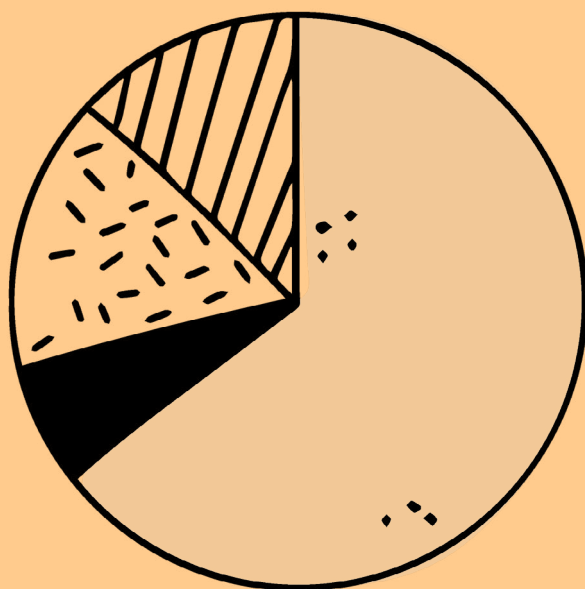


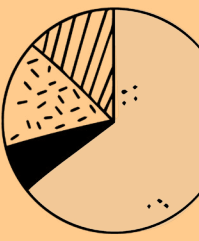
EU Horizon

Inspiring European Futures

Youth and company consultation



Co-funded by
the European Union



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Introduction

The International Network has developed the project EU Horizons: Inspiring European Futures with the aim of improving the employability and labour market options of young people. All this through the production of a series of materials and intellectual outputs that will be able to help the partner organisations of the network, as well as other youth organisations pursuing these objectives. It is also necessary to mention that there will be collaboration between third sector entities and companies with the ultimate aim of facilitating access to training offers for young people who wish to do so.

This document seeks to understand the needs of both young people and companies in order to establish a concrete framework in which to develop useful tools so that the groups involved can develop and collaborate to improve the general situation of young people, third sector organisations and companies.

1. Aims of the research

This research is intended as a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics that influence young Europeans' participation in internships abroad, as well as the perspectives of the companies that provide them with these opportunities. This study is based on the need to address the challenges faced by the new generations when integrating into an increasingly globalised and demanding labour market, characterised by the growing demand for intercultural, digital and practical skills. It also seeks to explore how companies, in various economic sectors, perceive and manage the reception of these young people, considering both the advantages and the challenges involved in integrating new talent into the professional environment.

One of the main objectives is to identify and analyse the motivational factors that drive young people to participate in international placements, such as the desire to gain professional experience in a diverse context, improve language skills and develop a global vision of the labour market. It is considered essential to understand how these factors vary according to demographic aspects such as the age, educational level and professional status of young people, which include students, recent graduates and early career professionals. This understanding will enable detailed profiles of young people interested in international placements to be drawn up, tailoring recommendations to their expectations and needs.

Another key objective is to examine the barriers that hinder young people's access to these international experiences. The research aims to identify economic and financial obstacles, such as living costs in destination countries and insufficient financial support, which may limit the possibilities for many young people to participate in these programmes.

It also addresses logistical and bureaucratic difficulties, such as obtaining visas and work permits, and cultural challenges related to adapting to unfamiliar environments and integrating into new cultures. By highlighting these aspects, it is hoped to provide an accurate diagnosis of the areas in which public policies and educational institutions need to intervene to improve accessibility and equity in access to these opportunities.

On the other hand, the research also focuses on companies participating in international internship programmes, with the aim of analysing their motivations for taking on young people from diverse backgrounds and the expectations they have about their profiles and skills. The aim is to understand what benefits companies perceive from integrating young people in internships, from the introduction of new ideas and perspectives to the possibility of identifying and training future employees that match their needs.

Through a methodology that combines the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data obtained through surveys and interviews conducted in several European countries, the aim is to provide a comprehensive view of the dynamics of international internships. This approach makes it possible to capture the diversity of contexts and situations, as each country presents particularities in terms of market opportunities, labour regulations and characteristics of the education system. Data collection has been carried out in a comprehensive manner, covering a large number of young people and companies, which ensures that the results reflect general trends and are not limited to isolated cases.

The research aims to produce a series of recommendations addressed to young people, companies and educational and training institutions. These recommendations are aimed at improving the connection between the supply and demand of international internships, proposing strategies for young people to overcome the obstacles they face and maximise the benefits of their experience abroad. They also aim to guide companies to optimise their hosting processes and to maximise the potential of the young people they host, creating a mutual learning environment that contributes to the development of a more inclusive and competitive European labour market.

This research aims not only to provide a detailed diagnosis of the current situation of international internships for young Europeans, but also to foster a constructive dialogue between the different actors involved: young people, companies, educational institutions and governmental bodies. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to the formulation of more effective policies and the creation of internship programmes that promote a more equitable labour integration, favouring the personal and professional development of young people and the strengthening of the companies that host them.

2. Methodology used

The methodology of this research is based on a combination of primary and secondary data collection techniques, with the aim of providing an in-depth analysis of young people's participation in international internship programmes and the perspective of the companies that host them. The methodological design has been carefully planned to capture the diversity of experiences and realities in the different countries that make up the "International" network. The choice of this methodological strategy responds to the need to understand the complex dynamics that affect the integration of young people into the labour market through internships and how companies value their participation in these programmes.

For primary data collection, surveys were conducted with both young people and enterprises in all network countries. The youth surveys covered a wide age range, from 18 to 30 years old, including university students, recent graduates and young professionals. This diversity in the sample allowed to reflect the different stages of youth transition into the labour market and the different motivations and concerns that may influence the search for international internships. In parallel, the surveys addressed to companies sought to obtain detailed information on their previous experience in hosting young interns, as well as their expectations and perceptions on the benefits and challenges of participating in these programmes.

The surveys allowed for large-scale quantitative data collection, providing a solid basis for cross-country comparative analysis. Importantly, the breadth of the survey sample, conducted in a variety of national and sectoral contexts, ensures an adequate representation of the realities of young people and enterprises. This makes it possible to identify common trends and patterns, as well as to highlight key differences that may influence the effectiveness of international internship programmes in different contexts. Small focus groups have also been included in this collection and aggregated with the information from the interviews.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both young people and company representatives to complement the quantitative data obtained through the surveys. The interviews offered a deeper insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants, allowing to explore issues that require a more qualitative analysis, such as the expectations of the young people regarding their professional development during the internship or the reasons that lead a company to participate in international internship programmes. Through these interviews, it was possible to collect personal testimonies and specific examples of good practices, as well as to identify areas where there are opportunities for improvement.

Secondary data analysis was also an essential component of the methodology. Previous studies and reports from international organisations, such as Eurostat and the European Commission, which provide statistics on the European youth labour market situation, international mobility and the regulation of apprenticeships in different countries, were reviewed. These secondary data allowed to contextualise the research findings in a broader framework of public policies and socio-economic trends, and helped to compare the situation of young people and enterprises with the evolution of these indicators at European level.

The combination of these data sources offers a holistic perspective on the phenomenon of international internships, allowing us to understand not only the factors that motivate young people to seek these opportunities, but also the barriers they face, such as economic costs, lack of information on available offers and bureaucratic challenges related to visas and work permits. Likewise, the methodology used allows us to analyse the reasons why companies decide to take on young interns, highlighting the search for new ideas, cultural diversity and the possibility of training future employees.

The scope of the research encompasses a comparative analysis between the countries of the network, allowing for the identification of both similarities and differences in the experiences of young people and enterprises. This provides a basis for better understanding the regional dynamics that influence the effectiveness of internship programmes and for proposing recommendations that respond to the particularities of each context. For example, the research highlights how in some countries with a strong tradition of dual training, such as Germany, the transition of young people from internships to formal employment is smoother, while in southern European countries, such as Spain and Italy, the lack of clear regulation on internships may limit their impact on youth employability.

However, the methodology has some limitations that need to be considered. One of the main limitations is the diversity in the economic and political context of the countries included in the analysis, which may influence participants' responses and the conditions under which practices are developed. Although efforts have been made to ensure the representativeness of the sample, the heterogeneity of labour regulations and policies across countries may make some findings more applicable to certain contexts than others. In addition, the fact that a large part of the surveys and interviews were conducted virtually, due to mobility restrictions in recent years, may have limited the depth of some responses, especially in the qualitative interviews.

Despite these limitations, the methodological approach adopted allows for a rigorous and detailed analysis of the opportunities and challenges of international placements for young Europeans. The richness of the data obtained, both through surveys, interviews and analysis of secondary sources, provides a solid basis for understanding how the relationship between young people and companies is articulated in the framework of

international mobility and what measures could contribute to improving the quality of these experiences. The comparative nature of the study also provides an integrative view that can be useful in designing policies and programmes to encourage the participation of young people in the globalised labour market, thus contributing to greater social and economic cohesion in Europe.

3. Justification and relevance of the study

The rationale and relevance of this study is framed in a European context that has experienced significant transformations in the labour market, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic and the push for digitalisation and the green transition. Previous analysis of the youth labour market and internships in Europe provides a detailed overview of economic dynamics, youth unemployment rates and internship opportunities, highlighting regional disparities and differences in the regulation of these training experiences. The research presented here builds on this background to deepen understanding of the motivations, barriers and expectations of young people seeking international internships, as well as the perspectives of the companies that host them.

Findings from the labour market analysis

The previous analysis on the youth labour market in Europe highlights several trends that are essential to understand the current context of international internships.

Firstly, there is a growing demand for digital and sustainability-related skills, which has become a key requirement for young people's entry into the labour market. This demand for new skills has accelerated with the digitisation of many economic sectors, creating both opportunities and challenges for young people seeking to adapt to a constantly changing work environment. Countries such as Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands have led the way in the creation of jobs in technology sectors, while other southern European economies, such as Greece and Spain, face greater difficulties in adapting their productive fabric to the new demands of the market.

The study also points out that while digitalisation offers employment opportunities in emerging sectors, structural problems such as high youth unemployment persist, especially in Southern Europe. Lack of work experience and a disconnect between academic training and market needs are factors limiting the employability of young people, which means that international internships are perceived as a key way to acquire relevant skills and improve their employment prospects. However, this analysis also reveals that not all young people have the same access to these opportunities, as international mobility is conditioned by economic factors, availability of information and bureaucratic barriers.

Conclusions of the analysis

The study concludes that, in order for international internships to be effective as tools for labour market integration, it is essential to improve the alignment between the skills that young people develop during their studies and the demands of the labour market. Internships should be seen not only as a complement to formal education, but as an experience that allows young people to apply knowledge in a real environment and acquire practical skills. Countries that have developed dual training programmes, such as Germany, have demonstrated a greater ability to facilitate young people's transition from education to employment by integrating well-structured internships into their education system.

Another important conclusion of the analysis is the need for greater coordination between educational institutions, companies and public policies to promote quality internships. In many countries, the lack of regulation on the duration, remuneration and quality of internships contributes to the perception of internships as unattractive opportunities or even as experiences that do not add real value to young people's careers. This is particularly relevant in the case of unpaid internships, which limit access for young people with fewer economic resources and perpetuate inequalities in access to quality training experiences.

Implications of the situation for young people's search for internships

The situation described above has important implications for young people seeking international internships. Internships represent an opportunity to develop technical competences and soft skills, such as adaptability and the ability to work in multicultural teams, which are increasingly valued in a globalised labour market. However, the findings of the analysis reveal that many young people face economic barriers that limit their access to these opportunities. The costs associated with mobility, such as accommodation and subsistence, mean that only those with greater resources can afford to participate in unpaid internships abroad, reducing the possibilities for those from more disadvantaged backgrounds.

In addition, the lack of information and adequate channels for finding international placements is also a significant obstacle. Despite the existence of European programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, many young people report that they are not sufficiently aware of the opportunities available or find it difficult to access internship offers in specific sectors. This underlines the importance of improving communication between educational institutions and young people, as well as strengthening digital platforms that facilitate the search for internships and the connection with international companies.

Implications of the situation for the reception of trainees by companies

Hosting international interns also has important implications for the companies participating in these programmes. The findings of the analysis highlight that companies value the possibility of having young interns as a way to incorporate new perspectives and to identify talent that could be part of their teams in the long term. In sectors such as technology and research, where the demand for specialised skills is high, internships become a tool to train future employees and to ensure knowledge transfer in strategic areas.

