

# Review 01

EMBARGO

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EN

## EU actions addressing traineeships for young people



EUROPEAN  
COURT  
OF AUDITORS

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## Executive summary

**I** A traineeship is a limited period of work practice, which also provides a training element. It can help young people to make the transition to the world of work smoother by allowing trainees to gain valuable on-the-job work experience. In recent years, traineeships have become an important point of entry into the labour market for young people. In the EU, the share of young people who complete a traineeship before taking up a regular job has significantly increased over the last 10 years. There are no official data on the overall number of traineeships carried out in the EU. Based on our rough estimations, around 3.7 million young people in the EU may undertake every year traineeships as their first professional experience.

**II** This is not an audit report; it is a review based mainly on publicly available information, but also on material specifically collected for this purpose and previous audit work. The objective of the review is to provide stakeholders and the wider public with an objective and useful source of information in view of the ongoing traineeship-related EU policy framework update. More specifically, we provide an overview of the EU actions on traineeships for young people and identify key opportunities and challenges.

**III** Member states' legislative frameworks on traineeships differ substantially, with 16 of the 27 member states lacking a legal definition of traineeships. While the EU has been creating a policy framework for traineeships since 2013, the non-binding 2014 Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships does not clarify whether and under what conditions trainees might be considered as workers. So far, not all member states have aligned their legal frameworks with this recommendation, despite acknowledging that high-quality traineeships could be effective in facilitating young people's access to employment.

**IV** The issue of remuneration is not one of the quality attributes in this Council Recommendation, which is being updated at the time of publication. The need for a compensation of trainees is the point of disagreement with regard to the key attributes of a good quality traineeship. Recent surveys indicate that around one-third of labour market trainees are unpaid. This could have an impact on equal access to traineeships, consequently impede the entry of disadvantaged young people into the labour market.

**V** The EU budget provides financial support for traineeships through different programmes and measures. However, there is no information on the specific amounts allocated nor any information on the exact number of trainees benefitting from this support:

- The European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative mostly support disadvantaged young people in the member states – through active labour market traineeships. There are no exact figures on how much of the yearly €1.53 billion earmarked for integrating young people into the labour market is actually spent on traineeships. We estimate that at least 270 000 young people participated in such EU-funded traineeships every year;
- Directly managed funds by the Commission, such as Erasmus+ and the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation provide funding mainly for cross-border traineeships. On average, during the 2014-2020 period, the annual EU funding of these measures amounted to around €146 million. We estimate that around 90 000 young people participated every year in this sort of EU-funded traineeships;
- The EU institutions and bodies covered by this review welcome around 4 700 paid trainees every year, financed from their administrative budgets, costing around €30 million. These traineeships provide an opportunity for young people to familiarise themselves with the objectives and goals of the EU's integration processes and policies.

**VI** It is important to ensure that traineeships are useful to help young people to integrate into the labour market and that they can benefit fully by undertaking good quality traineeships while avoiding that they replace regular workers. We identified the following challenges and opportunities relating to traineeships, which could be considered in light of the upcoming revision of the 2014 Council Recommendation:

- varying definitions of traineeship, with lack of clarity with regard to what the concept entails;
- the limited reliable data on traineeships hindering evidence-based policy making;
- the inconsistent application of the 2014 Council Recommendation on quality traineeships in member states; and
- potential variations in opportunities and accessibility to traineeships for young people from different social backgrounds.

# Introduction

## Traineeships are a form of work-based learning

**01** There is no unique definition of traineeships. **Box 1** provides the definitions used by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the EU.

### Box 1

#### Definition of traineeships

- According to the ILO, traineeships are *short-term periods of work practice* in a firm, public body or non-profit organisation, during which a person *receives training and acquires experience* in a specific field or career area, *prior to taking up regular employment*<sup>1</sup>.
- In the 2014 Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, traineeships refer to a *limited period of work practice*, whether paid or unpaid, which includes *a learning and training component*, undertaken in order to *gain practical and professional experience* with a view to *improving employability and facilitating the transition to regular employment*<sup>2</sup>.

**02** These definitions have four elements in common. Traineeships:

- cover a short period of time;
- are a form of work practice;
- provide training and work experience; and
- should facilitate finding regular employment.

**03** There are two main **categories** of traineeships: educational traineeships and labour market traineeships. For the latter, we need to differentiate between traineeships that are associated with active labour market policies (ALMPs) and open-

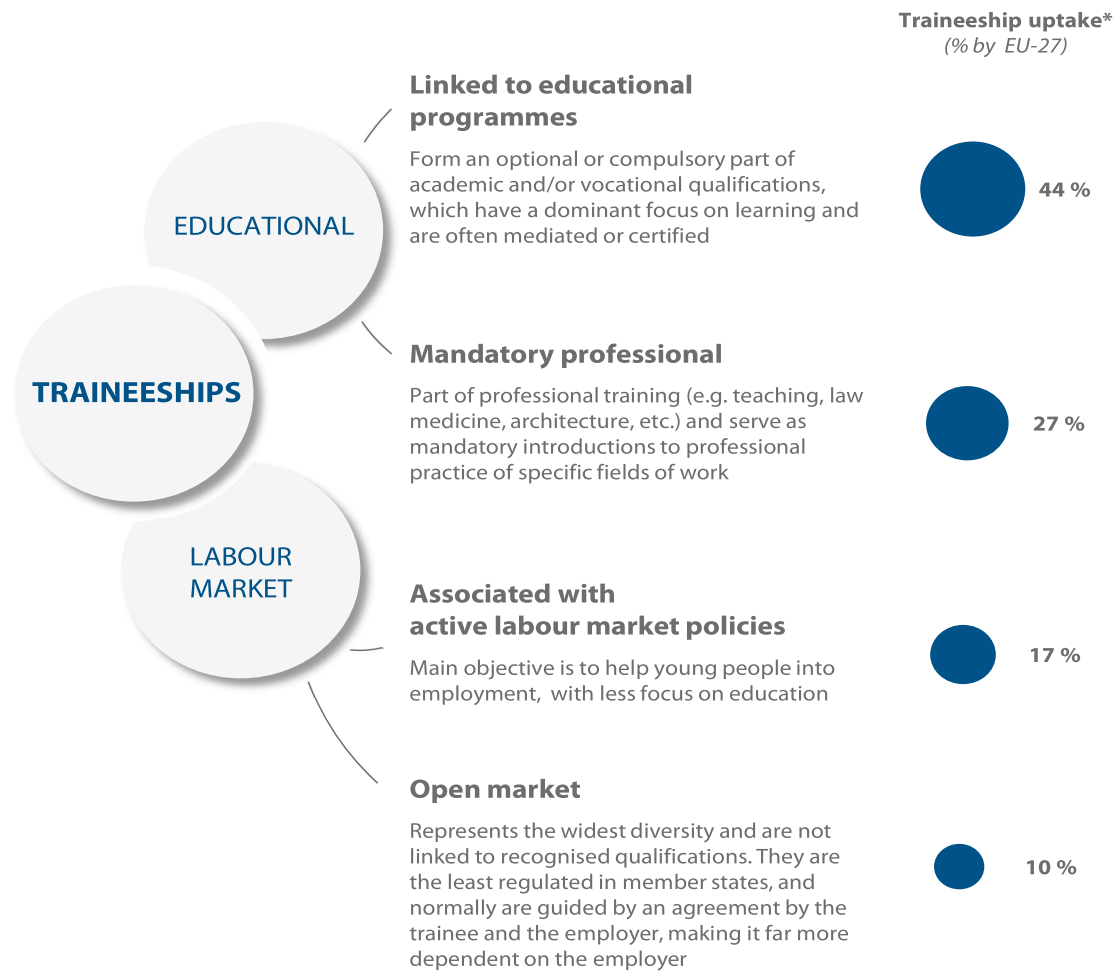
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<sup>1</sup> [Developing quality traineeships for young people](#), ILO 2017, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> [Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeship, 2014/C 88/01](#), recital 27.

market traineeships (see [Figure 1](#)). Educational traineeships make up for 71 % of the total number of traineeships. A similar share was observed in 2013.

**Figure 1 – Types of traineeships and their prevalence in the EU**



*Note:* 2 % of the respondents did not know what type of traineeship they completed.

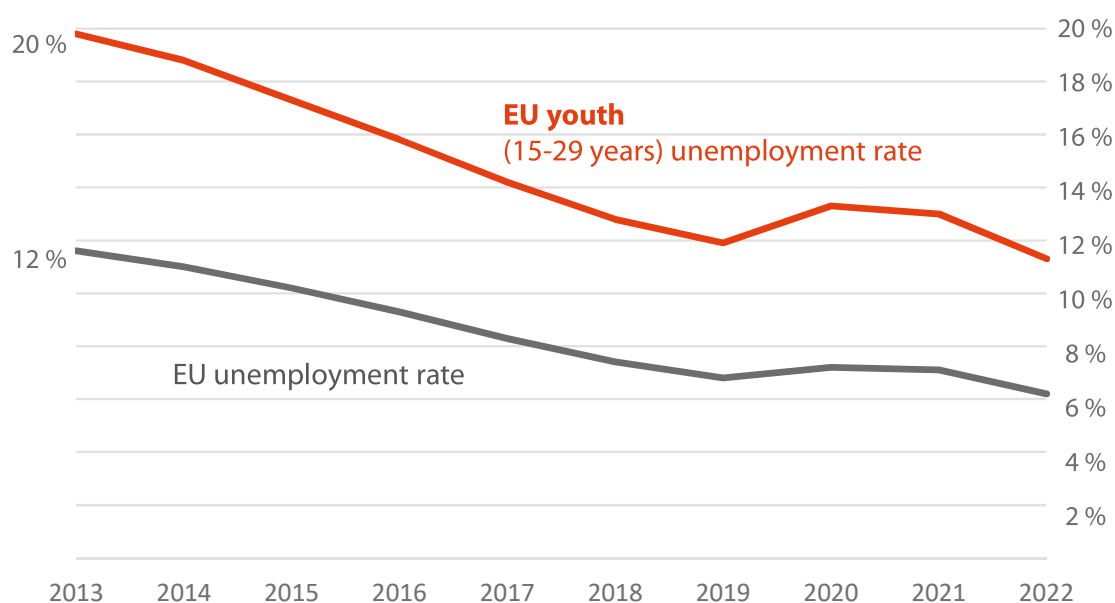
*Source:* ECA based on a Commission [Study on comprehensive overview of traineeship arrangements in Member States](#), Commission, 2012, and 2023 Eurobarometer.

## The EU policy framework for traineeships

**04** In accordance with the [Treaty](#)<sup>3</sup>, the responsibility and competences for social policy, employment and education in the EU lie with the member states. The EU's role is to support, coordinate, and complement member states' actions. For social policy, the EU may fulfil its role by adopting directives<sup>4</sup>.

**05** In times of crisis, young people often find themselves more affected by unemployment. [Figure 2](#) shows that, since 2013, the EU-27 youth unemployment rate has been 5.1 to 8.2 percentage points higher than the total unemployment rate, reaching 11.3 % in 2022 compared with 6.2 % for the whole population.

