

# Skills Development and Employment: Apprenticeships, Internships, Volunteering

## BACKGROUND

The European Parliament has been intensively working on skills development and its implications to increase the employability of citizens in changing labour markets as reflected in a number of dedicated resolutions (e.g. resolution of 10 December 2013 on volunteering and voluntary activity in Europe, of 01 July 2015 on creating a competitive EU labour market for the 21st century: matching skills and qualifications with demand and job opportunities, as a way to recover from the crisis; resolution of 19 January 2016 on skills policies for fighting youth unemployment). In these resolutions, Parliament calls for strengthening work-based learning serving as a stepping stone to a job; for enhancing and monitoring quality and effectiveness and for validation and recognition of skills and qualifications.

### Focus and objectives of the study

The study [Skills development and employment: Apprenticeships, internships, volunteering](#) focuses on two questions with regards to these different forms of work-based learning: First, **what are the effects on employability?** Second, is there a risk **of abusing young people as cheap labour?**

Thus, the study does not only contribute to the general debate on work-based learning, but provides also food for thought on the **New Skills Agenda** launched by the European Commission in June 2016, in particular as regards one of its ten key actions: the **planned Quality Framework for Apprenticeships** to be launched by the Commission in summer 2017. Further, the study puts European Programmes for Volunteering, such as the **European Solidarity Corps** launched in December 2016, into a broader scientific and policy perspective.



## KEY FINDINGS

### Definitions, patterns and trends: Internships up, apprenticeships down

**Apprenticeships** are forms of Vocational Education and Training (VET) that formally combine and alternate company-based training with school-based education, the successful completion of which leads to a nationally recognised qualification.

**Internships** are working practices that include an educational/training component but which are limited in time (short to medium duration, up to six months, sometimes a year).

**Volunteering** is non-compulsory work where individuals give their time without pay to activities in an organisation or directly to others outside their own household.

**Participation** is highest and increasing in internships (4 to 6 m). It stands at 2 to 4 m in a given year for apprenticeships, while there are indications that numbers are decreasing. Around 1.5 m young people are volunteering and the trend is stable.

Participation strongly varies across EU Member States:

|  | Participation   | Member States                                      |
|--|---|--|
| Apprenticeship (2013)<br>Age group: 18 to 35 | High participation in apprenticeships (>30 per cent)                  | AT, CZ, DE, HR, FR, HU, LT                         |
|  | Medium participation in apprenticeships (<30 per cent & >20 per cent) | IT, PT, SK, LV, PL, LU, NL, DK                     |
|  | Low participation in apprenticeships (<20 per cent)                   | EL, ES, CY, BE, BG, SI, SE, UK, IE, RO, EE, FI, MT |
| Internships (2013)<br>Age group: 18 to 35    | High participation in internships (>50 per cent)                      | BE, FR, DE, EE, LU, NL, AT, FI                     |
|  | Medium participation in internships (<50 per cent & >25 per cent)     | EL, ES, IT, CY, PT, BG, HU, PL, SI, SE, UK, DK     |
|  | Low participation in internships (<25 per cent)                       | SK, HR, IE, LV, LT, RO, CZ, MT                     |
| Volunteering (2015)<br>Age group: 15 to 30   | High participation in volunteering (>25 per cent)                     | CY, PT, BE, IE, SI, UK, DE, DK, MT, NL             |
|  | Medium participation in volunteering (<25 per cent & >20 per cent)    | ES, IT, HR, SK, FR, LV, LT, PL, AT, CZ, EE, LU     |
|  | Low participation in volunteering (<20 per cent)                      | EL, BG, HU, RO, SE, FI                             |

### Employment outcomes: Apprenticeships show best employment outcomes, but partially high dropout rates

**Apprenticeships:** According to rough estimates, based on the available national data, on average, **between 60 and 70 per cent of apprentices secure employment** immediately upon completion of their apprenticeship. However, there is a considerable risk of dropout (completion rate between 50 per cent and 85 per cent).

**Internships:** The labour market entry rate strongly varies depending on the type of internship. High quality internships (where besides the employer and the intern, another stakeholder is involved - such as an education institution or the public employment service (PES) - or where it is part of a (VET) programme or ALMP), are associated with the best job prospects. In contrast, **open-market internships show less positive outcomes**. Overall, 7 out of 10 former interns state that their internship experience(s) was useful in finding a regular job, 90 per cent agree that during the traineeship, the trainee learns things that are useful professionally.

**Volunteering:** As volunteering leads to personal development, it can lead to the acquisition of **skills that are valued by employers**. Analysis of the employment outcomes associated with volunteering has received relatively little research attention and hence there is little data on how volunteering supports labour market integration.

### Quality and risk of abuse as cheap labour: Highest risk in open-market internships

**Apprenticeships** are **usually well covered by governance frameworks**. The employment status of apprentices differs by country, but in general, apprentices are employed by the company training them on the basis of an **employment contract**, they receive a wage, and they are protected by employment regulations. The **learning component** in apprenticeships is typically assured through governance systems that involve representatives from both the world of work and world of education, with learning outcomes described in the apprentice's apprenticeship agreement/individual learning plan. Although there is **no**

**indication of systematic misuse** of the apprenticeship system, both concerning the labour conditions of the apprentice and the replacement of regular employment, this does not exclude **issues of low pay in specific countries and sectors**. Furthermore, it can also be considered exploitation of the apprentice delivering **work of increasing quality not being reflected in increasing remuneration**.