However, many companies face challenges when trying to participate in these internship programmes. Among the main obstacles are the administrative procedures related to managing visas and work permits for young people coming from other countries, as well as the costs associated with the supervision and training of interns. This is particularly relevant for small and medium-sized enterprises, which, although they represent the majority of the business fabric in Europe, often have fewer resources to manage internship programmes and may need additional support in order to benefit from the incorporation of young people into their teams.

The analysis also shows that, although most companies recognise the benefits of hosting interns, there is a need to improve the regulation and structure of internship programmes to ensure that internships are real learning experiences and not just routine tasks. This implies setting clear criteria on the duration of the internship, financial compensation and the integration of young people in activities that allow them to apply and develop their skills in the work environment.

Relevance of the research

The relevance of this study lies in its ability to identify in detail the elements that limit and enhance the effectiveness of international internships as career development tools for young people. By providing a comparative view across countries and sectors, the research not only contributes to academic knowledge on youth mobility and labour market integration, but also offers practical recommendations to improve the quality of internship programmes and their accessibility. This is essential to ensure that all young Europeans, regardless of their socio-economic background, can access learning experiences that enable them to fulfil their potential and contribute meaningfully to local and regional economies.

In an increasingly competitive global context, the ability of European countries to foster the integration of young people into the labour market through international internships will be a key factor for their economic and social development. By analysing both young people's and companies' perspectives, this study provides a solid basis for the formulation of policies and the creation of programmes to ensure that internships become a real bridge to quality employment.

It has been divided into two parts to make it easier to understand, the first one corresponding to the young people and the second one to the information obtained from the companies.

During the research itself and the collection of the results of the surveys, interviews and focus groups, the coordinating team of this report has found it convenient to show the data in an aggregated form and with a qualitative perspective. This will give a general and homogeneous overview of the situation of young people and companies. This will enable solutions and the development of tools that can be applied in a simpler and more concrete way in the countries of the network, but that can also be used and developed by other entities in third European countries.

Part I:

4. Youth Perspectives for International Internships

1. Profile of the Young Respondents

The profile of the young people who have participated in this research reflects the diversity of European youth interested in international placements, a group composed of university students, recent graduates and young professionals. Through the information collected, demographic characteristics, educational levels, current situations and areas of academic and professional interest have been identified to provide a detailed picture of those seeking these mobility opportunities.

In terms of **age**, the participants are mainly between 18 and 30 years old, which covers a range that includes both young people in the early stages of their university education and those who, after completing their studies, are looking for their first international professional experience. This diversity in age allows us to understand how the motivations for doing an internship can vary according to the stage young people are at. Younger students tend to see internships as a way of complementing their formal education, while recent graduates and young professionals seek to gain practical experience and establish contacts that may facilitate their future employability.

In relation to **gender**, the sample reflects a relative balance between men and women, albeit with a slight female majority. This gender distribution is significant, as experiences and perceived barriers in accessing international internships may vary between men and women, especially in sectors traditionally dominated by a specific gender. In addition, a minority group of young people were identified as identifying outside the gender binarism, which underlines the importance of considering the diversity and specific needs of all groups in the creation of inclusive international internship policies.

The **educational level** of the young people surveyed is another relevant factor in understanding their profile. Most of the participants are in advanced stages of their academic training, including students in their final years of university degree and master's programmes, as well as those who have recently completed their higher education. This interest of highly educated young people in international internships underlines the perception of these experiences as an essential complement to strengthen their professional profile and differentiate themselves in a competitive labour market. In addition, significant interest has been observed from young people with technical and vocational studies, who see international placements as an opportunity to apply their skills in a real working environment and broaden their professional horizons.

In terms of the **current situation**, most of the respondents are students who are still in their university studies, which reflects their search for practical experiences that will allow them to acquire skills complementary to the theoretical ones they receive in their educational institutions. These students are particularly interested in internships that offer them the possibility to combine the acquisition of technical skills with a practical approach that prepares them for the challenges of the working environment. Especially if they can have such an experience abroad.

On the other hand, an important group of participants are **recent graduates** who, after completing their academic training, are in transition to the labour market and see internships as a way to gain experience and improve their employability. This group stresses the need for internships that are recognised as a first relevant work experience and that allow them to establish professional networks.

In addition, a segment of the sample is made up of **young professionals** who already have some experience in the labour market, but who wish to improve their career prospects through international experience. This group, although less numerous, has a different profile, as they are looking for internships that are aligned with their previous career path and that allow them to acquire new skills or specialise in specific areas. For these young professionals, internships are a way to broaden their experience and explore new development opportunities in foreign markets.



In terms of **areas of study or academic and professional interests**, the research has identified a variety of disciplines among young people interested in international internships. Students and recent graduates of technology, engineering and computer science-related degrees form a prominent group, reflecting the high demand for digital skills in today's labour market. These young people are looking for internships in sectors such as artificial intelligence, software development and cybersecurity, where opportunities to apply their skills and gain international experience are particularly valued.

There has also been significant interest in areas such as social sciences, economics and business administration, where young people perceive that international experience can provide a broader perspective on project management, public policy analysis and resource management in a globalised context. These participants are looking for internships in international organisations, NGOs and multinational companies that allow them to develop competencies in multicultural team management and analysis of global problems from an economic and social perspective.

Another relevant group of respondents comes from **study areas related to sustainability and the environment**, reflecting the growing importance of the green economy and energy transition in Europe. These young people, motivated by concerns about climate change and the need to develop sustainable solutions, are looking for internships in sectors such as renewable energy, natural resource management and environmental innovation. Internships in this field are seen as a way to gain relevant experience in a growing sector, as well as to actively contribute to the European Union's sustainable development goals.

The diversity in the areas of academic and professional interest of young people seeking international internships underlines the need to tailor internship opportunities to the specific demands of each discipline and to create programmes that offer relevant experiences for different profiles. This is especially important to ensure that internships not only provide a learning experience, but also facilitate a more effective integration of young people into the labour market, responding to the needs of strategic sectors for Europe's economic and social development.

In summary, the profile of young people interested in international internships is broad and diverse, ranging from students looking for their first professional experience to young professionals who wish to strengthen their career with an experience abroad. This diversity in terms of age, gender, educational level and areas of interest reflects the need to design internship programmes that are flexible and can be adapted to the needs of each group, ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to benefit from these experiences and to develop the skills that will enable them to thrive in a globalised and constantly changing labour market.

2. Motivations for International Internships

The motivations that drive young people in the International network to seek international placements are varied and reflect a combination of professional, personal and academic aspirations. Through the research, several key reasons have been identified as to why young people find the experience of an internship abroad valuable, as well as the expectations they have about the impact of these experiences on their future career paths. A strong preference for certain countries and sectors has also been observed, reflecting both perceived opportunities in specific markets and young people's academic and professional interests.

One of the main motivations for young people seeking international internships is **professional development**. Internships represent a unique opportunity to gain experience in a real working environment and to apply the knowledge acquired during their academic training in challenging professional contexts. This desire to develop technical competences and practical skills is particularly relevant in highly specialised sectors, such as technology, engineering and health sciences, where practical experience is essential to improve employability and position oneself competitively in the labour market. Young people see internships as a means to strengthen their professional profile, learn new work methodologies and get closer to the dynamics of global companies.

The **development of language skills** is another prominent motivation for young people seeking internships outside their home country. The possibility of improving proficiency in foreign languages, such as English and French, is seen as an important competitive advantage in a globalised labour market, where the ability to communicate in multiple languages is increasingly valued. Young people believe that proficiency in a second language not only gives them access to a wider range of job opportunities, but also enhances their ability to integrate into multicultural teams and to work effectively in international environments. This motivation is particularly strong among students in careers linked to international relations, commerce and business management, where language skills are a key factor for professional success.

In addition, the **cultural experience** offered by international internships is another factor that attracts many young people. The possibility of living and working in a different cultural environment is seen as a way to broaden one's personal and professional perspective, allowing young people to develop adaptability and resilience skills. This desire for cultural immersion goes beyond simply learning a language, as it involves the opportunity to understand how organisations and markets function in other countries, as well as to establish personal and professional connections that can be valuable in the future. Cultural experience is especially valued by young people seeking to develop a global mindset and who aspire to work in international organisations or companies with an international outlook.

Young people's expectations of the impact of international internships on their careers are high and are closely linked to the idea that these experiences can be a stepping stone to stable and quality employment. Many research participants see internships as an opportunity to build a more attractive CV, highlighting their ability to adapt to new challenges and to work in diverse environments. This perception is particularly relevant in sectors where international experience is a valued criterion for employers, such as consulting, technology and international business.

Young people also expect international placements to enable them to **develop professional networks** that can be useful throughout their career paths. The possibility of establishing relationships with colleagues, supervisors and mentors in an international context is seen as a significant advantage, as it can facilitate future employment opportunities, both at home and abroad. This focus on professional networking reflects young people's awareness of the importance of networking in a competitive labour market and how these connections can open doors in the future.



Another aspect that young people see as crucial is the **opportunity to access high added-value sectors** that offer better prospects for career growth. International internships allow young people to gain experience in emerging industries and sectors that are key to Europe's economic transformation, such as digital technology, renewable energy and sustainable project management. This gives them the possibility to position themselves in areas with high demand for skilled professionals and to improve their medium- and long-term salary prospects.

In terms of **preferred countries**, the research has revealed a significant inclination towards certain destinations that young people find most attractive for internships. Among the most frequently mentioned countries are those that are perceived as leaders in online innovation and digitisation. Countries such as Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands stand out for their strong investment in technology and their commitment to sustainability. These destinations are particularly attractive for young people interested in sectors such as artificial intelligence, software development and renewable energy, due to the strength of their technology ecosystems and the high demand for talent in these areas.

On the other hand, southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal and Greece also appear as desirable destinations, albeit for different reasons. Many young people choose these countries because of their interest in sectors related to **tourism, cultural management and sustainability**. The importance of these industries in the economy of these countries, together with the possibility of working in projects linked to ecotourism and the development of authentic cultural experiences, attracts those seeking an enriching international experience that combines work with learning about new cultures.

The attractiveness of some overseas countries such as Martinique and Saint Marteen has also been highlighted by young people, who value the possibility of exploring new development opportunities in territories that combine European characteristics with a Caribbean context. These destinations are particularly interesting for those who wish to work in sectors such as sustainable tourism, natural resource management and international cooperation. Moreover, the cultural attractiveness of these regions, together with their biological and social diversity, offers young people a unique immersion and learning experience.

In terms of **sectors of interest**, young people show a clear preference for those considered strategic for Europe's economic future. In addition to technology and digitalisation, sectors such as **renewable energies, the green economy and biotechnology** are highly valued by those seeking an internship that not only allows them to acquire technical skills, but also to contribute to projects with a social and environmental impact. This inclination towards sustainable sectors reflects the new generation's awareness of the importance of the transition to a greener economy and the opportunity to be an active part of this process.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, regardless of the country or sector chosen, young people agree that international internships should offer a work environment that is conducive to learning and that allows for comprehensive personal and professional development. This includes the possibility of facing real challenges and participating in meaningful projects that allow them to step out of their comfort zone and broaden their view of the world. For many, the experience of doing an internship in an international context is associated with accelerated growth and the acquisition of skills that would be difficult to obtain in their home country, which reinforces their interest in these mobility opportunities.

3. Perceived Barriers and Obstacles

Despite young people's interest in and positive expectations of international placements, the research reveals a number of barriers and obstacles that limit their access to these opportunities. These difficulties vary in intensity and nature depending on the country context, but all contribute to the fact that international mobility remains a challenge for many young people. The main barriers identified include economic and financial challenges, lack of information and resources, logistical and bureaucratic complications, as well as difficulties of cultural adaptation.

One of the barriers most frequently mentioned by young people is the difficulty in covering the **financial costs** associated with international placements. These costs include transport, accommodation, food and other expenses necessary to settle in a new country for the duration of the placement. Although some companies offer financial compensation, this is not always sufficient to cover all costs, especially in countries with a high cost of living. This situation is particularly problematic for young people who do not have financial support from their families, which limits their ability to take advantage of these opportunities.

