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Internships and Volunteering in Europe A Precarious Way to Professionalization

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Abstract The idea to professionalize studies has gradually emerged as the best way to overcome youth unemployment across Europe. Amongst the different schemes developed from the '80s, internships appear to have been favoured by employers and have grown significantly. However the effective contribution these schemes are making to training is contested, while interns employment terms and condition are often denounced. The research presented in this paper explores and compares interns situations in six countries – France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom – and put into perspectives the different demands raised by social actors in this particular field. It is based on a systematic collection of available statistical data, a comparative analysis of national legislation and a dozen of case studies conducted in the six countries. This research was founded by the European Commission DG employment and social affairs.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Internships: Definition and Measure. – 3 Intern's Employment situation. – 3.1 Interns Employment terms and Conditions in Practice. – 3.2 Internships Contribution to Training. – 4 Employability. – 5 Trade Unions and NGO's Positions and Actions. – 6 Conclusions and Perspectives.

Keywords Internships. Youth unemployment. Professionalization. Working conditions.

1 Introduction

Youth unemployment has been identified by the European community as one of the most pressing issues for the European Union. By August 2015, 4,5 millions young people aged between 15 and 24 (21%) were unemployed in the EU. Reaching 21%, youth unemployment rate is more than double the overall unemployment rate.¹ Several reasons are cited in order to explain young people's difficulties in integrating the labour market; amongst them their lack of professional experience emerged as a real concern.

1 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1036> (2017-03-30).

The idea to professionalize studies through internships, apprenticeships has gradually emerged as the best solution to overcome this problem across Europe (Eicher 1997; Sewastianowicz 2005; Briant, Glaymann 2013). These schemes are altogether presented by policy makers as specific training periods and real work situations where young people are given a chance to acquire the professional knowledge that they will need for their future profession. They are also presented as opportunities to put together the professional network that will help them to find a job.

In the meantime numerous voices were raised against the dysfunctions of these schemes. In almost all countries independent social movements and NGO's were created to detect and denounce abuses among which the use of interns as an exploitable and underpaid or non-paid workforce (Génération Précaire 2006, Voltolina 2010, Intern Aware 2013). Although very partial and oriented, the material they published contributed to fill in an important gap of knowledge regarding interns employment terms and conditions, a topic that remains largely under-researched.

The research presented in this chapter, *Internstage*, was conducted between 2013 and 2015 and founded by the European commission. It was designed to assess the real situation of interns in six European countries - France, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom - where labour market and education system differ significantly. It was conducted by six national research teams based in each of the countries.²

While Poland, France, Latvia and Italy show youth unemployment rates close to EU-28 average, ranging from 9% for the first to 12,7% for the latter, the UK has by far the lowest rate (6,1%) while Spain has the highest one (24,5%).³

They also have different histories regarding professionalization of studies. The process began as early as the 19th century in medicine and law in France. Training placements were then gradually extended to all professions, but under very different forms (Briant, Glaymann 2013). In Poland too, training placements became part of the education after World War 2 through the Voluntary Labour Corps.⁴ The purpose was to get young people of both sexes to work together to allow them to acquire professional qualifications in conjunction with the provision of general education and civic education. From the beginning of the encampment until the fall of

2 France: Sylvie Contrepois (London Metropolitan University & CRESPPA-CSU); Italy: Rosana Cillo, Fabio Perocco (Ca' Foscari University); Latvia: Aija Lule, Zaiga Kristjane (University of Latvia); Poland: Joanna Unterschütz (Gynia University); Spain: Arturo Lahera Sánchez et al. (Complutense University); United Kingdom: Nick Clark, (London Metropolitan University).

3 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment_trends (2017-03-30).

4 The voluntary labour corps (Ochotnicze Hufce Pracy, OHP) was a youth organisation created in 1958.

the communist system in Poland in 1989, the organisation had its share of significant structures militarized and Civil Defence. In the four other countries – Italy, Latvia, Spain and United Kingdom – work placement and internships appeared more recently.

A preliminary desk research allowed to understand the different national legal frameworks and to gather existing statistical data. A second part of the research was dedicated to the sector case studies: industry engineers in France and Spain; the paramedical professions in France; local authorities in Latvia; the information technology sector in Latvia and Italy; the tourism sector in Italy and hotels in Spain; the voluntary sector and the press in the United Kingdom; food industry and judicial sectors in Poland. These case studies were mainly based on the production of semi-structured interviews with trainees, staff representatives, human resources managers and representatives of training institutions.

