, concluding that there are significant issues with the exclusion of marginalised groups and indirect discrimination.

The paper builds on three supporting sources: firstly, the European Youth Forum Internship Survey,¹ a survey conducted by the European Youth Forum where the majority of respondents (n=345) had experience of internships, secondly, a cost-of-living data analysis,² and finally, an analysis of existing academic literature on the topic of internships.

Key Facts:

Costs of living

- A single young person may need to spend just over €1028 per month to meet their basic needs and costs of living whilst undertaking an unpaid internship (EU-27 country average figure).
- Undertaking a single 6-month unpaid internship may require having access to €6169 to subsidise living costs (EU-27 country average figure). In the European Youth Forum Internship Survey 34% of respondents said they have done 2 unpaid internships and 15% said they have done 3. Young people taking on 2 or 3 unpaid 6-month internships might need to subsidise their costs of living to €12,338 and €18,507 respectively (EU-27 country average figure).
- According to research by The European Social Policy Network,³ young people in non-standard work roles such as unpaid internships may not receive support from social protection schemes, as they are less likely to meet the eligibility criteria to access social protection.
- A young person will typically require cost of living support from family, friends or substantial savings to undertake an unpaid internship.

1 Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C. (2022a) *European Youth Forum Internship Survey: Understanding the impact of unpaid internships*, European Youth Forum, Brussels.

2 Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C. (2022b) *Working paper: Estimating the financial costs of unpaid internships to the individual*, European Youth Forum, Brussels.

3 Ghailani, D., Peña-Casas, R., Coster, S. & Regazzoni, P. (2021) *Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8454&furtherPubs=yes>.

Loss of income and overwork to avoid it

- A young person choosing to take a 6-month, full-time, unpaid internship rather than a lower paid, full-time job may suffer a net income loss of €7218 during the 6 months of the internship (EU-27 country average figure).
- Young people taking on 2 or 3 unpaid 6-month internships might experience an income loss of €14,436 and €21,654 respectively (EU-27 country average figure).
- The Sutton Trust has identified as many as 27% of young people may be taking paid work *alongside* unpaid internships to avoid this income loss.⁴ There is evidence this creates challenges juggling both roles, and may create a risk of health and wellbeing issues through excessive working hours.
- Respondents to the European Youth Forum Internship Survey reported feelings of exploitation, stress and burnout during internships leading to negative effects on mental health and well-being.

Indirect discrimination and exclusion

- The financial circumstances of an individual will greatly affect their ability to take on an unpaid internship. In the European Youth Forum Internship Survey 68% of those surveyed said they couldn't afford to work for free within the next 6 months.
- The European Youth Forum Internship Survey identified that young people in households with the lowest economic standing were 4 times less likely to say they can afford to take on unpaid internships than young people in medium standing economic households and 8 times less likely than those in the highest standing economic households.⁵
- According to Eurostat, people in weaker financial circumstances include people living in single-parent households, people with disabilities, migrants, people with lower education levels, young people not living with their parents and those from low work-intensity households. Young people in these groups are therefore less likely to have access to the financial resources required to undertake unpaid internships.
- In the European Youth Forum Internship Survey young people from marginalised backgrounds were significantly less able to take on unpaid internships as they are often financially excluded. 15% of young people from marginalised backgrounds said they could afford to take on an unpaid internship, compared to 29% of young people from non-marginalised backgrounds.
- Young people from marginalised backgrounds may be unfairly excluded from accessing employment opportunities within the organisations and industries that use unpaid internships. The use of unpaid internships may result in indirect discrimination towards some groups of young people (e.g. young people with disabilities, or young migrants).

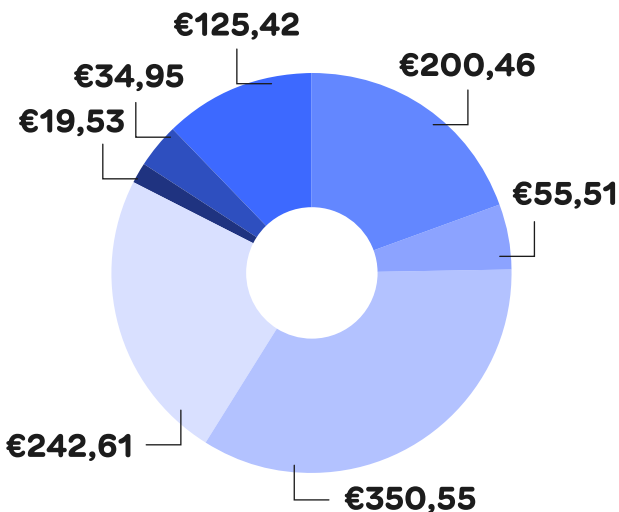
4 Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2018) *Pay as you go? Internship pay, quality and access in the graduate job market*, The Sutton Trust, UK, available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Pay-As-You-Go-1.pdf>

5 Based on a 10 point self assessment scale of household economic standing, lowest standing = 1-5, medium standing = 6-7, highest = 8-10.

Costs of living whilst undertaking unpaid internships

The most direct cost to a young person undertaking an unpaid internship is their own expenditure relating to cost-of-living and meeting their basic needs during the internship itself. On average across the EU-27 countries, a single young person living on a minimal budget to cover only bare necessities can expect to spend €1028 per month. This “ramen noodles only” budget includes the expenditure below. It is based on Eurostat data on purchasing power parities per inhabitant with all elements that might be considered luxury items, or postponable expenses removed.⁶

“Ramen Noodles” only budget - the monthly living costs of a young person on an unpaid internship



EU-27 country average (2021 data)

- Transport services (1,9%): €19,53
- Communication (3,4%): €34,95
- Recreation and culture (12,2%): €125,42
- Food and non-alcoholic beverages (19,5%): €200,46
- Clothing and footwear (5,4%): €55,51
- Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (34,1%): €350,55
- Health (23,6%): €242,61

Based on this, a young person undertaking a 6-month unpaid internship requires access to resources equivalent to €6169 (EU-27 average) to cover their basic living costs during the internships. In 11 EU countries, where costs of living are higher, an even greater amount would be required - the highest being Luxembourg, requiring €11,047. In the European Youth Forum Internship Survey 34% of respondents said they have done 2 unpaid internships and 15% said they have done 3. Young people taking on 2 or 3 unpaid 6-month internships might need to subsidise their costs of living to €12,338 and €18,507 respectively (EU-27 country average).

As well as this basic expenditure there is also some limited evidence to suggest the short term and transitional nature of internships may include additional costs that would not otherwise be faced by those in more stable employment positions. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research indicates that as internships are inherently short-term and it is uncertain if they will lead to a permanent position, interns may have to pay more for short-term accommodation or risk moving into accommodations without knowing their future earning situation.⁷ The European Youth Forum Internship Survey also identified concerns from young interns that such costs included new clothing to fit the dress code of the workplace, commuting expenses, and other costs associated with being physically in the workplace.

⁶ See Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C. (2022b) *ibid.*

⁷ Roberts, C., (2017) *The Inbetweeners: The New Role of Internships in the Graduate Labour Market* Institute for Public Policy Research, London.

“People also don’t talk about how students may need to purchase clothing and work attire to fit the dress code of the workplace, that adds an extra social layer to why some students are left behind.”

“During my first unpaid internship I spent more money than usual because I didn’t have time to cook at home so I always bought [more expensive food from vendors near at the office].”

European Youth Forum Internship
Survey Respondents

Whilst it is possible that unpaid interns might access some form of social protection to subsidise living costs, this cannot be assumed. Access to social protection is highly variable by country, but within the EU, entitlement to social protection has been traditionally tailored to workers in full-time, permanent employment for a recognised employer. The extent to which social protection systems cover all forms of employment effectively and adequately depends on eligibility criteria. For most branches of social protection systems, time and income thresholds (qualifying periods, waiting periods) are widely used across the EU. Non-standard workers face difficulties in meeting these eligibility criteria.⁸ According to a 2021 report by the European Social Policy Network, young people, in non-standard worker roles (such as internships) are often excluded from accessing social security benefits and therefore do not have full social protection.⁹

Existing research on how unpaid interns support themselves, though limited, seems to support the idea that social protection is not generally used. Research into graduates who had completed unpaid internships in the UK indicates that during the internship, 43% had relied on living for free with family and friends; 37% had lived off money they had saved and 26% relied on money from their parents. A similar number, 27% had to work another paid job alongside their internship in order to fund their internship.¹⁰

“Interns in the organisation I was a part of donated blood to get extra cash for living expenses.”

European Youth Forum Internship
Survey Respondent

In any situation, it is clear a young person taking an unpaid internship must find a way to subsidise their living expenses to a substantial amount. The exact level and source of finances will be dependent on the young person's living situation. Some young people might be able to access social protection, but it seems likely that most will not be able to access state support. Furthermore, living circumstances themselves might also be compromised by an unpaid internship, leading to the choice to delay the transition to independence by living with parents for longer periods, or to rent short-term and more expensive accommodation.

8 European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2022) *Monitoring framework on Access to social protection for workers and the self-employed: Version 0*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8358&furtherPubs=yes>.

9 Ghailani, D., Peña-Casas, R., Coster, S. & Regazzoni, P. (2021) *Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries*, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8454&furtherPubs=yes>.

10 Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2018) *Pay as you go? Internship pay, quality and access in the graduate job market*, The Sutton Trust, UK, available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Pay-As-You-Go-1.pdf>

Income loss during unpaid internships

A second cost of unpaid internships is the loss of potential income that occurs during the internships compared to the alternative of taking full-time paid work. Here, a young person in the EU-27 who takes a 6-month unpaid internship rather than a full-time job paying close to minimum wage¹¹ might suffer a net income loss of €7,218. In 10 out of 27 member states this would be even higher with the highest income losses being in Luxembourg (€14,021) and Netherlands (€12,124).¹² In the European Youth Forum Internship Survey 34% of respondents said they have done 2 unpaid internships and 15% said they have done 3. Young people taking on 2 or 3 unpaid six-month internships might have experienced income loss of €14,436 and €21,654 respectively (EU-27 country average).

These figures assume a young person gives up paid work entirely to undertake an unpaid internship, though this may not necessarily be the case. There is evidence to indicate that as many as 27% of young people continue to work in paid work alongside internships¹³ and cutting back on paid work hours during internships occurs amongst this group.¹⁴

However, working paid roles alongside unpaid internships creates additional non-financial costs for the young person and is not necessarily a desirable alternative. A study in Australia indicates there are significant challenges faced when trying to balance paid work with unpaid internships.¹⁵ Research in the United States reported that young people adding an internship to their schedule put their existing paid jobs at risk, due to a tension with what they called “back-to-back-to-back scheduling”.¹⁶ Within Europe, the European Youth Forum Internship Survey identified potential mental health challenges

faced by young people working alongside their unpaid internships.