The lack of **structured financial support** is also perceived as a relevant obstacle. While there are European programmes such as Erasmus+ that provide financial support for student and graduate mobility, the funds available are not always sufficient to cover the full costs, and access to them can be complex due to the requirements and formalities involved. This situation means that many young people, especially those from more vulnerable economic backgrounds, are forced to forego the possibility of a work placement abroad, thus perpetuating inequalities in access to these training experiences. This particularly affects destination countries with a higher standard of living from which the young people come.

Another significant obstacle for young people is the **lack of adequate information and resources** to find international internships that align with their interests and academic profiles. Despite the existence of multiple digital platforms and networks that facilitate the search for internships, many young people report that they do not have the necessary guidance to identify the best opportunities or to understand the specific requirements of each offer. This lack of information is also reflected in the difficulty in accessing clear data on the working conditions of internships, such as remuneration, duration and expectations of companies.

This problem is compounded by **limited coordination between educational institutions and the labour market**, leading to a disconnect between the supply of internships and the real needs of young people. While some universities and training centres have guidance offices and job placement programmes, the effectiveness of these resources varies

considerably between countries and regions, leaving many young people without the necessary support to navigate the search for international opportunities. This lack of institutional support contributes to the fact that many young people face the internship search alone and with few resources at their disposal.

In addition to economic and information problems, **logistical and bureaucratic challenges** represent a major barrier for young people wishing to undertake international placements. Difficulties associated with obtaining visas and work permits are a constant feature of mobility experiences, especially in countries where bureaucracy is complex and administrative procedures are unclear. Despite the existence of mobility agreements in the European Union, which facilitate movement between member countries, the situation can be more complicated for young people seeking placements in territories with specific requirements or coming from countries outside the Schengen area, such as Turkey.

Formalities related to the recognition of qualifications and validation of competences can also be an obstacle, especially for young people wishing to undertake traineeships in regulated sectors such as health and engineering. This can delay the start of placements or even limit the opportunities available to young people who do not meet all the administrative requirements of each country. The perception that these procedures are complex and require considerable effort to complete may discourage many young people, who choose to look for smaller opportunities that do not involve so many complications.

Finally, **cultural adaptation** is another challenge faced by young people when seeking international placements. The possibility of living and working in a different cultural environment is one of the main motivations for mobility, but it can also be a source of stress and anxiety for those who feel unprepared to deal with significant cultural differences. Adapting to new customs, ways of working and communication styles can be difficult, especially for young people who have no previous experience of living abroad.

Culture shock and language barriers are aspects that can negatively influence the placement experience, making it difficult for young people to integrate into work teams and affecting their performance. Differences in expectations about the work environment, working hours and communication dynamics can lead to misunderstandings and tensions, which may result in some young people not feeling fully comfortable or valued in their placement.

Despite these challenges, many young people find that adjustment difficulties are an inherent part of the international experience and that overcoming them allows them to develop greater resilience and adaptability that will serve them well in their future careers. However, for these experiences to be positive and enriching, it is essential that host companies are prepared to support young people in their integration process by providing an inclusive working environment and facilitating their adaptation to new cultural realities.

The barriers identified in this section underline the need to adopt a more inclusive and flexible approach to promoting international placements, to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to participate in these experiences, regardless of their economic situation, access to information or the logistical difficulties they may face. Overcoming these obstacles requires a coordinated effort between educational institutions, businesses and public policies, with the aim of creating a more favourable environment for youth mobility and fostering the effective integration of young people into the global labour market.

4. Search Channels and Resources Used

The search for international internships is a challenging process for young people in the International network. These challenges are linked not only to economic and logistical barriers, but also to the need to access the right resources to enable them to identify and apply for opportunities that best align with their interests and career goals. In this context, the use of digital platforms, the role of educational institutions and intermediary organisations, as well as the relevance of networking, have become central elements in facilitating young people's access to international internships.



Firstly, **digital platforms and online tools** play a key role in the search for international internships. In an increasingly digitalised world, young people are turning to specialised portals that allow them to access internship offers in different countries of the International network, as well as in various sectors of interest. Platforms such as LinkedIn, EURES and Glassdoor have gained popularity among young people due to their ability to concentrate a large number of internship offers in one place, providing search filters that make it easier to identify opportunities according to location, sector and level of experience required.

LinkedIn, in particular, has proven to be a key tool for young people interested in internships, not only because it facilitates the search for specific offers, but also because it allows young people to present a detailed professional profile, including their skills, achievements and past experiences. This platform has become a networking space where young people can connect directly with recruiters and companies of their interest, increasing their chances of being considered for an international internship. Furthermore, the use of online forums and groups dedicated to youth mobility and internship opportunities allows young people to exchange information and advice, creating a supportive community in the search process.

However, despite the usefulness of these platforms, many young people face difficulties in identifying which are the most reliable tools and how to use them effectively to access the best opportunities. This highlights the importance of the **role of educational institutions and intermediary organisations** in the internship search process. Universities and training centres play an essential role in guiding young people in using these digital resources and connecting them with internship programmes that align with their studies and career aspirations.

Many educational institutions have job placement offices and career guidance departments that help students prepare for internships, either by organising workshops on how to build a competitive CV or by holding recruitment events such as job fairs. At these fairs, young people have the opportunity to meet first-hand representatives of companies looking for interns, which facilitates a first contact and provides a space to solve doubts about internship programmes.

In addition, in many countries in the International network, universities have established agreements with companies and organisations at national and international level to facilitate students' access to internships. These agreements are particularly valuable because they guarantee the quality of the experiences offered and enable young people to access placements that might otherwise be difficult to obtain on their own. However, the effectiveness of these institutional networks varies between countries and universities, which may affect equal access to quality opportunities.

Intermediary organisations, such as youth mobility agencies and associations dedicated to promoting international cooperation, also play an important role in facilitating access to traineeships. These organisations act as a bridge between young people and companies, helping them to understand the requirements of each traineeship programme, advising them on the application process and providing detailed information on working conditions in each country. Some of these organisations work in coordination with European programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, allowing them to offer comprehensive support to young people interested in international mobility.

However, not all young people have access to these institutional networks and formal resources, making **professional networks and personal contacts** an essential tool in the search for international internships. Creating and leveraging a network of contacts is a strategy used by many young people to access opportunities that are not always advertised on open platforms. Research shows that those young people who have cultivated relationships with teachers, mentors and industry professionals have an advantage when looking for internships, as these contacts can provide references, recommendations and, in some cases, inform them about vacancies before they are publicly advertised.

The importance of networking is also reflected in the growing relevance of networking events and open days organised by companies and professional associations. These events allow young people to interact directly with recruiters and get a clearer picture of companies' expectations of internship candidates. In addition, these spaces are an opportunity for young people to showcase their competences and skills in a direct way, which can be decisive in the selection process.

Networking through social media has also gained importance in recent years. Groups on platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook, specifically dedicated to international mobility and internship opportunities, allow young people to stay informed about job developments and connect with other young people who have had similar experiences. This virtual community functions as a supportive space where advice is shared and questions are answered, helping to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety that many young people face when looking for their first professional experience abroad.

In conclusion, the search for international internships for young people in the International network relies on a diverse set of resources and strategies. Digital platforms, educational institutions and intermediary organisations facilitate access to information and provide guidance to young people, but professional networks and personal contacts remain a valuable resource that can make a difference in securing an internship opportunity. However, it is essential that actions are strengthened to ensure that all young people, regardless of their background, have access to these resources and can benefit from the mobility opportunities offered by integration into a globalised labour market. The promotion of more accessible guidance and the creation of programmes that strengthen the connection between young people, universities and companies are essential to reduce inequalities and ensure that international internships are a real possibility for all.

5. Expectations of Host Companies

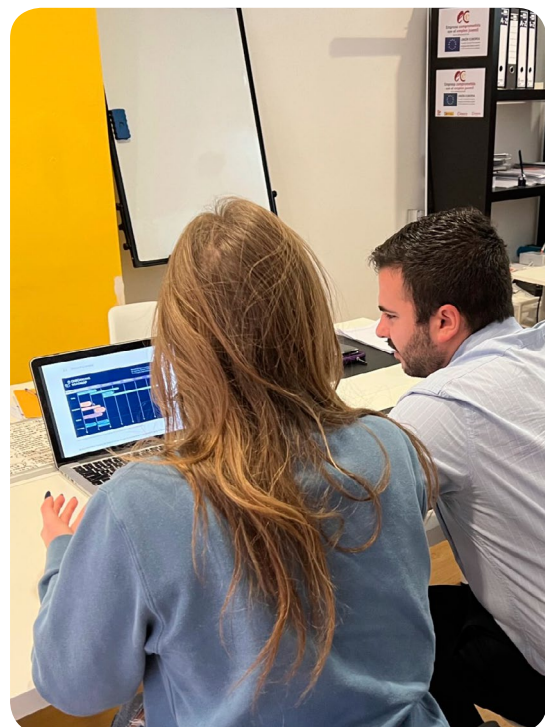
Young people's expectations of international internship host companies are varied and deeply influenced by their desire to find an environment that offers them meaningful learning, opportunities for professional growth and conditions that allow them to have

a positive experience during their time abroad. These expectations focus not only on tangible aspects such as financial compensation, but also on the quality of the working environment and the type of company they consider ideal for developing their skills. In the following, the most relevant preferences and expectations of young people regarding host companies are analysed, taking into account the context of the International network.

One of the first considerations influencing the selection of a company for an internship is the **type of company** in terms of its size, sector and location. Many young people show a preference for internships in medium-sized and large companies, especially those with a more formalised structure for hosting interns. These companies tend to offer more structured internship programmes, with clear objectives and continuous monitoring by mentors or supervisors. In addition, larger companies often have specific departments for talent management, which facilitates the integration of young people into the work environment and gives them access to a more formative experience.

On the other hand, a considerable group of young people also value the possibility of internships in **small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**. These internships are often perceived as an opportunity to become more directly involved in the day-to-day running of the organisation and to take on responsibilities that, in larger companies, might be reserved for more experienced professionals. Young people looking for an experience where they can feel that their contribution has an immediate impact tend to gravitate towards SMEs, as they value the proximity to the founders or directors of the company and the possibility to learn in a more personalised way.

In terms of **geographical location**, young people's preferences vary depending on factors such as language, cost of living and cultural affinity. Some young people prioritise destinations in large urban centres that are considered technology and innovation hubs, as they perceive that these cities offer a dynamic ecosystem and a wider network of contacts. However, there is also interest in internships in less central regions, where young people believe they can have a more integrated experience in the local culture and where the pace of life may be more adapted to their expectations of a training stay. This interest in less urban areas is especially present among those seeking internships in sectors such as sustainable tourism or environmental management, where proximity to natural surroundings is an important factor.



Expectations about the work environment and learning opportunities are another of the most important aspects that young people consider when choosing a company for their internship. In this sense, young people look for work environments that are open, collaborative and promote inclusion and diversity. They especially value companies that have an organisational culture that facilitates the integration of new members, encourages teamwork and offers an environment where they can learn not only from their own experience, but also from the exchange with more experienced colleagues.

For many young people, the ideal working environment is one where there is a **close relationship with mentors or supervisors** and where access to continuous feedback is facilitated. The possibility of having a mentor to guide them during their internship is seen as a key element for the success of the experience, as it allows them to identify areas for improvement and develop specific competences more effectively. In addition, opportunities to participate in concrete projects and to take on challenging tasks are highly valued, as young people seek to feel that they are actively contributing to the company and that their internship time is productive and meaningful.

Flexibility in working hours and the possibility to balance work and personal development are also important expectations for young people. Many young people want companies to understand their needs as learners and to provide an environment where they can learn without feeling overburdened. This flexibility is particularly relevant for those who are still in university or who are adjusting to a new country, and who need time to adjust to their environment and to establish a personal support network abroad.

In terms of **financial compensation and additional benefits**, young people have expectations that vary depending on the context and the host country, but in general they value that the company offers some kind of financial support during the internship period. Although financial compensation is not always the main reason for choosing an internship opportunity, it is a determining factor for many young people, especially for those who have to cover accommodation, transport and living expenses in a foreign country.

Fair remuneration is perceived as a sign that the company values the interns' work and that it considers the internship experience as a mutually beneficial relationship, where the young person contributes with his/her effort and the company, in turn, contributes to his/her professional development. In addition, young people value other **additional benefits** that can enhance their experience, such as access to training courses, cultural integration programmes, support with accommodation or coverage of some costs associated with mobility, such as air tickets. These forms of support are particularly significant for those young people who do not have a solid financial backing and who, without such support, would find it difficult to participate in the traineeship.

