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Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Conference: Quality Traineeships in the EU - Youth Guarantee, European Solidarity Corps and beyond

10 November 2017

Summary Report

The conference "**Quality Traineeships in the EU - Youth Guarantee, European Solidarity Corps and beyond**", organised by DG EMPL B1 in collaboration with the European Youth Forum on 10 November 2017, brought together nearly 100 stakeholders and young persons. The conference also marked the International Interns Day¹.

In her opening speech, **Nafsika Vrettaki, Board Member of the European Youth Forum**, highlighted the need for more quality in traineeships, which is why the implementation of the Quality Framework for Traineeships (QFT) must continue. In particular, traineeships must be an educational experience, with adequate social rights and more transparency in hiring practices. Ms Vrettaki also reminded that while legislators in Member States have the main responsibility for traineeships, also employers play a crucial role.

Stefan Olsson, Director, DG EMPL, European Commission, set the scene for the first panel which focussed on "**Challenges and promising practices at European and national level**". He was determined to continue supporting the implementation of the QFT, and highlighted the European Pillar of Social Rights as a key impetus for ensuring quality traineeships for young people.

Brando Benifei, MEP, explained that the basis for the "Fair Internships" campaign and the previous legislature initiative "Manifesto" was a survey among EP interns, which revealed, for example, a lack of learning content and excessive working hours in EP traineeships. These initiatives call for more quality elements in traineeships. Mr Benifei also pointed to the increasing number of atypical unpaid traineeships which the Commission and the EEAS delegations offer. He urged for the QFT to be binding and for the European Solidarity Corps to codify the QFT. Currently, different perceptions of 'quality' prevail, and the implementation of QFT is still limited and patchy. Mr Benifei also explained that the EP will place focus on pay and quality in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

¹ Initiated in by the Interns GoPro and the European Youth Forum in 2015.

Bryn Watkins, from the Brussels Interns NGO B!NGO, supported the EU action in youth employment issues. He pointed out how unpaid traineeships not only have negative consequences for the trainee, but also are bad for the society and the economy as a whole by undermining the social model, contributing to the deterioration of skills of young people and generating no tax revenues. In its role as a voice and a watchdog for interns, B!ngo has launched the “Just Pay!” campaign which monitors the Belgian job market to assess if internship providers comply with the national law. As a consequence of illegal practices, many young people in Belgium don’t have access to social security or health insurance. Mr Watkins also called for greater coherence in the Commission policies and instruments, making sure the QFT is used in the assessment of quality of traineeship offers under the Youth Guarantee. Finally, Mr Watkins highlighted the importance of speaking openly about working conditions in order to help address abuses.

Mateusz Szymański from the Polish Solidarność Trade Union explained that a Social Partner agreement was reached in Poland in June 2017. This agreement covers open labour market traineeships, but does not cover ALMP traineeships nor traineeships within vocational training. It is expected to fill gaps in transparency and learning objectives, both areas where greatest gaps are observed. However, remuneration is not covered by this agreement, as no agreement was reached on this matter. The agreement is currently not binding, but the Trade Unions work towards this aim.

Elodie Fazi, Team Leader from DG EMPL, European Commission, gave an overview of the QFT and the state-of-play of traineeships across the EU, highlighting the diversity across Member States. She reminded that even though the QFT is a Council Recommendation, there is a political commitment in Member States to implement it. Since the adoption of the QFT in 2014, 8 Member States have modified their legislation to better align to the Recommendation. Main challenges remain in transparency of hiring practices, the duration of traineeships and cooperation with social partners. The Commission has competence in monitoring the implementation of the QFT, which is also done as part of the monitoring of the Youth Guarantee, and in supporting Member States in the implementation. In addition, it can provide funding through initiatives such as the Youth Employment Initiative and the recent Digital Opportunity Scheme.

The Chair concluded the main messages as follows:

- To implement the QFT, engaged and committed actors are needed.
- Work needs to continue at practical, at national and at EU level.
- There is a need to look at the future, while learning from the past.
- There is scope for coherence in EU policies, looking in particular at the next Commission mandate.

Jan Noterdaeme, Senior Advisor from CSR Europe, chaired the second panel on "How to engage with the business sector to promote quality traineeships?"

Nicholas Wenzel, Managing Director from InternsGoPro explained the Transparency at Work campaign, launched ahead of the International Interns' Day. It allows young people to rate their internship, apprenticeship and entry level job experiences online, and to share their reviews. The aim is to empower young people to access better quality opportunities. Employers can also benefit from increased visibility and publicity.

Dr Cornelia Anderson, Head of Talent Acquisition - Europe, Middle East, Africa, from Solvay explained that offering equally high standards globally is a challenge in a company such as Solvay, which operates in many different countries around the world and offers a multitude of traineeships options at different occupational and educational levels. However, all traineeships at Solvay aim at offering young people a rich experience with meaningful tasks. This brings benefits for the young people, while allowing the company to benefit from the potential there is in trainees.

Sven Schayes, International Affairs Coordinator from Actiris, presented the "Stage First" programme implemented in Brussels which offers work experiences to young job seekers with low qualifications. This programme includes coaching prior to the traineeship, mentoring and guidance during the traineeship and an action plan after the traineeship. Actiris monitors the quality of the traineeships. As a result, one year after the end of the traineeship, the employment rate of participants was 25-30% higher than that of similar young people who did not take part in such traineeships.