“I took a part-time job on top of my full-time unpaid internship so that I could afford transportation and bills. It was barely worth it, I almost burnt myself out.”

European Youth Forum Internship
Survey Respondent

The number of hours a young person spends on their side-jobs in addition to their unpaid internship is not known. However, at the very least it is clear that a young person working in a full-time unpaid internship alongside part-time paid work would likely be working more hours than the European Working Time Directive 2003/88/EC would permit for a single role (48 hours in a seven day period). Though not unlawful across multiple roles, this limit is designed to protect the health and safety of workers, the public and to prevent worker exploitation. Those issues are not mitigated for a young person undertaking these hours across a mixture of unpaid internships and paid work. Overall then, a young person wishing to take on a full-time unpaid internship faces a choice between suffering significant and potentially immediate income loss, or attempting to maintain part-time paid work and undertaking working hours that may put their health and safety at risk.

11 Annual net earnings of a single person without children earning 50% of the average earning, see Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C. (2022b), *ibid*.

12 See Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C. (2022b), *ibid*.

13 Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2018), *ibid*.

14 Oliver, D., et al. (2016) *Unpaid Work Experience in Australia: Prevalence, Nature and Impact*, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Australia, available at: https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/unpaid_work_experience_report_-_december_2016.pdf.

15 Oliver, D., et al. (2016), *ibid*.

16 Hora, M. T., Wolfgram, M., & Chen, Z. (2019) *Closing the doors of opportunity: How financial, sociocultural and institutional barriers intersect to inhibit participation in college internships: WCER Working Paper No. 2019-8*. University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, available at: https://wcer.wisc.edu/docs/working-papers/WCER_Working_Paper_No_2019_8.pdf.

Non-financial costs of unpaid internships

Alongside the financial costs, young people may face many other non-financial hardships when undertaking unpaid internships. Respondents to the European Youth Forum Internship Survey reported feelings of exploitation, stress and burnout during internships leading to negative effects on mental health and well-being. These primarily seemed to result in being undervalued and treated poorly by employers. Participants in a national survey of unpaid work experience in Australia reported that internships took time and energy away from finding paid employment, and they found it difficult to balance paid work, family life, study, and unpaid work.¹⁷

“Even if I could afford my unpaid internship, now that I feel the effort that I did during these months on my body I really feel like I should have been paid. Because my work has a cost (for me).”

“The unpaid internships also required more after hours and gave me less motivation, because I felt used and undervalued.”

“Unpaid and underpaid internships demotivated me in the past. I know that I have always been a valuable team member, but often felt like I was not worth it or good enough to be remunerated adequately.”

“After four unpaid internships, it's my dignity to tell me I would not want to undertake a new unpaid internship even if it was fitting my career goals. After studying for 7 years and having many experiences, it's time I am properly paid for my work.”

“Unpaid internships weigh heavily on your mental health... you are often given tasks that other staff members do not want to do and are therefore not very interesting to develop skills (mostly administrative work). When you are treated as inferior for a long period of time, this takes a toll on your mental health and self-esteem... Particularly when you know your colleagues are being paid very high salaries.”

“Sometimes you are treated as if you are not a human and have to do menial tasks which do not contribute to your overall career development or life skills like personal tasks such as making tea for your boss or licking envelopes.”

European Youth Forum Internship
Survey Respondent

¹⁷ Oliver, D., et al. (2016), *ibid.*

Equality costs of unpaid internships

The economic circumstances of an individual will greatly affect their ability to take on an unpaid internship. There is a wide variety of evidence to identify that unpaid internships are harder to access for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The European Youth Forum Internship Survey identified that young people in households with the lowest economic standing were 4 times less likely to say they can afford to take on unpaid internships than young people in medium standing economic households and 8 times less likely than those in the highest standing economic households.¹⁸

Similarly, a nation-wide survey on unpaid work experiences in Australia showed that as the socio-economic status of respondents aged 18-29 increased, so did the likelihood of participating in an unpaid work experience in the last five years.¹⁹ In Great Britain, a YouGov survey of young graduates (those with a degree or higher) aged between 21 and 29 showed that those from a middle-class background were more likely to have completed an unpaid internship than those from a working-class background. In this study, 38% of non-interns from working-class families said they 'couldn't afford' to take on an internship, compared to 31% of middle-class families.²⁰ Research in the United States also showed that students with lower parental income were more likely to report lacking internship opportunities. In the same study young people who participated in unpaid internships reported they could do so because their family was able to provide resources to offset the financial costs of unpaid work, such as through gifts or loans of money from parents, or have a room and board provided by relatives who lived near the internship site.²¹

It seems evident that young people in weaker financial situations will find it harder to subsidise their costs of living and absorb the income losses described above. Those whose families are in lower income situations will find it harder to provide support for the young person, and those not supported by families (such as young people growing up in alternative care) may not have access to any family financial support at all.

Importantly though, financial circumstances intersect with social background. As a result, evidence that unpaid internships exclude those in weaker financial positions also implies that unpaid internships may exclude young people from certain social backgrounds. According to Eurostat, in the EU the social groups at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion tend to be women, people living in single-parent households, people with disabilities, migrants, people with lower education levels,²² those whose parents have lower education levels,²³ young people not living with their parents and those from households with low work intensity households.²⁴ Ill-health and being a member of minority ethnic groups such as Roma and Travellers is also widely linked to being at risk of poverty.²⁵ The European Youth Forum Internships Survey confirmed this, with respondents without marginalised backgrounds significantly more likely to afford to undertake an unpaid internship than those from marginalised backgrounds. 15% of young people from marginalised backgrounds said they could afford to take on an unpaid internship, compared to 29% of young people from non-marginalised backgrounds. Research in the United States has also shown that young people with obligations relating to caring for elderly or sick family or dependent children reported that these factors made it difficult to pursue internships.²⁶ There is also evidence to indicate that young people who can afford to forego

18 Based on a 10-point self-assessment scale of household economic standing, lowest standing = 1-5, medium standing = 6-7, highest = 8-10.

19 Oliver, D., et al. (2016), *ibid.*

20 Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R. (2018), *ibid.*

21 Hora, M. T., Wolfgram, M., & Chen, Z. (2019), *ibid.*

22 Eurostat (2020) *Europe 2020 indicators - poverty and social exclusion*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Archive:Europe_2020_indicators_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion#Which_groups_are_at_greater_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion.3F.

23 Eurostat (2022) *Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion#Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion.

24 Eurostat (2022) *Young people - social inclusion*, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Young_people_-_social_inclusion#Young_people_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion.

25 European Anti Poverty Network (2014) *Poverty and Inequality in the EU*, available at: <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2014-Poverty-Explainer-EN-web.pdf>

26 Hora, M. T., Wolfgram, M., & Chen, Z., (2019), *ibid.*

paid employment or can afford to work only part-time are more likely to be able to participate in multiple internships than young people with work, family, or other obligations that place constraints on their time and other resources.²⁷

Overall then, whilst the exact patterns of exclusion may not be fully clear, it is evident that unpaid internships are more difficult to access for those in weaker financial circumstances. The equalities implications of this are that young people from social groups who are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion (such as young migrants, young people with disabilities or other young people from marginalised backgrounds) will likely be less able to undertake unpaid internships. This is an issue of indirect discrimination unfairly limiting the access that young people from marginalised social backgrounds have to any specific unpaid internship opportunity. It is also possible that industries which rely heavily on interns, such as communication or the arts, will show reduced diversity within the workforce overall, and be as a whole, industries to young people from non-marginalised backgrounds.²⁸

Conclusion

The cost of an individual taking an unpaid internship is primarily financial. They include subsidising the costs of living whilst working unpaid, and the loss of potential income during an internship compared to taking a full-time job. Whilst both of these figures vary by country and by circumstance, on average in the EU-27 a young person requires over €1000 per month to cover very basic living expenses and may lose over €7000 if giving up a low paid job for six months to become an unpaid intern.

Though further research is needed, it seems unlikely that a young person in an unpaid internship will have access to social protections to offset these costs. As a result they require either support from friends and family, substantial savings or to undertake paid work alongside the internship. There is emerging evidence of young people taking on additional part-time work to subsidise unpaid internships leading to mental health and wellbeing impacts; it is clear that paid work alongside a full-time unpaid internship would lead to excessive work hours. These wellbeing issues may further also be exacerbated by poor quality internship conditions, and interns' feelings of worthlessness within the workplace.

Alongside ethical concerns within this situation, a further question is if these upfront financial costs are then compensated for by improvements in long-term career prospects. Here, the existing research is not fully clear on the impact of taking an internship. Overall, a range of studies do show a link between taking on internships (both paid and unpaid) and more positive labour market outcomes later in life.²⁹ A 2018 ILO study also concluded that paid internships lead to better post-internship labour market outcomes than unpaid ones, particularly when they are well-structured and are oriented

27 Wolfgram, M., Ahrens, V. Wu, Zhixuan (2020) *One Internship, Two Internships, Three Internships... More!* Exploring the Socioeconomic and Sociocultural Factors of the Multiple Internship Economy. WCER Working Paper No. 2020-11. Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED611671>

28 Cullinane, C. & Montacute, R., (2018), *ibid.*

29 Baert, B.S. et al. (2021) *Student internships and employment opportunities after graduation: A field experiment*, *Economics of Education Review* 83, 102141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2021.102141>; Bittmann, F., & Zorn, V.K. (2020) *When Choice Excels Obligation: About the Effects of Mandatory and Voluntary Internships on Labour Market Outcomes for University Graduates*, *Higher Education* 80, no. 1 pp.75–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00466-5>; Bolli, T., Caves, K., & Oswald-Egg, M. (2021) *Valuable Experience: How University Internships Affect Graduates' Income*, *Research in Higher Education* 62, no.8, pp.1198–1247, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-021-09637-9>; Baert, B.S. et al. (2021) *ibid.*

towards learning.³⁰ But other research identifies that internships do not necessarily enhance a graduate's ability to find a job that adequately matches their skills, nor does it increase their wage returns,³¹ and that former interns may face a long-term salary penalty compared to those who went directly into paid work.³² Furthermore, young people taking unpaid internships are more likely to be from higher socio-economic backgrounds, have higher levels of education and may also be less risk averse or more motivated. As a result, any better labour outcomes linked to unpaid internships may be the result of other privileges and attributes more common amongst young people accessing internships than the internships experience itself.³³ Ultimately, the evidence of the positive impact of unpaid internship does not conclusively provide justification for the upfront costs faced by the individual. However, on the whole it does show that there are positive long term benefits of internships for those taking them.

unfairly limiting their access to specific roles and potentially whole sectors.