**Figure 2 – Youth unemployment rate vs total unemployment, 2013-2022**



Source: ECA, based on Eurostat, [YTH\_EMPL\_110] and [UNE\_RT\_A], extracted on 8 June 2023.

**06** The [2013 Council Recommendation](#) proposed that the Commission and the member states set up the EU [Youth Guarantee](#) (YG). Under this framework the member states committed to ensuring that all young people under the age of 25 should receive a good quality offer for work, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. To mitigate the increase in the youth unemployment rate triggered by the COVID-19

<sup>3</sup> [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), articles 145-165.

<sup>4</sup> Article 153(2)(b) of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#).

pandemic, the Council adopted a **Reinforced Youth Guarantee** in October 2020, which expanded the target group to cover all those under the age of 30.

**07** The EU has taken a number of policy initiatives and legislative measures in recent years with regard to traineeships (see the timeline in **Table 1**). The 2014 Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships specifically addressed traineeships and is being updated at the time of publication.

**Table 1 – EU policy initiatives and legislation relating to traineeships**

2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Evaluation</b> of the Quality Framework for Traineeships</li> <li>→ European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on <b>quality traineeships</b> in the Union</li> <li>→ Commission reply to the EP resolution and <b>social partners consultation</b> (TFEU Article 154)</li> </ul>
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on <b>adequate minimum wages</b> in the European Union</li> </ul>
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan</b>, announcing the review of the 2014 Council Recommendation</li> </ul>
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Commission adopts the <b>Youth Employment Support: a bridge to jobs</b> for the next generation package</li> <li>→ European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2020 on the Youth Guarantee, inviting the Commission to review the 2014 Council Recommendation</li> <li>→ Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020 on <b>A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee</b></li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Directive (EU) 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on <b>transparent and predictable working conditions</b> in the European Union</li> <li>→ Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed 2019/C 387/01</li> </ul>
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ European Parliament resolution of 18 January 2018, on the <b>Implementation of the Youth Employment Initiative in member states</b></li> </ul>
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2017 on the <b>European Pillar of Social Rights</b></li> </ul>
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a <b>Quality Framework for Traineeships</b></li> </ul>

2013



Council Recommendation of 22 April 2013 on establishing a  
**Youth Guarantee**

Source: ECA.

## EU financial support for traineeships

**08** There are five potential sources for EU financial support for traineeships:

- the Cohesion policy funds foresee funding for the integration of young people in the labour market, especially through the **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)** (specifically for young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs)), and the **European Social Fund (ESF)** in the 2014-2020 period. For the 2021-2027 period **ESF+**, including YEI, continues to provide funding;
- the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)** provides additional funds to tackle youth unemployment;
- **Erasmus+** is the EU's programme which supports education, training, youth and sport in Europe by providing opportunities to study, train, gain experience, and volunteer abroad;
- the **EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)** has provided financing for the European cooperation network of employment services (EURES), and to support mobility schemes that promote paid cross-border traineeships;
- each **EU institution** and body offer their own **traineeship schemes**. These schemes are financed from the **administrative expenditure** of the EU budget.

## Review scope and approach

**09** Our review looks at how the EU supports traineeships as a way of helping young people to integrate in the labour market. This is not an audit report; it is a review based mainly on publicly available information, but also on material specifically collected for this purpose and previous audit work. The objective of the review is to provide stakeholders and the wider public with an objective and useful source of information in view of the ongoing update (see paragraph **07** and **Table 1**) of the 2014 Council Recommendation. More specifically, we provide an overview of the EU actions, including the provision of EU funding, addressing traineeships for young people and identify key opportunities and challenges.

**10** Our review covers the period from 2013, the year when the Youth Guarantee came into being until mid-2023. In particular, we looked at:

- the trends in number of traineeships;
- the definition of traineeships;
- the quality of traineeships and how this concept is applied in the member states;
- the allocation and utilisation of EU funds for traineeships.

**11** In our review, we primarily refer to ALMP and open-market types of traineeships, because these traineeships were covered by the 2014 Council Recommendation, which is being updated at the time of publication. When information is presented throughout the report, we will specify, whether it covers other types of traineeships.

**12** We have drawn on a wide range of information sources, including documents issued by the Commission<sup>5</sup>, Eurofound (the European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions), the European Parliament, including the European Parliamentary Research Service; the Council, international organisations (e.g. International Labour Organization), organisations representing employers, trade unions and young people, and academic papers. In addition, we have also taken into consideration our own related special reports: one on the Youth Guarantee and another one on the Youth employment initiative<sup>6</sup>. We also consulted experts in the

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<sup>5</sup> Directorate-General (DG) for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, and Eurostat.

<sup>6</sup> [Special report 03/2015](#) and [Special report 05/2017](#).

area through an Expert Panel meeting. We interviewed representatives from a number of organisations at EU level and looked specifically at two member states (France and Ireland) to better understand their traineeship practices.

**13** Data on traineeships are not well reflected in official statistics. In particular, Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, does not collect any overall data from member states about traineeships. Therefore, almost all of the available data on traineeships are based on non-representative surveys and self-declarations. Moreover, these surveys do not differentiate between the different types of traineeships. Furthermore, the age group covered is not fully aligned between the data sources. The data used in this review originate from:

- o two surveys on traineeships: the [2013 Flash Eurobarometer](#) and the [2023 Flash Eurobarometer](#) (see [Annex I](#)), covering ages 18-35.
- o the [2023 Living and Working in the EU and Neighbouring Countries](#) survey carried out by Eurofound. This edition of the survey included specific questions on traineeships based on our request for the purpose of this review (see [Annex I](#)), covering ages 16-35.

**14** In addition, we carried out our own survey with the ESF/YEI managing authorities in the member states to obtain more information on whether and how these funds had supported traineeship projects in practice (see [Annex I](#)).

**15** Finally, we requested information on traineeships from: the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council of the European Union, the Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the European Court of Auditors, and as well as two consultative bodies: the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions.

## Being a trainee in the EU

**16** In the EU, many young people complete traineeships before taking up their first job. We reviewed the practice of using traineeships as a point of entry into the labour market and looked at how traineeships are regulated in the 27 member states. We also considered the elements that constitute good quality traineeships.

### Traineeships have become an important point of entry into the labour market

**17** Traineeships can help to make the transition to the world of work smoother, by allowing trainees to gain valuable on-the-job work experience<sup>7</sup>. When filling entry-level positions, employers often look for young people who have completed one or more traineeships<sup>8</sup>. At the same time, traineeships can serve a way for employers to build positive corporate branding in a labour market that is increasingly focused on recruiting skilled workers. Back in 2013, 72 % of small and medium sized enterprises stated that the chance to get in touch with potential future employees is the key reason they offer traineeships<sup>9</sup>.

**18** The following paragraphs provide an overall picture of traineeships in the EU. The data are based on the 2013 and 2023 Eurobarometer surveys and on Eurofound's 2023 survey on Living and Working in the EU. These surveys are not representative, are based on self-declarations and should therefore be interpreted with caution (for further details see [Annex I](#)).

**19** The Eurobarometer responses indicate that the share of young people who took part in any type of traineeship in the EU has significantly increased over the last 10 years: in 2023, four in five young people (78 %) surveyed did at least one traineeship of any type. This compares to only 46 % in 2013 (see [Figure 3](#)). Of the

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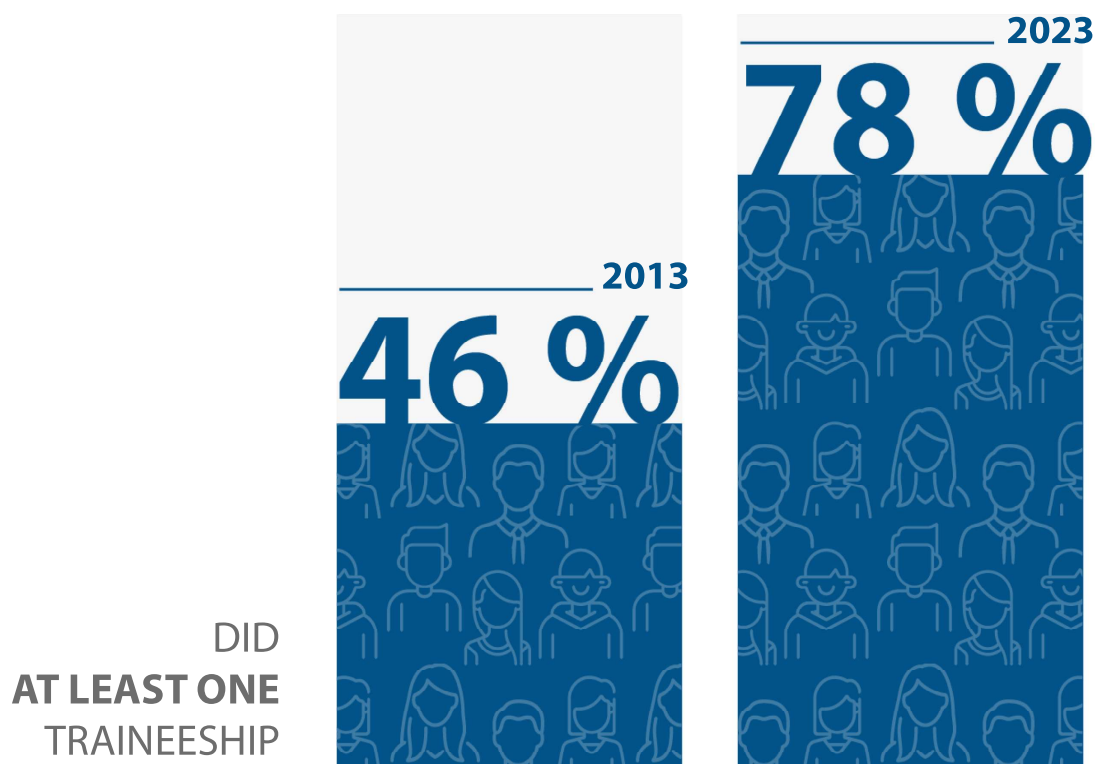
<sup>7</sup> As seen in: [Traineeships under the Youth Guarantee: Experience from the ground](#), European Commission, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> European Youth Forum, [Position Paper "European Youth Forum's demands of the review of the Quality Framework on Traineeships"](#), 31 May 2022, p. 2; N. O'Higgins – L. Pinedo Caro: [What makes for a "good" internship?](#), published in [Internships, Employability and the Search for decent work experience](#), ILO, 2021, Table 3.1.

<sup>9</sup> COM(2013) 857 final, p. 4.

young people surveyed, 19 % said that traineeships had been their first work experience.

