



Quality Charter on Internships & Apprenticeships

moving towards equal opportunities
for young people in the labour market




table of contents

Definitions: internship and apprenticeships	5
Transparent recruitment	6
Fair working conditions	7
Learning opportunities	8
Adequate framework and protection	9
Conclusion	10

The following Charter is for:


1 Policy-makers

to implement better strategies and initiatives which are in-line with young people's rights.




2 Employers

to facilitate the transition between education and the labour market, to offer the best possible placements to young people in order to capture and retain their talent and creativity, and to build diversity;



3 Young people

to better know their rights in the workplace.



intro

Every year, countless young people eagerly anticipate their entry into the labour market, seeking opportunities to gain experience, launch their careers, develop new skills, and foster their journey towards independent adulthood. Internships and apprenticeships currently serve as crucial pathways for these aspirations, facilitating the transition from studies to work. In designing and implementing policies on these matters, it is essential to adopt a youth-centred approach that focuses on workers' rights, ensuring that interns and apprentices are empowered, respected, and protected. In recognising their potential and valuing their contributions, we established this Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, in order to create an inclusive environment.

However, most of the time, internships and apprenticeships do not meet certain quality criteria, ending in missed opportunities, both for young people to leverage their goals, and for employers to benefit from young people's added-value.

Despite some updates at the European Union (EU) level in the last decade, with the adoption of the 2014 [Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships](#)¹ and the 2018 [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#)², the current system still allows for exploitation in the labour market to occur. Practices such as unpaid internships or low-paid internships and apprenticeships that have no proper

mentorship or learning objectives, or no follow-up opportunities, are still common. Unpaid internships in particular deepen social inequalities, particularly for marginalised groups, including those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and prevent young people from being financially independent. Furthermore, research by the International Labour Organisation³ suggests that paid work placements lead to better follow-up outcomes.

Currently, there is no binding legislation at international level that holds different stakeholders to account. Even in countries that have some form of legislation, there are still loopholes and little labour inspection or law enforcement preventing these occurrences. More often than not, young people find themselves in an endless cycle of unpaid internships, which do not lead to any stable work contracts or financial security.

In 2017, the [European Youth Forum lodged a complaint against Belgium to the Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights](#)⁴ on the grounds that Belgium was not doing enough to prevent exploitation of interns in the labour market. The outcome of the complaint officially recognised that Belgium had violated the European Social Charter, with gaps in Belgium's laws allowing for the exploitation of unpaid internships, and whereby the Council of Europe called on the Belgian government to better monitor labour laws and increase the labour inspectorate's capacity.

1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32014H0327%2801%29>

2 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018H0502%2801%29>

3 O'Higgins et al (2021) Internships, Employability and the Search for Decent Work Experience, International Labour Organisation: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_799773.pdf

4 <https://www.youthforum.org/collective-complaint-on-unpaid-internships>

definitions

Internships*

1 Curricular internship:
a mandatory or optional work placement that is undertaken by a student to obtain credit points to complete their higher education studies. Interns generally have a student status, and have access to services like student loans, student housing, health insurance, scholarships, etc.;

3 Internship as part of active labour market policies:
a work placement which is promoted by the public employment services in collaboration with the internship provider in order to support unemployed or inactive young people in the labour market;

2 Internship in a recognised profession:
a work placement that is undertaken by a graduate student in order to enter a specific professional field. While this internship is not mandatory for students to graduate, they still have to complete one in order to exercise their profession;

4 Internship in the open labour market:
work experience that is undertaken outside of formal education, including after graduation, that is not required for completing higher education studies nor offered within study programmes, but rather to obtain work-based experience as well as any other form of similar work experience that is offered to young people as a work-based learning opportunity.



Apprenticeships

a work-oriented training that is part of vocational education and training and that is solely a school-based programme or a combined school- and work-based programme.



* The European Youth Forum does not differentiate between internships and traineeships, using the terms interchangeably.