National advisory boards, composed of representatives of trade unions, employers and students, training institutions and labour inspections were set up in each country in order to monitor and validate the progress of the research and to help with access to fieldwork.

A first observation is that of the extreme differences in national legislation that do not systematically provide specific regulation for internships and work placement. In France the regulation of internships is especially expanded and monitored by the Ministry of Education, whereas this regulation is under the auspices of ministries of labour in all other countries. In France also, internships are strictly limited to the initial training period while they are addressed more widely to students and graduates in the five other countries. Volunteering is particularly developed in the UK. Apprenticeship finally remains underdeveloped in most countries and concerns only marginally tertiary students.

Despite these differences, the interns situation in these schemes do not fundamentally differ from one country to another. Compensation for the professionalization period and its truly formative nature are problematic in many cases especially in services, which are big users of interns. In all countries, equally, representation and defence of the interests of this segment of (future) young workers remains underdeveloped and more surely relayed by associations than by the student unions and workers trade unions.

2 Internships: Definition and Measure

Internships and work placements are diversely regulated in the six countries researched during the Internstage project. In the UK there is no statutory regulation, nor any standards to which internships need to comply. Work placement taking place during the studies are mostly arranged by

agreement between the individual higher education institution and the employer, on terms set down by the Higher Education. Only some vocational courses such as nursing and teaching have clear regulation.

In Latvia, Poland, Italy and Spain, different regulations apply according to the kind of internships. In Latvia internships in vocational education are regulated by the law on vocational education while internships in higher education are regulated by the law on higher education. In all cases, a tri-party agreement should be signed between an intern, his/her school and an employer. In Poland, Italy and Spain, regulation is different for curricula internship and post-graduate internship.

In France, internships have to be part of higher education curriculums and aim at giving students a first insight into a professional environment. They are under the responsibility of the ministry of Education. A tri-party agreement listing all the skills to be acquired and expanded has to be signed between the intern, the company and the higher education institution.

As a result of these multiple coexisting regulations, the research has evidenced a great variety of schemes in the six countries researched, diversely used:

- Voluntary work is a way to gain work experience, to learn new skills and to help a community. In most countries, voluntary work is allowed in state, municipal and NGOs institutions. It is, by definition not paid, but can be covered by some legislation on insurance, health and safety.
- Free labour market internships relate to a practice consisting of hiring workers without any clear training purpose and disconnected from school or studies curriculum; work performed is often unpaid and the intern is replacing a regular worker but without an employment contract.
- Internships or traineeships for graduates are aimed at graduate students who have not yet found employment. In the countries where they exist, national law provides for various conditions based on age (maximum 30 years of age in Poland) or number of years after studies (maximum 5 years after completion of studies for traineeships in Spain). In Poland or in Latvia, they are paid most of the time but not considered an employment relation and therefore they are not protected by a regular employment contract. In Italy internships are not considered an employment relationship, although hosting institutions are obliged to pay an "appropriate compensation" to extracurricular interns. In Spain, traineeships are regular employment contracts while in UK extra-curricular internships are considered as employees and receive the minimum wage when they are paid.
- Internships for students: curricular internships for students exist in each country, often based on agreements between the student, their universities/ educational institutions and employers. Most curricular

internships (also called ‘placements’, ‘work placements’ or ‘industrial placements’) last for any length of time between one week and 12 months. They can be paid or not paid (most usually).

These different schemes don't exist in the same way in all countries, as each country has its specific organisation. There is also an evidence from our research that even in the countries where internships are regulated and recognised as a distinctive form of legal relationship, the parties may and do choose forms of contracts outside this frame.

And finally, there is no common legal definition of an internship, even though one may agree that there are some common features such as: gaining practical experience by the trainee at a workplace; temporary nature of the contract; specific role of the trainee in the company combining performing work and learning; when an internship is taking place during the studies (on secondary or higher level), the program of the internship should be integrated in the curriculum of the student.

The European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships⁵ defines internships as either:

- a. part of higher education that brings credit points where interns have a student status, access to services like student loans, student housing, health insurance and scholarships;
- b. taking place outside formal education (also after graduation) that do not bring credit points for the diploma. Some of these internships do not have a legal status or may even be considered illegal;
- c. and any other form of similar work experience that is offered to young people as a work based learning opportunity.