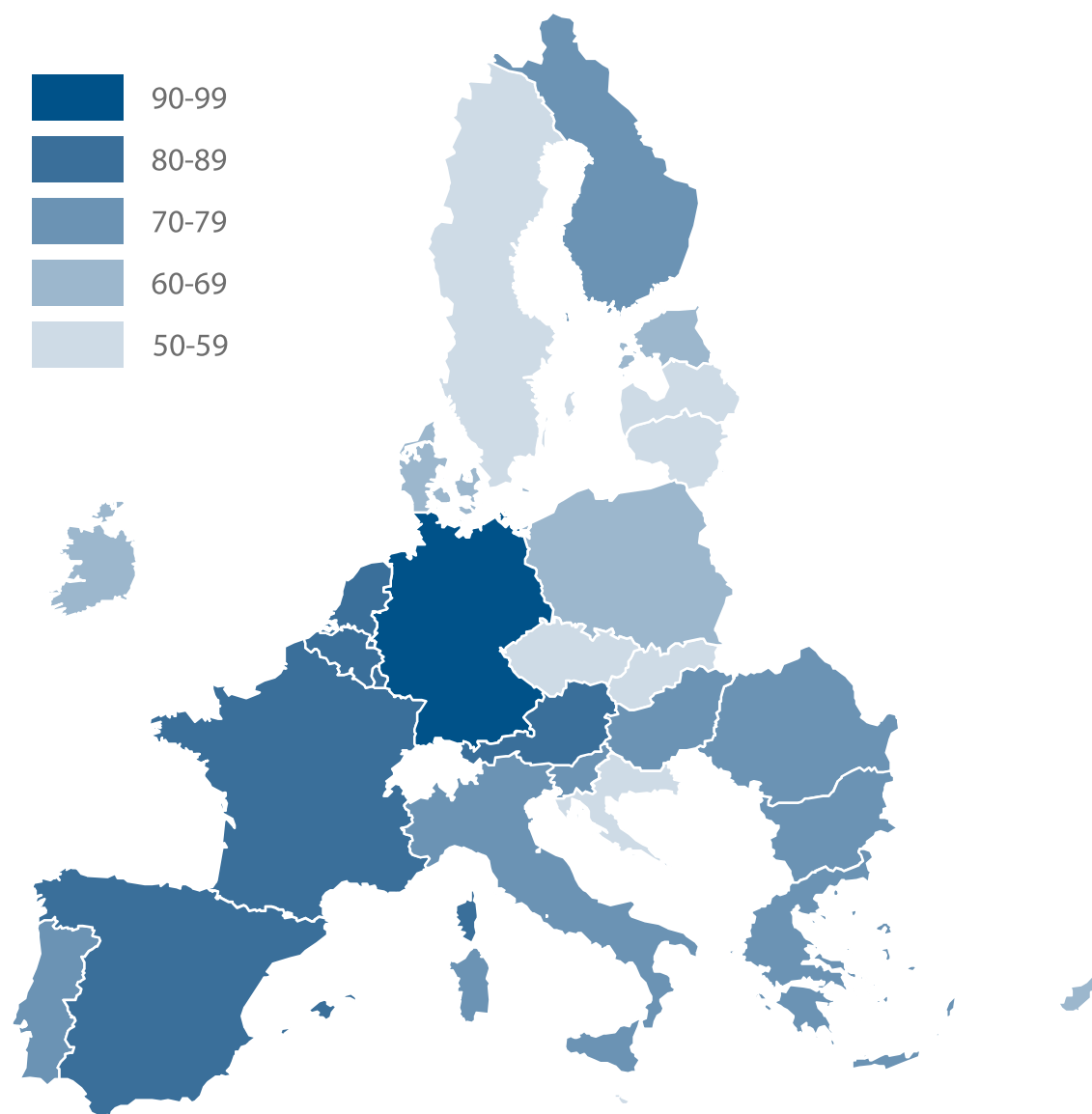
**Figure 3 – Share of respondents (aged 18-35) in 2013 and in 2023 who had at least one traineeship of any type**



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 378/2013 and Flash Eurobarometer 523/2023.

**20** The share of respondents to the 2023 Eurobarometer who had completed at least one traineeship of any type (or duration) differed between member states: it ranged from 53 % in Sweden and 54 % in Czechia and Malta to 86 % in the Netherlands, 87 % in France and 90 % in Germany (see [Figure 4](#)).

**Figure 4 – Share of respondents (aged 18-35) with at least one traineeship of any type by member state, 2023**



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 523/2023.

**21** More than half of the respondents (52 %) stated that they had completed more than one traineeship: 29 % had completed two traineeships and 23 % had done three or more traineeships. Generally, this 2023 Eurobarometer in relation to the 2013 Eurobarometer data indicates that carrying out a traineeship of any kind has become more frequent.

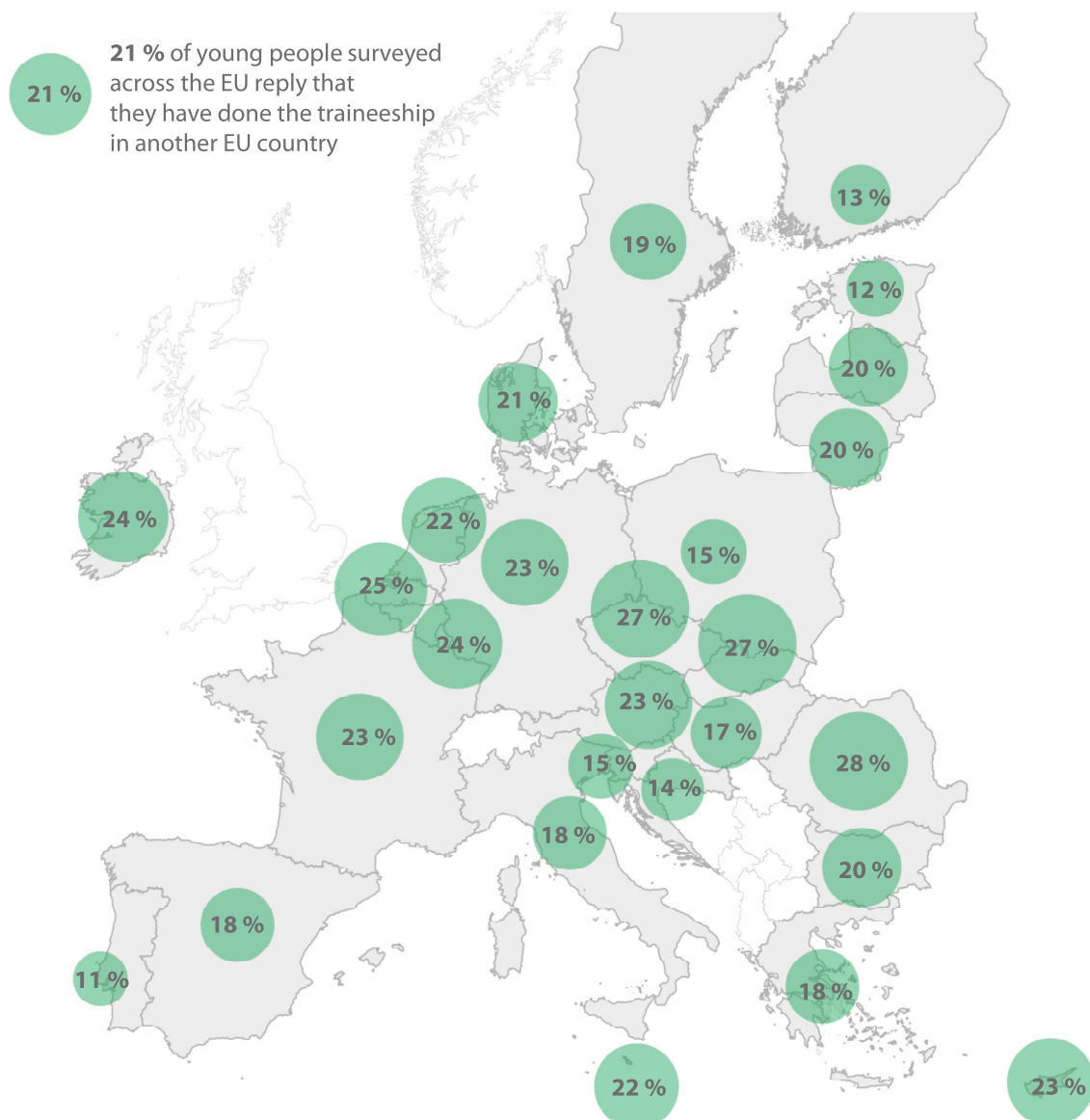
**22** There are no official statistics on the overall number of traineeships carried out in the EU. In the period between July 2022 and June 2023, 19.6 million young people (18-35 years old) have started their current job in the last three months in the EU-27<sup>10</sup>. Based on the [survey data](#), we estimate that around 3.7 million young people may undertake each year traineeships as their first experience of the world of work (see [Annex I](#) for the calculation).

**23** The 2014 Council Recommendation encouraged cross-border traineeships. According to recent data, the significance of cross-border traineeship has increased in recent years. Out of the respondents having undertaken a traineeship, according to the 2013 Eurobarometer, 9 % of respondents had undertaken one or more traineeships of any type abroad. In comparison, in the 2023 Eurobarometer, 21 % of respondents had undertaken at least one of their traineeships in another member state (see [Figure 5](#)).

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<sup>10</sup> Eurostat: EU labour force survey data (ad hoc extraction from the microdata).

**Figure 5 – Share of respondents in the 2023 Eurobarometer who state having carried out cross border traineeships of any type from the respondents having undertaken a traineeship**



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 523/2023.

## The definition of traineeship differs between member states

**24** There is no legal or conventional definition of what a traineeship entails in more than half of the EU's member states<sup>11</sup> (16 out of 27). Definitions differ from country to country. The definition used by the 2014 Council Recommendation is general. In

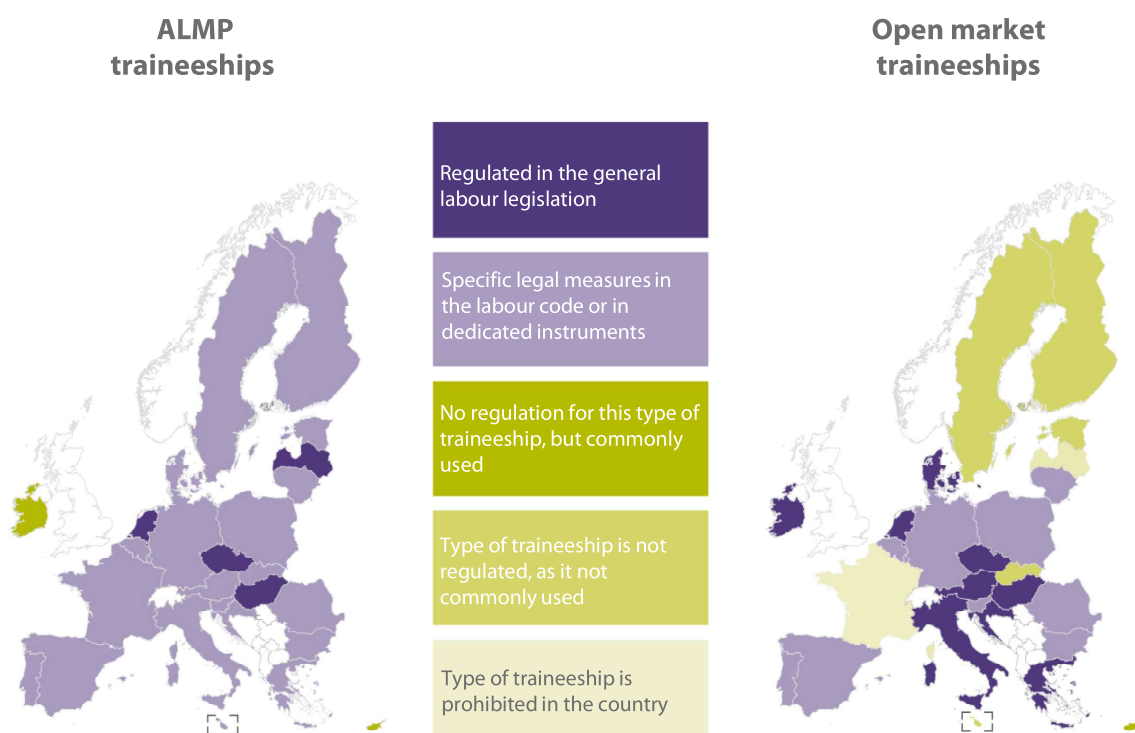
<sup>11</sup> SPRINT: Standardize best PRactices about INTernships – Erasmus+ project 2017-1-FR01-KA203-037293 – [General report](#).

particular, while it refers to a limited period of work practice, being a Recommendation, it does not clarify whether and if so under what conditions trainees might or might not be considered workers. The implications of this are important given that the EU competence in social policy matters is limited to the working condition for **workers**. If trainees are considered workers, they are protected by the [EU legislation on the rights of workers](#).

