
Training and work: European Youth Forum and ETUC call for ban on unpaid internships. Issue up for discussion in Strasbourg today

“In cases where it is established that an internship does not include a learning and training component, but concerns performance of real and genuine work, then the trainee should be considered as ‘worker’ with the right to a decent remuneration”. This is what the European Social Charter provides for and what the European Committee of Social Rights reiterates today in a decision about the complaint lodged by the European Youth Forum (EYF) in 2017 against Belgium that had breached the Charter due to “failures relating to detecting and preventing bogus internships”. Indeed, the competent authorities have been inefficient in detecting “abusive replacing of paid jobs with unpaid internships”. According to the Committee, inspections arising from “individual complaints by interns” are not effective since trainees “might not want to take legal action” and might “lack knowledge concerning their rights”. For the EYF, the non-payment of interns results in discrimination “against those young people who are unable to afford to work for extended periods of time without pay, but also against the unpaid interns themselves by denying them the right to fair wages while guaranteeing this right to other categories of workers”. On this issue, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Youth is supporting a campaign to ban the practice of unpaid internships in Europe, starting with European institutions. To this end, the European Parliament’s Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has put forward a resolution to be discussed in Parliament today with concrete steps to “improve the lives of young people and young workers in Europe”.

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