

European Year of Youth – Empowering young workers through actions

ETUC Resolution adopted at the Executive Committee meeting of 16-17 March 2022

European Institutions and national leaders declared 2022 the European Year of Youth. (EYY). This is a evidence to the fact that young Europeans are one of the groups most affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. The series of lockdowns caused a collective trauma with no current attempt to heal it as the national authorities continue their battle against the new wave of infections. Additionally, the precarious position of young people in the labour markets forced them 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.

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 the liberalisation of the market led to an increase in young people, particularly those with low skills, 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 an impact we have to have legislative changes that will guarantee long-lasting improvements in all Member States.

To make tangible changes we will continue to monitor the impact on different initiatives on young workers, to explore and promote the added value that Social Partners can have in those and to sound our voice in existing for a, advocating for quality jobs and the implementation of the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Concretely, we will undertake the actions outlined below.

Campaign to Ban Unpaid and Unfair Internships

Internships are often considered a great way for young people to gather valuable work experience and get a foothold in the labour market. Their importance has risen as graduates find it increasingly difficult to land a job, particularly during the economic downturn. However, widely reported abuses have led to vocal criticism of internships as a source of cheap, and often free, labour used by public and private bodies equally. ETUC is a long-standing promoter of quality internships¹ and believes there is momentum for stopping the widespread discriminatory practice of unpaid work in name of upskilling.

The legislation regulating internships is different in the member states², this can hamper the existing efforts by Trade Unions to share best practices in the field. Given

¹ https://www.sprint-erasmusplus.fr/sites/sprinterasmusplus.fr/files/CWA17541_2020%20final%20version.pdf

² https://www.sprinterasmusplus.fr/sites/sprinterasmusplus.fr/files/1_O1%20%20General%20Report%20on%20student%20placement%20in%20EU%20VF.pdf

the level of mobility among young people, we need harmonisation and binding action on an EU level. That is why the goal of our advocacy is a binding legal proposal to:

- Ban unpaid internships, offered as 'free market internships³', to gain professional experience ahead of taking up regular employment, that are undertaken outside of secondary or post-secondary education;
- Ensure that internships do not replace entry-level jobs by closing all legal loopholes, and by strengthening the role and capacity of the labour inspectorate to tackle the abuse and wrongful implementation of existing laws;
- Strengthen the role of Trade Unions in labour rights education, particularly among young people.

Youth Guarantee

We regret to see that the potential of the Youth Guarantee, newly financed by the ESF+, with the obligation to spend a minimum of 12% of the funds in the Member States with a higher NEET rate than the EU average⁴, as the main policy tool to fight rising youth unemployment, has not been fully realised.

In the Council Recommendations to strengthen the tool⁵ (October 2020), the ministers included the call for the quality offer however no binding criteria were proposed and the quality and the reach out remain a matter of concern⁶. ETUC notes that the last update of National Implementation Plans dates 2014 consequently the plans are completely irrelevant. Furthermore, not all EU Member States have started to update their national youth strategies taking into account the Reinforced Youth Guarantee.⁷

Therefore, ETUC will:

- Call on the European Commission to monitor the progress and implementation of the Council recommendations via the National Implementation Plans, which are prepared with meaningful participation of social partners;
- Promote strategical mobilisation and monitoring of EU funding, including the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) to make this instrument truly effective and functional; and
- Advocate for the strengthening of Public Employment Services that play a crucial role in supporting people facing barriers to employment and ensuring smooth job transitions.

ALMA

The European Commission's new programme ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve), a new Erasmus-style cross border mobility scheme targeting NEETs, providing short-term working experience to young Europeans in other Member States, has been portrayed as a new flagship program to boost youth employability.

³ [Definition: free market Internships](#)

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1099&langId=en>

⁵ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee and replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a Youth Guarantee 2020/C 372/01

⁶ Open Letter to Commissioner Schmit; April 2020; <https://www.etuc.org/en/document/youth-guarantee-momentum-quality-jobs-now>

⁷ Konle-Seidl, R. and Picarella, F. (2021), [Youth in Europe: Effects of COVID-19 on their economic and social situation](#), European Parliament, Luxembourg.

Financed by the ESF+, the cost of individual mobility is estimated to be 15k, which makes the outreach of the pilot phase, with the budget of 15million, extremely limited⁸.

In this respect, ETUC:

- Believes that there is a severe overlap between ALMA and the Youth Guarantee, and therefore insists that quality standards, including social protection, guidance and supervision and remuneration and compensation, should be guaranteed for the beneficiaries;
- Believes that if ALMA is a social inclusion initiative rather than an employment one, the target group should be better defined with concrete criteria and strategies for outreach; and
- Will continue to monitor its national implementation and will promote the role of Trade Unions in the implementation process, including the launch event on 9 May, since a complete lack of involvement was reported to date.

Citizens Dialogues

In the Framework of EYY the Commission plans to implement citizen dialogues with policymakers that would directly contribute to policymaking. The selection procedure for those delegations was not disclosed and would be outsourced to an external contractor.

In this respect, ETUC:

- Believes that this approach goes against the logic of organised civil society and existing procedures embedded in the EU treaties, such as social dialogue, and other established processes such as youth and civic dialogue;
- Calls on the Commission to include Trade Unions in the organisation of all citizens delegations for all the topics that are subjected to European Social dialogue; and
- Will advocate for clear distinctions between the weight of contributions from individuals representing themselves and representatives of democratic organisations that have mandates to represent hundreds, thousands and sometimes even millions of people, which is the case of ETUC.

European Civic Service

The idea launched by the French presidency of the EU council aims to expand existing civic service schemes across borders. The civic service, that exists in several EU countries, helps young people develop a sense of community and enhances civic engagement. Additionally, it can be an important part of developing the sense of future career pathways.

Therefore, ETUC:

- Calls on the European Commission to assess the added value of this initiative in light of already existing programs such as the European Voluntary Service and Solidarity Corps;

⁸ ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform, EC (Dec 2021); <https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/circular/file/2022-02/ESF%20TCP%20ALMA%20Webinar%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>

- Reaffirms that the Civic service has to have clear red lines and limits that can not result in the replacement of jobs. These include, but are not limited to, a cap on hours per week; the engagement is based on reciprocity and no hierarchy or worker/employee relationship is involved; access to state-paid indemnity and social security coverage during the engagement; and
- Believes that accreditation as a hosting organisation could be explored by Trade Unions to promote the added value of our movement among young people.