**25** The definition of workers has been clarified by several judgements<sup>12</sup> of the Court of Justice of the EU and indicate that a person can be considered a worker if they perform genuine and effective activity, performing services under the supervision of another person, and in return for remuneration.

**26** According to the sources reviewed, ALMP traineeships are more regulated compared with open-market traineeships (see [Figure 6](#)). Meanwhile, open-market traineeships are expressly prohibited under national law in France and Latvia.

**Figure 6 – Regulatory approaches to ALMPs and open-market traineeships in member states, 2022**



Source: Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, table 3, Study supporting the evaluation of the quality framework for traineeships, table 7, Youthwiki, SPRINT : Standardize best PRactices about INTernships – Erasmus+ project 2017-1-FR01-KA203-037293 – [General report](#).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Cases C 66/85, Lawrie-Blum, C-3/90, Bernini, C-109/04, Kranemann, C-229/14, Balkaya.

**27** Collecting data on a consistent and comparable basis is difficult without a precise definition or at least a common understanding of the term traineeship. Policy making is not based on systematic data collection but on surveys and estimations, which do not necessarily provide a fair and true picture of the situation of trainees due to their lack of representativeness. A comparable legal framework between member states may also have a positive effect over cross-border traineeships.

## The quality of traineeships: a key concern

### The quality of traineeships is associated with positive employment outcomes

**28** About two-thirds (64.3 %) of 2023 Eurobarometer respondents, who declared having carried out an open-market or an ALMP traineeship, agreed that their last traineeship was or would be helpful for them to find a regular job (24.9 % “totally agree” and 39.4 % “tend to agree”).

**29** Similarly, when asked about their employment situation six months after the traineeship, again six out of ten respondents (61 %) replied that they were in regular employment. In particular, 28.7 % said that they had found a regular job after their last traineeship. The survey also showed that on average respondents completed two traineeships before finding a regular position. In addition, the Eurofound survey results showed that men more often than women received job offers following a traineeship.

**30** A 2021 ILO study and the Council Recommendation<sup>13</sup> suggest that there is a clear connection between the quality of the traineeships and the employment outcome<sup>14</sup>. According to ILO, high quality traineeships are more effective in helping young people go on to find a regular employment and contribute to integrating young people into the labour market. More specifically, according to the same study, high quality traineeships should also include a compensation payment.

**31** Meanwhile there are frequent concerns about the quality of some traineeships and the limited learning component that are offered to young people. European stakeholders (such as the [European Youth Forum](#) or the [European Trade Union Confederation](#)) also reported poor working conditions for trainees, with long working hours, unsatisfactory coverage in term of health and safety risks, and no remuneration or compensation. Finally, there is the risk that some employers use trainees to replace regular workers<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeship, 2014/C 88/01, recital 5.

<sup>14</sup> N. O’Higgins – L. Pinedo Caro: What makes for a “good” internship?, published in [Internships, Employability and the Search for decent work experience](#), ILO, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> [Fraudulent contracting of work: Abusing traineeship status \(Austria, Finland, Spain and UK\)](#), Eurofound 2017.

The 2014 Council Recommendation sets out the minimum requirements for good quality traineeships but implementation varies across member states

**32** The 2014 Council Recommendation asked member states to put in practice several principles for a good quality traineeship. We have grouped these key principles into six clusters (see [Figure 7](#)).

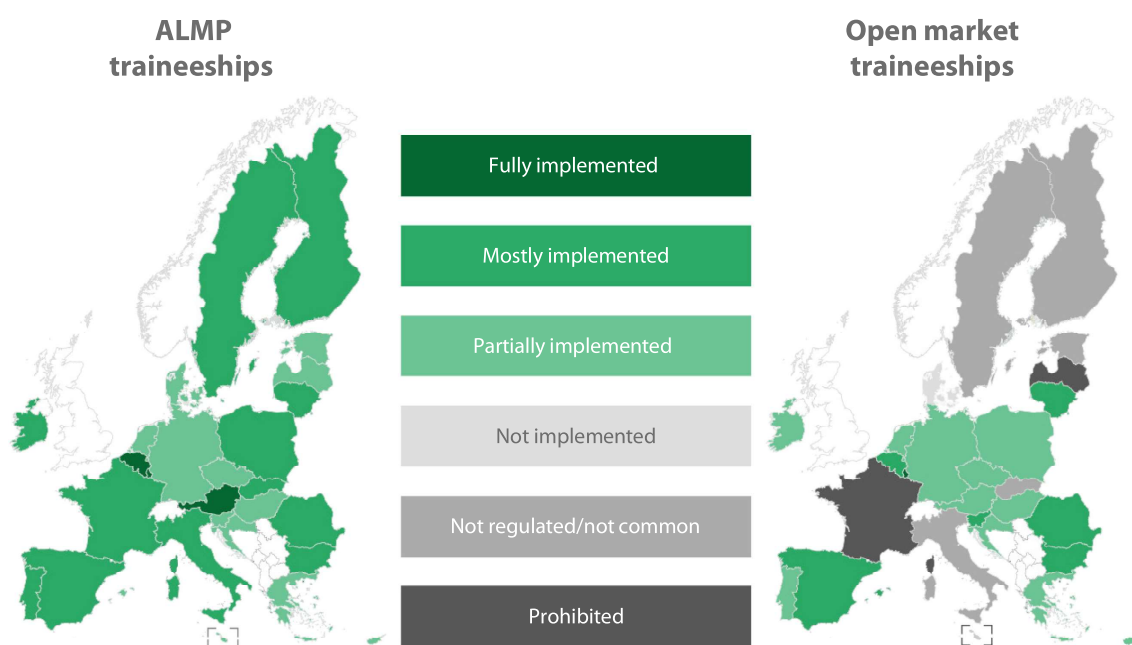
**Figure 7 – Key principles of quality traineeships according to the 2014 Council Recommendation grouped in clusters**

PRINCIPLES	CLUSTERS
<p><b>Conclusion of a written traineeship agreement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Traineeships based on written agreement</li> <li>— Written agreements indicate educational objectives, working conditions, if compensation provided and how much, rights/obligations of all parties, duration</li> <li>— Ensure that the traineeship agreement sets out the rights and obligations of the trainee and the traineeship provider, including policies on confidentiality and the ownership of intellectual property rights</li> </ul>	<p><b>I. Written traineeship agreement</b></p>
<p><b>Learning and training objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Tasks allow the trainee to work towards their learning and training objectives</li> <li>— Traineeship providers assign a supervisor for the trainee</li> </ul>	<p><b>II. Learning and training objectives</b></p>
<p><b>Working conditions applicable to the trainee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Trainees' rights and working conditions are respected, including limits to maximum weekly working hours, weekly rest periods, minimum holiday entitlements</li> <li>— Traineeship providers clarify if they provide trainees with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o health and accident insurance</li> <li>o sick leave</li> </ul> </li> <li>— The written agreement clarifies if the trainee is entitled to an allowance or compensation, and the amount</li> </ul>	<p><b>III. Working conditions</b></p>
<p><b>Reasonable duration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— The duration of the traineeship does not exceed six months, except when justified</li> <li>— The conditions for an extension or renewal of the traineeship are clarified</li> <li>— The written agreement includes information on how the trainee or the traineeship provider can terminate the contract</li> </ul>	<p><b>IV. Reasonable duration and renewal</b></p>
<p><b>Proper recognition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— The knowledge, skills, and competences acquired by the trainee are recognised by the traineeship provider through an assessment and a certificate</li> </ul>	<p><b>V. Recognition and validation</b></p>
<p><b>Transparency requirements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Traineeship providers include information on the traineeship conditions in their vacancy notices</li> </ul>	<p><b>VI. Transparency in recruitment</b></p>

Source: ECA based on [Developing quality traineeships for young people](#), ILO, 2017.

**33** The degree to which the Council’s 2014 quality principles are implemented in member state legislation varies. According to the [2023 Commission evaluation of the Quality Framework for Traineeships](#), in national legislation there is generally a high degree of implementation for ALMP traineeships and a more modest degree of implementation for open-market traineeships (see [Figure 8](#)). In France, open-market traineeships are [prohibited by law](#) to ensure that all traineeships are monitored by a third party. Luxembourg has modified its [employment law](#) to incorporate all quality principles set out in the 2014 Council Recommendation.

**Figure 8 – Degree of implementation of the 2014 quality principles in member state legislation, 2023**



*Source:* Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, tables 4 and 5, Study supporting the evaluation of the quality framework for traineeships, table 10, Youthwiki, SPRINT: Standardize best PRactices about INTernships – Erasmus+ project 2017-1-FR01-KA203-037293 – General report.

**34** Overall, representatives of both the employee and employer side agree with the principle clusters of the 2014 Council Recommendation (see [Figure 9](#)).

**Figure 9 – The Council’s 2014 key quality principles v elements of quality traineeships according to stakeholders**

	2014	2017	2022	2023		
	QFT	ILO	EYF	ETUC	Employers	EP
Written traineeship agreement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Learning and training objectives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Working conditions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reasonable duration and renewal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Recognition and validation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transparency in recruitment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Compensation/ remuneration		✓	✓	✓		✓
Social protection		✓	✓	✓		✓
Break period between the end and start of traineeships			✓	✓		
Maximising the number of trainees per employer			✓	✓		
No requirement by employer of previous working experience				✓		✓
Access to worker’s representation and Trade Unions				✓		✓

*Source:* Council recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeship, ILO 2017: Developing quality traineeships for young people, EYF 2022: European Youth Forum’s demands on the review of the Quality Framework on Traineeships, ETUC 2023: European Trade Union Confederation Resolution on Quality Traineeships, Joint European Employers’ Statement on Traineeships, EP 2023: European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on quality traineeships in the Union (2020/2005(INL)).