The population of interns is badly known. None of the national statistical systems of the six countries surveyed provide unified statistics. Interns are either not included in the labour market statistics by central offices – as this is the case in France or in Poland – either included within some other categories of workers. In UK for example, the Labour force survey showed that 7,8% of the employed workforce were also students.⁶ In Spain, traineeship contracts and apprenticeship contracts represent 4,08% of the total number of temporary contracts in 2013 with the main part of them (77,12%) belonging to young people between 20 and 29 years old.

Different sources, sometimes contradictory, are trying to assess the number of interns and their chance to find a permanent job. Depending

5 http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2013/10/0595-10_European_Quality_Charter_Internships_Apprenticeships_FINAL.pdf (2017-03-30).

6 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/march-2012/index.html> (2017-03-30).

on countries these are governmental agencies; tri-party bodies; ministries of Education; universities and observatories.

According to national sources there are between 800,000 and 1.6 millions a year of students interns in France; between 400,000 and 500,000 students and graduate students interns per year in Italy; 83,397 in Latvia; 186,000 students interns and 30,000 'open-market' graduated interns in Spain and about 250,000 in UK. Overall, the Intern Aware campaign (2013) has shown that each year about 4.5 million persons undergo internships stages or other form of vocational practice.

In all countries, it appears that the number of interns is raising as the universities are more and more accountable for the professional integration of their students. Also internship appears to be the cheapest scheme from employers point of view as this was reported in Spain where the CCOO (2007, 7) evidenced that the growing interest in internships was due "to the difference in wage and social costs of a young worker hired through a traineeship contract and another student through an internship: instead of 7,93 euros per hour for the first one, the company pays only 3,98 € in the second case, a net saving of almost 50% of wage costs".

In the six countries studied, specialised agencies play a key role for the access to internship. Especially, universities and education institution play an important part in providing interns to companies through their careers and special internship service. Big companies themselves have developed their own recruitment platform. In all countries, there are also some specialized websites, like *la Manu* and *l'Etudiant* in France; *Prakse* in Latvia. Finally, students can most of the time rely on their individual networks.

The European Youth forum tried to assess the respective importance of these different channels. It found that 32,7% of respondents indicated that they applied spontaneously to a specific organisation; 25,9% that this was the outcome of an Internet search for internship vacancies; 18,5% that the internship was offered by school or university; 4,5% evocated a graduate recruitment scheme; 3,1% government employment activation program and 15,3% others (friends, colleagues, family).

3 Intern's Employment Situation

Interns employment situation in Europe is only partially known. Our in-depth study of national regulations offers a first approach, allowing to assess how far interns can rely on employment rights. As we can see from the table below, the national legislative frame are very heterogeneous, with France having the most binding legal frame, while United kingdom and Poland have no national legal frame and rely exclusively on collective bargaining.

Table 1. Internship regulation in six countries

	France	Italy	Latvia	Poland	UK	Spain
Specific national regulation	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Bi or Tripartite agreement	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internship limited to training	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Tutor from the company	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Compulsory Payment	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Limited duration	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Limitation on proportion of interns in a same company	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

However, a sound knowledge of governing legislation does not suffice to get to grips with real situations. The survey carried out by the European Youth Forum 'interns revealed' (2011, 8) is so far the only large-scale source available, covering more than 70 countries worldwide. In spite of its relatively restraint sample (3.028 answers), it provides some helpful indications, especially for those of the countries best represented in the sample: Germany (13% of the total number of answers); Italy (11%); France (10%); United Kingdom (7%), Spain (6,5%) and Romania (6,5%). A possible bias in selection of interviewees needs to be noted, as they were all related with youth organisations.

National sources are very divers and partial. If it appeared relatively easy to find data, although imperfect, on the way interns access to internship and on their employability because a number of quantitative and qualitative research was conducted on these topics; it turned a lot more complicated to find expert work related to interns employment terms or on the real contribution internships are making to training. In these two fields, the main data available were from NGOs organisations. While producing some complementary knowledge on the two first topics, our research specifically questioned the two last points.