The perception that the company offers a **holistic and enriching experience** is ultimately what defines young people's decision on where to do their international internship. They are looking for an environment where they can not only develop their technical skills, but also grow personally, learn to work in a multicultural context and gain a broader view of the business world. Young people's expectations reflect an understanding of the importance of internships as a transitional stage towards the labour market, where learning, adaptation and skills development are as important as the professional experience itself. Therefore, companies that manage to meet these expectations not only contribute to the development of young people, but also have the opportunity to develop future professionals who can become valuable long-term collaborators.

6. Previous Experiences and Opinions

Another part of this research has been to hear the testimony of young people who have already completed an internship abroad, in order to gain a complementary view of the challenges faced by young people who wish to live these experiences. This added value to the data obtained.

The previous experience of young people who have undertaken international placements provides a valuable insight into the real impact of these opportunities on their personal and professional development. Through the research, testimonies have been collected to understand how these experiences have contributed to the young people's growth, highlighting both the positive aspects and the areas that they believe could be improved. The stories of young people who have gone through these experiences help to identify patterns of satisfaction and recognise the challenges that remain, offering a holistic view of what it means to participate in internships in an international context.

Among the testimonies collected, the **success stories of young people** who consider that their international internships have been a decisive factor in the consolidation of their professional careers stand out. Many of these young people point out that the experience of working in a multicultural environment has allowed them to acquire a series of soft skills that are difficult to develop in a national context. Adaptability, teamwork skills and intercultural communication are competences that, according to them, have improved significantly during their time abroad, and which they now consider essential to face the challenges of a globalised labour market.

For example, several young people who did their internships in technology sectors in countries such as Germany and Denmark highlight how the experience allowed them to become familiar with new working methodologies and emerging technologies, which has given them a competitive advantage when they return to their home countries. These young people value the opportunity to have been involved in real projects and to have had the

responsibility of carrying out tasks that went beyond the traditional role of an intern, which allowed them to feel an active part of the team and not just an observer of the process.

A recurring theme in these success stories is the **importance of having a good mentor** during the traineeship. Those young people who had the opportunity to work under the guidance of an experienced supervisor consider that this figure was key to their development. Mentors provided them with constant feedback, guided them in problem solving and helped them to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This close relationship with a mentor is valued by the young people as one of the best ways to learn in a professional environment, as it allowed them to gain a clearer perspective on how to apply their theoretical knowledge in practice.



However, not all experiences have been entirely positive. The testimonies also reveal **important areas for improvement**, which should be considered in order to improve the quality of international placements. Among the most frequent criticisms, young people mention the lack of a clear structure in some internship programmes, which led to uncertainty about the tasks to be performed and the objectives of the experience. In some cases, trainees reported that they felt under-utilised, as the tasks assigned were not aligned with their academic training and did not allow them to develop new competences. This situation led to lower satisfaction with the experience and the perception that their internship time had not been as productive as they had expected.

In addition, **the lack of adequate remuneration** is an issue that generates dissatisfaction among many young people. While most understand that international internships are a learning opportunity, they feel that the lack of fair compensation makes it difficult for some young people to access these experiences, especially those who have to cover high living costs abroad. This has led some of the young people interviewed to feel that international internships are not always accessible to all, but tend to benefit those with strong financial backing. In this regard, some suggest that companies should make a greater effort to offer compensation that covers at least basic expenses, such as transport and living expenses, to make internships more inclusive.

Despite these criticisms, the **overall satisfaction** of young people who have participated in international internships tends to be high, especially when they perceive that the experience has allowed them to grow both personally and professionally. Many of them highlight the opportunity to get to know other cultures and to have had the chance to travel and explore new places as an enriching aspect that goes beyond the strictly work-related aspect. The ability to adapt to a new environment, to overcome language barriers and to build a network of contacts abroad are elements that the young people value as an essential part of their training during the internship.

Young people also appreciate that international internships give them access to a **wider labour market** and can open doors to employment opportunities abroad that would otherwise be more difficult to reach. For many, the experience of having worked in an international environment has been a highlight on their CV, making it easier for them to access interviews and more competitive selection processes. The possibility of having worked on high-level projects and having collaborated with professionals from other countries becomes an added value that differentiates their profile from that of other candidates.

The experiences of young people who have undertaken international placements reflect a combination of valuable learning and challenges that still need to be addressed to optimise the quality of these opportunities. While many young people highlight the relevance of internships for their professional and personal development, they also point to the need to improve the structure and remuneration of some programmes to ensure that all young people, regardless of their economic situation, can benefit from these experiences. The lessons learned from these testimonies are crucial to adjust internship policies and to create a fairer and more inclusive environment that fosters youth mobility in an increasingly interconnected labour market.



Part II:

5. Company Perspectives on Hosting Interns

1. Profile of Surveyed Companies

Research on the perspectives of companies participating in international internship programmes within the framework of the International network provides a detailed insight into the characteristics of organisations hosting young people. The profile of these companies is diverse, covering different sectors of activity, sizes and organisational structures, reflecting the multiplicity of contexts in which young people can develop their professional experiences. Moreover, the previous experience of these companies in hosting young people on international internships is a determining factor in understanding the expectations and challenges they face when integrating new talent into their teams.

The companies participating in the research come from **varied sectors of activity**, ranging from traditional industries such as manufacturing and agriculture to emerging sectors such as technology, innovation and renewable energy. This sectoral variety is relevant because it influences the nature of the internships offered, the skills valued and the companies' expectations of young interns. For example, in the technology sector, companies tend to demand advanced skills in programming, software development and artificial intelligence, looking for interns who can effectively contribute to digital development projects. In contrast, in sectors such as tourism and cultural management, companies value skills in event management, intercultural communication and visitor experience design, areas where young people can bring a fresh and creative perspective.

The **size and structure of companies** are also key aspects influencing the way they manage the reception of trainees. The sample includes both small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and large multinational corporations. SMEs, which represent a significant part of the business fabric in Europe, tend to have a more flexible structure and an organisational culture that facilitates the rapid integration of young people into their work teams. In these companies, trainees tend to have more direct contact with the founders or management teams, allowing them to actively participate in decision-making and project implementation. This proximity is valued by young people as an opportunity to learn directly and to take on significant responsibilities from the beginning of their experience.

However, SMEs also face particular challenges in hosting young interns, such as **limited supervisory capacity** and lack of resources to structure formal internship programmes. Often, these companies rely on the motivation and self-management of young people to make the experience productive, which can be a challenge if interns need a greater degree of guidance. However, many of these companies recognise that by offering a closer and more personalised experience, they can create a more dynamic and enriching learning environment.

On the other hand, **large companies and multinational corporations** tend to offer more formalised internship programmes, with clear objectives and a structure that includes continuous assessment processes and mentoring programmes. In these organisations, young people tend to join larger teams and participate in large-scale projects, allowing them to gain significant experience in managing large-scale projects and working in multicultural environments. Large companies value the arrival of young interns as a way of injecting new ideas and identifying talent that could become permanent employees in the future. This approach allows them not only to meet their corporate social responsibility objectives, but also to build a pool of talent that can be useful for future recruitment needs.

Previous experience in hosting international interns is another important factor defining the profile of the companies surveyed. Those companies that already have a consolidated track record in hosting international interns tend to have a greater capacity to design internship programmes that are attractive and formative for young people. This experience allows them to anticipate the needs of interns, offer a more welcoming working environment and ensure that the experience is beneficial for both the young person and the company.

Companies with experience in hosting young international interns tend to have a better understanding of the challenges interns may face, such as cultural adaptation and integration into the work team. Many of these companies have developed specific strategies to support young people during their adaptation process, such as appointing mentors, organising integration activities and offering logistical support such as finding accommodation. These practices have enabled them to improve young people's satisfaction with the experience and ensure that the internship is a real learning opportunity.



In contrast, companies that have less experience in hosting international interns often face greater challenges in structuring programmes that are attractive and useful for interns. These companies may have difficulties in defining clear tasks and objectives for young people, which can lead to a less structured experience and, in some cases, lower satisfaction on the part of interns. However, these companies also tend to be more open to flexibility and personalisation of internship experiences, adapting tasks to the competences and interests of each young person, which can result in a learning experience more tailored to individual expectations.

The profile of the companies involved in hosting international interns in the International network is diverse and reflects the multiplicity of environments where young people can develop their professional skills. This diversity, which includes differences in sectors of activity, company size and previous experience with interns, influences the quality and focus of the experiences offered. Companies recognise the value of having young interns as a way of enriching their organisational culture, attracting talent and fostering innovation, but they also face challenges in adapting their structures to ensure that the intern experience is effective and enriching. Understanding these differences is essential to adjust expectations of young people and to design policies that support companies in their role as trainers of future professionals.

2. Motivations for hosting interns

The companies in the International network that participate in international internship programmes do so for a variety of reasons that go beyond simply contributing to the training of new professionals. In many cases, these companies see the hosting of young interns as a strategic opportunity that allows them to strengthen their capacity for innovation, enrich their organisational culture with new multicultural perspectives and attract talent that, in the future, could be integrated into their work teams on a more permanent basis. Through research, it has been identified that these motivations are closely related to the search for greater competitiveness in a global market and the need to adapt to the changing demands of an increasingly dynamic business environment.

One of the main reasons for companies to participate in international internship programmes is the **desire to encourage innovation**. Bringing in young interns, especially those from international contexts, is seen by companies as a way of bringing in new ideas and approaches that can challenge traditional ways of working. Young interns often bring a fresh view on the problems and challenges facing organisations, allowing them to come up with creative solutions and alternative approaches that might not have emerged from more established teams. This is particularly relevant in sectors such as technology and research, where the ability to innovate and adapt quickly to change is essential to remain competitive.

The **multiculturalism** that young interns bring is another factor that companies value positively. In a context where many organisations are seeking to internationalise and expand their presence in foreign markets, the possibility of having young people of different nationalities and cultures allows them to enrich their understanding of other contexts and better adapt their products and services to the needs of a diverse clientele. Companies that host young international interns have the opportunity to develop a more inclusive working environment, where tolerance and mutual understanding are fostered, which in turn contributes to improved cohesion and collaboration within teams. Cultural diversity is seen as an asset that can improve creativity and decision-making within the company, facilitating the creation of strategies that are more adapted to the global reality.

In addition to innovation and multiculturalism, **attracting talent** is a central motivation for companies participating in international internship programmes. Organisations perceive hosting young people as a way to identify and evaluate potential future employees in a real working environment. Internships offer companies the possibility to get a close insight into the technical skills, attitude and adaptability of young people, allowing them to make more informed hiring decisions and reduce the risks associated with recruitment. This is particularly valuable in sectors where demand for skilled professionals outstrips supply, and where companies are competing to attract the best talent available.

Retaining talent by converting young trainees into permanent employees is a common practice among many of the companies surveyed. This allows them not only to ensure the continuity of specific projects, but also to keep in their ranks people who are already familiar with the organisational culture and who have demonstrated their ability to contribute to the company's development. The possibility of transforming an internship into a stable job is seen as an advantage for both the company and the young person, as it allows a smoother integration and a better adaptation to the expectations and challenges of the position.

Perceived benefits for the company

The benefits that companies perceive from hosting young trainees are diverse and are reflected in the improvement of their competitiveness, the acquisition of new skills and the creation of a solid base of young talent that can be crucial for their long-term growth. One of the benefits most often mentioned by companies is the **contribution of new ideas and perspectives** that young people bring with them. Unconstrained by the usual way of doing things, young people often challenge established processes and propose improvements that can optimise organisational efficiency. This innovative approach is particularly valuable in contexts where speed of adaptation to change is crucial, such as in the tech industry and in startups, where companies must be able to constantly reinvent themselves to stay relevant.

In addition to new ideas, young trainees bring **specific skills** that are particularly valued by companies, such as digital competences and familiarity with the latest technological and methodological trends. At a time when digitalisation and automation are transforming many economic sectors, companies find in young people a source of up-to-date knowledge that allows them to integrate new tools and optimise work processes. The ability of young people to handle specialised software, analyse data and manage digital platforms is a resource that many companies are looking to take advantage of to improve their performance and adapt their services to the needs of today's market.

