

## Topic #1: Establishing paid professional internships

### I. Background

When a person is driven by his own desire for success, they often tend to become a „ serial intern “. An internship is a position that provides numerous opportunities to gain experience in the field one wishes to specialize in. It is a steppingstone toward choosing a profession that will likely shape one’s career for years to come. This professional learning experience offers meaningful and practical work related to one’s area of study or career interests.

However, internships are not so perfect as they may seem. Not only is securing a position as an intern often incredibly challenging, but many internships provide little to no monetary compensation. According to an article many individuals report feeling more financially strained and exhausted after completing an internship than when they started.

It is also essential to recognize that internships often favor employers, placing them in winning position. Internships allow organizations to bring fresh ideas and energy into their workplace, cultivate talent, and build a pipeline for future full-time employees. While employees benefit from these arrangements, interns often end up feeling poorer – both financially and emotionally- while the employers grow richer from the experience.

### II. UN involvement

The United Nations (UN) has faced criticism for offering unpaid internships, particularly within its agencies like the UN Secretariat, WHO, and UNDP. However, in recent years, there has been a shift toward offering stipends or paid internships in some agencies. This change supports the UN's commitment to Sustainable Development Goals 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), recognizing the importance of accessible opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), the UN’s labor rights body, has been a strong advocate for paid internships. In 2018, the ILO’s Global Commission on the Future of Work recommended **increasing paid internships to reduce exploitation and inequality**. Unpaid internships, according to the ILO, exacerbate the gap between privileged and disadvantaged youth, limiting career opportunities for those from lower-income backgrounds.

In 2017, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution encouraging paid internships across the UN system. While non-binding, the resolution emphasized the importance of fair remuneration to ensure internships are accessible to a diverse pool of candidates.

Despite these efforts, many UN bodies still face financial constraints, and over 40% of UN interns reported working without pay in a 2019 survey. This remains a barrier, especially for interns from less privileged backgrounds who **cannot afford to work without compensation**.

While progress has been made, the UN continues to advocate for paid internships. Ongoing efforts aim to make internships more equitable and accessible, ensuring fair opportunities for all young people.

### **III. Useful links**

The ethical consequences of exploiting young talent:

<https://mih.com.au/opinion/the-ethical-dilemma-of-unpaid-internships#:~:text=Unpaid%20internships%20can%20often%20mislead.afford%20to%20work%20without%20pay.>

UN's fight for equality across decades.

<https://careers.un.org/home?language=en>

Pros and cons of an unpaid internship to understand vast points of view.

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/pay-salary/unpaid-internships>

Forum in the European youth portal.

[https://youth.europa.eu/nnfe/unpaid-internships-what-are-alternatives\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/nnfe/unpaid-internships-what-are-alternatives_en)

### **IV. Questions to consider**

- How do unpaid internships affect physical and mental health of the citizens of my country?
- What adaptation strategies can be implemented in my country to minimize the dissatisfaction of interns?
- How does an unpaid internship intersect with basic human rights?
- Is my country actively trying to resolve this issue?
- How does my country use educational initiatives to raise awareness among the public about this matter?

### **V. Sources**

The definition and useful information about internship programs.

<https://careers.umbc.edu/employers/internships/what-is-an-internship/>

Personal experience with internships.

<https://hbr.org/2021/05/its-time-to-officially-end-unpaid-internships>