What is much clearer is the potential indirect discrimination that may be occurring as a result of unpaid internships. The financial costs of unpaid internships evidently make it harder for young people in weaker economic situations to access internships opportunities. Within EU legislation³⁴ indirect discrimination is defined as when an apparently neutral provision criterion or practice put persons having a particular protected characteristic (e.g. their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation) at a disadvantage compared with others. Whilst economic circumstance itself is not a protected characteristic, dimensions of several protected characteristics are themselves strongly associated with being in weaker financial situations. Thus, the practice of unpaid internships may still result in indirect discrimination against a number of social groups with protected characteristics such as those with disabilities or those from migrant backgrounds. Effectively the use of unpaid internships serves to clearly exclude young people from more marginalised backgrounds,

30 O'Higgins, N. & Pinedo, L. (2018) *Interns and outcomes: Just how effective are internships as a bridge to stable employment?* International Labour Office, Employment Working Paper No. 241. available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_637362.pdf

31 Di Meglio, B. et al, (2021) *Knocking on Employment's Door: Internships and Job Attainment*, Higher Education 83, pp.137–161. available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-020-00643-x>

32 Holford, A., (2017) *Access to and Returns from Unpaid Graduate Internships*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 10845, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2998954>

33 Holford A. 2017, *ibid*.

34 Eurofound (2019) *Indirect Discrimination*, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/indirect-discrimination>

Working paper: Estimating the financial costs of unpaid internships to the individual

Introduction

This working paper attempts to estimate the financial costs a young person in Europe will face when taking on a 6-month unpaid internship. The paper is produced to support the European Youth Forum's advocacy work on ending unpaid internships and is produced by People Dialogue and Change.

The paper assumes that the financial costs young people will face are primarily composed of 1) the income loss from not undertaking paid work for six months, and 2) the cost of living during the internship. It includes estimates for all EU countries, plus North Macedonia and Serbia. EU averages are also included. This country selection is chosen to meet the needs of the European Youth Forum's membership.

As is the case in all real-life research endeavours, the research methodology is limited by various factors and contains a number of assumptions. All figures should be treated as estimates to illustrate the potential scale of costs faced by young people taking on unpaid internships.

Main findings

Q1) How much potential income does a young person lose by giving up the possibility of full-time paid work to take on a full time, unpaid, 6-month internship?

Taking on a full-time unpaid internship prevents a young person from undertaking full time paid work. Part of the cost of unpaid internships is the loss of income that occurs if a young person gives up the opportunity for paid work in order to take on an internship. This section estimates these costs.

Assumptions

- The calculations assume that a young person's earning potential, had they taken full-time work, would be close to minimum wage over the entire 6-month period. A young person looking for internships would be at the early stages of their career and therefore have low earning potential.
- It is assumed that the young person has access to employment and are not unemployed before taking on an internship i.e. they are giving up a job to take on an internship
- It is assumed that a young person takes no paid work alongside their unpaid internship. It is not feasible, nor just, to expect a young person to do so.

Working method

Eurostat's 2021 "Annual net earnings" data,¹ published on 25 March 2022 was used to identify the monthly net income after tax and social security of a single person in each EU country, North Macedonia and Serbia. The "Annual net earnings" data is calculated from gross earnings by deducting the employee's social security contributions and income taxes. Based on the objectives of the study, the data was filtered by the indicator "Annual net earnings of a single person without children earning 50% of the average earning". It was decided to use this data instead of minimum wage statistics, because 6 EU countries (Austria, Cyprus, Denmark,

¹ Net earnings and tax rates (earn_net), (2022), Eurostat. Accessed 20 August 2022: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_nt_net/default/table?lang=en

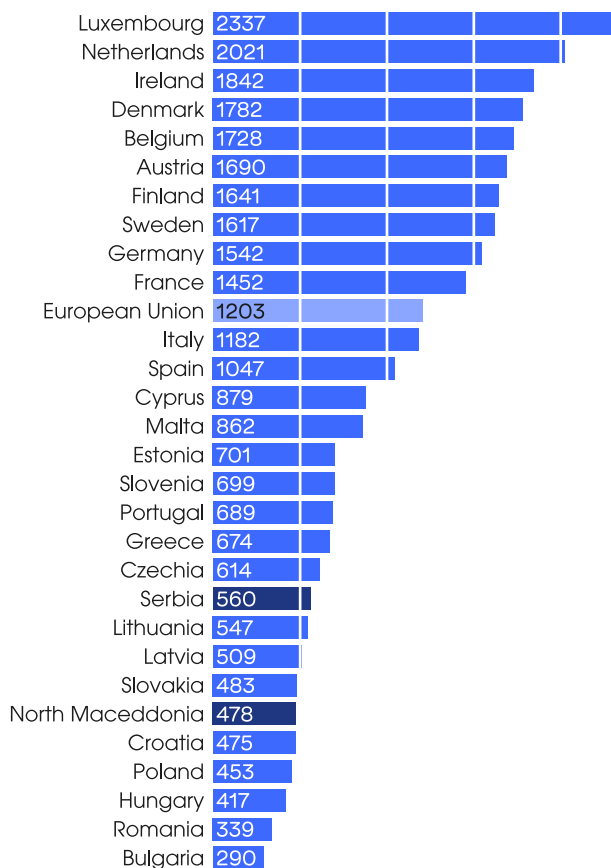
Finland, Italy and Sweden) do not have an official minimum wage and it is questionable to aggregate at EU level. Moreover, the data from this category is very similar to the minimum wage data. The mean percentage difference is around 10%.

In the case of Serbia and North Macedonia, the 2021 data published by the state statistical office of these countries was used. "Average paid net wage per employee" was used to identify the average monthly net income in North Macedonia. As the data is presented in Macedonian Denar (MKD) it was converted to Euro, for which the average exchange rate of 2021 was used, which was equal to 0.0162 EUR. As for Serbia, "Average annual earnings" was used to identify the average monthly net income. As the data is presented in Serbian Dinar (RSD) it was converted to Euro, for which the average exchange rate of 2021 was used, which was equal to 0.0085 EUR.

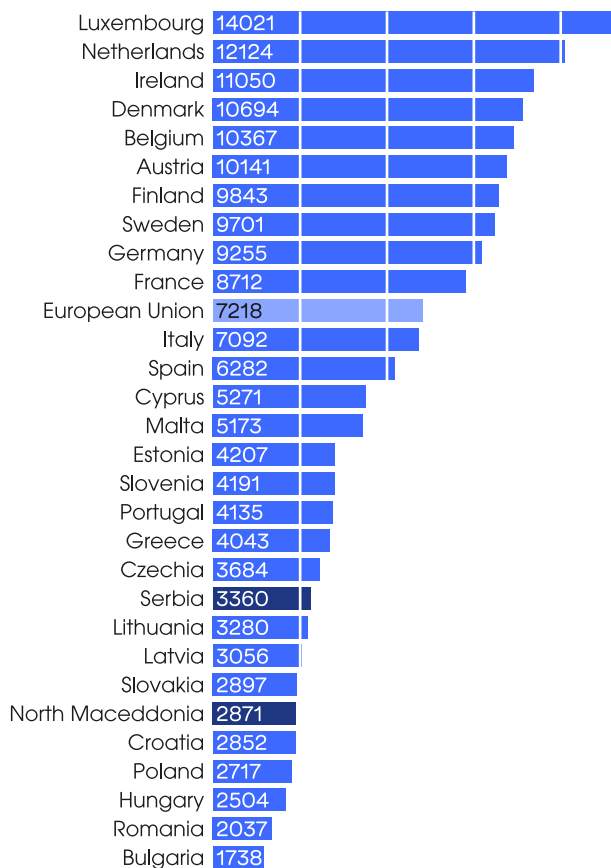
According to this data, the EU average net income was 1203 Euro. 10 out of 27 member states (37%) have a net income higher than the EU average. Among the 17 countries (63%), where net income is below the EU average, the lowest incomes are in the following three countries: Hungary (417€), Romania (339€) and Bulgaria (290€). Compared to these countries, North Macedonia (478€) and Serbia (560€) have a slightly higher net income.

- Country in the European Union
- European Union - 27 countries (from 2020)
- European Union Candidate Country

Monthly average net earning in 2021 (in euros)



6-month income loss in 2021 (in euros)



Result

Based on this data, the EU average 6-month income loss if someone gave up a low earning job for an unpaid internship would be €7218. In 10 out of 27 member states (37%), the 6-month income loss would be higher than the EU average.

Q2) How much does a young person have to spend to meet their basic needs whilst undertaking a full-time unpaid internship.

Any individual has living costs required to survive in a manner that maintains their basic human rights, such as food, clothing and housing. Part of the costs of unpaid internships are the costs of an individual's expenditure to meet these basic needs whilst undertaking the internship. This section estimates these costs.

Assumptions

- The calculations assume that a young person is financially responsible for themselves and does not have a source of housing or food or other items provided from them by another party such as parents.
- The calculations assume that a young person does not receive any state subsidised social security benefits during the internship.
- The calculations assume that a young person taking on an internship will live with a minimal expenditure and spend on as few areas of expenditure as possible to cover their basic needs. The calculation assumes that a young person will be able to delay purchases of less frequently purchased goods which may still be essential for basic needs such as household furniture. These assumptions are reflected in the choice of spending categories.

Working method

Eurostat's 2021 Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) data,² published on 24 June 2022 was used to identify