3.1 Interns Employment Terms and Conditions in Practice

If we now turn to effective employment terms and conditions, it appears that no systematic collection of data exists in any of the countries studied. Some basic statistics are available on compensations but working time and working conditions are largely ignored, even though some of the countries studied have specialised national agencies. In France, for example, even though the French National agency for improved working conditions (ANACT, Agence nationale pour l'Amélioration des Conditions de Travail) carries out studies on working conditions for different groups of employ-

ees, no specific investigation has yet been conducted on the working and employment conditions of interns. The same observation applies to the European foundation for improvement of living and working conditions.

In such a context, the only source of information available are the press, the social media and NGO's monographs where interns' testimonies are published. Among the recurring problems that are mentioned in the different countries studied, the most frequent are: insufficient compensations; incurred expenses, in particular when the workplace is far from the student's place of residence; working over time (above legal limits); abuses from superiors or colleagues.

Regarding compensations, the Eurobarometer established that 59% of interns do not receive remuneration for their work (DGC 2013). The European Youth Forum (2012) found that 3 out of 4 of respondents got no or insufficient compensation. This affects over 85% of those below the age of 16 and almost 80% of those between 16 and 20. In comparison, 58% of those above 30 receive no or little remuneration. Interns who do their internship in the new Members States are slightly more likely to receive no or insufficient pay than those working in the old member states.

Our research confirmed that the situation is extremely unequal between countries but also within each country. The level of compensations varies from a sector to another, from an organisation to another and also over time. In France, Chaynesse Khirouni (2014) stated in her report delivered to the National Assembly that 50% of interns receive a gratification. 60% of internships were paid an amount comprised between the regulatory threshold and 600 €. 20% of internships were paid over 600 € - this was the case for the engineers we interviewed. For the remaining 20%, the compensation was below the regulatory amount - this was especially the case for nurses. In Poland, according to the survey conducted by the portal Nieparzekawy.pl of 641 people who have had internships and traineeships, 65% were not paid while 35% received every month between 1503 and 2009 zł, paid at the hand. In the Food processing sector, the curricular internships are not paid, but during the holiday interns get remuneration on the level of junior expert in the company. In courts, by contrast, the interns do not receive any payment. In UK, it has been estimated that one in third interns were not paid while the others were receiving the National Minimum wage. In Spain, it appeared that only 42% were receiving an economic compensation equivalent to 3,98 euros per hour and 77% were covered for illness and accident. In Italy, 70% of interns turned to not be paid. This was especially the case for those working in the tourism sector.

A fair proportion of European interns are thus forced to rely on their family or their own savings, or to work irregularly or with atypical contracts to be able to support themselves through the internship. The European Youth Forum survey (2012) established that 65% of respondents received support from their parents while 20% had a scholarship and 35%

relied on personal savings. The collectif Génération Précaire (2006) point a risk of growing inequalities among students and deplore the fact that the growing number of internships is especially hard on students whose parents cannot support them and who have to work to pay for their studies. The authors note that some students take out loans, while others work every day of the week to finance their internships.

We could hardly find any statistical data on working conditions. NGO's collections of testimonies are giving an helpful insight but have an important bias since only the interns who experienced the worse treatments are inclined to offer an account. Here again our comparative research evidenced a great disparity between and within countries. Most of the interns we met during interviews indicated that they were working in the same conditions than the regular workforce and a number of them - this was especially the case for the engineers in France - stressed that their working time was scrupulously respected. Only few interviewees raised issues. Those completing an internship in the public sector in Latvia declared that they had long working hours and that their work was fairly intensive, while some in the Court in Poland said that they had no proper space to work - one indicating that he was working on two chairs, using one of them as a table. Another issue appeared to be the lack of health and safety training, while interns are not in a position to identify by themselves the many dangers existing at the workplace. This issue was especially raised with nurses in France.

Regarding work relationships with their colleagues and managers, though, a significant number of interns declared that they were happy, found their work environment very supportive and felt that they were recognised as valued members of the working team. Only a few of them reported having been assigned to trivial tasks.

3.2 Internships Contribution to Training

This mainly positive experience in terms of work relationships may explain that internships were, in most cases, perceived very positively by interns in terms of improving their knowledge and getting more confident about their ability to be integrated in the labour market. However, it appeared that in numerous cases very few relationships were developed between the employer and the training institution, which meant that the articulation between theoretical knowledge and professional experience was relatively poor. Nurses in France even complained about the fact that employers were not always able to fill in their 'booklet of acquired skills' correctly.

