



TOGETHER FOR A FAIR DEAL FOR WORKERS

EL/TJ/LR/TM/LS/eb
Brussels, 29 January 2024

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European
Commission

[Letter sent by e-mail]

Dear President of the European Commission Ms Ursula von der Leyen,

We are addressing you after receiving information about delays in the publication of initiative on quality traineeships.

The EU needs to take action to make traineeships empowering not exploitative. We need rules that ensure quality traineeships provide a truly formative experience accessible to all, instead of exclusive opportunities available only to the lucky few, which furthermore often replace entry-level jobs that would have been taken by young workers.

To achieve this **a binding initiative in the form of a Directive is necessary**. The 2013 Council Recommendation on Quality Framework for Traineeships, which was not binding, has proven insufficient. The latest Eurobarometer confirms that traineeships are on the rise, often unpaid, with bad working conditions and with a majority of young people doing at least two, before securing a real job.

This exploitation cannot continue any longer.

Blocking access to career opportunities for young people based on their family's ability to fund extended periods of unpaid work is a stain on Europe's aspiration to equal opportunity. European Institutions have themselves progressively banned unpaid traineeships, considering them unfair barriers to social mobility. Why should young people across all sectors of the economy not benefit from the same protection?

Preventing bogus traineeships would ensure young people's access to basic employment protections guaranteed under European and national law. We understand employers are claiming this would increase labour costs. However, we insist that paying people for their work cannot be seen as an unreasonable burden or 'cost of the initiative' and even less as a reason to not go forward with the Directive. Businesses that are not viable if they have to pay their workers and fully respect workers' rights have no place in the EU market. The EU's competitiveness must not be built on the exploitation of young people.



During the Conference on the Future of Europe and during the European Year of Youth, young people repeatedly demanded concrete action to improve their living conditions. We cannot let them be disappointed on a topic which affects them directly.

We reach out to you to ban unpaid internships once and for all.

We hope we can count on your support, and we are looking forward to your reply while remaining available for a meeting or any exchange on this important matter.

Best regards,

Esther Lynch
General Secretary of the ETUC

Tea Jarc
Confederal Secretary of the ETUC