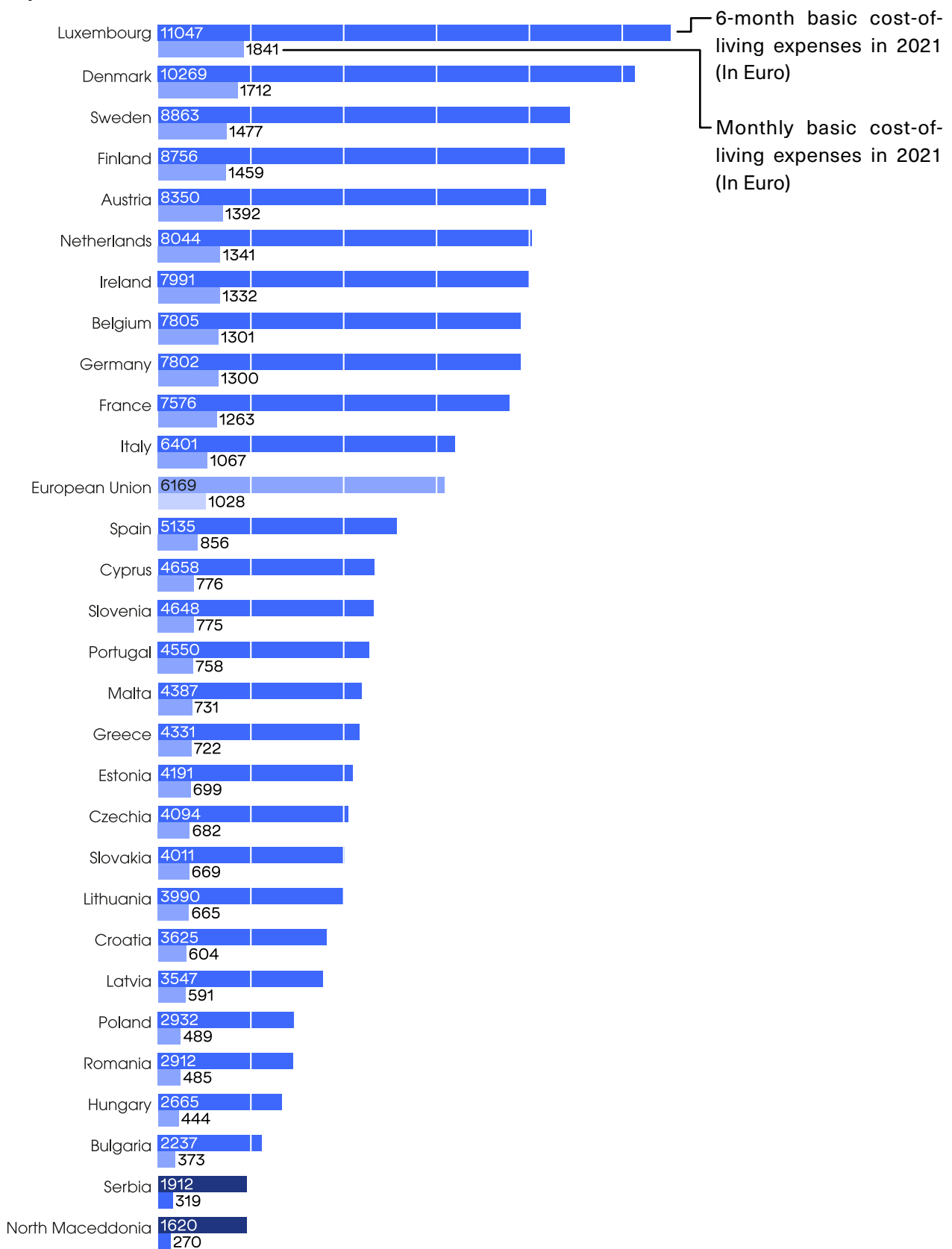
the monthly minimum cost of living for a single person in each EU country, North Macedonia and Serbia. Purchasing power parities (PPPs) is a set of indicators that allows measuring relative price levels in a group of countries. As this study aims to identify the actual EUR cost of basic living expenses, the data was filtered by the indicator "Nominal expenditure per inhabitant in euro". 7 categories were chosen from the larger PPP dataset to represent the very basic elements of expenditure an individual would require to maintain a standard of living that meets their basic human rights. These were:

- A0101 - Food and non-alcoholic beverages (EU-27 mean expenditure = 19.5%);
- A0103 - Clothing and footwear (EU-27 mean expenditure = 5.4%);
- A0104 - Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels (EU-27 mean expenditure = 34.1%);
- A0106 - Health (EU-27 mean expenditure = 23.6%);
- A010703 - Transport services (EU-27 mean expenditure = 1.9%);
- A0108 - Communication (EU-27 mean expenditure = 3.4%);
- A0109 - Recreation and culture (EU-27 mean expenditure = 12.2%);

The expenses of these 7 categories were summed up to determine the basic cost of living in each of the 27 EU member states, as well as in Serbia and North Macedonia.

² Purchasing power parities (prc_ppp), (2022), Eurostat. Accessed 20 August 2022: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/purchasing-power-parities/data/database>

Monthly and 6-month basic cost-of-living expenses in 2021 (in euros)



Result

The EU average basic monthly cost-of-living expenses was €1028 and the 6-month average was €6169. 11 out of 27 member states (41%) have a basic monthly cost-of-living expense above €1000. Among the 16 EU countries (59%), where basic monthly cost-of-living expenses are below €1000, the lowest rates are in Romania (€485) and Bulgaria (€373). The lowest cost of living is in North Macedonia (€270) and Serbia (€319). A young person undertaking an unpaid internship would need access to financial resources equivalent to these amounts to support themselves during an internship.

Q3) What is the total cost to a young person taking on a full time, PAID, 6-month internship?

The analysis in section indicates that paid internships may not cover the costs of basic living expenditure. This calculation illustrates the potential for this.

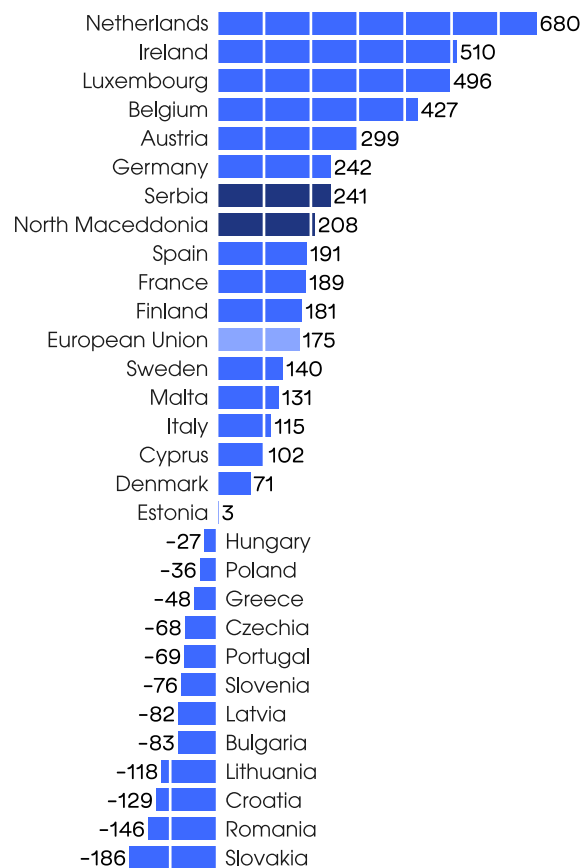
Assumptions

- The calculations assume that an internship will be paid at the “Annual net earnings of a single person without children earning 50% of the average earning” (see question 2)
- The calculations assume that a young person does not receive any state subsidised social security benefits during the internship.

Working methods

Monthly average net earnings (Question 1) are subtracted from basic monthly cost-of-living expenses (Question 2) to identify the amount of monthly free income.

Monthly free income in 2021 (in euros)



Result

The EU average monthly free income was €175. In 15 out of 27 member states (56%) the amount of free income was positive and in 12 countries (44%) it was negative which means that the income in these countries is not enough to fully cover the cost of living. The lowest rate in EU member states is in the following countries: Croatia (-€129), Romania (-€146) and Slovakia (-€186). North Macedonia (€208) and Serbia (€241) have a positive rate.

Summary of results

As is the case in all real-life research endeavours, the research methodology above reflects limitations posed by various factors. All figures should be treated as estimates to illustrate the potential scale of costs faced by young people taking on unpaid internships. Despite these limitations, the data and findings presented in this paper identify that young people taking on unpaid internships face significant costs:

- Whilst wages would vary between individuals, on average, across the EU-27, the income loss if a young person gave up a low earning job for a six-month unpaid internship can be estimated as €7218 over six months.
- Taking into account that wages vary considerably between countries, the country level estimates of income loss also vary considerably, from €14,021 in Luxembourg to €1738 in Bulgaria.
- Whilst the expenditure will vary for every individual, the cost a young person will face to meet their basic needs during a six-month unpaid full-time internship can be estimated as €6169 on average across the EU.
- Taking into account that cost of living vary considerably between countries, the country level estimates of expenditure vary considerably from €11,047 in Luxembourg to €2237 in Bulgaria (and lower in North Macedonia and Serbia).
- So, whilst there are a variety of factors that will create variance, on average, the costs a young person in the EU will face taking on a six-month unpaid internship are €13,387.
- Furthermore, young people taking on **paid** internships in 12 EU countries may face challenges to cover the costs of their basic needs.

European Youth Forum Internship Survey: Understanding the impact of unpaid internships

List of Figures

Figure 1: Do any of the following describe you (% , multiple-choice)	24
Figure 2: Have you undertaken an unpaid internship? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing)	25
Figure 3: If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake an unpaid internship at some point in the future? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing)	25
Figure 4: Could you afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing)	26
Figure 5: Have you ever undertaken a paid internship? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing)	26
Figure 6: If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake an unpaid internship at some point in the future? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing)	27

Introduction

Young people across Europe need access to decent jobs that will kick-start their future. But how can they do that when they are expected to work for free? Unpaid internships leave generations of Europeans behind by perpetuating inequalities and forcing them to give up their social and economic stability. As part of recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic and rising youth unemployment, young people will find it difficult to enter the open labor market. It means they are more likely to take up unpaid internship opportunities as a way to get their foot in the door. This cannot be the case as part of Europe's recovery.

The European Youth Forum is running a campaign to ban unpaid internships. In this context, the European Youth Forum initiated a survey to identify costs for young people when they take on an unpaid internship and who is most likely not to be able to undertake an unpaid internship. Within the scope of the projects, People Dialogue and Change carried out the survey analysis.

Methodology

The findings discussed in this report are derived from an online survey. Respondents were young people from 18 to 29 years old. They were selected using a non-probability chain-referral (snowball) sampling method. As respondents were selected using a non-probability sample, caution should be taken when generalising the European youth population.

The survey questionnaire was administered using the online survey tool Survey Monkey. The fieldwork was conducted in August and September 2022. Overall, 345 respondents participated in the survey. The interview language was English.

From the analytical perspective, descriptive statistical tools were used. To identify statistically viable differences between groups, logistic and multinomial regression models were used. These model controls are for respondents' key socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, respondents' household economic standing and belonging to different social groups. Reported differences are statistically significant if no other caveats are mentioned.

Findings

Demographic profile of respondents

Overall, 345 responses were collected. The plurality of respondents was from western European countries (Table 1), followed by southern European countries. Thirteen percent were from eastern European countries and 9% were from northern European countries.

Region of Residence	Total number	Proportion
Western Europe	149	43
Southern Europe	122	35
Eastern Europe	44	13
Northern Europe	30	9

Table 1: Number of interviews by region of residence

The majority of the respondents were women (73%), more than one-fourth were men (26%) and 2% identified as an other gender.

Seventeen percent of the respondents mentioned that they identify themselves as LGBTQIA+, 11% have an immigrant background or heritage. Less than 10% said that they are NEET (currently not in education, employment or training, 9%), have a chronic illness (7%), are part of an ethnic or religious minority in their country (7%), identify as a person with disability (3%), or have experienced homelessness (1%). The majority of the respondents (62%) said they do not identify as being part of a marginalised group.