Talent creation is another benefit that companies associate with hosting young interns. Organisations feel that by offering a well-structured and enriching internship experience, they are not only contributing to the training of future professionals, but also building a pool of skilled talent that can be relevant to their long-term projects. This is particularly relevant in sectors where practical training is essential for the development of specific skills, such as engineering, biotechnology and renewable energy. Companies that actively participate in training young people through internships not only reap the immediate benefit of their contribution, but also strengthen their reputation as quality employers, which in turn helps them to attract more talented candidates in the future.

Moreover, participating in international internship programmes helps companies to improve their **corporate social responsibility image** and their commitment to youth. In a context where responsible business practices are increasingly valued by consumers and other market players, hosting young people is seen as a way to contribute to the development of society and to promote inclusion and international mobility. Companies that support young people in their training process and offer them opportunities for growth are seen as organisations committed to social welfare, which can improve their public perception and strengthen their relations with the community.

Companies' motivations for hosting young interns go beyond a simple act of cooperation and are aligned with their strategic interests in terms of innovation, attracting talent and enriching their organisational culture. The experience of hosting young interns not only gives companies access to new ideas and skills, but also provides them with the opportunity to build a long-term relationship with professionals who can be key to their future growth. By better understanding these motivations, it is possible to adjust internship policies and mobility programmes to ensure that both young people and companies get the maximum benefit from these international collaborative experiences.

3. Requirements and Expectations of Interns

Companies hosting interns within the International network set a number of requirements and expectations that aim to ensure that interns are able to adapt to the dynamics of the organisation and contribute effectively to the projects in which they are involved. These

requirements are often related to the technical and personal competencies that young people should possess, as well as the level of education and previous experience expected of them. Companies also have specific expectations regarding the attitude, learning ability and flexibility of young people, which they consider essential for a successful integration into the work environment.

First of all, one of the main **requirements valued by companies** is the mastery of certain **technical skills and competences** that are relevant to the sector of activity of the company and to the tasks that the trainee will have to perform. In sectors such as technology, engineering and biotechnology, companies are looking for young people with advanced knowledge in specific areas such as programming, data analysis, software design or scientific research. These skills are essential for the intern to be able to integrate quickly into the company's projects and contribute from the very beginning.

In the case of sectors such as tourism, cultural management and international trade, companies value **project management** skills, **intercultural communication skills** and language skills that facilitate interaction with clients of different nationalities. Fluency in English is almost a universal requirement for international internships, but other relevant languages are also valued depending on the region and the company's target market. Language skills not only facilitate communication with work teams, but also enable young people to participate more actively in activities involving interaction with international clients or partners.

Alongside technical skills, companies have a strong preference for young people who demonstrate **soft skills** such as the ability to work in a team, problem solving and adaptability. These skills are particularly valued because they enable young people to integrate more smoothly into the work environment and to adapt to the changing demands of a dynamic business context. The ability to manage pressure and the willingness to face challenges are considered essential qualities, as they enable trainees to successfully cope with the responsibilities assigned to them and to learn from the challenges that arise during the internship experience.

Educational level and previous experience are also aspects that influence the requirements set by companies for hosting young trainees. Although many organisations are open to receiving university students who are still in the process of completing their academic training, there is a preference for those who are already in the final years of their degree or who have recently completed a Master's degree. This is because companies consider that these young people have a stronger knowledge base and are better prepared for the tasks and responsibilities involved in internships. In some cases, companies look for young people who already have previous professional experience, even if it is minimal, as this allows them to adapt more quickly to the work dynamics and to better understand the expectations of the business environment.

However, companies also value **attitude and willingness to learn** as determining factors when selecting young people for internships. While experience and technical skills are important, many organisations consider the young person's growth potential and motivation to be equally crucial elements in ensuring a successful internship experience. Young people who demonstrate a proactive attitude, who are willing to take on new challenges and who are curious to learn from different areas of the company are particularly valued, as their willingness to step out of their comfort zone can translate into a greater contribution to the team and more meaningful learning.

Flexibility and adaptability are qualities that companies expect to find in young interns, especially in an international context where challenges can vary from one moment to the next. The ability to adapt to different working styles, to handle uncertainty and to adjust to the company's schedules and rhythms is essential for the trainee to be able to integrate smoothly and contribute effectively. This flexibility is seen as a quality that enables young people to cope successfully with unforeseen situations and to make the most of the learning opportunities that arise during the internship.

In addition, companies have expectations regarding the **duration of the internship and the availability of the young people's time**. In many cases, organisations prefer internships to last several months, which allows interns to familiarise themselves with the company's internal processes and gain more in-depth experience. A longer stay also makes it easier for young people to participate in larger projects and to see the results of their work over time. In terms of time availability, companies usually expect young people to be able to adapt to a full working day, although in some cases they offer some flexibility to accommodate the personal or academic needs of interns.

In conclusion, companies hosting young interns in the framework of the International network are looking for a balance between previous experience, technical skills and personal skills of the interns. The attitude of the young people, their willingness to learn and their ability to adapt to an international environment are crucial to ensure a successful internship experience for both interns and companies. By understanding these expectations, it is possible to design training and orientation programmes that better prepare young people to face the challenges of international internships and enable them to make the most of the opportunities presented to them.

4. Barriers and Challenges for Business

Companies involved in hosting international interns face a number of barriers and challenges that can limit their ability to provide quality experiences and to integrate interns effectively into their teams. These challenges range from the administrative and logistical difficulties associated with international mobility to the costs inherent in hosting foreign students and challenges related to cultural integration. Understanding these barriers is

fundamental to designing policies and programmes that facilitate the hosting process and ensure that internships are beneficial for both young people and companies.

One of the most significant obstacles for companies is the **management of administrative and logistical procedures**, especially with regard to obtaining **visas and work permits** for young trainees coming from other countries. Although mobility between EU countries is relatively easy thanks to the free movement of persons, the situation can be complicated for young people who come from territories with specific migration requirements or who need additional permits for traineeships in certain sectors. Companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, often face a complex bureaucracy that requires time and resources to ensure that young people comply with all legal regulations for their stay in the country.

Dealing with these formalities can delay the start of internships or even discourage some companies from participating in international programmes, as the administrative burden of applying for visas and permits can be considerable. This is especially relevant in countries where immigration regulations are strict and where the process of obtaining documents can be lengthy and complicated. Companies without a human resources department specialised in managing international mobility often find it more difficult to understand and comply with all the requirements, which can limit their ability to attract talented young people from other countries.

In addition to administrative difficulties, companies face **costs associated with hosting international students**, which can be a major impediment to participating in internship programmes. Although some organisations are willing to invest in the training of young people as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy, many companies, especially SMEs, find it difficult to bear the additional costs involved in integrating an international intern. These costs include not only the financial compensation offered to the young people, but also other expenses such as organising integration activities, taking out insurance and investing in the infrastructure needed to host the trainees. This is the case when the companies themselves offer their own traineeship programmes, which is not the case when young people benefit from programmes such as Erasmus+.

For many companies, the financial compensation of interns is a sensitive issue, as while they recognise the importance of adequately remunerating interns to cover their basic expenses, they must also balance this need with their own operating budgets. In some cases, companies choose to provide additional benefits such as accommodation or meal vouchers, which help to ease the financial burden on young people without significantly increasing the direct costs to the company. However, these solutions are not always viable, especially for companies located in cities with a high cost of living, where accommodation can be a considerable expense.

Despite these efforts, the perception that international internships involve significant costs may limit the willingness of some companies to open their doors to young people from other countries. This highlights the importance of designing **public incentives** to facilitate the hosting of trainees, such as specific subsidies for international mobility or co-financing schemes that ease the financial burden on companies. Such incentives can be particularly effective in encouraging SMEs to participate in traineeship programmes, thus contributing to a greater diversity of opportunities for young people.

Another important challenge for companies is the **cultural integration and adaptation of interns in the work team**. The arrival of young people of different nationalities and cultures can be enriching for the company, but it also involves a process of adaptation for both the interns and the host team. Differences in communication styles, expectations about the working environment and ways of working can lead to misunderstandings and tensions if not properly managed. This is especially relevant in companies that have no previous experience in hosting international youth and may not be prepared to manage cultural diversity effectively.

Companies that manage cultural integration well often adopt **specific adaptation strategies**, such as appointing mentors to facilitate the welcoming process, organising team building activities and creating spaces where young people can share their experiences and learn about the organisational culture. These initiatives not only help trainees feel more comfortable in their new environment, but also improve team cohesion and foster a more inclusive and collaborative work environment. However, implementing these strategies requires a commitment on the part of the company and may represent an additional effort that some organisations are not always willing to undertake.

In addition, the language barrier is an aspect that can also hinder the integration of young people in the work environment. Although English is often the working language in many companies participating in international internship programmes, the ability to communicate in the local language remains an important factor for the integration of interns. Companies operating in environments where the use of the local language is essential for interaction with customers and suppliers may find it more difficult to integrate young people who do not have a sufficient command of the language, which may limit the tasks assigned to them and reduce their contribution to the team.

The barriers and challenges faced by companies in hosting young people for international internships are manifold and include administrative, economic and cultural aspects. While participation in these programmes offers significant benefits for companies, such as access to new ideas and the possibility of attracting young talent, it also requires considerable effort to overcome the difficulties associated with international mobility. It is essential that policies to support youth mobility take these barriers into account and provide tools to facilitate the integration of young people into companies, ensuring

that international placements are an enriching experience for both parties and that they contribute to the development of a more inclusive and globalised labour market.

5. Resources and Channels Used for Recruiting Interns

Companies in the International network employ a variety of resources and channels to recruit young interns, leveraging both digital tools and partnerships with educational institutions and associations. These recruitment strategies allow companies to connect with a wide pool of talented young people and ensure that international internships are a mutually beneficial experience. Among the most commonly used resources are online platforms, partnerships with universities and youth organisations, and participation in European programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, which facilitate access to young people interested in international training experiences.

Firstly, the use of **digital platforms and networks** has become a fundamental tool in the search for international internship candidates. Companies use specialised portals such as LinkedIn, EURES and youth-specific employment platforms, which provide access to a large and diverse database of students and recent graduates looking for internship opportunities in other countries. These digital platforms offer search filters that facilitate the identification of candidates according to their skills, educational level and availability, allowing companies to optimise the selection process and find profiles that best fit their needs.

LinkedIn, in particular, has established itself as one of the most relevant tools for identifying young talent. Companies post internship offers and, in turn, can directly contact candidates who match the requirements of the position. This platform also allows companies to showcase their organisational culture and highlight the benefits of the internships they offer, which can be an attractive factor for young people looking for a training experience in a professional environment that promotes innovation and continuous learning. In addition, LinkedIn's specific groups, oriented towards youth mobility and the promotion of international internships, are spaces where companies can interact directly with young people and answer their questions about available opportunities.

In addition to online platforms, companies in the International network find a valuable resource in **partnerships with universities and youth organisations**. Partnerships with higher education institutions give companies direct access to students looking for internships, especially through educational cooperation programmes that facilitate the integration of young people into the labour market. Universities, for their part, often have career guidance offices that organise job fairs and networking events, where companies have the opportunity to present their internship programmes and meet interested candidates first-hand.

These partnerships not only facilitate the recruitment process, but also help companies to ensure the quality of the candidates they receive. By working closely with universities, companies can define specific profiles of the young people they are looking for, agreeing on competency and skills requirements that are aligned with the needs of the organisation. These partnerships also allow universities to adjust their training offer to the demands of the market, ensuring that students acquire the competences that are most valued by companies when it comes to internships.

Youth organisations and international mobility networks also play an important role in the recruitment process. These organisations, which often have a focus on promoting international mobility and skills training for employment, act as intermediaries between young people and companies, facilitating access to internship opportunities in different countries of the International network. Youth associations organise seminars, workshops and career guidance activities that help young people prepare their search for internships, while companies can participate in these events to present their offers and establish relationships with future interns.

Another key resource in the search for candidates is the participation of companies in **European youth mobility programmes**, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. These programmes offer a structured framework that facilitates the connection between companies and young people interested in international placements, providing funding and logistical support for mobility. Companies participating in these programmes have the advantage of a simplified selection process and access to young people who already have the backing of a recognised European programme, which can reduce the uncertainty and risks associated with hosting trainees from other countries.