## Not all trainees benefit from a good quality traineeship

**35** This section describes the perception of respondents from the Eurobarometer surveys and the Eurofound survey in relation to the main principles proposed by the 2014 Council Recommendation. We have extracted responses relating to the two categories mainly covered by this review from the 2023 Eurobarometer data: on ALMP and open-market traineeships. The numbers referring to the Eurofound survey include all types of traineeships. Based on these data, we noted that not all trainees experience a good quality traineeship:

- First, according to the 2023 Eurofound survey, 68 % of respondents had their traineeship on the basis of a written contract or **agreement**. While not completely comparable, the same figure was 60 % in the 2013 Eurobarometer survey results;
- Second, for a traineeship to truly benefit the trainee, it is necessary that it includes **learning content, objectives** and that the work is **supervised** and **evaluated** at the end of the traineeship. Of the Eurobarometer survey respondents, 74.5 % agreed that they learnt things that would be useful professionally. A mentor who could help and support the trainee is also considered necessary. According to the survey data, in 2023 three quarters of respondents had a mentor (73.4 %);
- Third, in the 2023 Eurobarometer 68.7 % of respondents agreed that apart from their pay, their **working conditions** (in terms of equipment, working hours, workload, treatment etc.) were equivalent to those of regular staff;
- Lastly, with regard to traineeship **duration**, the 2014 Council Recommendation proposes that high quality traineeships do not last longer than six months. At the same time, according to other frameworks, the traineeship experience should not be shorter than one<sup>16</sup> or two months<sup>17</sup>: according to the 2023 Eurobarometer, 67.2 % of respondents stated that their most recent traineeship lasted between one and six months, while 16.7 % say that their traineeship was shorter than a month and 14.4 % say that it was longer than six months.

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<sup>16</sup> See the [EP Resolution of 14 June 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on quality traineeships in the Union](#).

<sup>17</sup> See [European Trade Union Confederation Resolution on Quality Traineeships](#).

## Around 60 % of traineeships offer compensation and access to social protection

**36** The need for trainees to receive a compensation is the point of disagreement with regard to the key attributes of a good quality traineeship. [Employers](#) consider that a traineeship is a learning experience and that trainees are typically not workers (see paragraph [24](#)). They also argue that the relationship between compensation and higher quality traineeships is not supported by evidence, and that an obligation to remunerate trainees would put increased financial and administrative burden on companies. Meanwhile, the [European Youth Forum](#) (EYF) and the [European Trade Union Confederation](#) have been campaigning to ban unpaid traineeships since 2016. Their argument, apart from the [ILO study](#) (paragraph [30](#)), is that *not all young people can afford unpaid traineeships*, which further increases inequalities among young people, especially those from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. In its [resolution of 14 June 2023](#), the [European Parliament](#) also called for better conditions and adequate compensation for trainees.

**37** The questions in the 2023 Eurobarometer asked whether trainees were paid or offered **financial compensation**. For ALMP and open-market traineeships, almost two-thirds (65 %) of the respondents had received financial compensation for their traineeship (see [Figure 10](#)). Finally, according to the Eurofound survey that covers all kinds of traineeships, there is a gender gap: while 58 % of male trainees replied that they have received compensation, this figure is only 45 % for female ones.

**38** Moreover, as regards the financial compensation, there is a large variation between member states' legal requirements. A recent study<sup>18</sup> found that in 10 EU member states there is no legal obligation to pay trainees in open-market traineeships. In 11 member states there is a legal obligation to pay trainees based on general labour law, while there are 4 member states, which set a legal obligation through specific traineeship-related legislation.

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<sup>18</sup> [European Network of Public Employment Services \(2021\), Remuneration of Open-Market Traineeships in EU-27.](#)

**Figure 10 – Share of respondents in the 2023 Eurobarometer having followed an ALMP or open-market traineeship who were offered financial compensation**



Source: Flash Eurobarometer 523/2023.

**39** Similarly, regarding **social protection**, 63.5 % of 2023 Eurobarometer respondents stated that they had full (32.1 %) or partial (31.4 %) access to social protection during their traineeship. In terms of type of social protection, the Eurofound survey found that the chances of having a work accident insurance was the most likely (75 %), followed by health insurance (68 %) and pension contribution (42 %).

## Support for traineeships from EU funds

**40** The 2014 Council Recommendation invited member states to make use of European Social Fund (ESF) and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) to increase the number and improve the quality of traineeships. In addition, the Commission directly manages Erasmus+ and EaSI, which can provide funding for cross-border traineeships. Furthermore, all of the EU institutions offer traineeship opportunities to young people, and these are financed from their administrative budgets.

### Traineeships funded through the ESF/YEI or the ESF+ are mostly ALMP measures in support of the Youth Guarantee

**41** During the 2014-2020 period, EU funding available for traineeships came from the ESF and the YEI. In the current 2021-2027 period, the YEI was fully integrated into the ESF+. Member states with a NEETs rate above the EU-average should allocate at least 12.5 % of their ESF+ resources to youth-related measures<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, there is no specific funding from cohesion policy funds for traineeships.

**42** Out of 188 ESF/YEI programmes in the 2014-2020 period, we identified 76 programmes in 22 out of 27 member states that had allocated funding to integrating young people into the labour market, for a total of around €13.6 billion. YEI funding accounts for more than 60 % of this amount (€8.6 billion). For the 2021-2027 period, we identified 101 programmes for youth employment and socio-economic integration in 23 member states. The total allocation planned has however decreased to €10.9 billion. By mid-2023, member states had spent around 80 % of the planned ESF/YEI allocations for the 2014-2020 programmes, indicating a yearly spending of €1.53 billion. By that time, no member state had incurred or declared actual spending for any of the 2021-2027 ESF+ programmes.

**43** Through our survey we received further details on these programmes. According to the replies obtained, for both periods two-third of the programmes had references to traineeships and around half had published specific calls for proposals. For the 2014-2020 period, around half of the programmes had already contracted projects, while for the 2021-2027 less than half had done so.

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<sup>19</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, article 7 indent 6.

**44** When responding to our survey, most managing authorities were however unable to identify the exact amounts spent on traineeships due to several reasons:

- o neither the 2014-2020 nor the 2021-2027 monitoring and reporting framework collect specific expenditure data for traineeships;
- o the bulk of the funding is spent in support of the Youth Guarantee. In these cases, traineeships are only one of several measures that can be offered to a young person. Moreover, at least for the ESF, most traineeship related costs are not for the work placement itself, but rather for administrative capacity building<sup>20</sup>;
- o only around half of the programmes include specific calls or measures for traineeships, for which such data can be produced (see [Annex I](#)).

**45** Our survey indicates that almost all of the traineeship-related measures funded by ESF/YEI or the ESF+ are in the area of ALMP. [Box 2](#) provides information on traineeship projects identified in France, Portugal and Ireland.

## Box 2

### Examples of traineeship related projects

#### *France*

Mayotte's regional ESF programme implemented a project which financed traineeships for professional baccalaureate (*Bac Pro*) and post-secondary higher technical certificate (*Brevet de technicien supérieur*) students in mainland France and La Réunion, because the traineeship possibilities on Mayotte are limited.

The project covered the following costs: plane tickets, accommodation costs, and other expenses related to on-site training. The planned amount for the overall project was €661 000.

The average duration of traineeships was one month. According to the managing authority, the project has faced difficulties due to COVID-19 confinement measures. As a result, only 27 of the planned 162 students have been able to benefit from the programme (16 %).

<sup>20</sup> [Special report 03/2015](#) and [Special report 05/2017](#).

### **Portugal**

In Portugal, the “professional internships” (*Estágios Profissionais*) operation was financed by the ESF to help equip young, unemployed or disadvantaged people to find long-term employment.

Implemented by the Portuguese Institute for Employment and Vocational Training the project matched young graduates and other unemployed people’s skills and backgrounds with the requirements of a wide range of traineeships – and upskills them through work placements.

During the 2014-2020 period more than 100 000 trainees were supported with a total EU contribution of €521 million.

### **Ireland**

Ireland did not have any specific call or measure for traineeships under its ESF programme. The 6 560 ALMP traineeships provided through its local Educational and Training Boards (local bodies responsible for continuous education) were financed by the YEI.

**46** In terms of the ESF/YEI and the ESF+ funding supporting the Youth Guarantee, [the indicator framework for monitoring](#) makes it possible to follow up the uptake of traineeship offers by young unemployed persons in member states and their integration into the labour market after 6, 12 and 18 months.

**47** Data collected show that traineeships, as part of the Youth Guarantee, became progressively less frequently used in the 2014-2020 period to break out of unemployment. On average, this resulted in 270 000 traineeships annually over the 2014-2020 period for the EU as a whole. In 2021, traineeships represented 2.5 % of all exits<sup>21</sup>, amounting to at least 241 000 young people.

**48** Those who did participate in traineeships generally had a successful employment outcome. In 2021, 71 % of participants in YG traineeships across the EU were in employment after six months of exiting the YG.

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<sup>21</sup> Data collection for monitoring of Youth Guarantee schemes: 2021, European Commission, March 2023.

**49** The YG rules<sup>22</sup> recommend that the quality criteria laid out in the Quality Framework should be considered as minimum quality standards for all such traineeships provided within the context of the YG. Based on YG monitoring data, the Council’s 2014 quality principles seem to be broadly respected.

**50** According to our analysis, all traineeship programmes provided in the context of the Youth Guarantee for 2021 are covered by a written agreement and two-third provide for a mentor. At the same time, the duration of these programmes that provide traineeships differ, ranging from a few days (for instance France) to longer than six months in seven countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Portugal). Moreover, only one-third of the programmes provide a certification at the end of the programme. Lastly, more than three-quarters provide remuneration.

### Data gaps on traineeships funded through the Recovery and Resilience Facility

**51** Under the RRF, the “Policies for the next generation” policy pillar includes specific measures for youth employment. Thirteen member states have programmed RRF reform or investments related to youth employment in their national Recovery and Resilience Plans. Overall, 11 % of the planned expenditure (20 measures) in this pillar are related to youth employment. Traineeships for young people were specifically mentioned by four member states: Estonia, Spain, Portugal and Slovakia (see [Box 3](#)).

#### Box 3

##### RRF measure for youth employment in Estonia

The “My first job” (M1T) scheme includes two components: a wage subsidy paid to the employer and the reimbursement of the training costs of a young person (between 16 and 29 years old and registered as unemployed with no or only short-term work experience). An amount of up to €2 500 is paid to the young person’s employer.

*Source:* Investment 6.6 of the [Estonian Recovery and Resilience Plan](#).

<sup>22</sup> Point 6.4 of the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Youth Guarantee on the YG and Staff Working Document for the Reinforced YG](#) (p. 35).