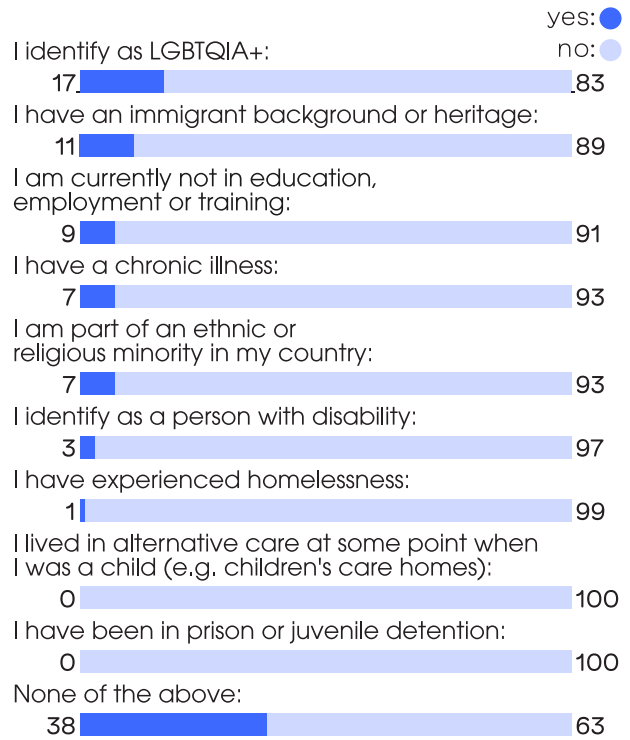


Figure 1: Do any of the following describe you (% multiple-choice)

To gauge respondents' households' economic situation, respondents were asked to evaluate their household's socio-economic standing compared to others in their country by probing them to rank it using a 10-point scale. Overall, respondents tended to name scores closer to the middle (median 6), with an average value of 5.6 out of ten. Notably, male respondents and respondents who were not from marginalised background were more likely to evaluate their socio-economic standing with a higher score than others¹.

Unpaid Internships

Overall, the majority of the respondents (77%) said that they have undertaken unpaid internships, while 23% said that they have never undertaken unpaid internships. Among those who have undertaken unpaid internships, 46% experienced one unpaid internship, 34% experienced two unpaid internships, 15% experienced three unpaid internships, 3% experienced four, and 1% experienced five unpaid internships. No significant differences were observed between groups.²

1 Differences were identified using a multinomial regression model that predicted respondents' households' economic standing using demographic predictors (respondents' gender, age groups, social groups). Only statistically significant differences are reported.

2 Differences were identified using a logistic regression model predicting whether or not a respondent reported having undertaken unpaid internships. Predictors include respondents' gender, age groups, social groups, and households' economic standing.

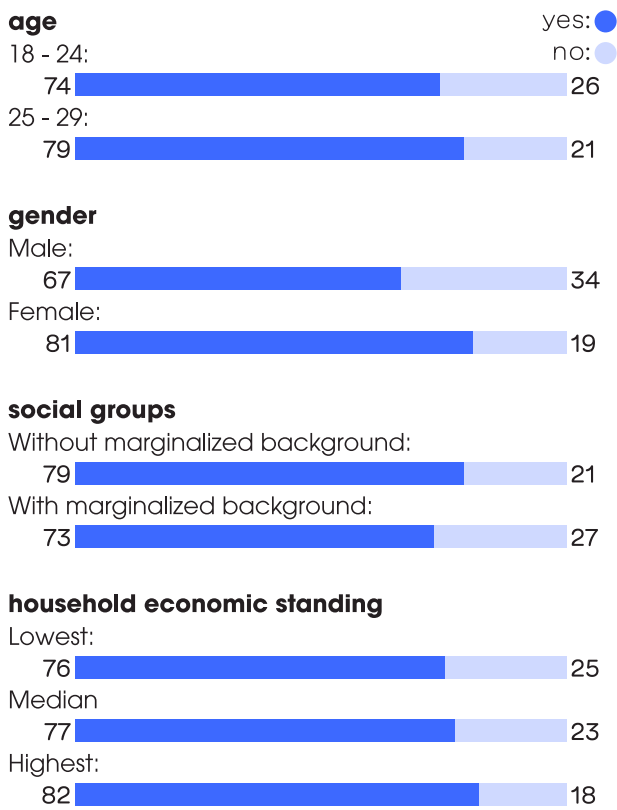


Figure 2: Have you undertaken an unpaid internship? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing³)

Respondents were asked if it suited their career goals, how likely they would be to undertake an unpaid internship at some point in the future. The majority of the respondents (unlikely 27%, extremely unlikely 45%) said that they would not undertake an unpaid internship. One-fifth would agree to undertake an unpaid internship (extremely likely 3%, likely 17%). Seven percent said they were neither likely nor unlikely to undertake an unpaid internship and 1% did not know. Notably, respondents aged between 25 and 29 were more likely to respond that they would not undertake an unpaid internship. No other significant differences were observed.

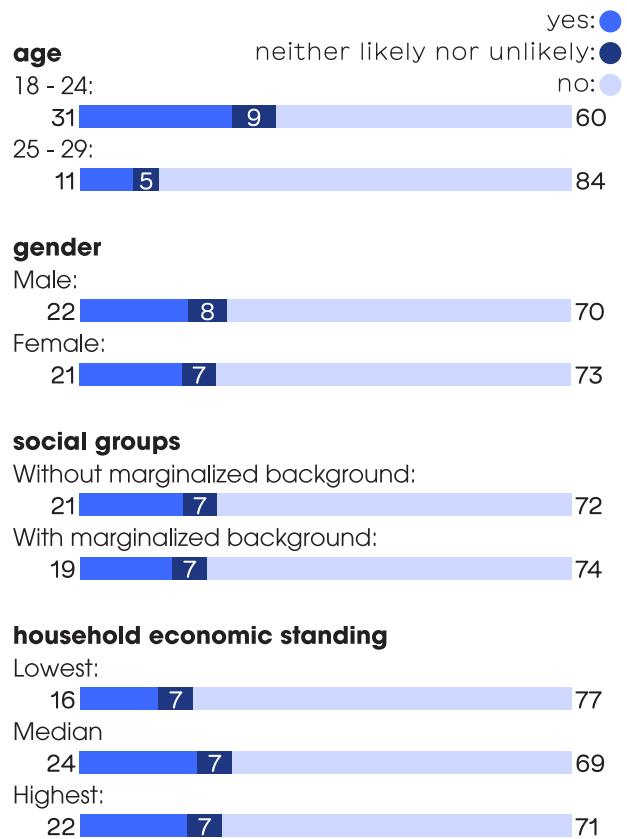


Figure 3: If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake an unpaid internship at some point in the future⁴? (% , one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing⁵)

The majority of young people (68%) said that they cannot afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months. Slightly more than one-fifth (21%) said the opposite, while one-tenth (10%) did not know if they could afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the upcoming months. Notably, respondents with their households' higher economic standing (median and highest) and respondents without marginalised backgrounds were more likely to afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months than respondents with their households' lowest economic standing or respondents with a marginalised background. No other significant differences were observed⁶.

3 Variables were recoded as 1-5 points =lowest, 6-7 points =median, 8-10 points=highest.

4 Variables were recorded as extremely likely and likely=likely, neither likely nor unlikely=neither likely nor unlikely, extremely unlikely and unlikely=unlikely.

5 Variables were recorded as 1-5 points=lowest, 6-7 points=median, 8-10 points=highest.

6 Differences were identified using a logistic regression model predicting whether or not a respondent can afford to undertake unpaid internship in the next six months. Predictors include respondents' gender, age groups, social groups, and households' economic standing.

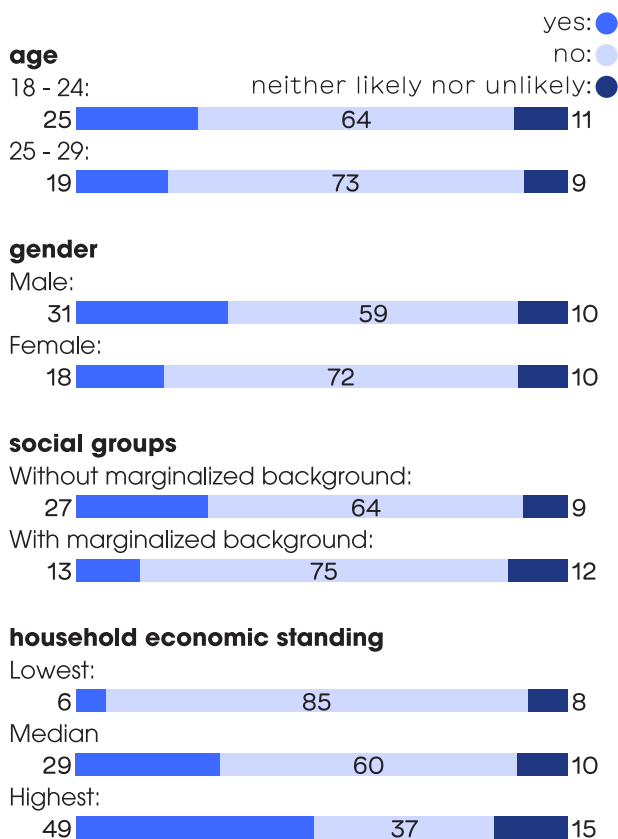


Figure 4: Could you afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months? (% one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing⁷)

Paid Internships

More than half (59%) of the respondents noted that they have undertaken paid internships, while 41% had not. Among those who have undertaken paid internships, 63% have had one paid internship, 24% had two paid internships, and 8% experienced three paid internships. 4% or less have undertaken more than three paid internships. Notably, respondents aged between 25 and 29 were more likely to have undertaken paid internships than younger respondents. No other significant differences were observed.⁸

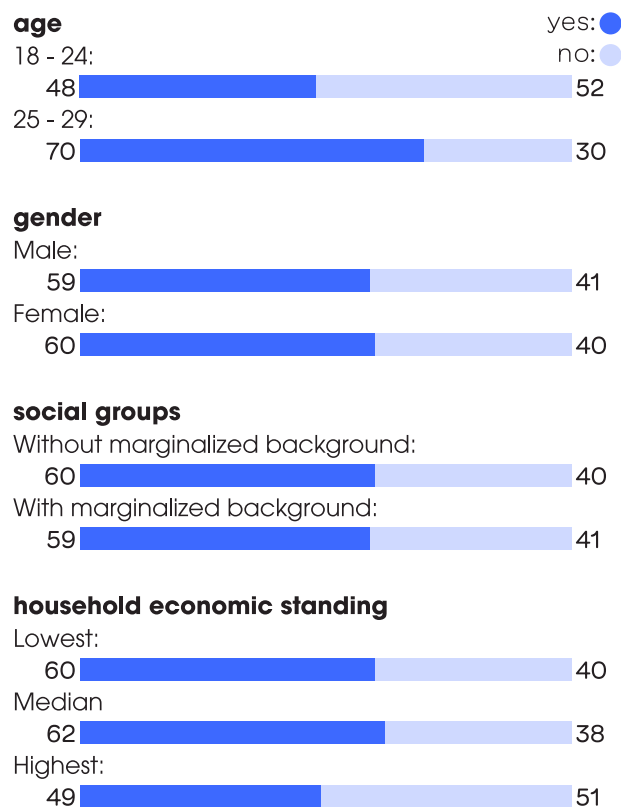


Figure 5: Have you ever undertaken a paid internship? (% one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing⁹)

Respondents were asked if it suited their career goals, how likely they would be to undertake a paid internship at some point in the future. The majority of the respondents (extremely likely 54%, likely 26%) mentioned that they would undertake a paid internship. Only 14% noted that they would not undertake a paid internship (unlikely 9%, extremely unlikely 5%). 6% are neither likely nor unlikely to undertake a paid internship and 2% do not know. No significant differences were observed between groups.

