



## Internships: A way out of the youth employment crisis? Yes, but only if of quality!



International  
Labour  
Organization

Several youth organizations, including the *European Youth Forum* and *InternsGoPro*, marked 10 November 2015 as the first [International Interns' Day](#) in recognition of the engagement of millions of young people who undergo internships every day. Thousands of young people gathered in several cities to remind policymakers, employers and the media that not all internships are the same and call for urgent action to define fair rules.

The use of internships has increased worldwide. Finding a job is certainly easier for those who have already acquired work-related experience as part of a training programme, although not enough to ensure young people's transition to the labour market and to adult life. According to recent data disseminated by the European Youth Forum, each year there are approximately 4.5 million young persons who undertake an internship. Of these, 59 per cent are unpaid; around 40 per cent are not based on a contract; about 30 per cent lack real training content. The 75 per cent of these interns does not find a job after the programme.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youthforum.org/pressrelease/on-international-interns-day-young-people-all-over-the-world-come-together-to-demand-paid-good-quality-internships/>

Internships may offer a real opportunity to gain a job. They however need to be carefully monitored to prevent abuses. In the last years, the use of internships has exponentially increased, particularly in the crisis-hit economies. In the early '80s in the USA, for instance, only 3 per cent of students underwent an internship, while today this share has risen up to 75 per cent. In European countries too, the number of internships is constantly increasing. One of the reasons for this may also be the increasing difficulty for young people to access the labour market as shown by the ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015.

The ILO analyses emerging issues as part of its commitment to monitor youth employment trends on a global scale. This includes the recent explosion of internships in a growing number of countries. The analysis of the different national and regional contexts has allowed for the identification of the main elements of quality internships. As stated in the 2012 Resolution of the International Labour Conference, internship may help improve the school-to-work transition.



Adopted by the representatives of governments, employer organizations and trade unions of 185 member States of the ILO, this Resolution states that internships should be regulated and monitored with a view to ensuring that «they allow for a real learning experience and [do] not replace regular workers». Last year, the European Union too adopted a Recommendation that defines a framework for quality internships for all of its 28 member States.

The quality elements identified through the analysis of internship programmes and existing practice include: a transparent recruitment process, the existence of a written agreement, the clear identification of learning objectives, defined duration, supervision of interns, compensation, insurance coverage and final certification. It is good practice that the formal agreement be accompanied by a work-plan that clearly indicates the intern's tasks. The supervisor should allot sufficient time to follow the intern during the entire training process and provide feedback. It is equally important that the duration of the internship is established on the basis of the training objectives to be achieved. This is also crucial to avoid the use of internships as probationary period or as an alternative to entry-level or regular jobs. In Europe, the average length of internships spans three to twelve months. In Italy, for instance, the length of "training internships" is set at six months, while that for labour market (re)insertion internships can last up to 12 months. The written agreement between the parties shall define and quantify the remuneration. In principle, the intern should be compensated for meals, accommodation and transport costs. The compensation is one of the most discussed issues among young people who consider the lack of economic support a factor of exclusion for those who are not able to sustain themselves. This would generate a vicious circle which paradoxically excludes those who are in greater need. The advantages of remunerated internships are evident even in the labour market. According to a survey conducted in 2012 by the National

Association of Colleges and Employers in the USA, about 60 per cent of remunerated interns were offered a job at the end of their training period. Only 37 per cent of non-remunerated interns received a similar offer. This compared with 36 per cent of young people who found a job without having undergone an internship.

The three main typologies of internships are those connected to: (i) education and training programmes that include work experience; (ii) youth employment policies; (iii) active job search (also known as internships in the open market). Being the latter typology less regulated, it is more difficult to apply the same conditions to all interns as in the case of the other typologies and to monitor its implementation. The implementation of this type of internships has, in some cases, led to legal actions with a view of ascertaining the actual nature of the relation between the intern and the host organization. In the last years, several tribunals in the USA were called to decide upon the application of the labour legislation to alleged cases of disguised internships, particularly in respect of the application of the legislation on minimum wage.

### References and resources

- [International Labour Conference Resolution "The youth employment crisis: A call for action", 2012](#)
- [ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2015](#)
- [Watch "The Intern", video racing for the ILO Decent Work for Youth Video Contest, 2012](#)
- [Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, 2014](#)

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