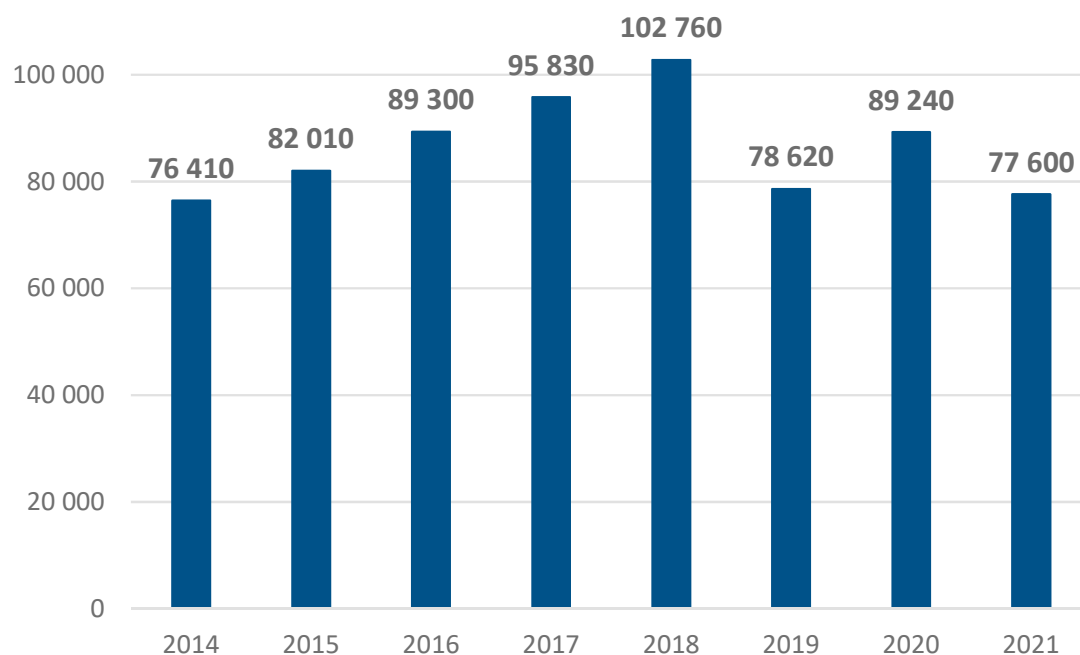
**52** However, for most of these measures we could not determine the amount of funding for traineeships because the traineeship-components are only one part of the measures that contribute to the satisfactory achievement of the related milestones and targets. Similarly, the common RRF indicator 14: “Number of young people aged 15-29 receiving support” does not indicate how many of these young people participated in traineeships.

### **Traineeships funded by Erasmus+ are mainly cross-border traineeships for students in higher education**

**53** During the 2014-2020 period, the total Erasmus+ budget amounted to €16.5 billion, of which €1 billion of grants for higher education traineeships, around €145 million per year. The EU is continuing to fund traineeships for young people in higher education in the 2021-2027 period. The budget for the whole programme has increased significantly to more than €26 billion, but at this stage it is unclear how much of this will be allocated to traineeships.

**54** Between 2014 and 2020 more than 600 000 young people in higher education participated in an Erasmus+ funded traineeship abroad (see [Figure 11](#)), before and shortly after graduating, resulting in around 90 000 per year. The number of traineeships reached 100 thousand in the call year 2018 but dropped in call year 2019 due to the COVID lockdowns (traineeships for the call year 2019 only actually started in spring 2020). On average, these traineeships lasted for 4 months. The average traineeship grant in this period was €426 per month, in addition to any national or host organisation student grants. An example of an Erasmus+ traineeship initiative is the digital opportunity traineeships (see [Box 4](#)).

**Figure 11 – Number of traineeships from Erasmus+ for higher education, 2014-2021**



Note: Figures refer to call years 2014-2021.

Source: ECA based on Commission data, data for 2021 are not final.

#### Box 4

##### Digital opportunity traineeships (DOT)

DOT initiative was launched to better support students to acquire digital skills across all study disciplines. It aims at providing an opportunity for recent graduates and students to gain practical experience in the area of technology in a company abroad by matching the needs of companies in need of digitally skilled workforce, and the students and recent graduates looking for a first experience in the tech sector. Between 2018 and 2020, almost 32 000 trainees found a placement. As a result of the 2021 and 2022 calls, 15 020 placements are expected.

**55** Erasmus+ also finances vocational education and training opportunities abroad some of which include a training and work practice element, similarly to traineeships. However, no figures are available for traineeships within vocational education and training opportunities abroad.

**56** Erasmus+ also supported traineeships under the [European Solidarity Corps \(ESC\)](#) initiative. The Commission estimated<sup>23</sup> that 307 traineeships were financed from Erasmus+ in the 2018-2020 period in an amount of around €0.7 million.

**57** A 2017 evaluation study of Erasmus+ found that the main motivation for students to participate in traineeships is to live abroad and meet new people, to learn or improve a foreign language and to gain work experience in another language<sup>24</sup>. 94 % of trainees were satisfied with their experience<sup>25</sup>. According to the Commission, the good quality of Erasmus+ traineeships is ensured on different levels:

- o first, only accredited institutions are allowed to send or receive trainees, and they must follow the [programme guide](#);
- o second, at an individual level, [learning agreements](#) are established between the trainees and the host institutions/organisations. These agreements lay down basic provisions, such as learning outcomes, tasks, mentoring, monitoring, working time and conditions, insurances, contributions from the host, support and other arrangements.

**58** According to an impact study<sup>26</sup> on the outcomes of Erasmus+ traineeships, 40 % of participants who undertook an Erasmus+ traineeship between 2017 and 2019 were offered a position by the employer that hosted them. In 2014, this share was 33 %.

## The EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation directly and indirectly supports traineeships

**59** [EaSI](#) is a financing instrument to support a high quality and sustainable employment, guarantee adequate and decent social protection, combat social exclusion and poverty, and improve working conditions. During the 2014-2020 period, the EaSI had an overall budget of around €919 million. The Commission estimates that around €5 million were allocated to support traineeships, either directly or indirectly. For the 2021-2027 period, EaSI was merged in the [ESF+](#).

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<sup>23</sup> Commission estimation based on ESC dashboard.

<sup>24</sup> [Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes](#), 2017, p. 126.

<sup>25</sup> [Idem](#), p. 127.

<sup>26</sup> [Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study](#), 2019, p. 102.

**60** There are three main activities under which EaSI supports traineeships. First, the EURES portal provides information on traineeships in member states and also includes traineeship advertisements submitted by public employment services in member states. A study showed that only 36 % of respondents found the portal useful for finding a traineeship abroad<sup>27</sup>. Second, EaSI also provided funding for “Your first EURES Job” (YfEJ), a mobility scheme that promotes cross-border traineeships and jobs. During the 2014-2020 period, 10 YfEJ projects were implemented supporting 949 young people to carry out traineeships abroad. In 2019, the YfEJ programme was merged into the integrated action “EURES Targeted Mobility Scheme” which has been continued in 2021-2027 period. The calls for projects under YfEJ required that the traineeships provided were to comply with the European Quality Framework for Traineeships.

**61** Third, EaSI also funded traineeships in the context of the [European Solidarity Corps](#) jobs and traineeships strand in 2019 and 2020. In these projects, 255 placements took place, including 68 traineeships. The call for proposal required that traineeships provided within the ESC should “comply as much as possible with the European Quality Framework for Traineeships”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Study supporting the ex-post EURES evaluation and the second biennial EURES report, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Implementing Guide of the EaSI Call for proposal VP/2016/018: European Solidarity Corps Occupational Strand, p. 12.

## Traineeships in the EU institutions

**62** The EU provides funds for traineeships at the EU institutions through the administrative expenditure budget line. The Commission welcomed the first three trainees in 1960. Since then, the number of participants has grown steadily and other EU institutions have also started their own traineeship programmes. These traineeships provide an opportunity for young people to familiarise themselves with the objectives and goals of the EU integration processes and policies. They also allow for trainees to gain experience in a multicultural, multilingual and multi-ethnic professional environment. Currently, there are traineeship programmes within the largest European institutions and bodies.

**63** Generally, there are specific traineeship periods during which trainees complete a traineeship of up to five months, and these are organised twice per year. In 2022, nearly 4 700 young people completed a paid traineeship at EU institutions and two bodies based in Brussels, Frankfurt, Luxembourg and Strasbourg (see [Table 2](#)). The amount spent on traineeships in 2022 for these institutions and bodies was around €30 million (excluding the ECB for which we did not receive information).

**Table 2 – Number of trainees in the EU institutions and bodies, 2022**

	Number of paid trainees	Number of atypical/unpaid trainees	Share of paid trainees within total staff number
European Parliament (Trainees in the Secretariat and trainees with Members)	1 834	20	23 %
European Council and Council of the EU	109	25	3 %
European Commission	1 861	597	6 %
Court of Justice of the EU	212	55	9 %
European Central Bank	525	NA	12 %
European Court of Auditors	51	9	6 %
European Economic and Social Committee	52	7	7 %
European Committee of Regions	48	12	9 %
Total	4 692	725	9 %

*Note:* Unpaid traineeships means trainees not paid from the EU budget.

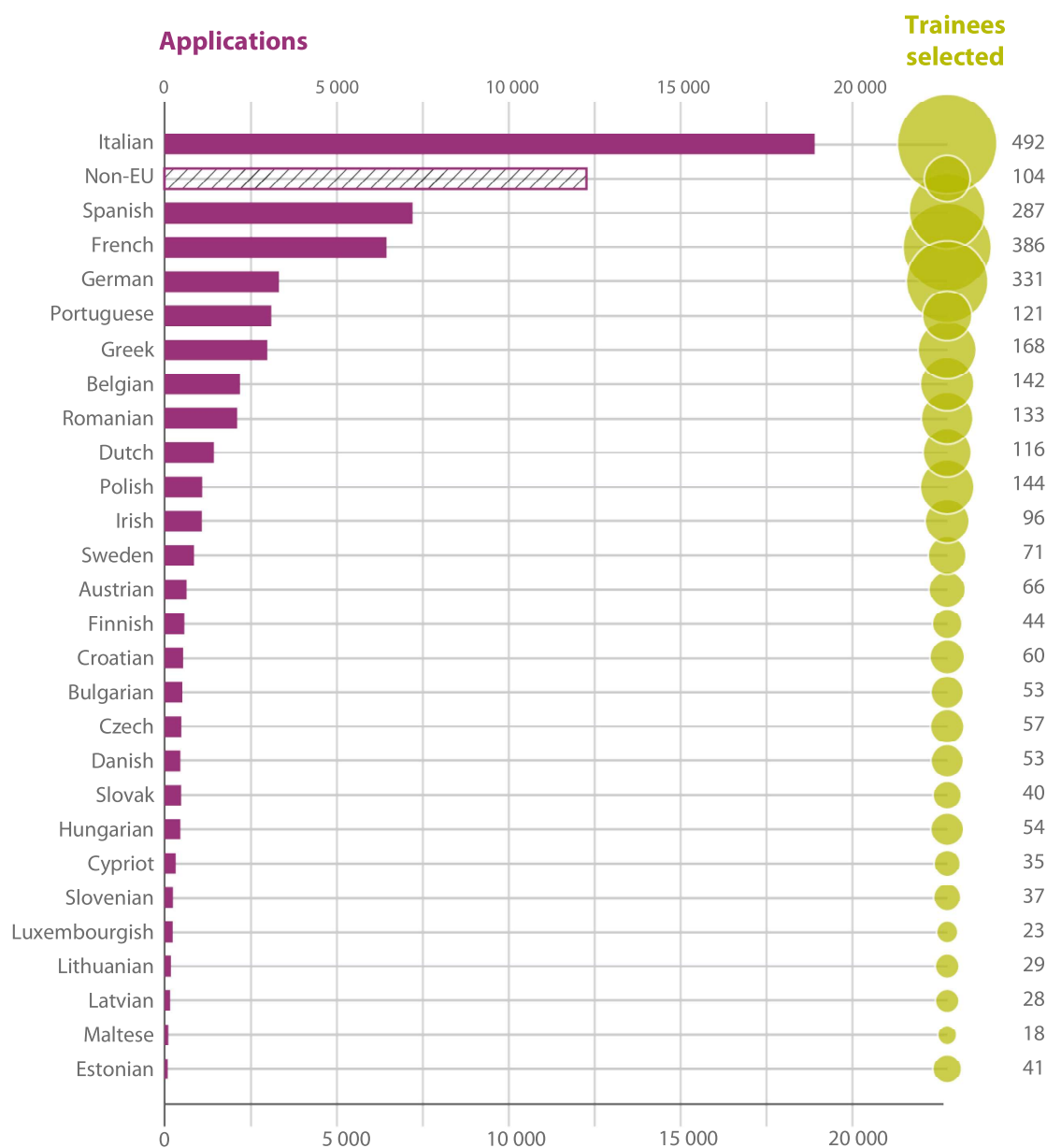
*Source:* The EU institutions, [Total staff number for the European Parliament](#) and the [2022 ECB Annual Report](#).