In the light of this poor quality of the relationships between employers and training institutions, the real contribution internships are making to the learning process needs to be questioned, especially in the case of 'se-

rial internships'. The Eurobarometer demonstrates that 30% of interns do not gain any practical skills or knowledge from the internship (DGC 2013). Our research found that a number of our interviewees had to go through several internships before they could obtain a degree or find a job. This was systematically the case in France but was also true in the other countries. This observation is confirmed by the European youth forum survey evidencing that 63% of the respondents did one or two internships while the remaining 37% completed 3 or more. The majority of interns from France (51%), Austria (62%), and Germany (65%) have done many internships, while the share is considerably lower for most other countries, including Italy (39%), Spain (38%) and Romania (22%).

How far is it justified to introduce rules that oblige young people to complete periods of non-paid or very low-paid work during their studies? And how far is it justified to allow this specific form of employment to be used once the student has graduated? The European youth forum notes that, very often, 'serial internships' are motivated by the lack of job opportunities. Our research evidenced the high level of contribution interns are making to the production process, especially in the case of internships lasting more than three months. In the engineering and IT sector, our interviewees declared that they were frequently entrusted with specific projects for which companies could not afford to pay regular employees. In the other sectors researched, they indicated that they were fulfilling a young worker's job. According to the employers we interviewed, only a few days are necessary for the interns to become productive.

Our research evidenced that in a number of cases, potential employers are requesting students to have experience for the job offered as an internship. This was found to be especially the case in the engineering sector in France and in Spain and in the press sector in UK.

Beyond the necessary professionalization of studies, the crisis and the decline in job opportunities seems to have led to a new 'normal' of unpaid work as the principal route for graduates into the workforce. There seems to have been a generalised acceptance on the part of many young workers and social actors of the need for such soft routes into work.

On this point our findings are reinforcing and generalizing the French expert, Chaynesse Khirouni (2014) conclusions. According to her, one of the most frequent illegal practices in France, where internships are strictly limited for training purpose, consists in recruiting interns who are about to graduate, either at the level of the IUT (University Technology Institute) or the master, to perform duties incumbent to employees. Some companies even go as far as to offer an internship as a first job to young people who have completed their studies. In order to do so, they encourage former students to apply once again at a higher education institution so that they will be able to obtain an internship certificate. According to

Chaynesse Khirouni (2014), one can estimate today that about 100,000 internships are real jobs in disguise at a time when the unemployment rate for people under twenty-five reaches 25% and when they find it harder and harder to find a job after going through a series of internships that delay their access to a first position. As part of their campaign to expose such abuses, NGO Génération Précaire (GP) awarded the 'prize of cynicism' to the BNP on April 16, 2010. The association intended to report the growing number of interns (68% more in three years) at the expense of fixed-term contracts, which had decreased by 35%, and summer jobs, which were down by 23%.⁷

The same organisation (Génération Précaire 2006, 26) has systematically reviewed offers and found out that one frequent illegal practice consists in recruiting interns with job descriptions that should apply to employees. According to this organisation, an abusive offer, in the light of the French legislation, is characterised by one of the following elements: no reference to training; a demand to be autonomous on the job; an internship length over six months; no or little gratification; no compensation; previous experiences required; a very detailed job description; the replacement of a full fledge employee is mentioned; the absence of employment prospects; necessity to already have a degree.

4 Employability

It is particularly difficult to measure internships contribution to employability as this would imply to be able to compare the chances of people with similar profiles of being recruited with and without completing an internship. No such data exist at the moment. We can only rely on some approximate measures of the proportion of interns obtaining a job.

According to the European Youth Forum (2012), 16% of those surveyed were offered a job with their host organisation subsequent to their internship and 18% state that the internship helped them get a job with another employer. They are only small differences among the countries with high number of respondents. Between 13 and 15% of interns from Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and Spain were hired by their host organisation. Notable exceptions are United Kingdom, where 23% of interns were offered to continue with their host organisation after their internship, and Latvia and Finland where 19% were given the opportunity to progress. In total 34% of the respondents turned their internship into a job either with their host organisation or with another employer.

7 *Le Monde*, 18 June 2010, <http://www.capital.fr/carriere-management/dossiers/jusquou-exploiter-legalement-les-stagiaires-564820> (2017-03-30).