Menno Bart, Public Affairs Specialist, Adecco Group explained that the private employment service Adecco aims at filling the gap between the supply and the demands of the labour market, e.g. through traineeships. According to Mr Bart, quality traineeships bring added value both to companies and to young people; they allow to attract talent, to find young persons who want to work, and to provide them with the right skills. Trainees, who do productive work, benefit companies, and they can also improve work atmosphere. Adecco is a signatory of the European Youth Forum's European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships, and is present through a range of European platforms on both these issues, such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

On the question on whether specific measures apply to help vulnerable persons access traineeships; none of the panel members work with vulnerable persons who are very far from the labour market, such as the homeless. However, **Actiris** does focus on young people who lack education and skills, as they face the greatest risk of long term unemployment. The humanitarian part of **Adecco**, 'Humando', operating in France, helps disadvantaged youth enter the labour market. Dr Anderson mentioned the different backgrounds needed at **Solvay's** different company sites, but acknowledged that more could be done to help the most vulnerable. She highlighted the importance of local NGOs and civil society in this context.

According to the Chair's experience, applicants for traineeships are older than before, and he wondered what keeps them from applying for regular jobs. He

therefore provoked the panellists to reflect whether dead-end traineeships are becoming a norm. All panellists condemned traineeships as a source of cheap labour. According to **Dr Andersson**, it is in the interest of a company and its competitiveness to pay trainees appropriately. She also explained that many of Solvay's trainees are consequently hired to permanent jobs. **Mr Bart** thinks that traineeships should be a norm, as they form a link between education and work, but they should be of high quality so that young people would not be stuck on traineeships for a long time. **Mr Wenzel** called for measures to address the fact that trainees are becoming older and have higher qualifications.

The Chair concluded the main messages as follows:

- Make sure that rules and regulations are enforced.
- Obligations vs rights: ensure that the interests of companies and those of trainees are aligned.
- Support from NGOs and local actors is needed to assure quality of traineeships and jobs – in particular in the case of vulnerable groups.
- Traineeships are becoming the new norm, but this is not a problem as long as trainees take something out of them.
- Contents of a traineeship have an important psychological effect.

The third panel "**How to ensure quality traineeships in the European Solidarity Corps?**" was chaired by **Andrea Casamenti, Board Member of the European Youth Forum**, who gave a brief introduction to the European Solidarity Corps.

Anita Vella, Deputy Head of Unit from DG EMPL, European Commission, gave an overview of the state-of-play and the next steps for the development of the European Solidarity Corps. Assuring the quality of placements, including post-placement support, will be crucial. In the occupational strand, only paid traineeships will be allowed, with financial support (to employers) to finance on-the-job training and mentoring, in the form of an "integration programme". Learning component and validation will be important parts of the these traineeship experiences.

Ignacio Doreste, Advisor from ETUC, pointed to the positive values in this programme and highlighted the importance of making best use of the QFT in the implementation of the European Solidarity Corps. He called for the Social Partners to be involved in the design of programme, in particular in the offers under the occupational strand. Limiting the programme only to volunteering would avoid the risk that placements replace jobs. In any case, measures should be taken to avoid any potential misuse. For example, if profit-seeking companies participate, this should be only under the occupational strand of the programme.

Ben Butters, Policy Director from EUROCHAMBRES underlined the importance of involving not only national level Social Partners in the occupational strand, but also other relevant stakeholders, for example chambers of commerce given their experience in cross-border matching and placements. He argued that measures to ensure quality and effectiveness should be based on tools and approaches that are already in place. For example, Transparency at Work could

be applied to the Corps. Mr Butters also thinks that young people should be paid for their work in the Corps, which is why the occupational strand is important. Otherwise, there is a risk that the Corps becomes an elitist programme only for those who can afford it.

Helena Gandra, European Solidarity Corps trainee, European Volunteer Centre considers that the solidarity aspect is the essence and the added value of the programme. While the volunteering strand focuses on beneficiaries in a more direct way, the occupational strand has the potential to affect the values of solidarity through developing the participant's skills. For her, post-placement support and mentoring are relevant, because young people who go abroad often lack networks that facilitate their entry into the labour market. Ms Gandra was in favour of separating the occupational strand and volunteering, in order to avoid confusion, and proposed to limit volunteering to non-profit organisations or businesses that cooperate closely with such organisations.

The audience highlighted the need to better communicate about the programme and its opportunities as a whole, and focus less on the different strands. The importance is in the sustainable goals of the programme, which could provide right strategies for growth.

The European Youth Forum proposed to apply specific rules to the occupational strand. In particular, social protection and trainee rights should be defined clearly, as well as the number of placements an organisation can simultaneously host over a certain period of time, to prevent replacing jobs with traineeships. Finally the chair concluded that there is a will from all stakeholders to ensure quality placements under the European Solidarity Corps.

In his closing remarks, **Michel Servoz, Director-General of DG EMPL**, referred to the improving youth employment situation. However, many young people still suffer from precariousness, and unemployment remains high in countries such as Spain or Italy. Mr Servoz reminded of various policy measures that have contributed to the improvement, such as the Upskilling Pathways and the Pact for Youth, but stated the need for further action. Concerning the QFT, there is a need to reinforce the educational contents, and applying the QFT should not constitute a burden for employers. Mr Servoz considers that the European Solidarity Corps has the potential to be an enriching and educational experience for the young, validated through a certificate. He noted the need to offer good quality traineeships, and reminded that much will depend on the Social Partners and the civil society in general.