**64** The EU institutions and bodies have established their own rules for their traineeship programmes, and these are available on their respective online application page. The rules are very similar across all reviewed EU institutions and bodies. In general, the entry requirement is that the candidate must have completed at least a bachelor's degree. The trainee needs to have a thorough knowledge of one of the EU's official languages and a good knowledge of another official language. Trainees must be EU citizens, although candidates from non-EU member states can apply to some of the programmes. At the Commission for instance, around 5-10 % of the trainees are non-EU citizens. Another common principle is that someone who has already completed a traineeship in one EU institution cannot apply for a second traineeship in another EU institution. These rules are updated regularly.

**65** Each EU institution and body organises its own selection process. The selection process is highly competitive. For instance, in 2022, there were 4 692 paid traineeship places available in the institutions and bodies in our review with around 68 000 applicants.

**66** All EU institutions and bodies strive to select applicants from different background and origins, to ensure a broad geographical coverage and gender balance. However, according to statistics on the applicants and selected trainees in the institutions and bodies in our review, southern and eastern European countries are overrepresented, while northern and western European countries are underrepresented (see [Figure 12](#)).

**Figure 12 – Geographical balance of paid trainees at the EU institutions and bodies: applications vs trainees selected, 2022**



*Note:* Traineeships at European Central Bank and with Members of the European Parliament are not included. Statistics based on first nationality.

*Source:* ECA based on data provided by the EU institutions and bodies in the review.

**67** Regarding access to these traineeships for young people with disabilities, there have been developments in recent years. In 2022, after a pilot phase in 2020, the Council launched the “[Positive action programme for trainees with disabilities](#)”, where up to six places are guaranteed for EU nationals with a recognised disability. A similar initiative, the “[Positive Action Scheme](#)”, has been offered at the European Parliament

since 2021. Both schemes offer successful candidates an additional payment of up to 50 % of trainees' monthly grant, to compensate for additional costs incurred.

**68** As a general rule, vacancy notices for traineeships are publicly available and recruitment is transparent, except for the Commission's atypical traineeships (see [Box 5](#)), and Members of the European Parliament traineeships. In these two cases, the selection is not centralised but takes place on a DG/ MEP level.

**69** The decision on traineeships (see [Annex II](#)) in each EU institution and body sets out the conditions for traineeships: trainee's rights and obligations, remuneration, duration, early termination, and future employment prospects. Moreover, a traineeship agreement is signed with the candidates when they enter into service. Trainees are also assigned a supervisor. Their traineeship is recognised either by an attestation or, upon request, a letter of recommendation.

**70** Even if traineeships in the EU institutions are compensated in general, in some institutions a proportion (between 1 and 30 %) are unpaid, see [Table 2](#). These traineeships are offered to people who receive a compensation somewhere else, and the traineeship is needed for their professional path. [Box 5](#) provides examples of unpaid traineeships.

## Box 5

### Traineeships at the EU institutions not covered by the EU budget

#### *Council*

Unpaid traineeships are for candidates enrolled with a national, including regional-level, school of administration or other educational establishment for current or future civil servants. These traineeships last for minimum of two and a maximum of five months.

#### *Commission*

The Commission refers to unpaid traineeships as “atypical traineeships”. There is no standard duration for these traineeships (they can last from a few days to six months) and are not centrally organised by the Commission. They cover a wide variety of traineeships, ranging from secondary school students who spend a week at the Commission, to university students who have not yet completed their studies and require work experience in a specific area as part of their course (for example, in competition law), to junior public administration employees who must complete a vocational training (for example, the German legal trainees, *Rechtsreferendaren*).

The Commission provides neither remuneration, nor social protection for these “atypical trainees” but may check that they have means of subsistence and social protection from other sources.

According to the Commission, the number of this type of traineeships has decreased over time. In 2022, there were 597 atypical trainees in the Commission, out of which 89 stayed for less than 1 month, 252 stayed between 1 and 3 months, and 256 stayed more than 3 months.

*Source: Decision No 57/22 of the Secretary General of the Council on rules relating to traineeships at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union and Evaluation of the European Commission’s traineeship programme, 2013.*

**71** Most EU institutions expect trainees to have their own valid health insurance. If trainees do not have health insurance or would like to complement their existing health insurance, the institutions offer complementary insurance for free or a small subsidised amount. The institutions have a common framework contract for this matter.

**72** ECA calculations (see [Annex II](#)) for comparing the basic cost of living expenses (based on [Eurostat data](#)) with the compensation provided to trainees show that the compensation covers basic costs of living for trainees in Brussels and in Strasbourg throughout the traineeship but does not cover living expenses for trainees at any

institution in Luxembourg, even though some institutions in Luxembourg provide higher compensation.

**73** The EU Institutions and bodies do not have a common policy regarding the employment of trainees joining the EU civil service, once they have completed their traineeship, whether on a permanent or on a temporary basis. If trainees want to secure a regular position within the EU administration, they need to apply through the same selection procedure as any other EU citizen. Nevertheless, a previous traineeship in an EU institution may be considered relevant work experience.

**74** Some institutions offer special integration programmes (like the Commission's [Junior Professionals Programme \(JPP\)](#) since 2016, the Parliament's [Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme](#) since 2021 and the Council's Junior Policy Team Programme since 2022) allowing for the best performing trainees to participate in a selection procedure to be potentially recruited.

**75** In general, the reviewed EU institutions and bodies do not monitor the trainees' professional careers once they completed the programme. As a result, they cannot measure the effectiveness of their traineeships in helping trainees to enter the labour market. Nevertheless, the European Youth Forum and the European Disability Forum we interviewed have generally expressed a positive view of the quality and inclusiveness of traineeships at the EU institutions. This positive view is also echoed by the trainees themselves: a 2013 evaluation<sup>29</sup> of the Commission's "Blue book traineeship" found that around 70 % agreed that the traineeship was useful for their career. Moreover, 82 % of the trainees were satisfied with the knowledge they acquired and 92 % were satisfied with the working conditions offered by the EU institutions.

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<sup>29</sup> [Evaluation of the European Commission's traineeship programme, 2013.](#)

## Closing remarks: Challenges and opportunities

**76** In recent years, traineeships have become an important point of entry into the job market for young people. According to the Eurobarometer surveys, over the last 10 years the number of young people carrying out a traineeship has significantly increased. In 2023, more than two-thirds of respondents undertook at least one traineeship before finding regular employment.

**77** There are no official statistics on the overall number of traineeships carried out in the EU. We estimate that roughly 3.7 million young people undertake a traineeship each year. For systematic data collection at EU level, a common definition would have to be agreed between member states.

**78** The 2014 Council Recommendation refers to a “limited period of work practice”, but it does not clarify whether, or if so under what conditions trainees might be considered workers or not. The implications of this are important given that the EU’s social policy competence is limited to the working condition of workers. If trainees are considered workers, they are protected by the EU law for the rights of workers.

**79** In 16 of 27 member states, there is no legal or conventional definition of what a traineeship entails. Where definitions do exist, they differ from country to country. Against this backdrop, it is not clear whether the quality criteria laid down in the 2014 Council Recommendation are effectively applied by employers across all member states.

**80** The need for a compensation of trainees is the point of disagreement as regards the key attributes of a quality traineeship. Employers consider that traineeship is a learning experience and trainees are typically not workers. They also argue that the relationship between compensation and higher quality of traineeships is not supported by evidence, and that an obligation to remunerate trainees would put increased administrative burden on companies. Meanwhile, trade union representatives and youth organisations have been campaigning for banning unpaid traineeships.

**81** A third of ALMP and open-market traineeships are still unpaid, while for the remaining two-thirds, compensation may not be sufficient to cover basic expenses. This poses particular problems for young people who must decline such traineeships for not having the financial means to pay for their living during this period.

**82** The EU supports traineeships for the most disadvantaged young people by providing funds for ALMP traineeships in member states. The EU also facilitates cross-border traineeships through its directly managed programmes. These traineeships are compensated. As regards the traineeships offered by the EU institutions, the compensation provided does not always cover basic cost of living in the place of employment. Therefore, these traineeships are not affordable for all young people in the EU.

**83** While the EU provides considerable funds for traineeships, exact amounts cannot be determined because this expenditure category is not specifically monitored for most programmes. As a result, this means that the effects of the EU funding cannot be assessed making it difficult to establish what has been achieved.

**84** Finally, we identified the following challenges and opportunities relating to traineeships, which could be considered in light of the upcoming revision of the 2014 Council Recommendation:

- varying definitions of traineeship, with lack of clarity as regard what the concept entails;
- the limited amount of reliable data on traineeships - hindering evidence-based policy making;
- the inconsistent application of the 2014 Council Recommendation on quality traineeships in member states; and
- potential variations in opportunities and accessibility to traineeships for young people from different social backgrounds.

This review was adopted by Chamber II, headed by Mrs Annemie Turtelboom, Member of the Court of Auditors, in Luxembourg at its meeting of 13 December 2023.

*For the Court of Auditors*

Tony Murphy  
*President*

# Annexes

## Annex I – Data collections used in the Review

### Eurobarometer surveys

To illustrate general trends for the purposes of our review, we used data from two Eurobarometer surveys on traineeships in the report. Flash Eurobarometer surveys are ad-hoc thematic surveys, which are carried out within a short space of time on a wide variety of specific topics relevant to the activities of the European institutions. They are characterised by relying on either telephone or online interviewing methods.

There were two Flash Eurobarometer surveys relating to traineeships: [Flash Eurobarometer 378/2013](#): The experience of traineeships in the EU and [Flash Eurobarometer 523/2023](#): Integration of young people into the labour market with a particular focus on traineeships.