Behind these figures, contrasted situations appear according to regions, sectors, companies and interns profiles. In Latvia, for example, our research evidenced that the opportunities to become a permanent worker in the public sector where interns undergo internships are very rare, due to public budget issues. In the food processing sector in Poland, by contrast, internships are used as a trial period and successful interns have high chances to be recruited in a permanent position. In this sector, more than 50% of interns get employment after they graduate and about 25% are regarded as a backup in case the employer plans recruitment.

In Italy, the number of interns hired or scheduled to be hired decreased between 2009 (37,000 out of 322,000 interns) and 2012 (27,800 out of 306,600) due to the economic downturn. Only 7.4 out of 100 new hires were selected after doing an internship in the same company that hired them (Unioncamere 2013, 32). Actual or scheduled hires depend on several factors. One of them is the company's size: the smaller the company, the less likely the hiring. In 2012, larger companies launched almost 44,000 internships, and hired or scheduled to hire about 8,700 – a figure just slightly lower than the 9,500 actual or scheduled hires recorded in small companies, which took a bit more than 150,000 interns. A second factor is the company's location on the territory: the internships more likely to result in a hire are those carried out in the North-West (10.2%) or Central Italy (9.6%), as opposed to those of the South and Islands (7.7%) or in the North East (8.3%). The third factor is the production sector: the internships leading to the lowest rate of actual or scheduled hiring are in the sectors of public and private healthcare and social services (4.9%), tourism and restoration (5.1%), construction (6.8%), while the best perspectives are in chemical, pharmaceutical and oil industries (19%), transport, logistics and storage (19.8%), IT and telecommunications (22.2%), and mineral mining (30.3%) (Unioncamere 2013, 35-37). As for the contractual form, should the internship lead to a hiring, the former intern will have to face a situation of increasing job insecurity. The survey *Gli stagisti italiani allo specchio* (Italian Interns in Front of the Mirror) reveals that 2% of the sample were offered a permanent contract, 6% were offered a temporary contract, and 13% an atypical contract (ISFOL 2010, 21).

In France, after a systematic examination of the longest internship carried out by students during their studies, Giret and Issehnane (2010) draw our attention to the fact that these experiences prove to be very heterogeneous and have very different effects on the way young people acquire skills and enter the labor market. They list five types of internships⁸ to which students have access according to their studies. They note that the

8 These types are: internships with “a proper training program and some gratification”; “short-term internships without any gratification”; “medium-term internships with limited gratification”; “long-term internships without gratification”; “optional and rather long internships”.

higher post-graduate programs (five years after the *baccalauréat*) offer the best internships in terms of training and gratification. According to these researchers, students can only benefit certain kinds of internship, generally those that take place within a highly selective and professionalizing education programs.

However, Giret and Issehnane indicate that their study does not allow to take into account the variety of the institutions delivering the same degree. They insist on the fact that the internships' qualities vary from one institution to the other depending on the traineeship office's list of contacts as well as on the faculty members in charge of internships. They conclude that internships create a risk of actually increasing social inequalities in terms of diplomas and training programs rather than reducing them.

5 Trade Unions and NGO's Positions and Actions

Interns situation and issues are addressed to some extent by workers and students european and national trade unions, but more frequently in the old EU member state - France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom - than in the new ones - Poland and Latvia. Beside the traditional organisations, new NGOs emerged and are playing an increasing role in the defence of interns rights. Amongst the more active are: Génération Précaire in France, San Precario in Italy; Oficina Precaria in Spain; Intern Aware in the United Kingdom. In Poland, the portal entitled Nie Parzę Kawy (I'm not making a coffee) was created for all apprentices and interns to deliver first hand information about quality of stages and internships from interns to interns.

Whether all organisations concerned are developing joint action or not, their initiatives are principally aimed at informing interns about their rights and at raising public opinion awareness regarding their situation. In the old EU member states campaigns were developed over internships denouncing their exploitation and their working conditions. In France, also the student trade union UNEF and the workers largest confederation CGT were very active in the process of framing the 2014 law on internships (Vila 2013).

Going through students and workers trade unions and NGOs demands in the six countries researched and through the European quality charter for internships, eight key points could be identified.

The first relates to the purpose of internships that should be exclusively focused on training. All organisations agree that internships cannot replace proper jobs and should be organised in a way that interns could acquire theoretical as well as practical skills. For this purpose, it is agreed that interns need a tutor or a mentor who guides them through their tasks.