Erasmus+, for example, offers companies the possibility to work with universities and training centres to host trainees in the framework of cooperation programmes. This not only facilitates access to candidates, but also ensures that the placements meet quality standards and that young people receive an appropriate training experience. In addition, the Erasmus+ programme provides financial resources that can help cover some of the costs associated with mobility, which is an important incentive for companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, that wish to participate in hosting international trainees but face budgetary constraints.

The **European Solidarity Corps** is a programme that focuses on promoting solidarity and community work, allowing companies and non-governmental organisations to welcome young people who wish to undertake internships with a social focus. This has been particularly relevant for companies seeking to integrate young people in projects with a social, environmental or community impact, offering an experience that goes beyond technical skills and promotes the development of soft skills and social awareness in the young participants.

The **importance of these partnerships with European programmes** is that they facilitate youth mobility and ensure that international placements are accessible to a wider range of candidates, overcoming economic and logistical barriers that can limit young people's access to these opportunities. For companies, participating in these programmes also implies a commitment to quality and social responsibility, which can enhance their reputation and strengthen their position as a benchmark employer in the field of youth mobility.

Companies looking for young interns within the International network combine the use of digital platforms, partnerships with universities and youth associations, and participation in European programmes to ensure that their recruitment process is effective and efficient. These resources allow companies to access a broad base of young talent, ensuring that the selected candidates have the necessary skills and motivation to contribute to the development of the organisation. At the same time, these recruitment channels make it easier for young people to find internship opportunities that match their expectations and needs, promoting an enriching and formative international mobility experience for both parties.

6. Satisfaction and Evaluation of International Internships

The evaluation of the international internships and the satisfaction of the companies involved in these programmes provide a complete picture of the benefits and challenges involved in hosting young people in the context of the International network. The testimonies of previous experiences, both from young people and companies, allow us to identify the most valued aspects of these experiences and those that still need to be improved in order to optimise the impact of the internships. Furthermore, this evaluation underlines the key role of internships in the development of professional and personal skills, as well as their contribution to the creation of more dynamic and diverse working environments.

Testimonials from previous experiences with young trainees

Testimonials from companies that have participated in international internship programmes highlight the **positive contribution of young people** in their teams and projects. Many companies emphasise that the arrival of interns brings a renewed energy to the work environment, characterised by the enthusiasm, motivation and curiosity that young people often show when confronted with a new professional environment. The willingness of interns to learn and take responsibility is particularly valued by companies, who see them as a valuable resource to support project implementation and to bring new perspectives to problem solving.

A recurring testimony from companies that have received young interns is the recognition of the impact that these experiences have on the organisation's ability to **innovate and adapt to new challenges**. In sectors such as technology, digitalisation and renewable energy, the presence of young people with up-to-date knowledge has been fundamental for the implementation of new processes and for the incorporation of digital tools that have improved the company's efficiency. This has been particularly relevant in projects requiring a fresh perspective and a creative approach, where young interns have been able to propose innovative solutions that have enriched the team dynamics.

However, some testimonies also highlight the need for better **initial preparation and orientation** so that young people can adapt more quickly to the expectations of the company. Companies point out that, in some cases, young people arrive with an unrealistic idea of what working in a business environment entails, which can lead to initial difficulties in integration. This gap between young people's expectations and the reality of professional work has led some companies to implement more structured welcome programmes, with the aim of facilitating the adaptation of trainees and ensuring that they have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities from the start.

Evaluation of the impact on business and young people

The evaluation of the impact of international internships reveals that, although the experience can be demanding for both parties, the long-term benefits often outweigh the initial challenges. Companies highlight that the integration of young interns has allowed them to **identify potential talent** which, in many cases, has been incorporated as part of the team on a permanent basis. The possibility of closely assessing the skills and attitude of young people before offering them a formal contract is seen as a significant advantage, as it reduces the risks associated with recruitment and ensures that new team members share the culture and values of the organisation.

From the young people's point of view, international internships represent a valuable opportunity to **gain experience in an international professional environment**, allowing them to develop technical competences, improve their intercultural communication skills and build a network of contacts that can be fundamental for their professional future. Most of the young people who have participated in these experiences consider that the internships have been a key element to improve their employability and to access better job opportunities both in their home country and in other international markets.

However, the impact assessment also highlights **some areas for improvement** where both companies and mobility programmes can work to ensure that the experience is more satisfying and formative. One of the main criticisms from young people is the lack of clarity in the objectives of the placements and the tasks to be carried out, which in some cases leads to frustration and a feeling of wasted time. The companies, for their

part, mention that the lack of prior preparation of some young people may affect the efficiency of the first months of the internship, as they require more support and guidance to adapt to the demands of the working environment.

Feedback on possible improvements and recommendations for future programmes

Both companies and young people offer **valuable recommendations to improve the quality of international internship programmes** and to ensure that these experiences are enriching for both parties. One of the most recurrent suggestions is the need to strengthen **coordination between universities and companies** to ensure that the expectations of young people and the needs of organisations are aligned from the outset. This implies not only clearly defining the objectives of the internship, but also offering prior training that prepares young people to face the demands of the labour market and allows them to better understand the dynamics of working in a professional environment.

Another important recommendation is to improve the **structure of mentoring programmes** within companies. The appointment of mentors who can guide young people during their stay is seen as a key factor in ensuring that interns receive the support they need to develop and that the internship experience is truly formative. Mentors can act as a source of continuous feedback, helping young people to identify their strengths and improve in those areas that require further development. This mentoring relationship not only benefits the young people, but also helps companies to integrate interns more effectively into the work team.

Companies also suggest the **need for greater flexibility in the duration of internships**. While some organisations prefer longer programmes that allow for deeper learning, others consider that greater flexibility in duration can facilitate the participation of young people who have academic or personal constraints that prevent them from committing full time for several months. Offering internship options with different durations could make these experiences more accessible to a greater number of young people and allow companies to tailor programmes according to their specific needs.

In terms of **financial compensation and working conditions**, both companies and young people agree on the need to ensure a minimum level of financial support to enable trainees to cover their basic expenses during their stay abroad. This not only contributes to equity in access to mobility opportunities, but also helps young people to fully concentrate on their learning experience without the constant worry about their financial situation. Companies suggest that mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, could offer greater incentives to support the compensation of young people, allowing more organisations to participate without excessive financial effort.

The evaluation of the satisfaction and impact of international internships highlights both the benefits of these experiences and the challenges that still need to be addressed to optimise their functioning. Recommendations from both young people and companies point to the need to improve the structure and support during the internship process, with a focus on mentoring, clarity of objectives and financial compensation. By incorporating these improvements, it is possible to ensure that international internships continue to be a key tool for the integration of young people into the labour market and for the creation of a more dynamic, inclusive and future-oriented business environment.

6. General Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Main Research Findings

The research on international internships in the framework of the International network has identified a number of key findings that provide an in-depth understanding of the motivations, expectations and challenges of both the young people and the companies involved. These findings reveal a complex and diverse picture, where international internships emerge as a valuable opportunity for the integration of young people into the global labour market, but also face significant obstacles that require a strategic approach to overcome. Visits to some foreign institutions have also complemented the search for relevant data for this paper.

Firstly, one of the most relevant findings is the **importance of international internships as a bridge between education and the labour market**. For many young people, these internships represent the first opportunity to apply in a practical way the knowledge acquired during their academic training, allowing them to develop technical competences and soft skills that are essential for their future employability. The experience of working in an international environment not only enriches their CV, but also provides them with a global perspective on labour dynamics, enabling them to better adapt to a constantly changing market.

However, research has also revealed that **there are significant financial and logistical barriers** that limit some young people's access to these opportunities. The lack of financial support to cover the costs associated with international mobility, such as accommodation and transport, remains a significant obstacle, especially for young people from more vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds. This highlights the need to strengthen support mechanisms, both from companies and mobility programmes, to ensure that international placements are accessible to more young people and are not limited to those with greater financial resources.

In relation to companies, one of the most striking findings is the **value they place on the integration of young interns as a way of fostering innovation and diversity** within their teams. The companies that participated in the research recognise that the arrival of young interns brings a fresh vision and renewed energy that can be key to generating new ideas and adapting to market changes. In addition, the cultural diversity that young internationals bring is seen as a resource that enriches the organisational culture and enhances the company's ability to understand and adapt to the needs of a globalised market.

Despite these benefits, research has also revealed that **companies face significant challenges in managing international mobility**, especially in terms of administrative procedures and the cultural integration of young people into the work environment. Difficulties in obtaining visas and work permits, as well as the lack of previous experience of some companies in hosting international youth, may limit the willingness of organisations to participate in these programmes. This highlights the importance of strengthening support policies and providing resources that facilitate the integration of young people in companies, ensuring that the internship experience is smooth and enriching.

Another key finding of the research is the **need for better coordination between educational institutions and companies** to ensure that internships are a meaningful learning experience for young people. The research has shown that, in many cases, young people do not have adequate guidance to identify the best internship opportunities or to understand the expectations of companies. This leads to a disconnect between academic training and the needs of the labour market, which can make it difficult for young people to adapt to the demands of their professional environment. Universities and training centres, in collaboration with companies, have a key role to play in designing internship programmes that are more aligned with the reality of the market and that prepare young people to face the challenges of their first professional experience.

Finally, the research has revealed that, although the **overall satisfaction of young people with their internship experiences is high**, there are areas for improvement that need to be addressed to optimise the impact of these opportunities. Young people particularly value the possibility of working on real projects, the close relationship with mentors and the opportunity to grow in an international environment, but they also point out the need for greater clarity in the objectives of the internships and a structure that guarantees constant learning. Companies, for their part, recognise the importance of having mentoring programmes and offering an inclusive work environment that facilitates the integration of young people.

Taken together, these findings underline the importance of international placements as an essential tool for the integration of young people into the labour market, but also highlight the need to adjust mobility policies and strengthen collaboration between all

actors involved. Only through coordinated action between educational institutions, companies and mobility programmes, it will be possible to overcome current barriers and ensure that international placements continue to be a high-value training experience for young people and for the organisations receiving them.

2. Recommendations for Young People

Based on the research findings, a series of recommendations can be identified that seek to guide young people interested in international placements to maximise the success of these experiences and overcome the challenges they may face. These recommendations focus on prior preparation, making the most of available resources and attitude during the internship experience, with the aim of enabling young people to get the most out of their time abroad and improve their integration into the global labour market.

One of the key recommendations for young people is the **importance of prior preparation** before starting the search for an international internship. This involves not only preparing a CV tailored to the professional profile they wish to project, but also **doing in-depth research on the companies and sectors of interest**. Understanding the needs of the sector and the skills that companies value in interns can help young people to fine-tune their profile and highlight their strengths in the selection process. In addition, it is advisable for young people to spend time learning about the cultural particularities of the host country, which will facilitate their adaptation and integration into the working environment.

In this sense, taking advantage of **further training** opportunities can make a difference in the competitiveness of young people in the selection process. The development of digital skills, such as programming, data analysis and the use of technological tools, is increasingly in demand by companies, especially in emerging sectors. Similarly, foreign language skills are a valuable asset that can facilitate communication in an international environment. Young people should therefore consider taking additional courses or becoming certified in specific skills that are relevant to the internship they wish to undertake. This additional training not only enhances their profile, but also demonstrates to employers their willingness to continue learning and to adapt to the requirements of the labour market.

Another key recommendation is to **make the most of the networking** and guidance resources offered by educational institutions and mobility organisations. Universities, through their employment and guidance offices, often have information on internship programmes and agreements with companies that can be very useful for young people. Participating in job fairs, networking events and seminars organised by these institutions can facilitate access to opportunities that would otherwise be more difficult to find. In addition, it is important for young people to get involved in professional networks, such as LinkedIn, where they can connect directly with recruiters and industry professionals.

Once they have secured an internship opportunity, young people should be aware of the **importance of being proactive** during their stay. The internship experience is an opportunity to demonstrate their competences and to learn from the professionals they work with, so it is essential that they adopt an attitude of openness to learning and actively seek out new tasks and responsibilities. Being proactive means not only fulfilling assigned tasks, but also offering ideas, participating in projects and showing an interest in understanding how the company works. This approach not only enhances the internship experience, but also allows young people to stand out to their supervisors and increase their chances of being considered for future employment opportunities.

