



PRESS RELEASE

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Belgium: Youth Forum takes legal step to ban unpaid internships

In a milestone in the fight against unpaid internships, today (12th May) the European Youth Forum lodges a legal complaint on the issue of unpaid internships in Belgium.

[The complaint](#) aims to challenge and ultimately change Belgian legislation, seeking a legal decision that will set a precedent across Europe and beyond to make this unfair and discriminatory practice illegal.

Currently Belgium has the highest percentage of unpaid interns in the EU, with only 1 in 5 (18%) being paid for work. One focus of the complaint is on the "stage bénévolat" or voluntary internship offered to young people after their studies, which are often used to replace entry-level jobs. The complaint argues that unpaid internships are in violation of the right to fair remuneration as well as the right of children and young persons to protection as defined in the European Social Charter.

The Youth Forum's complaint comes a week after the EU Commission's European Youth Week, where events were held across the continent to discuss and celebrate the contribution of young people in society. However, the use of young Europeans as cheap or free labour is a problem that needs to be tackled urgently, as employers continue to exploit youth at a time when 1 in 3 young people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, making youth the most at risk age group.

There is a growing pressure on international institutions as well as national governments to end the practice of unpaid internships as they are inaccessible to young people that do not have the financial means to support themselves. The European Youth Forum has already set out a [European Quality Charter for Internships and Apprenticeships](#), urging Member States to adopt regulations to ensure that providers of internships commit to quality standards and decent pay for internships.

Zuzana Vaneckova, Board Member of the European Youth Forum:

"Unpaid internships must be banned once and for all. They are a prime example of inequality, providing opportunities only to those who have the financial means and shutting everyone else out. In an era of high youth unemployment they are simply inexcusable and only serve to further marginalise young people, who have been the first to suffer from the economic crisis and austerity measures."

If the complaint submitted today is accepted and validated by the European Committee of Social Rights, then it has the potential to transform the working conditions for interns, not only in Belgium but also in all other Member States of the Council of Europe. As highlighted by the European Pillar of Social Rights last week, the European Union must do more to combat social exclusion and discrimination. By lodging this complaint, the European Youth Forum hopes this marks a huge step forward towards this goal.

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Notes to the editor:

Read the [Collective Complaint](#) lodged by the European Youth Forum.

The European Youth Forum would like to thank the [HEC-NYU EU Public Interest Clinic](#), without which it would not have been possible to lodge the Collective Complaint.

About the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum is the platform of youth organisations in Europe. Independent, democratic, youth-led, it represents over 100 National Youth Councils and international youth organisations from across the continent. The Forum works to empower young people to participate actively in society to improve their own lives, by representing and advocating their needs and interests and those of their organisations towards the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. For more information, visit www.youthforum.org

About the European Committee of Social Rights

The European Committee of Social Rights is a group of experts responsible for monitoring the compliance of Council of Europe Member States with the European Social Charter. The Social Charter focuses on social and economic rights, complementing the European Convention on Human Rights. Under the Charter a number of countries accept Collective Complaints, a procedure that allows certain organisations to lodge complaints against Member States when the law or practice is in violation of the Charter. Once a complaint is lodged it takes 18 months for the Committee to make its decision, assuming the Complaint is deemed admissible.