7 Variables were recorded as 1-5 points=lowest, 6-7 points=median, 8-10 points=highest.

8 Differences were identified using a logistic regression model predicting whether or not a respondent reported having undertaken paid internships. Predictors include respondents' gender, age groups, social groups, and households' economic standing.

9 Variables were recoded as 1-5 points=lowest, 6-7 points=median, 8-10 points=highest.

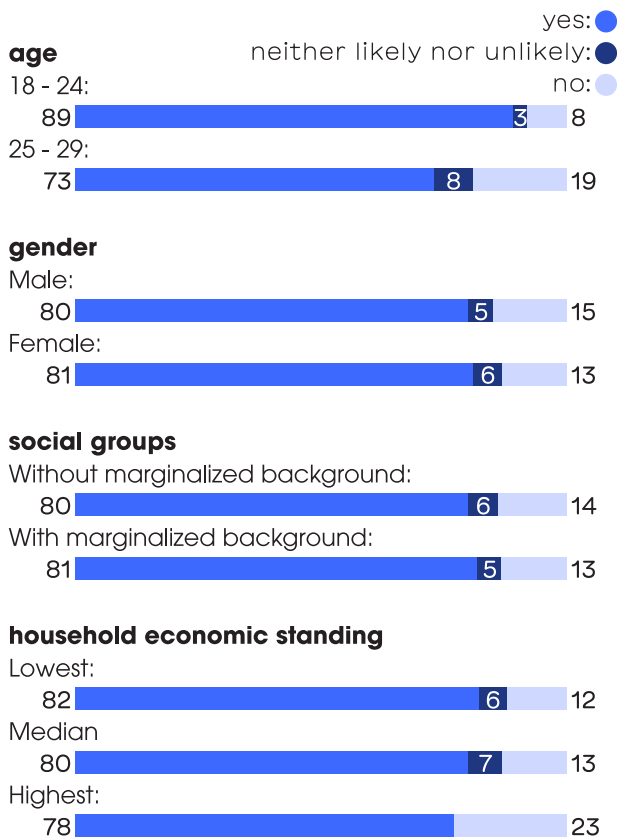


Figure 6: If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake an unpaid internship at some point in the future¹⁰? (% one choice, by age, gender, social groups and households' economic standing¹¹)

Conclusions

The analysis of the evidence from an online survey indicates 45% of the surveyed young people had undertaken both unpaid and paid internships. More respondents had undertaken an unpaid internship (77%) than a paid internship (59%). Notably, respondents aged between 25 and 29 are more likely to have undertaken paid internships than younger ones.

When it comes to the number of internships, among those who have undertaken unpaid internships, 46% experienced one unpaid internship, while among those who have undertaken paid internships 63% have had one paid internship. More than one-third (34%) mentioned that they have experienced two unpaid internships while 24% experienced the same number of paid internships. In addition, 15% had undertaken three unpaid internships, while only 9% mentioned that they have undertaken three paid internships.

Respondents were asked how likely they would be to undertake an unpaid and paid internships at some point in the future. The majority of the respondents (72%) mentioned that they would not undertake an unpaid internship, while 80% mentioned that they would undertake a paid internship. One-fifth of the respondents would agree to undertake an unpaid internship. Notably, respondents aged between 25 and 29 were more likely to respond that they would not undertake an unpaid internship.

The majority of surveyed young people (68%) say that they cannot afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months. Notably, respondents with their households' higher economic standing (median and highest) and respondents without marginalised backgrounds were more likely to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months than respondents with their households' lowest economic standing or respondents with the marginalised background.

10 Variables were recoded as extremely likely and likely=likely, neither likely nor unlikely= neither likely nor unlikely, extremely unlikely and unlikely=unlikely.

11 Variables were recoded as 1-5 points=lowest, 6-7 points=median, 8-10 points=highest.

Additional Comments

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience of internships?

Many times it also depends on the sector in which one carries out the internships. Anyway, I believe that there is no culture of giving value to what young people can offer, and above all there is a culture of utilitarianism and mistreatment at work. Fortunately, I have had good experiences, but I have also lived others where the human being is not seen as a person who also has dreams to fulfill, but as a machine that helps them to lower costs and from which they can ask for everything.

I am experiencing an internship cycle, whenever I apply for an entry-level position, candidates with more experience are preferred. A year of internship only led me to another internship.

In Ireland, there was a ban on pharmacy internship payment. This would mean students would be in debt of 30,000 Euro approximately after 12 months of interning and an increased masters fee. After a campaign, the decision was rebuked and interns are allowed to be paid, but this is up to the employer. It should be mandatory that all internships are paid.

Even if I could afford my unpaid internship, now that I feel the effort that I did during these months on my body I really feel like I should have been paid. Because my work has a cost (for me)

No

The unpaid internships also required more after hours and gave me less motivation, because I felt used and undervalued.

No

The 2 of 4 unpaid internships were not really a hard work and it was just a few meetings a week for an hour, therefore I can see why they did not pay me but at the same time it was for a state institution and overall it seems all sketchy.

I have done three unpaid internships in special circumstances. My first unpaid internship was undertaken in my hometown, very part time, but I was studying and working at a cafe at the same time. It was truly exhausting and lonely for a 20-year-old. My second one, I was able to do because of all the savings I made in my Caffey job. So yes, literally working and paying what I had worked to do another internship. I used all my savings on that, and still I'm "privileged" for being able to save for that and not to help my parents for instance. My third one I was a scholarship student so the scholarship would pay my spending. Yet, unpaid labor was promoted by my master's. I am almost 27, 4 years of work experience and no savings, no pension fund, never had a work contract and therefore no rights.

It really should stop- interns deserve at least the bare minimum- so they can afford transportation and food during internships. people also don't talk about how students may need to purchase clothing and work attire to fit the dress code of the workplace, that adds an extra social layer to why some students are left behind. There's a lot of costs students carry that might not be obvious at face value.

Complicated questions.

I have chosen to not apply for internship openings when I realized an internship is not paid several times. I think it is unfair and non-inclusive.

In the Netherlands unpaid internships are sometimes mandatory to graduate however in some internships they basically overwork you while in others they don't give you any work, basically there is lack of control and it supposed to not be an internship but a research project aka you getting taught, but in the end most people end up doing a lot of work equal to the work some PhDs do

The PAID INTERSHIPS I have undertaken in the past, were paid under the minimum wage of the country where they took place. I had to recently decline an offer because it was in a different country, and with the salary provided I would not have been able to move there and maintain myself there either.

I believe my unpaid internship was good for my career development. I interned in a local NGO with very limited funds. Personally I don't see why unpaid internships are automatically bad, whereas volunteer work is celebrated. In my field, volunteering is often very helpful for career advancement, and volunteers aren't paid either. I refuse to think unpaid internships are unequivocally bad as a societal phenomenon if volunteering and activism in student organizations etc. is good. Both can provide strategies for getting a first start in the job market.

Unpaid internships are needed in order to have a career in my working field which is a shame because it creates a sense of undervalue and dependency that don't let young people be independent and able to have a future.

#banunpaidinternships. Thanks for your work on this!

I am from Croatia, and to do unpaid internship in France I had to work for a year before living at home so I don't pay rent. I was 2 years older than the next oldest intern since everybody else was able to do the internship right after University

I had an unpaid internship and apart of being unpaid, the environment was pretty toxic. On top of that the organization stated straight away, that the internship is only 3 months, because otherwise they would have to pay me, and they did not want to, as it was easier to switch interns every 3 months. When I described them my financial struggle, as I'm from Russia, where wages are way lower and have only one working parent, they ignored it. I simply wanted an advice on where I can look for ANYTHING paid, but they were not eager to pay. It is also shady of what's called volunteering these days, I have done so much volunteer work, where I had to use my professional skills and received nothing back besides a certificate which has no real value.

LET'S MAKE INTERNSHIPS PAID!!!!!! So we can learn and earn, we cannot just do work for freeeeeeee

I Denmark you still receive the student grant under internship, that is why it was easier to have an unpaid internship

I would like to add that I was able to do an unpaid internship during my bachelor's degree because I had very low living expenses (I was living with relatives), and because I had an Erasmus+ scholarship for the time of the internship. Otherwise, I couldn't have done the internship, which would have been a shame because I learnt so much during that time, and it shaped me as a person.

even in France, where all interns are paid, international organizations find ways around that. setting an example looks different.

Unpaid and underpaid internships demotivated me in the past. I know that I have always been a valuable team member, but often felt like I was not worth it or good enough to be remunerated adequately.

Even if i was lucky to receive a small earning for my internship it never covered the costs of moving and rent etc. I think especially big companies with the Financial abilities have to Pay a minimum wage!

I never accepted to do unpaid traineeships.

'Paid' internship was 250 euros a month for fulltime work, so idk if that even counts as paid

I could probably afford another unpaid internship because my father, who died 6 years ago, had a pension that the state has been partially giving to me. But after 4 unpaid internships, it's my dignity to tell me I would not want to undertake a new unpaid internship even if it was fitting my career goals. After studying for 7 years and having many experiences, it's time I am properly paid for my work.

Even though it's an internship, you are actually carrying out work, so you should be paid for the work you do.

Unpaid internship doesn't let you be independent

No more

My dream was to work at the UN. I had to renounce it when I learned internships were unpaid.

i can take the unpaid internship only because my mother already lives in Belgium and she can offer to help me out for 3 months

I have always tried to avoid unpaid internship (apart from the curricular ones which were obviously unpaid). But this meant more time to find a job and acquire new skills

I have taken 2 internships, have a master's degree and still I am not considered qualified enough for any job within my field of education. Right now I am working freelance to give myself the experience as an alternative to low or unpaid internships

I have done an unpaid internship in a company that was constantly hiring unpaid interns as assistants, thus saving loads of money. I study human rights and it feels deeply unfair that only privileged people can do unpaid internship and get the experience. Moreover, unpaid interns are more likely to be exploited. I know of people having done unpaid interns with the UN who were contributing so much to research papers but their names never appeared anywhere in the publication.