It is also recommended that young people seek to **establish a close relationship with their mentors and supervisors**. Mentors can be a valuable source of guidance and can provide feedback on areas where young people need to improve. Maintaining open communication with mentors allows young people to learn more effectively and receive advice that can be useful for their professional development. In addition, a good relationship with mentors and other team members can facilitate access to the company's network of contacts, which can be a valuable resource for future career opportunities.

Another relevant aspect is that young people should **be realistic about the conditions of the internship** and be prepared to face the challenges it entails, such as adapting to a new cultural environment and differences in working styles. It is important that they understand that the internship is a learning stage and that, although not all tasks will be challenging, each experience offers them an opportunity to improve their skills and to better understand the functioning of a company in an international context. Keeping an open and resilient mindset in the face of obstacles can help young people make the most of their stay and turn each experience into valuable learning.

It is crucial that young people **use the international experience as an opportunity to build a strong professional narrative**. This involves reflecting on what they have learned during the internship and how these experiences align with their career goals. Building a portfolio that includes projects and achievements during the placement, as well as updating their CV and profile on professional networks, will allow them to present a more attractive professional image to future employers. The ability to clearly communicate the value of their international experience is an aspect that can make a difference when competing for more demanding and responsible jobs.

International internships represent a unique opportunity for young people to gain experience in a diverse professional environment and to develop skills that are essential in a global labour market. However, the success of these experiences depends to a large extent on prior preparation, attitude during the stay and the ability to take advantage of available resources and networks. By following these recommendations, young people can maximise the impact of the internship on their professional and personal development, and ensure that the international experience opens new doors in their career.

3. Recommendations for Companies

Companies hosting young international interns have the opportunity to enrich their team and foster innovation within their organisations. However, in order for the hosting experience to be beneficial for both parties, it is necessary for companies to adopt certain practices that optimise the integration process of young people and enhance their professional development. These recommendations focus on improving the internship experience and creating a more favourable environment for learning and collaboration.

An effective strategy is to structure mentoring programmes that facilitate the integration of young people into the work team. Mentors play a key role in guiding trainees, helping them to better understand the dynamics of the company and offering them personalised guidance in developing their skills. The presence of a mentor allows young people to receive continuous feedback and helps them identify their strengths and areas for improvement. For companies, this mentoring relationship is also a way to ensure that young people adapt more quickly to the expectations of the position, which in turn increases their productivity and contribution to the team.

In addition to mentoring, companies should clearly define the objectives and expectations of the placement from the beginning of the process. Establishing a detailed work plan and communicating it to the young people allows both parties to have a clear understanding of what is expected during the placement. This approach not only helps trainees to organise their time and prioritise tasks, but also allows companies to evaluate the progress of the young people in an objective way. Clarity of objectives contributes to making the internship a formative and meaningful experience, where young people can see the impact of their work and feel motivated to do their best.

It is recommended that companies maintain open and constant communication with young people throughout the internship period. Fostering an atmosphere of dialogue allows interns to express their concerns, ask questions and propose ideas, which contributes to a more collaborative and inclusive working environment. Open communication also makes it easier for young people to feel part of the team and to become more actively involved in the company's projects. This is especially important when working with young people from different cultures, as open dialogue helps to overcome cultural barriers and build stronger relationships between team members.

In relation to the management of administrative aspects, companies should consider simplifying and streamlining the procedures necessary for hosting young international trainees. Bureaucracy, especially when it comes to obtaining visas and work permits, can be a discouraging factor for both companies and young people. Collaborating with mobility agencies, educational institutions and support programmes can ease the process, reducing the administrative burden and ensuring that young people can start their experience quickly and smoothly. Companies that take a proactive approach to managing these procedures often have an advantage in attracting the most talented candidates.

Another important recommendation is to provide adequate financial compensation to enable young people to cover their basic expenses during the traineeship. Although remuneration is not the only factor that determines the quality of an internship experience, adequate financial support ensures that young people can fully concentrate on their professional development without having to constantly worry about their financial situation. Companies that provide fair compensation also enhance their image as responsible employers and can attract a wider group of candidates, including those from more vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds.

In the area of diversifying the work environment, companies should promote inclusion and diversity as core values of their organisational culture. The arrival of young people from different countries and cultures offers a unique opportunity to enrich the work environment and to foster an exchange of ideas that can be key to innovation. Including activities that facilitate cultural integration, such as awareness-raising workshops, welcome events and social activities, helps to create a more welcoming environment for international trainees and strengthen team cohesion.

It is essential that companies continuously evaluate the impact of internships and use the learnings to improve their host programmes. Feedback from young people on their experience can be a valuable source of information for adjusting aspects such as the length of the internship, the type of tasks assigned and the mentoring structure. Companies that are willing to listen to young people and adapt to their needs tend to offer more fulfilling internship experiences, which not only benefits the interns, but also strengthens the company's reputation as an attractive workplace for new talent.

These recommendations aim to optimise the experience of hosting international interns by fostering a work environment that is conducive to learning and collaboration. By implementing these strategies, companies can ensure that internship programmes are an effective tool for attracting and retaining talent, while contributing to the development of a new generation of professionals better prepared to face the challenges of a globalised market.

4. Opportunities for Improvement and Collaboration

International internships offer significant potential to connect young people to the labour market, promoting their integration into a global professional environment. However, to maximise the benefits of these experiences and ensure that they are accessible to a greater number of young people, it is necessary to identify opportunities for improvement and foster collaboration between the different actors involved. This includes concrete proposals to strengthen the relationship between young people and companies, as well as a more active role of educational institutions and third sector entities, such as Somos Europa, in facilitating this process.

One of the main **proposals to strengthen the connection between young people and companies** is the creation of collaborative platforms that facilitate direct exchange between the two. These platforms could function as digital spaces where young people can learn first-hand about available internship opportunities, access detailed information about companies' expectations and receive personalised guidance. At the same time, companies could use these spaces to publish internship offers, organise virtual open door events and hold question and answer sessions where candidates can clarify their doubts. These platforms would contribute to greater transparency in the selection process and fairer access to opportunities, especially for those young people who do not have previous networks.

Another measure that could improve the connection between young people and companies is the promotion of **pre-internship programmes** that allow young people to familiarise themselves with the organisational culture of companies before starting a full internship experience. These programmes, which could include workshops, company visits and mentoring sessions beforehand, would help young people to better understand the expectations of the work environment and prepare them more effectively for the tasks they will be assigned. Companies, in turn, would have the opportunity to get to know the young people before making a selection decision, which would facilitate the matching of the candidates' skills with the specific needs of the organisation.

The creation of **inter-enterprise mentoring networks** is another proposal that can strengthen the connection between young people and companies. Through these networks, experienced professionals from different sectors could act as mentors for groups of young people, guiding them on the skills most in demand and helping them to develop a clearer perspective on their career goals. These networks could be run in collaboration with universities and third sector organisations, which would facilitate the participation of a larger number of young people and allow knowledge about the demands of the labour market to be shared more effectively among all parties involved.

The **role of educational institutions** is essential to facilitate young people's access to international internships and to ensure that these experiences are truly formative. Universities, through their career guidance offices, can play a more active role in preparing students for the internship search process by organising workshops on CV writing, interviewing and intercultural skills. In addition, educational institutions can improve their coordination with companies to ensure that internship programmes respond to the needs of the market, adjusting their training offer to the most demanded skills and promoting the participation of their students in international mobility initiatives.

Universities also have the capacity to **encourage the creation of cooperation agreements with international companies**, which facilitate the mobility of their students and ensure them more direct access to internship opportunities in other countries. These

agreements can include the creation of integrated internship programmes, where young people can complete part of their training at the university and part in the company, ensuring a smooth transition between the academic and professional environment. In addition, educational institutions can act as mediators in solving problems that arise during the placement, offering support to both young people and companies to ensure that the experience is a positive one for both parties.

As for **third sector entities**, such as Somos Europa and the other members of the International network, their contribution to the promotion of international internships and the integration of young people into the labour market can be decisive. These organisations can provide crucial support in the dissemination of internship opportunities, acting as a bridge between young people and companies and ensuring that information reaches a larger number of beneficiaries. In addition, third sector organisations can offer guidance and further training programmes that prepare young people to face the challenges of international mobility, addressing issues such as managing cultural diversity, adapting to new environments and developing digital skills.

Third sector organisations can also play an important role in the **evaluation and continuous improvement of internship programmes**, collecting data on the experience of young people and companies and providing recommendations for adjusting programmes according to changing market needs. Through research and case studies, these entities can identify best practices in the management of international placements and share this knowledge with universities, companies and public institutions, contributing to a higher quality and effectiveness of mobility programmes.

Strengthening collaboration between universities, companies and third sector entities is essential to overcome the barriers that young people face when accessing international internships and to ensure that these experiences are a real opportunity for professional growth. Only through joint action will it be possible to create an environment where young people can fully develop their potential, where companies can benefit from emerging talent and where a more inclusive and dynamic labour market is promoted, adapted to the challenges of a globalised world.

Annexes

1. Questionnaires and interviews conducted during the present research

1. Youth Survey

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Age
 - 15-18 years
 - 19-24 years old
 - 25-30 years
2. Gender
 - Man
 - Woman
 - Another
 - I prefer not to say
3. Country of residence
 - Open response
4. Area of residence
 - Urbana
 - Rural
 - Semi-urban
5. Highest level of education attained
 - Secondary education
 - Vocational training
 - University (Degree)
 - University (Master's degree or higher)

Section 2: Practice Aspirations and Preferences

1. In which type of company would you like to do your internship? (Select all that apply)
 - Small business (less than 50 employees)

- Medium enterprise (50-249 employees)
 - Large company (250 or more employees)
 - Startups
 - Non-profit organisations
 - Public sector
2. In which sectors would you be interested in doing your internship? (Select all that apply)
- Technology
 - Health
 - Finance
 - Education
 - Culture and Arts
 - Environment
 - Social Services
3. What characteristics are you looking for in a company where you would like to do your internship? (Select all that apply)
- Innovation and advanced technology
 - Inclusive and diverse corporate culture
 - Focus on professional development
 - Flexibility in working conditions
 - A benchmark in its sector
 - Social and environmental
 - Sector leadership
4. What are your expectations of the learning experience during the internship (select all that apply)?
- Acquire specific technical skills
 - Development of soft skills (communication, teamwork, etc.)
 - Exposure to international projects
 - Mentoring opportunities
 - Integration into the corporate culture
 - Possibility of being hired at the end of your internship
5. What working conditions do you value most when considering an internship opportunity? (Select all that apply)
- Time flexibility
 - Remuneration
 - Opportunities for further training
 - Collaborative working environment
 - Possibility to work remotely
 - Support and guidance during tasks

Section 3: Onboarding Processes and Corporate Culture

1. Which aspects of the onboarding process do you consider most important for a successful integration into the company? (Please select all that apply)
 - ☐ Initial orientation and training sessions
 - ☐ Mentoring and ongoing support
 - ☐ Clear information on expectations and responsibilities
 - ☐ Integration into the team from day one
 - ☐ Access to resources and tools needed for the work
2. How would you describe your preference in terms of corporate culture (select all that apply)?
 - ☐ Results-oriented
 - ☐ Focus on employee wellbeing
 - ☐ Focus on innovation and creativity
 - ☐ Rigid and formal
 - ☐ Flexible and open to new ideas
 - ☐ Collaborative and team-oriented

Section 4: Expectations and Sustainability of the Employment Relationship

1. Would you like the internship to become a long-term employment opportunity?
 - ☐ Yes, I would very much like to
 - ☐ Yes, but it is not a requirement
 - ☐ No, I am looking for short-term experience
 - ☐ Not sure
2. What factors would influence your decision to stay with the company after the internship? (Please select all that apply)
 - ☐ Professional development opportunities
 - ☐ Organisational culture
 - ☐ Compensation and benefits
 - ☐ Stability of the company
 - ☐ Prospects for growth in the sector

Section 5: Labour Market and Entrepreneurship Vision

1. How would you describe your perception of the current labour market (select all that apply)?
 - ☐ Competitive and difficult to access