**Parts** of what are referred to as **internships** in many countries are **not regulated** and consist solely of an agreement between the employer and the participant (these concern the **open-market internships**). These schemes can be unpaid with the **intern not possessing the same rights and obligations** that relate to employees. Overall, at EU level 40 per cent of interns received financial compensation, ranging from **20 per cent of all interns in Belgium to 80 per cent of trainees in Slovenia**. The learning element in internships that were part of an education programme or an ALMP is better assured compared with **open-market internships**. These often show a **lack of clear rules** regarding validation and recognition of skills acquired; insufficient levels of learning taking place, lack of clarification of learning objectives; lack of engagement and lack of competences of mentors or other types of guidance staff; lack of transparency on hiring practices; and the length of traineeships is often longer than 6 months.

The **status of volunteers differs depending on the country**. **Only a few countries** (i.e. Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain) **have a specific legal status for volunteers**. The rights, obligations and remuneration depend on the agreement between the organisation and the participant. In other countries, if you volunteer, you 'work' under the same rules as paid employees in terms of labour rights, working conditions and safety regulations. There is the possibility to volunteer whilst being on unemployment/social benefits, which provides an option for unemployed people to develop their skills. The learning that takes place in volunteering is not usually made explicit and there is no underlying learning plan. The **challenges** are **similar to unpaid internships**.

### Existing Quality Frameworks and remaining challenges

Approaches having been elaborated at EU level currently differ for each of the three work-based learning schemes.

- **Apprenticeships:** There exist various proposals for guidelines or quality frameworks having been elaborated by the Commission, the Council and stakeholders. Some go beyond apprenticeships including work-based learning in a more general perspective.
- **Internships:** The Council adopted a Quality Framework for Traineeships in March 2014 having slightly adjusted the proposal prepared by the Commission.
- **Volunteering:** The European Youth Forum elaborated a Volunteering Charter (2012).

The developed frameworks **touch upon the identified challenges for work-based learning**. They emphasise the need for a shared responsibility, involving employers and SMEs, alignment to the labour market needs and **quality of the learning**.

However, there are a **number of aspects** for which **no conclusive agreements are expressed in the frameworks** including, e.g.

- for **apprenticeships:** whether work-based learning in a company should be based upon an **employment contract** or what should be a **minimum proportion of work-based learning** (in a company) to call a scheme alternating.
- For **apprenticeships, internships and volunteering:** under the condition that equal work should be paid equal: whether work-based learning should always **be remunerated and if so, what would be a fair remuneration** as this has also implications for assuring equal access.

## Way forward: Policy Recommendations

### Apprenticeships

- Ensure that the **term 'apprenticeship' is used as a brand**, associated with quality learning and working environments. This requires an **agreement on a core definition** at European level.
- **Stimulate further the engagement of employers (and SMEs)** in the development and implementation of apprenticeships (e.g. financial incentives and support in organising work-based learning).
- Enhance the **use of apprenticeships by groups that are currently under-represented** (which differs by country).
- Ensure the **quality of learning in the workplace** by means of establishing agreements between providers and employers and assuring the quality of the in-company trainers and mentors.
- Establish agreement between social partners at EU-level and at national level on issues related to **employment contracts for apprentices and fair payment**, balancing the interests of the apprentices and the employers (keeping employers interested in offering apprenticeships). This agreement should inform the development of a European level definition of the concept of apprenticeship that can be used to improve the data availability and quality on apprenticeship systems in Europe.

### Internships

- Stimulate a **more structured approach** towards internships, especially to the **open-market internships**
- Establish **better governance arrangements** by spelling out the contractual status, remuneration (open-market interns should be paid), guidance, and the envisaged learning outcomes.
- In addition, more can be done to guarantee the **quality of mentors** guiding the interns.

### Volunteering

- Regard volunteering, first of all as a **non-labour market related activity**. First and foremost it contributes to an individual's personal development and well-being and it makes a contribution to the local community in which it takes place.
- **Competences and experiences** gained, **should be accredited** applying schemes for validation of informal learning so that they have currency in the labour market.
- Additionally, if volunteering is regarded a stepping stone into employment, in order to **allow equal access** to volunteering for young people with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, volunteers should be supported with their living costs.

For a number of aspects, **gaps in research have been detected**. These include, for example analysis of low completion rates in apprenticeships and policies to combat drop-out; unequal access to work-based learning schemes; comparative analysis of apprenticeship systems in the EU (Cedefop is currently preparing a cross-national analysis according to information from the European Commission); regular analysis of developments in participation over the years and in general, analysis of employment outcomes and abuse.

---

#### DISCLAIMER

The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author and any opinions expressed therein do not necessarily represent the official position of the European Parliament. It is addressed to Members and staff of the EP for their parliamentary work. Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

This document is available at: [www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses)

Contact: [Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu](mailto:Poldep-Economy-Science@ep.europa.eu)

Manuscript completed in April 2017

© European Union 2017

EMPL-2016-04

PE 602.063



CATALOGUE: QA-01-17-678-EN-C (paper)

CATALOGUE: QA-01-17-678-EN-N (pdf)

ISBN: 978-92-846-1213-0 (paper)

ISBN: 978-92-846-1214-7 (pdf)

doi:10.2861/64682 (paper)

doi:10.2861/58731 (pdf)