Eurobarometer surveys are not statistically representative. Comparing the 2023 data with the 2013 data allows identifying trends. However, these comparisons must be interpreted with caution, due to differences in the survey method and the questionnaire used. Additionally, the EU averages calculated for 2013 include the UK and exclude Croatia.

### The Eurofound survey

The [Living and Working in the EU and Neighbouring Countries' survey 2023](#) edition was carried out by Eurofound. The survey was conducted online among members of Eurofound's e-survey panel, as well as among respondents recruited via social media advertisements and posts. The data presented covers 2 666 respondents aged between 16 and 35. Data were weighted according to age and gender, education level and employment status, using the EU labour force survey and Eurostat population estimates as representative target data.

Upon the ECA's request, the 2023 edition included specific questions relating to traineeships. The following questions were included:

- participation in traineeship/apprenticeship and how many;
- satisfaction with the learning support;
- the extent to which the experience improved skills;
- the existence of a written contract;

- the existence and type of compensation (wage, accommodation, transport, food, other);
- the existence and type of social protection (health insurance, accident insurance, pension contribution, other);
- whether a job was offered following the traineeship;
- whether the traineeship was turned down due to lack of remuneration.

Eurofound provided the ECA with an analysis of the results in July 2023.

### **The EU labour force survey (EUROSTAT)**

The EU labour force survey (LFS) is the largest household sample survey providing annual and quarterly results on labour participation of people aged 15 and over, and on people outside the labour force. Part of this data collection, the “[recent job starters by sex and age](#)” provides quarterly information on entry into the labour market for all age brackets.

According to the LFS in the period between July 2022 and June 2023 19.6 million young people (18-35 years old) started their current job in the last three months in the EU-27. Taking into account that according to the [2023 Eurobarometer question 3](#) (“Q3 How would you categorise your first work experience?”) 19 % of the respondents categorised their first work experience as a traineeship, we estimate that around 3.7 million young people (= 19.6 million x 19 %) may undertake traineeships every year as their first experience of the world of work.

It should be noted that this figure only aims to provide a rough estimate, considering that it is based on two different sources and that the Eurobarometer has no guaranteed response rate.

### **The ECA survey on traineeships to ESF managing authorities**

On 8 May 2023, the ECA launched a survey to managing authorities of ESF programmes through the EU survey platform. The aim of the survey was to gain more information about how programmes addressed traineeships in member states.

Our survey included two separate blocks referring to the relevant two periods (2014-2020 and 2021-2027) and asked for information on the specific priorities and funding relating to traineeships: the existence of specific programmes/calls/measures, projects, allocated amounts and actual spending. We also asked about the outputs (i.e. the number of trainees supported) through the projects.

Programmes were selected based on their planned support for the integration of young people in the labour market (intervention field (IF) 103). In the 2014-2020 period 76 programmes were selected. We identified six more programmes through the analysis of their description.

The ECA received responses from 33 managing authorities in 18 member states, which implemented altogether 43 programmes for the 2014-2020 period and 34 for the 2021-2027 period.

In the 2014-2020 period out of the 43, 29 programmes included reference to traineeship in their description, 21 published traineeships specific calls, and 22 had contracted projects relating to traineeships.

In the 2021-2027 period, out of the 34 programmes that we received information for, 21 had references to traineeships in their texts, 19 had specific calls and 15 had funded projects to traineeships. *Figure 13* provides further information on the results from the survey.

**Figure 13 – ESF/YEI programmes (2014-2020 period) and ESF+ programmes (2021-2027 period) with a traineeship component, ECA survey responses**

Member state	Reference to traineeships in the OP		Calls/programmes/measures for traineeships		Projects supported for traineeships	
	2014-2020	2021-2027	2014-2020	2021-2027	2014-2020	2021-2027
Belgium	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Bulgaria	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Czechia	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Denmark	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Ireland	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Cyprus	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Latvia	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Luxembourg	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Malta	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Netherlands	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Austria	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Slovenia	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Finland	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Germany	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
France	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Portugal	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Croatia	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
Italy	●	◆	●	◆	●	◆
<b>TRAINEESHIP PARTIALLY ADDRESSED</b>						
<b>Germany (5)</b>						
2014-2020	3 out of 5		4 out of 5		4 out of 5	
2021-2027	2 out of 5		2 out of 5		2 out of 5	
<b>France (17)</b>						
2014-2020	10 out of 17		4 out of 17		5 out of 17	
<b>France (9)</b>						
2021-2027	4 out of 9		4 out of 9		2 out of 9	
<b>Portugal (2)</b>						
2014-2020					1 out of 2	
2021-2027			1 out of 2		1 out of 2	
<b>Croatia (2)</b>						
2014-2020	1 out of 2		1 out of 2			
2021-2027					1 out of 2	
<b>Italy (4)</b>						
2014-2020	3 out of 4				2 out of 4	
2021-2027					2 out of 4	

*Note:* The number of programmes is indicated in brackets. For France, we received information for 17 programmes in the 2014-2020 period, and 9 programmes in the 2021-2027 period.

*Source:* ECA.

## **Annex II – Traineeships programmes at the European institutions and bodies**

The decisions relating to the traineeship programmes for EU institutions and bodies reviewed by us are the following:

### **European Parliament**

- [Internal rules governing traineeships in the Secretariat of the European Parliament](#)
- [Rules concerning members' trainees bureau decision of 10 December 2018](#)

### **Council of EU/ European Council**

- [Decision No 57/22 of the Secretary General of the Council on rules relating to traineeships at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union](#)

### **European Commission**

- [Commission Decision of 2. 3.2005 – C\(2005\)458](#)

### **European Court of Justice**

- [Décision du Comité administratif de la Cour de justice de l'Union européenne, du 29 novembre 2021](#)

### **European Court of Auditors**

- [Decision No 25-2023 laying down rules for the employment of trainees at the European Court of Auditors](#)

### **Committee of the Regions**

- [CoR DECS/188/2022 – Decision on the rules governing traineeship schemes](#)

### **Economic and Social Committee**

- [Decision No 166/23 A laying down provisions regarding traineeships at the European Economic and Social Committee](#)

### **Calculation of the cost of living – Paragraph 72**

The cost of living calculation for the trainees in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg was based on Eurostat's [Purchasing power parities \(PPPs\), price level indices and real expenditures for ESA 2010 aggregates](#) [PRC\_PPP\_IND\_\_custom\_6963659] dataset.

We took the “Nominal expenditure per inhabitant (in euro)” indicator, which quantifies the amounts necessary for the basic cost of living in different cost categories. We used a limited number of cost items that were strictly limited to a modest life, namely:

- (1) Food and non-alcoholic beverages;
- (2) Clothing and footwear;
- (3) Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels;
- (4) Health;
- (5) Transport;
- (6) Communication.

The total (annual) amount of these items divided by 12 provided the monthly amounts for the three cities: €1 445 for Brussels, €2 116 for Luxembourg and €1 339 for Strasbourg.

# Abbreviations

**ALMP:** Active labour market policy

**Bac Pro:** Baccalauréat professionnel

**DG:** Directorate-General

**EaSI:** EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation

**ECB:** European Central Bank

**ERDF:** European Regional Development Fund

**ESC:** European Solidarity Corps

**ESF:** European Social Fund

**ESF+:** European Social Fund +

**EURES:** European Employment Services Network

**Eurofound:** European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

**ILO:** International Labour Organization

**NEET:** Not in employment, education or training

**OP:** Operational programme

**RRF:** Recovery and Resilience Facility

**TFEU:** Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

**YEI:** Youth Employment Initiative

**YfEj:** Your first EURES Job

**YG:** Youth Guarantee

# Glossary

**Apprenticeship:** Programme for learning a trade or profession through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction.

**Cohesion policy funds:** The four EU funds supporting economic, social and territorial cohesion across the EU in the 2021-2027 period: the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, and the Just Transition Fund.

**Council Recommendation:** Non-binding act by which the EU seeks to achieve certain ends without imposing a mandatory legal framework.

**Direct management:** Management of an EU fund or programme by the Commission alone, in contrast to shared management or indirect management.

**EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation:** EU programme that supported the employment and social protection/inclusion objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.

**Erasmus+:** EU programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, chiefly by giving higher and vocational education and training students and other young people the opportunity to study, learn and gain work-based experience abroad.

**EURES:** Network of employment services in EU and European Free Trade Association countries, designed to facilitate the free movement of workers.

**European Regional Development Fund:** EU fund that strengthens economic and social cohesion in the EU by financing investments to reduce imbalances between regions.

**European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions:** EU agency that provides information, advice and expertise in the field of EU social policy on the basis of comparative information, research and analysis.

**European Pillar of Social Rights:** EU framework with 20 principles covering equal opportunities and access to jobs, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.

**European Social Fund:** EU fund for creating educational and employment opportunities and improving the situation of people at risk of poverty. Superseded by the European Social Fund Plus.

**European Solidarity Corps:** EU initiative for young people to volunteer or work on projects that benefit communities in their own country or abroad.

**Managing authority:** The national, regional or local authority (public or private) designated by a member state to manage an EU-funded programme.

**National recovery and resilience plan:** Document setting out a member state's intended reforms and investments under the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

**Operational programme:** Framework for implementing EU-funded projects in a set period, reflecting the priorities and objectives laid down in partnership agreements between the Commission and individual member states.

**Recovery and Resilience Facility:** The EU's financial support mechanism to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and stimulate recovery, and meet the challenges of a greener and more digital future.

**Small and medium enterprise:** Size definition applied to companies and other organisations, based on the number of staff employed and certain financial criteria. Small enterprises have fewer than 50 staff, and turnover or a balance sheet total not exceeding €10 million. Medium-sized enterprises employ fewer than 250 staff, and have turnover up to €50 million or a balance sheet total up to €43 million.

**Youth Employment Initiative:** EU programme which supports young people not in education, employment or training in regions with a youth unemployment rate above 25 %.

**Youth Guarantee:** EU scheme under which young people who become unemployed or leave formal education are offered employment or vocational training opportunities within 4 months.

## ECA team

This ECA's review on EU actions addressing traineeships for young people was adopted by Chamber II Investment for cohesion, growth and inclusion spending areas, headed by ECA Member Annemie Turtelboom. The task was led by ECA Member Eva Lindström, supported by Kristina Maksinen, Head of Private Office and Johan Stalhammar, Private Office Attaché; Elena Graziuso, Policy Assistant, Maria Eulàlia Reverté i Casas, Principal Manager; Agota Krenusz, Head of Task; Fernando Pascual Gil and Manja Ernst, Auditors. Agnese Balode provided graphical support. Laura McMillan provided linguistic support.



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The share of young people completing a traineeship before taking up a regular job significantly increased over the last 10 years. Studies show that traineeships can help young people to make the transition to regular employment. The 2014 Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships (under update at the time of publication) establishes key criteria for good quality traineeships. Our review provides an overview of the EU actions and funding supporting traineeships. We identified challenges related to the: varying definition of traineeships, limited reliable data hindering evidence-based policy making, inconsistent application of the 2014 Council Recommendation on quality traineeships in member states and potential variations in opportunities and accessibility for young people from different social backgrounds.

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