Reinforcing co-operation between employers and schools and universities in the case of curricular internships is a second demand. According to

social actors, this co-operation should include a jointly-agreed program of training during the internship, which corresponds with the school or university learning program as well as the needs and capabilities of the employer.

A third point is that internships should be limited only to students or, in the countries where extra-curricular internships are common practice, to very recent graduates. Social actors from these countries indicated that the extra-curricular internships should be offered only to persons who graduated in the last one or two years with a possible exception of those, who decided to reorient their career and e.g. start working in a new branch of industry. Also the internship should be limited in length. Depending on national legislation, a maximum duration of 6 to 12 month seems to be a reasonable limit. Such a limitation could be accompanied with the prohibition to renew internship at the same company or with a limitation on the number of interns per company/employer.

Three other key points are related to interns employment terms and conditions. There is a shared idea that after one month, the interns should be paid and at least all internships should be offered coverage of the costs incurred as well as basic social security, especially health insurance. Regarding working conditions, interns should be provided with basic protection in terms of health and safety at work, including protection for pregnant workers, working time limits – preferably ones that allow to combine internship with studying or other paid work – and rest periods. Finally there is a general acceptance amongst social actors that internship should be based on a written contract, including training objectives and hours, training location, tasks, compensations, interns’ rights and obligations. The contract should be provided in three copies: for the intern, the ‘sending institution’ (monitoring) and the employer.

Supporting employers who are effectively dedicating resources to interns training and who are offering good quality internships is another key point. The idea is that this support could be organised through employment policies.

A last point relates to the development of statistical studies allowing to monitor intern’s profile, employment terms and working conditions, integration in the labour market.

6 Conclusions and Perspectives

The Internstage research confirmed and contributed to generalise the existing knowledge on internships in Europe. It evidenced that whatever the national regulations are, interns are confronted with very similar problems from one country to another. Especially, it clearly appeared that, although internships dedicated to trivial tasks tend to disappear, a number of them (both curricular and extra-curricular ones) still lack any training quality.

This is especially the case when interns are used to replace regular workers, often with lower pay, or no pay at all. This happens even more often in countries where internships are not strictly limited to students and recent graduate students.

The Internstage research also confirmed that wages and compensations appear to be a serious problem in most cases. With the exception of certain professions like engineers in France and in Spain or of those who are perceiving the national minimum wage in UK, interns cannot live from what they earn, when they earn something, and they even have often to face some incurred expenses, in particular when the workplace is far from their place of residence.

The case studies have, furthermore, confirmed the phenomena of cumulating internships. While in some cases this accumulation is related to the need to acquire various skills gradually, in other cases employers require prior work experience from their trainees or simply try to replace regular jobs with low or non-paid work. This latter strategy seems to be spreading in many sectors of European labour markets to the point that experts consider that the traditional function of the internship, namely to allow young people to get a paid job with a permanent employment contract, has been strongly reduced (ISFOL 2010; Voltolina 2010, 2013). Significantly a great number of internship advertisements we have found in the different countries revealed employers demand for already well-established professional skills. A number of the employers we interviewed in the different countries confirmed that the young people they were employing were performing real work, at least after a month in their job. They even stressed the young people greater ability to different work situations and environments and their higher expertise in the field of new technologies. Internstage case studies have confirmed that Interns have in general a poor idea of their rights and that they are largely ignored by trade unions.

Paradoxically, the case studies revealed that most of the students interviewed felt that they were highly benefiting from being involved in real work situation, as part of their training. Not only they felt that it improved and extended their theoretical knowledge, but it allowed them to learn specific professional skills and behaviours, in spite of the poor co-operation between employers and training institutions. The early combination of training and work thus appeared particularly accurate in most of the sector investigated and fully coherent with a productive organisation based on life long learning. However, it appeared that such a combination could be developed through more protective frames, like apprenticeship systems.

It appeared therefore that the change we could observe in the discourse regarding young people's employability had more to do with the employment crisis and the justifications provided at all times by employers to reduce the cost of the work of some component of the labour force. In such context, further research could fruitfully explore the actual contribution

interns are making to the economy and the role they actually play in labour organizations put under tension by restructuring. Such knowledge would certainly help to rethink the articulation between training and work under a different perspective, more respectful of these young workers rights.

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