Article 1:

transparent recruitment

Internships and apprenticeships should not lead to the replacement of standard jobs. This includes ensuring that internships and apprenticeships adhere to quality standards (such as on fair remuneration, the right to quality training, and access to social protection).

Internships and apprenticeships should provide recognised work experience that is also valid for future recruitment processes, and that develops the skills of young people, elevates their professional capacity and brings new ideas for employers.

Vacancy notices should be transparently advertised, provide clear information on remuneration, working conditions, expected tasks, and follow-up opportunities. Where applicable, employers should also provide the number of interns or apprentices they hired over the previous year.

There should be a transparent and unbiased hiring process, bearing in mind the importance of reaching out to those coming from diverse and/or marginalised backgrounds.

Education institutions should provide assistance to those looking for suitable work experience as part of their studies, while fostering partnerships with different stakeholders in order to provide the best possible quality offers. When recommending internship or apprenticeship providers or fostering partnerships, the education institutions

should create mechanisms to ensure that the internship or apprenticeship providers abide by minimum quality standards.

The internship or apprenticeship provider should try as much as possible to provide feedback to candidates regarding the selection process. Early communication of the selection results is crucial, particularly when it comes to cross-border internships and apprenticeships and when hiring third-country nationals to allow enough time for administrative procedures and relocation. Here, providers should also support relocation, such as through applications for work visas or allowances.

Interns and apprentices' personal information and data should be handled with confidentiality and in compliance with applicable data protection regulations.

For each employing business or organisation, there should be a maximum ratio of the number of interns versus staff members and break periods between the hiring of interns. If no break period is possible, in most cases it demonstrates that this needs to be transformed into a stable position.

Ideally, use of internships and apprenticeships should be limited to pupils, students and recent graduates, and the length of these work placements should be restricted to a reasonable and fixed number of months, such as 6 months.

Article 2:

fair working conditions

It is essential that every internship and apprenticeship is based on a legally binding written contract agreed upon between all parties, which clearly stipulates each party's rights and obligations; remuneration; working time, rest and holiday periods; health coverage, accident insurance and sick leave; length of the work experience; and how to terminate the contract. Furthermore, for curricular internships, internships in a recognised profession and apprenticeships, the contract should involve the education institution as well and should indicate how many credit points this will contribute to the diploma of the intern or apprentice; how the learning outcomes of the internships or apprenticeships will contribute to the learning outcomes of the study programme; how the achievement of the learning outcomes will be assessed; and what appeal mechanisms are available, as well as the feedback and complaint procedures that are available between the three parties.

A description of learning objectives and tasks should be attached to the written contract.

Every intern and apprentice should be entitled to adequate remuneration. Ideally, this would translate into remuneration at least at the level of the national minimum wage or the collective bargaining in place and above the national poverty threshold for every intern and apprentice. Curricular internships, internships in a recognised profession, and apprenticeships should at least be entitled to receive a grant covering the costs incurred during their work experience, notably food, accommodation and transport.

Interns and apprentices should be informed by the internship or apprenticeship provider of their social and labour rights, workers' representatives and how to join a trade union, as well as any health and safety risks posed to them through the position or at the workplace. They should also have the right to actively participate in staff meetings.

Interns should have access to social security protection, particularly unemployment benefits and health and pension systems, but also to maternal, parental and carers leave, and invalidity benefits.

Employers should promote a respectful and inclusive work environment, free from any form of discrimination, harassment, or bullying, and ensure that trainees are treated with dignity and respect, with their well-being at the forefront of any decision taken. Employers should undergo appropriate training to ensure an equitable and inclusive working environment for all, including for young people with disabilities, young women and non-binary people, young people of colour, etc.

Interns should be provided with fair and reasonable working hours, ensuring that they are not overworked or subjected to exploitative practices, and where the providers should respect the principles of work-life balance. Overtime work should be adequately compensated. In this line, employers should respect the right to disconnect, particularly for remote interns and apprentices.

