

ETUC Resolution on Quality Traineeships

Adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 30-31 March 2023

Background

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) fights for quality traineeships for all Europeans. Young people bring a diversity of new ideas and energy to the workplace. Yet, youth unemployment remains at 15%¹, and young people are the demographic group facing the highest poverty risk. Furthermore, the recent and ongoing crisis has transformed the labour market into a very hostile place for young workers.

ETUC believe that traineeship can facilitate skill acquisition and motivate individuals to try and undertake different careers. However, we reiterate that traineeships cannot be mistaken for an onboarding period or workers' training.

Low-quality, underpaid and unpaid traineeships are one of the most apparent forms of exploitation. Ironically, these 'opportunities' are reserved only for people who can afford to work for free. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot afford to work for free face greater hardships in trying to enter the labour market.

Using young and experienced workers as cheap labour, in the name of upskilling, cannot be tolerated and has no place in the recovery period. Imposing binding quality criteria on traineeships after graduation is a fair way to ensure equal access to the labour market for young people regardless of their socio-economic background. Young workers deserve quality jobs and decent wages. The effective and enforceable ban on unpaid internships is one of the long-overdue promises which European co-legislators now have a chance to deliver.

Following up on the successful campaign to Ban Unpaid internships, which led to a draft own-initiative (INI) report by the European Parliament at the beginning of 2023, ETUC is ready to implement an advocacy campaign that will guarantee that traineeships are a quality learning experience and prevent exploitation of young workers.

ETUC demands

A European Directive on quality traineeships

The Directive should cover trainees carrying out traineeships in the open labour market, which includes open-market traineeships, traineeships as part of active labour market policies (ALMP), those offered by the Youth Guarantee, and traineeships as a mandatory part of professional training², and should include the following demands :

- Wage provided to the trainee follow the Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union (Directive (EU) 2022/2041) and relevant sectoral collective agreements in order to ban unpaid and underpaid internships, as well as non-labour contracts proposed to trainees.
- Access to social protection, particularly unemployment benefits and health accident insurance and pension contributions, must be guaranteed to prevent precarity after the traineeships period.
- The Directive should not lead to creation of new types of vulnerable contracts in national labour law as the aim is to offer trainees quality job.
- The traineeship providers do not require previous working experience when issuing or advertising trainee vacancy notices.

¹ Eurostat Dec2022

² traineeships as a mandatory part of professional training is a traineeships that is not done to obtain credits as a part of educational curricula.

- Strengthening labour inspectorates to prohibit the substitution of entry-level or permanent posts traineeship.
- A break period between hiring trainees for the same position, as otherwise, it should be a permanent position.
- A written traineeship agreement setting out the duration and provisions for any renewal of the traineeship; the duration of the traineeships should be limited and no shorter than two months. The renewal or prolongation of traineeships must not result in the replacement of entry-level jobs or vacancies for full-time jobs and permanent employment contracts.
- Professions, where traineeships have high risks of replacing entry-level jobs, should negotiate with trade unions if traineeships can be offered in order to fight against bogus traineeships.
- The trainee and traineeship provider must set the learning objectives jointly. The tasks to be carried out by the trainee must have strong links to established learning objectives. Supervision, mentoring, and monitoring of progress must be guaranteed throughout the traineeship.
- Trainees shall have access to workers' representation and trade unions at the workplace.
- Transparent, gender neutral and inclusive vacancy notices and advertisements must include information on the terms and conditions of the traineeship, including wage, working conditions, expected tasks, and health and accident insurance
- The number of traineeship positions in the company can represent a maximum 20% with respect to the number of permanent positions.
- Employers should have access to financial subsidies only if they comply with the quality criteria, legislation and collective agreements (*including for offers under the Youth Guarantee and other ALMP*).
- Implement adequate monitoring schemes to ensure that trainees' first working experience is of high quality; The Commission should publish guidelines for adequate monitoring schemes to ensure uniformity of data collection with the participation of social partners.

A Recommendation on traineeships for education purposes

The Recommendation should address the traineeships part of educational curricula with a revision, reinforcement and better implantation of the Quality Framework for Traineeship (QTF) to cover all traineeships that are undertaken in exchange for credits, and must be completed to obtain a qualification, including :

- Working hours that are compatible with the studying plan concerned if the training and education are to be carried out simultaneously, including limits to maximum weekly working time.
- Financial allowance provided to the trainee should compensate for the direct cost incurred by the trainee.
- Access to social protection, in particular to accident insurance as well as sick leave.
- A maximum duration of six months, taking into account national practice.

The following demands will serve as a guideline to engage in an advocacy campaign towards the European Parliament (the vote in plenary is foreseen for May 2023) and for answering the two-stage partners' consultation that **we urge the European Commission to launch**, as established in article 154 of TFEU (the initiative on quality traineeships is foreseen in European Commission Work Program for Q2-Q3 2023).