



Campaign to ban unpaid and unfair internships

Background

European Institutions and national leaders declared 2022 the European Year of Youth. (EYY) This has been done after data from all corners of the EU showed that young Europeans are one of the most affected groups by the COVID 19 pandemic. The series of lockdowns caused a collective trauma with no attempt to heal it as the national authorities continue their battle against the new wave of infections. Additionally, the precarious position of the young people in the labour markets forced young people into unemployment, often without any safety net as their previous (often multiannual) working life was composed of short term and non-standard contracts and employers were not obliged to pay a social security contribution.

The EYY is therefore designed to provide an impetus to initiatives that target and improve the situation of young people in the current difficult situation.

Why the campaign

ETUC has long been warning that the austerity measures introduced after the last economic crisis, left the labour market a very hostile place for young workers. The race to the bottom and liberalisation of the market led to an increase in young people who had little choice but to accept unfair working conditions in the form of temporary contracts, 0 hours contracts, bogus self-employment, unpaid or poorly paid internships that often substituted entry-level jobs.

We, therefore, welcome the EYY initiative but **we denounce the lack of concrete proposals and commitments to make the life of young workers better**. For EYY to have the impact we have to have legislative changes that will guarantee improvements in all member states. One of the ways to immediately achieve that is to end the exploitation of young workers and BAN UNPAID INTERNSHIPS.

The goal of the campaign

The legislation regulating internships [is very different in all member states](#). We need to harmonisation and binding action on the EU level. That is why the goal of our advocacy is the EU directive to

- Ban unpaid internships that are undertaken outside of secondary or post-secondary education to gain professional experience ahead of taking up regular employment.
- Ensure that internships do not replace entry-level jobs

What internships do we want to ban?

Our action is targeted to **'free market' internships** - those that take place **outside of the educational framework**.

Free market internship:

- serves to offer a concrete work-based learning experience to individuals who are either **newly entering or re-entering** the labour market.
- is conducted for professional development **during a limited time period** and its goal is to **increase learners' competencies and obtain skills relevant for the labour market**
- consisting of activities that are connected with the area of study or professional development.
- It is organized in advance to provide structured and applied to learn through practical experience and **leads to the recognition of learning outcomes**, under the supervision of a professional(s) with a significant background in the field of the experience

What is a quality internship?

- The quality internship has to have several criteria¹:
 - 1. Recruitment
 - 2. Written agreement
 - 3. Remuneration
 - 4. Skills development
 - 5. Tutoring
 - 6. Career development and employment
 - 7. Work environment and working conditions
 - 8. Social protection and insurance

Unfortunately, gaps in the national law allow for the use of non-quality/poor internships, often unpaid or underpaid, without proper tutoring or learning content, with job descriptions and tasks corresponding to the regular permanent working position.

1

Momentum for the campaign

Several developments on the national and EU level contribute to the good momentum to conduct the campaign and advocacy action.

- Failure of the policymakers to introduce binding quality criteria for the Reinforced Youth Guarantee. (October 2020)
- Italy (one of the strongest EU economies) calling for a ban on unpaid internships in the proposed budgetary law (December 2021)²
- Adoption of the European Parliament resolution on Empowering Youth that - *“Calls for paid, quality and inclusive traineeships and apprenticeships. Condemns the practise of unpaid internships and calls on the Commission and the Member States to propose a legal framework to ensure fair remuneration for traineeships and apprenticeships”*. (Feb 2022)
- Publication of the result of the collective complaints of YFJ against Belgium acknowledging the bad practice of replacing entry-level jobs with internships (February 2022).

Main messages

- Unpaid internships must be illegal. - Unpaid is illegal!
- If the EU is serious about improving the lives of young people they have to take serious steps and they must move together. The time for the end of exploitation is now!
- EU can not fund precarity! The huge sum of the money used for the recovery and investment into business can not create more precarious jobs. Banning unpaid internships will make sure dishonest employers stop exploiting young people. On the other hand, honest employers will not be affected by the legislation.
- Young people do not need more skills! Young people need quality jobs.... The generation of young workers can not be exploited as cheap labour in the name of upskilling and increased employability.
- Unpaid internships are for the privileged ones who have family resources to support them during their unpaid job... EU should protect all young people by a directive that will improve the lives of all young workers regardless of their financial background.
- Do you want to impact? Make legislation... The life of young people, and of all of us, will improve in the short term once the lockdown ends. We are also anxious to see the re-start of the cultural and world discovering activities near us and globally. But if we want to see the long term impact, the EYY has to bring legislative proposals.

² <https://twitter.com/AndreaOrlandosp/status/1475499697183899650>

Links to other initiatives on EU level

- *Union of equality*³: how is it equal if the path to a stable job leads through unpaid internships and therefore the support of your family?
- *Discover EU*⁴: running away from the devastating consequences of the pandemic in the train is a great but only short term solution. Lifting spirits is not the main task of the EU, their main task is to provide fair and safe working conditions: **Young people need quality jobs and quality wages, anything else won't solve the problem.**
- *The Youth Guarantee*: failure to implement the quality criteria and lack of engagement from the side of the member states

Actions

- Combination of online and offline advocacy activities will depend on the development of the file and will include
 1. Meetings with policymakers on national and European level
 2. Raising awareness activities online
 3. Policy monitoring and data gathering on existing good and bad practice
 4. Interactive workshops for activists and stakeholders
 5. Regular exchanges between stakeholders of the campaign

Visual identity and materials

The campaign visuals explore the absurdity of young people who are asked to work for free.

[All visuals for the campaign can be accessed via the Google Drive Folder.](#)

The folder will be regularly updated by materials in different languages as well as the materials in modifiable format.

More info

Members of the Youth Committee will be asked to join the steering group of the campaign, who will be in charge of the planning of concrete activities.

Regular updates and invitations to take action will be sent via email.

You can always reach out to Lucie, the Youth Committee Coordinator, for more info or if you have any questions (lsusova@etuc.org)

3

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/dalli/announcements/union-equality-first-year-actions-and-achievements_en

⁴ https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/0319_youth_2021-12_discovereu_factsheet_v10.pdf