Remote interns and apprentices should be provided with clear guidelines on their working conditions, particularly considering their recent increase. They should have the same rights and conditions as place-based interns and apprentices, particularly when it comes to accessing adequate remuneration or financial grants and accessing social security. Working remotely should not ob-

struct the learning objectives of the intern or apprentice.

Educational institutions and/or internship and apprenticeship providers should provide particular support for cross-border interns and apprentices as they are at risk of unfair treatment through activities which enable their cultural integration such as language courses.

Article 3: **learning opportunities**

Internships and apprenticeships are an opportunity to learn, to develop new skills and to acquire practical experience that complements or is on par to the knowledge and qualifications that have been previously obtained through formal or non-formal education, and should guide interns and apprentices professionally by widening their perspectives on different sectors.

Every internship should have defined learning objectives and a competent mentor to guide and support the interns, with whom there is regular contact and a space to discuss the progress of the work experience as well as future career development.

When it comes to curricular internships and apprenticeships, the length and tasks of the work placement should correspond to spe-

cific learning objectives concerning the education curricula and which are shared with the student at the beginning of their work experience. Furthermore, there should be clear evaluation criteria of the internship or apprenticeship which should be undertaken towards the end of completion.

Interns, as any other employee, should have access to training opportunities during their work experience in order to develop their skills.

Ideally, internships and apprenticeships should have follow-up opportunities within the organisation hosting them. When not possible, there should be a space for follow-up advice before the completion of the internship or apprenticeship.

Article 4:

adequate framework and protection

Internships and apprenticeships should be recognised and regulated by national legislation and employers should be provided with assistance for any legal enquiries related to the implementation of an internship or apprenticeship. Binding legislation should be adopted at the international level that effectively bans all types of unpaid internships.

Social partners, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders should be involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies concerning internships and apprenticeships.

Collection of data should be more tailored in order to feed into the policy process and to better implement strategies and initiatives. This translates into the collection of statistics at national and at international level on the number of internships and apprenticeships, their average length, the social benefits available, and payments. The data should be disaggregated by factors including age group, ethnicity, and gender.

An overview should be available, at national and international level, of the different internship and apprenticeship policy frameworks and their place within the respective legal systems. Furthermore, there should be better coordination between the stakeholders, particularly member states and

education institutions, on cross-border internships and apprenticeships to ensure the recognition of skills acquired at the home member state.

National and international systems for certification and recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through internships and apprenticeships should be in place to further support the integration of young people in the labour market and youth labour mobility.

At the international level, there should be mechanisms in place to promote the exchange of best practices.

Decision-makers should implement active labour market policies such as the use of financial incentives to encourage employers to hire interns or apprentices permanently, as well as the use of public funds such as the EU's European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), to support the implementation of quality of internships and apprenticeships.

Law enforcement of internships' and apprenticeships' national and international regulations should be strengthened by regular and tailored labour inspectorates in order to tackle abuse and prevent exploitation, particularly considering the power imbalance that interns and apprentices face vis-a-vis their employers.

conclusion

We urge decision-makers to adopt binding legislation at national and international level, such as an EU Directive, in order to provide opportunities where young people can have both financial security through fair pay for their work and access to social protection, as well as quality training to develop their skills.

The vote in the European Parliament in June 2023¹⁰ calling for binding legislation which bans unpaid internships is a decisive step in safeguarding quality working conditions for everyone in Europe. We are closely monitoring the discussion and on any follow-up from other European institutions.

We call on all internship providers to provide quality work experiences as the best way to capture talent and to follow these principles and commit themselves to treat interns and apprentices fairly and as equal employees.

We encourage young people to share this Charter among their peers, to build a community and raise their voices, and demand better conditions be put in place.

By following these principles and implementing quality internships and apprenticeships, we would be preventing social exclusion and ensuring that everyone has equal access to the same opportunities. We thank the different partners and stakeholders for their involvement in this topic and for continuing to fight together with us for youth rights to #BanUnpaidInternships.

The **European Youth Forum** is the voice of young people in Europe. Standing up for their rights and striving for societies where young people are empowered and encouraged to achieve their fullest potential as global citizens.





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.