- It offers a variety of opportunities
 - Unstable and with little job security
 - In the process of shifting to new forms of employment
2. Do you feel ready to enter the labour market?
- Highly skilled
 - Something prepared
 - Unprepared
 - Nothing prepared
3. Do you consider entrepreneurship as a career option for you?
- Yes, definitely
 - Yes, but I see it as a long-term thing.
 - No, I prefer to work for a company or organisation.
 - Not sure
4. In case you have considered entrepreneurship, what kind of support do you think you would need to start your own business? (Select all that apply)
- Business management training
 - Access to finance
 - Networking and mentoring
 - Information on regulations and legal requirements
5. What are the main challenges you think young people face when looking for a job? (Select all that apply)
- Lack of previous work experience
 - Competition with more experienced candidates
 - Lack of job opportunities in the sector of interest
 - Uncertainty about the skills required
6. Which sectors do you think have more opportunities for young people in the future?
- Open response
7. What do you think about flexible working (remote working, flexible working hours, temporary contracts) as a trend in the labour market?
- It is essential and should be offered in more sectors.
 - It is important, but not indispensable
 - I prefer stability and more traditional working conditions
8. Would you like to receive more support from institutions (educational, governmental, etc.) to improve your skills and job opportunities?
- Yes, I would very much like to
 - Yes, but in specific areas
 - No, I feel I already have the necessary support
 - Not sure

Section 6: Concluding Remarks

1. Are there any additional comments you would like to share on how the EU could improve support for young people in finding internships?
 - Open response

2. Company survey

Section 1: General Company Information

1. Name of the company
 - Open response
2. Country of main operation
 - Open response
3. Type of company
 - Small business (less than 50 employees)
 - Medium enterprise (50-249 employees)
 - Large company (250 or more employees)
4. Company sector
 - Technology
 - Manufacturing
 - Education
 - Health
 - Agriculture
 - Culture and Arts
5. Company location
 - Urbana
 - Rural
 - Semi-urban

Section 2: Needs and Expectations of Fellows

1. What kind of roles or positions could your company offer to trainees? (Select all that apply)
 - Internships in technical areas (engineering, IT, etc.)
 - Internships in administrative areas
 - Internships in marketing and communication
 - Human resources internships

- Internships in research and development
 - Internships in production and logistics
2. What skills and competencies do you most value in the trainees your company receives? (Select all that apply)
- Specific technical skills
 - Digital skills
 - Soft skills (communication, teamwork, etc.)
 - Initiative and proactivity
 - Language skills
 - Ability to learn quickly
3. What is your company's main motivation for taking on trainees? (Please select all that apply)
- Access to young and fresh talent
 - Contribute to the professional development of young people
 - Strengthening the corporate image
 - Fulfilling corporate social responsibility
 - Identify potential employees for future recruitment
 - Bringing diversity and innovation to the team
4. What are your company's expectations regarding the recruitment of trainees (select all that apply)?
- Pre-internship training
 - Structured incorporation process
 - Mentoring and ongoing monitoring
 - Periodic evaluation of the grantee's performance
 - Full integration into the work team

Section 3: Corporate Culture and Sustainability of Employment Relationships

1. How would you describe the corporate culture of your organisation (select all that apply)?
- Results-oriented
 - Focus on employee wellbeing
 - Focus on innovation and creativity
 - Structured and formal
 - Flexible and open to new ideas
 - Collaborative and team-oriented
2. What are the most in-demand trainee profiles in your company? (Select all that apply)
- Specialised technical profiles
 - Creative profiles
 - Administrative profiles

- Project management oriented profiles
 - Profiles with previous experience or specific training
3. How much importance does your company attach to the possibility of offering long-term employment to trainees after the end of their internship?
- Very important
 - Moderately important
 - Not very important
 - Not a priority
4. What factors influence your company's decision to offer long-term employment to an intern? (Please select all that apply)
- Performance during traineeships
 - Adjustment to corporate culture
 - Company needs at the time
 - Availability of vacancies
 - Acquired competences and skills

Section 4: Support and Preferences for Collaboration with EU Programmes

1. What support would your company need in order to participate or continue participating in EU traineeship programmes? (Select all that apply)
- Advice on the application process
 - Administrative facilities and reduction of bureaucracy
 - Financial incentives
 - Access to a database of qualified candidates
 - Training programmes to prepare trainees before their arrival
 - Networking and collaboration with other companies
2. Would your company be interested in participating in future EU programmes promoting training and youth employment?
- Yes
 - No
 - Perhaps, depending on the project

Section 5: Local Market Perspective

1. How would you rate the competitiveness of the local market in which your company operates?
- Highly competitive
 - Competitive
 - Uncompetitive
 - Non-competitive

2. What factors do you think most affect your company's competitiveness in the local market? (Select all that apply)
 - ☐ Access to qualified talent
 - ☐ Government support
 - ☐ Available infrastructure
 - ☐ Competition from other local companies
 - ☐ Innovation and technology
 - ☐ Access to international markets
3. What role do you think EU traineeship programmes play in improving your company's competitiveness in the local market?
 - ☐ Highly relevant
 - ☐ Moderately relevant
 - ☐ Not relevant
 - ☐ Not relevant
4. Do you think that young trainees can bring new ideas or innovation that will improve your company's performance in the local market?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Perhaps
5. What specific challenges does your company face in the local market (select all that apply)?
 - ☐ Lack of access to skilled labour
 - ☐ High operating costs
 - ☐ Lack of institutional support
 - ☐ Difficulty in adopting new technologies
 - ☐ Little collaboration between local companies
6. How do you think you could improve the relationship between your company and the local environment through participation in EU programmes?
 - ☐ Open response

Section 6: Concluding Remarks

1. Are there any additional comments you would like to share on how the EU could improve its support to companies in these programmes?
 - ☐ Open response

3. Interview Youth

Section 1: Career Aspirations and Objectives

1. To begin with, could you tell us a bit about your professional and academic interests?
 - What are you studying or what would you like to specialise in?
 - What is your short- and long-term career goal?
2. What motivates you to seek an internship opportunity?
 - Are you looking to gain experience in a specific field, improve your skills, or explore different areas?

Section 2: Preferences on Types of Business and Sector

3. In what kind of company would you like to do your internship?
 - Do you prefer a small, medium or large company?
 - Are you interested in startups, non-profit organisations, or do you prefer an established company?
4. In which sector would you like to do your internship?
 - Technology, health, finance, education, culture and arts, environment, social services, other?
5. What characteristics are you looking for in the company where you would like to do your internship?
 - Do you value innovation, inclusive culture, career development opportunities, flexible working arrangements, etc.?

Section 3: Expectations in the Internship Experience

6. What do you hope to learn or achieve during your internship?
 - Are you looking to acquire technical skills, develop soft skills, or gain experience in international projects?
7. What are your expectations regarding the working conditions during the internship?
 - How important is flexible working hours, the possibility to work remotely, or remuneration to you?
8. What kind of support would you like to receive during your internship?
 - Mentoring, initial training, ongoing support, integration into the team, etc.?

Section 4: Incorporation Processes and Entrepreneurial Culture

9. What would you like your onboarding process to be like?
 - What aspects of the recruitment process do you consider most important for successful integration?
10. What kind of business culture appeals to you most?
 - Do you prefer a results-oriented work environment, focused on employee well-being, focused on innovation, or a more formal and structured one?
11. What values or behaviours do you think are important in a work environment?
 - How would you like your relationship with your colleagues and superiors to be?

Section 5: Sustainability of the Employment Relationship

12. Would you like the internship to become a long-term employment opportunity?
 - What factors would be decisive for you if you were offered a continuation in the company?
13. What impact would the possibility of staying with the company have on you in the long term?
 - How do you see this aligning with your professional goals?

Section 6: Support and Preferences for Collaboration with EU Programmes

14. What challenges have you encountered or could you encounter when looking for internship opportunities?
 - Lack of information, financial difficulties, language requirements, other?
15. What kind of additional support do you think would help you make the most of EU traineeship opportunities?
 - More information, personalised advice, financial support, programmes in your local language, other?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about how the EU or this project could better support you in your search for an internship?

4. Interviewing companies

Section 1: Company Profile

1. Could you tell us a little about the sector in which your company operates?
2. What is the size of your company (small, medium or large)?
3. Has your company hosted international trainees in the past?
4. If so, what have been the main areas or departments in which trainees have been involved?

Section 2: Motivations for Hosting Interns

1. What motivates your company to participate in international internship programmes?
2. What benefits do you perceive from hosting young interns (innovation, new ideas, multiculturalism, identifying long-term talent, etc.)?
3. Have you considered taking on young trainees as an opportunity to train future employees of the company?

Section 3: Expectations of Interns

1. What are the competences and skills you expect to find in the young people you take on internships (technical competences, languages, soft skills, etc.)?
2. What attitude or disposition do you consider most important in young people during their placement (proactivity, learning ability, flexibility, etc.)?
3. What educational requirements or previous experience does your company value when selecting young people for internships?

Section 4: Barriers and Challenges for Companies

1. What challenges has your company faced when hosting international interns (visa management, cultural integration, associated costs, etc.)?
2. How complicated has the administrative process been to manage the international mobility of young people?
3. How does your company deal with the cultural integration and adaptation of young people in the work team?
4. What additional measures or support do you think would be useful to facilitate the reception of young people on international placements (public incentives, reduction of administrative burdens, etc.)?

Section 5: Institutional Support and EU Programmes

1. Has your company received any support or funding from the EU for the hosting of young trainees? If so, what has your experience with these programmes been like?
2. What kind of additional support do you think would be useful to encourage business participation in these programmes (financial support, legal advice, simplification of procedures, etc.)?
3. Would you like EU programmes to offer more flexibility or customisation in the requirements for companies?

Section 6: Impact and Future of the Employment Relationship

1. Has your company considered turning the internship into a long-term employment opportunity?
2. What factors influence your decision whether or not to offer a job opportunity to young people after the end of the internship?
3. Do you believe that the impact of international practices has strengthened your company's organisational culture? In what ways?

Section 7: Concluding Remarks

1. Is there anything else you would like to share on how the EU or this project could better support your company in hosting young international trainees?

5. Youth focus group

1. Introduction (10-15 minutes)

- **Welcome and introduction of the moderator and participants.** Briefly explain the purpose of the focus group and the project "EU Horizons: Inspiring European Futures", funded by the European Commission.
- **Ground rules:** Ensure that all participants understand that they should respect each other's opinions, avoid interrupting, and keep discussions confidential.
- **Aim of the focus group:** To further explore young people's expectations, needs and concerns regarding placements abroad, based on the results of previous surveys and interviews.

2. Career Goals and Aspirations (15-20 minutes)

- **Question 1:** What are your short- and long-term career expectations, and how do you think an internship experience abroad could help you achieve them?
- **Question 2:** In terms of your academic background or area of specialisation, what kind of internship abroad do you think would be most relevant for you?
- **Question 3:** What are the main reasons that would lead you to opt for an international internship experience (gaining work experience, improving skills, getting to know other cultures, etc.)?

3. Preferences on Company Types and Sector (15-20 minutes)

- **Question 4:** What kind of companies are most attractive to you for an internship abroad (start-ups, large companies, non-profit organisations, etc.)?
- **Question 5:** In which sector would you like to do your internship? Why do you think this sector is the most suitable for your career?
- **Question 6:** What characteristics do you value most in a company when considering an internship abroad (innovation, inclusive culture, development opportunities, flexibility, etc.)?

4. Barriers and Challenges (15-20 minutes)

- **Question 7:** What do you think are the main barriers or challenges you might face when doing an internship abroad (costs, visas, cultural adaptation, etc.)?
- **Question 8:** What kind of support do you expect to receive to overcome these challenges (scholarships, cultural orientation, institutional support)?
- **Question 9:** Do you have any specific concerns about working conditions or experience in another country during the internship?

5. Expectations about the Internship Programme (20-25 minutes)

- **Question 10:** What aspects of the internship experience are most important to you (technical skills development, employment opportunities, team integration)?
- **Question 11:** How do you expect the company to support you during the internship? What kind of mentoring or training would you like to receive?
- **Question 12:** What do you hope to achieve at the end of your internship experience and how do you think it will influence your future career?

6. Sustainability of the Employment Relationship (15-20 minutes)

- **Question 13:** Would you like the internship to become a long-term employment opportunity? What factors would influence your decision to stay with the company?
- **Question 14:** How important is it to you that the company offers opportunities for professional growth after the internship?

7. Closing and Concluding Remarks (10-15 minutes)

- **Question 15:** Is there anything else you would like to share about your expectations regarding the internship abroad?
- Thank the participants for their time and contributions. Report on the next steps of the project and the importance of their contributions for the design of future internship programmes.



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