I am belonging to the persons who can afford not doing paid internships, however I chose not to do so, because I don't see a point of offering my work for free, especially now having a Master Degree. However, I am also someone who can afford not taken the unpaid internships and still will have good chances in the job market. Besides that, as German we sometimes can get German scholarships that fund otherwise unpaid internship which is a huge privilege and actually quite unfair for people from other countries who don't have this opportunity.

Unpaid internships weigh heavily on your mental health. Particularly in large international organizations, you are often given tasks that other staff members do not want to do and are therefore not very interesting to develop skills (mostly administrative work). When you are treated as inferior for a long period of time, this takes a toll on your mental health and self-esteem. While I understand that small NGO's are not able to compensate interns, but I definitely expect more of large international organizations. Particularly when you know your colleagues are being paid very high salaries.

Unpaid internship is not work, it is just a voluntary activity for which we have even to thank the employer

It's annoying when you spent a lot of time drafting reports for your internship, and then the organization either scraps the project or has no publishing plan for your work

Even a little of money is more than nothing.

Please do put pressure into UN unpaid internships. Out of them all, these are the most immoral.

Most horrible experience. My motivation was dealt a major blow man. I can't wish an unpaid internship for anyone

I wish I had other opportunities to have taken some experience than from unpaid internships

i recognize my privilege in being able to take unpaid internship, but I do not agree with the concept. especially at the UN, I find it unacceptable.

Inpatient internships present a generational issue and must be deemed illegal. I have worked three full-time unpaid internships during my studies while working in the weekends to make economic ends meet and become relevant for the job market in the end. This has left me with student debt I otherwise would never have had to undertake and leaves me at a clear disadvantage to those of my peers who have never had to undertake unpaid internships. If you study political science, I believe you are much more likely to undertake unpaid internships particularly at embassies and EU representations.

let's ban them!

In my case, especially the commuting expenses are a burden during unpaid internships

Some "paid" internships give unreasonably low stipends which still defeats the purpose of having paid internships.

Unpaid internships disproportionately affect students of international background in foreign countries. They are a reflection of the classist tradition that exists among high level entities. Especially in Politics/Economics/Law/IR the disqualify in internship experiences proves that only financially stable students can afford unpaid internships.

I was only able to do the unpaid internships as they were online during COVID so I could live with my parents for free. I would not have been able to afford to move to Brussels to do them.

Unpaid internships are how privileged individuals get to keep their (economic) privilege. Poorer students cannot 'eat air' and corporations that make so much money not providing money and getting free labor is a scam. No one should work for free as no one pays rent in 'exposure'

I would be somehow likely to undertake an unpaid internship for one reason only: the relevance of the company/organization/NGO on my CV. For what concerns me, two out of the three internships I undertook were with the UN Climate Change and EIT Climate-KIC. Everybody knows how relevant they are and it surely still helps a lot having these two names written on my resume. What nobody thinks about though is the chronic state of stress and how many sacrifices I did to get myself afloat both mentally and economically.

Some organizations in my country tend to exploit and overwork the interns even if it is a paid internship. One is expected to put in more working hours and are not fairly compensated for the same.

Both of the "unpaid" internships I did (one was 2 months in a local NGO in Tunisia, the other 3 months for a labor union in France), I got a scholarship, either Erasmus or from my university. I probably wouldn't have done them if it hadn't been the case.

In the past eight months, I have been looking for someone giving me an opportunity to start my career and, at the same time, preserve my dignity. So far, I have only been offered unpaid internships. The UN is the worst of all.

A minimum salary should be guaranteed

I do not have the financial support to take an unpaid internship, so many internships are already excluded for me, even though I absolutely want to gain experience.

Interns in the organization I was a part of donated blood to get extra cash for living expenses

Paid VS unpaid is too binary. Poorly paid internships are also problematic. It's impossible to live on most paid internship salaries in Switzerland.

Actually during my first unpaid internship I spent more money than usual because I didn't have time to cook at home so I always bought food outside (clearly more expensive)

I could afford to take an unpaid internship, but I won't because it's a question of principle. Stop expecting your interns, who fulfill actual tasks that should be paid, to work for free!!

I hate unpaid internships. In Spain, you literally work as a regular worker but without money.

I am part of generation traineeship, my knowledge, education, experience and skills are recognized by recruiters (meaning they want me to work for them) but not valued or appreciated (meaning recruiters/companies are not ready to hire me for a real position and/or remunerate me appropriately for the assets I bring and value my work brings for the company). This feels very unfair and leaves me (and my peers) with a feeling of injustice and fury. Frankly, even the European Institutions don't play the game fair - considering the internship opportunities and the responsibilities and commitment/performance demanded by trainees/interns and their significant qualifications needed to be selected as a stagiaire, the pay is very low, has not been adjusted to inflation for years and does not account for further costs (e.g. no exemption from taxation, public transportation costs, personal instruments needed for work like phone bills or internet required for home office). I think this initiative to ban unpaid internships is as great as it is necessary and overdue. Thank you for your work and for your efforts to make this happen - please do couple it with 1) paying your trainees and interns at the EU institutions appropriately and 2) the requirement to pay interns/trainees minimum wage too. In relation to previous ones and cost of living, our generation is the best educated and the least paid. This needs to stop. Thank you for your contribution to make a positive difference.

They should be paid a living wage. And Belgium's professional immersion contract is only another way to get cheap labor. I'll be starting one soon and it is appalling that I will be moving to a different country to start a career in my field and will be earning less than a minimum wage. I have a bachelor's and two master's degrees, and a whole lot of student debt.

I had three internships within the UN system. FAO was the only one that was paid. I never was offered a job in UN after.

I want to branch out and get working experience in central Europe. However, as most of the internship opportunities are not paid, I cannot afford moving to another country to do a couple of months of work for free for the 'experience'

Nej

In my professional area, unfortunately, we are obliged to do unpaid internships in order to finish our studies (Veterinary Medicine). I think that's why so many of us do it...I worked for 4 months without even pocket money for food or transportation, something doing 15h shifts.

Most people are better off getting a real job.

Only that from my experience, HR generally values volunteering and unpaid internships and that automatically puts everyone else in a disadvantage. Whoever affords to be unpaid has higher opportunities to succeed later.

In the future, i would like to work in an IO. Unfortunately, most of their internships are unpaid. For instance, I would have loved to do an internship at the OCHA at Genève. But it is unpaid and Genève is a very expensive city. I can't afford it especially since an internship does not lead to a permanent contract... However, I will apply for an internship at UNESCO just because I will have the Erasmus + grant and my parents live near to Paris. but if I get into UNESCO and another PAID internship that I like just as much (like in NGOs) I will seriously think about which internship to choose only for financial and ethical reasons (the UN promotes human rights but doesn't pay the interns...)

They often are not in line with learning, instead you do a normal job that can be covered by an employee.

Sometimes internships are paid, but so underpaid that it's still a burden. For instance, I was paid 200 euros per month. Insufficient. I have lost many opportunities for not being able to apply to unpaid internships to int. organizations as the cost of life in that city would have been unaffordable

Getting hired after an unpaid or underpaid internship meant very little negotiating power for my starting salary at that job. It has meant little significant income growth since (only coming up to year 5 in that company I can truly see how damaging that was and how much they took advantage of me. Now I'm seeking a position outside that company where the standard market rate for my role is at least 20% more than I'm currently getting paid)

I am pursuing a career in the NGO/INGO space. The space is transforming into a work place from a volunteering space so the job openings are still so few. This results in us jumping into any internship to make a name for ourselves

For one of my internships in Brussels, I was given a voluntary contract where I had to claim 800 euro per month in expenses. I think this was a way for my employer back then to avoid paying social security.

END UNPAID INTERNSHIPS!! Thank You for your fight!!

National circumstances matter - e.g. Sweden has unpaid internships as the person rely on government funding.

What i was asked to do on the job went well beyond the tasks I was assigned to on paper. All of this unpaid and unorganized.

Unpaid traineeships can be sometimes covered by Erasmus+ grant (of course not as a rule, it's separated), as it happened for me once.

Choose well your company and take caution with the application process, recruiters and recruitment process, always take a face-to-face online or in person interview

My underpaid internship was worthy because the people I worked with professional and kind. They taught me all the processes of my position and even showed another thing. It can be worth it with the right team of work!

Unpaid internship have a terrible impact on motivation, incentives and personal growth

I feel like unpaid internships are just a way to avoid paying struggling students minimum wage. I am applying to some internships that assume I already have 1+ years of experience at least. The entry level jobs are no longer entry level. Companies need to pay the people that do good work, even if they're young.

It also makes a big difference whether the internship is full time or not. My unpaid part time internship still allows me to work on the side and get a decent salary from a paid job that I do in the internship-free time

Sometimes they give access to full times roles, also the unpaid ones, also in EU institutions. This is extremely unfair.

I'm Albert Canadell from UCSB fratello! In my experience, in deal advisory in finance, they are mainly paid (bad in terms of hour wage but nice in total amount paid). I also think in the very early stage, some people would be willing to pay to do an internship that boosts their career in terms of learning and networking. Cheers brother!

While the unpaid internship I did was fair in terms of work responsibilities and workload: I was doing tasks which were coherent to my position, and I would work 9-6 as agreed. On the other hand, my paid internship was clearly just an excuse to pay me less for some time: during the time, I worked between 10 and 12 hours every day, and sometimes during weekend as well, and I was not paid for the extra time (interns cannot be paid extra). Moreover, I had the same responsibilities as people who had a permanent contract.

Youth are forced to do a vast amount of internships, which normally DO NOT lead to a permanent job.

I have completed the questionnaire while I am still living with my parents, but I have also a full time permanent job

No

All the unpaid internships I did were in the cultural associations

Most paid internships (although immensely better than unpaid ones) do not allow a person to live decently, and most trainees still require the support of their parents, or when it is not possible (like in my situation), have to either use their savings that they might have acquired while working during their studies & end up with being less well off than before, less able to pay for their studies etc. Also internships do not open access to unemployment benefits which is problematic especially after 6 month long internships at the end of a degree.

Mine were with the Flemish and the federal government. They pretend in the news that they care about banning unpaid internships, but they don't even pay their own interns.

Exploitative and discriminatory. Excludes the vast majority of people from building professional experience and a network. Relied on extremely heavily by EU institutions, and many private sector/NGOs surrounding institutions. Interns should not be seen as free labor.

The academic and professional requirements for many internships are ridiculous. Most advertised in Brussels require a master's degree and some professional experience (even if it is a CIP), in addition to multiple languages. All of this for something that does not pay a living wage.

I was able to do the unpaid internship as I was able to live at home, otherwise it would have been impossible with the rising cost of living, rent etc.

It shall be banned. I did three unpaid internships (national administration, a New York-based NGO, and at the United Nations). Although it is an investment into my future for better employment, it reproduces the structural inequalities we live in.

2 of my graduate internships were very badly paid (300 euro per month, paid upon termination of the internship)

The unpaid internship I did was for a prominent NGO in Belgium. When they heard about the new rule forcing employers to pay unpaid internships, they stated they'd probably just stop taking interns. For me, this underlines the predatory nature of unpaid internships. Clearly the company sees no benefit beyond it being unpaid labor for them.

Unpaid internships are a way to exclude those who are not already in particular circles.

I have been selected for multiple unpaid positions, even at renowned organizations such as UN agencies. I had to refuse these valuable experiences while people while peers in position of privilege could participate. It's not only exploitation, it is also highly classist. Let's end this.

unpaid internships are a less intimidating way to gain entry in highly desired field like the EU bubble. You can lean on the unpaid internship, leverage it into a paid internship and leverage that in a real, full time position. That being said, it's a privilege to be able to do an unpaid internship, and therefore unpaid internships are discriminatory and unethical. Instead of an unpaid internship being the first step in your career

I started with a very low paid internship (â, ~400/month) and a non-paid 1-month internship during university. I think that another aspect to consider is that of companies offering up to 1 year paid internship but not giving any guarantees of employment afterwards. Some young people risk being stuck in the loop of internships. Anyways, thank you so much for your great job, it's so much appreciated!

It was a great educational experience but it was discriminating for people without economic resources. I worked before and during the internship to cover the costs.

They are unjust and unfair

I am a journalist and doing an unpaid internship was the only way to do what I studied for at first. I took a part time job on top of my full time unpaid internship so that I could afford transportation and bills. It was barely worth it I almost burnt myself out

From my experience, when we do unpaid internships, people tend to see us more like a servant and give us work that isn't worthy.

The company I did my BSc internship, took advantage of the academic courses I had done to improve their qualifications

The internship I did would most likely not have been possible if it wasn't unpaid. I think a lot of internships won't be possible if they have to pay interns, I guess that should be considered as well.

Although they were valuable experiences, I had responsibilities that should have been paid.

Even if the employer don't pay me directly, I counted it as a paid internship when I received a salary in the form of monthly grant (a decent one)

My unpaid internships were for three months each - and still I couldn't afford it

In Greece most internships are unpaid. I always believed that if the internship provider has a great opportunity for your development it is worth having an unpaid internship. Three years later I realize that an unpaid internship is rarely or never a good experience. The employers that are not willing to pay you at all have no interest in your development and that is also evident in the tasks that are given to you. Most unpaid internships include administrative day-to-day tasks that require administrative personnel and secretaries. Instead of hiring people for these purposes they provide unpaid schemes advertising an educational experience and good insight of the organization. This is never the case.

In one of the companies I did my unpaid internship with, the main activity of the company was mostly carried out by unpaid interns. There was around 8 of us, while the company had 4 full time workers whose main purpose was managing the work carried out by interns. However, they had no intention at all of helping us through the learning process. Instead, older interns would train the new ones, resulting in a never ending chain of exploitation. When internship contracts are over, they never intend on hiring anyone, they just go onto the next batch of interns who will never be rewarded for their hard work.

My unpaid internship was a terrible experience: it's was an abusive and exploitative environment. 0/10 would do again.

I would not be able to do an unpaid internship if it wasn't for only 6 weeks, or it wasn't "just" 10 hours per week beside my studies.

The paid internships in the Netherlands aren't nearly enough to cover any living expenses. The paid internship I did had a salary of 450 euros a month. However, with the average rent being between 500 and 800 euros (depending on the city), it's a ridiculous low amount. From what I have seen 450 euros per month is on the high end of the spectrum and the majority offer around 200/300 euros per month.

it's really hard to get good internships, sometimes you do very valuable and highly qualified work even though earning only a minor payback

I was about to graduate and applied to between 30 and 50 jobs and internships. I graduated and I had one offer. Unpaid. Move countries for it. Figure out visas by myself. Find funding by myself. Leave home. Pay rent. Pay travel. I had no support and worked full time with no pay. I suffered migraines and had no place to live for a time. I got employed in the same company after the internship but at lowest starting salary which gave me barely enough to live in the city let alone to try and pay back the money I had borrowed while being unpaid.

The existence of unpaid internship is a major hurdle in the way of social mobility! They should be forbidden.

Sometimes you are treated as if you are not a human and have to do menial tasks which do not contribute to your overall career development or life skills like personal tasks such as making tea for your boss or licking envelopes.

I have carried out unpaid internships in 3 different sectors (small NGO, Government, United Nations), all of them over for over 4 months. The most frustrating part is that unpaid work is not valued and not challenging. I would have performed way better my duties if I wouldn't have known that regardless of how good or bad I am, firing me is not worthy for them, because we cost 0.

I was an UNPAID intern at one of the (if not THE) biggest human rights NGO globally. It was an odd feeling to be fighting for human rights justice across the globe while not being paid and having to struggle to figure out where my next meal is coming from

I have done 5 internships. Only one was adequately paid. The other ones offered very moderate (!) pay or none at all which is why I also cut one internship short since I couldn't afford it for a full six months without any stipend.

Internships especially remote require you to spend money to stay connected. For someone who's from a low economic background it can be difficult sometimes to make ends meet and still keep the job. You also do not have a choice because to get paid employment you need the experience.

YFJ very much worries about the transition between education and work, however, I believe there is another very important transition that is the one from traineeships to entry jobs.

Frequency tables

1. How old are you?	Freq.	Percent
18-24	162	46.96
25-29	183	53.04
Total	345	100

2. What country are you currently living in?	Freq.	Percent
Italy	67	19.42
Belgium	65	18.84
Germany	25	07.25
Spain	25	07.25
Netherlands	21	06.09
France	20	05.80
Romania	16	04.64
Austria	12	03.48
Denmark	9	02.61
Portugal	8	02.32
Bulgaria	7	03.22
Greece	7	03.22
Switzerland	6	01.01
UK	6	01.74
Ireland	5	01.45
Turkey	5	01.45
Sweden	5	01.45
Slovakia	4	01.16
Finland	4	1.16

Poland	4	01.16
Hungary	3	0.87
Cyprus	3	0.87
Czech Republic	3	0.87
Albania	3	0.87
Luxembourg	2	0.58
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	0.58
Lithuania	1	0.29
Slovenia	1	0.29
Serbia	1	0.29
Norway	1	0.29
Russia	1	0.29
Armenia	1	0.29
Croatia	1	0.29
North Macedonia	1	0.29
Total	345	100

2.1. Region of Residence	Freq.	Percent
Western Europe	149	43
Southern Europe	122	35
Eastern Europe	44	13
Northern Europe	30	9
Total	345	100

3. Do you identify as (choose one answer only)	Freq.	Percent
woman	251	72.75
man	88	25.51
Prefer not to say	6	01.74
Total	345	100

4.1. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I identify as a person with disability	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	336	97.39
Mentioned	9	02.61
Total	345	100

4.2. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I am part of an ethnic or religious minority in my country	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	321	93.04
Mentioned	24	06.96
Total	345	100

4.3. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I have an immigrant background or heritage	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	308	89.28
Mentioned	37	10.72
Total	345	100

4.4. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I identify as LGBTQIA+	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	288	83.48
Mentioned	57	16.52
Total	345	100

4.5. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I have a chronic illness	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	321	93.04
Mentioned	24	6.96
Total	345	100

4.6. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I am currently not in education, employment or training	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	314	91.01
Mentioned	31	8.99
Total	345	100

4.7. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I have been in prison or juvenile detention	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	344	99.71
Mentioned	1	0.29
Total	345	100

4.8. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I lived in alternative care at some point when I was a child (e.g. children's ca)	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	344	99.71
Mentioned	1	0.29
Total	345	100

4.9. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - I have experienced homelessness	Freq.	Percent
Not mentioned	342	99.13
Mentioned	3	0.87
Total	345	100

4.10. Do any of the following describe you? (Choose all answers that apply) - None of the above	Freq.	Percent
--	--------------	----------------

Not mentioned	130	37.68
Mentioned	215	62.32
Total	345	100

5. Let's imagine there is a 10-step ladder reflecting the economic standing of all households in your country today. The first step of this ladder corresponds to the lowest possible economic position in society, while the 10th step corresponds to the highest possible position. Which step of this ladder do you think your household stands on currently?	Freq.	Percent
0	1	0.29
1	2	0.58
2	7	02.02
3	29	08.41
4	49	14.20
5	63	18.26
6	77	22.32
7	76	22.02
8	34	09.86
9	5	01.45
10	2	0.58
Total	345	100

6. Have you undertaken an UNPAID internship?	Freq.	Percent
I do not know	3	0.87
No	79	22.90
Yes	263	76.23
Total	345	100

6.1.If yes, how many unpaid internships have you done?	Freq.	Percent
1	98	46.45
2	71	33.65
3	32	15.17
4	8	02.79
5	2	0.95
Total	211	100

7. Have you ever undertaken a PAID internship?	Freq.	Percent
No	140	40.58
Yes	205	59.42
Total	345	100

7.1. If yes, how many paid internships have you done?	Freq.	Percent
1	104	63.41

2	39	23.78
3	13	07.93
4	6	03.66
5	1	0.61
6	1	0.61
Total	164	100

8. If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake a PAID internship at some point in the future?	Freq.	Percent
I don't know	6	01.74
Extremely likely	185	53.62
Likely	88	25.51
Neither likely nor unlikely	19	05.51
Unlikely	30	08.70
Extremely unlikely	17	04.93
Total	345	100

9. If it suited your career goals, how likely would you be to undertake an UNPAID internship at some point in the future?	Freq.	Percent
I don't know	5	01.45
Extremely likely	10	02.90
Likely	60	17.39
Neither likely nor unlikely	23	06.67
Unlikely	93	26.96
Extremely unlikely	154	44.64
Total	345	100

10. Could you afford to undertake an unpaid internship in the next six months?	Freq.	Percent
I don't know	35	10.14
Yes	74	21.45
No	236	68.41
Total	345	100

Suggested citations:

Discussion Paper

Moxon, D., Bacalso, C. Dolidze, S., (2023)
*European Youth Forum Discussion paper:
The costs of unpaid internships*, European Youth
Forum, Belgium.

Annex 1

Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C., (2023)
*Working paper: Estimating the financial costs of
unpaid internships to the individual*, European
Youth Forum, Belgium.

Annex 2

Dolidze, S., Moxon, D., & Bacalso, C., (2023)
*European Youth Forum Internship Survey:
Understanding the impact of unpaid internships*,
European Youth Forum, Belgium.



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



The European Youth Forum is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the Council of Europe or the European Youth Foundation. Neither the European Union nor any other granting authority can be held responsible for them.

