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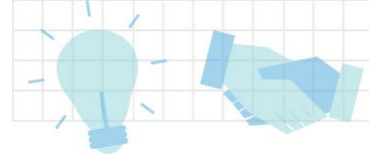
Virtual internships for inclusive societies



*Transnational synthesis of the state-of art
of virtual internships in Italy, North Macedonia,
Serbia and Spain*



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Introduction

In an ever-evolving global landscape, where the dynamics of education and employment are constantly reshaped by technological advancements and societal shifts, the concept of professional development has transcended traditional boundaries. Amidst this transformative journey, virtual internships have emerged as a pivotal force, seamlessly connecting the realms of learning and labor.

Intending to improve opportunities for the development of knowledge and skills among young people, partners from Serbia, North Macedonia, Spain, Italy, and Belgium are implementing the project "VI4IS – Virtual internships for inclusive societies“.

Before proposing models of virtual internship in partner countries, the partners developed national reports which present the overviews of state-of-art of virtual practices in each country.

The transnational synthesis embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the present state of virtual internships across diverse European countries (Italy, Spain, North Macedonia and Serbia), casting a keen eye on their integration within both formal and non-formal education systems.

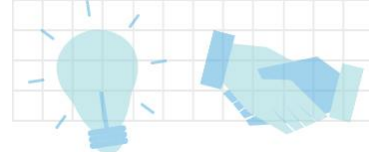
The synthesis presents analysis created in the 4 national reports containing an overview of the current state of virtual internships, in particular covering types of models of virtual internships that have been developed, platforms used in their organization, aims of virtual internship, specific youth target groups involved, and results of evaluation of existing programs.

The Transnational synthesis is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them



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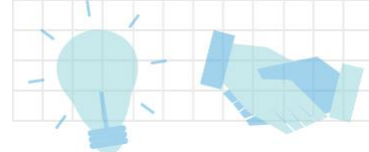
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About the project

The main goal of the Virtual Internships for Inclusive Societies (VI4IS) project is to improve access of young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities, to internship programs conducted within formal and nonformal education in Europe. The project contributes to ensuring equal opportunities for all young people to develop the necessary skills and gain practical experience in order to smoothen the transition from education to the labor market and ensure that all young people have access to adequately funded non-formal education at all levels.

The main activities of the project are: broad consultation process on country level, assessment of virtual internships, exchange of knowledge and good internships, both country-based and transnational (national and EU level, between EU and non-EU countries), piloting new and improving existing virtual internships programs across Europe.

The Virtual Internships for Inclusive Societies (VI4IS) project is co-funded by the EU.



About the partners

BELGRADE OPEN SCHOOL

The Belgrade Open School (BOS) is a non-profit, educational organization of civil society founded in 1993. BOS empowers and networks changemakers, improves public policies and brings together public, business and civil sectors to build a resilient society, based on knowledge, partnership and accountability.

BOS has a strong background in implementing projects for and by youth. Within the Employability and Career Guidance and Counseling programme area, BOS implemented more than 40 national and international projects focused on career guidance and counselling, has and reached more than 30000 young people, 50 youth offices, 80 schools, and more than 300 teachers.

Starting from 2003, BOS has been encouraging the individual's continuous development, lifelong learning and overall economic development of our society by contributing to establishing the career guidance and counselling system and strengthening the connection between education and the labour market.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT EUROPE

Junior Achievement Europe is the largest and leading European non-profit organization in entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial health programs for youth, dedicated to inspire and prepare young people to succeed and Member of JA Worldwide. For over 100 years, JA Worldwide has delivered hands-on, experiential learning in entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial health. In the last school year, the JA Europe network provided over 6.6 million learning experiences for youth in online, in person and blended formats.

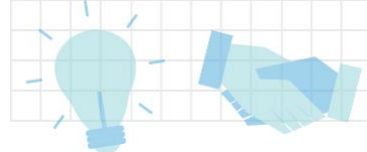
JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT SERBIA

Junior Achievement Serbia is the only accredited provider of entrepreneurship education services in Serbia. It is a locally managed and funded entity affiliated with Junior Achievement Worldwide, a global organization founded 1919 in the USA. The overall goal of JAS is to educate young people in the field of entrepreneurship, financial literacy and business, and to enable the business sector to take an active role in preparing and inspiring the youth of Serbia to become contributing members of the society. Since 2005, JAS is operating as an independent non-government and non-profit organization.

JAS implements educational programs for elementary and high school students in the field of entrepreneurship, financial literacy and work readiness, verified by JA Worldwide and accredited by the Serbian Ministry of Education. The programs represent best internships in developing entrepreneurial skills and knowledge of the market economy and include activities like competitions, trade fairs and online contests. All programs are implemented through the educational system either as a part of the school curriculum or as an after-school activity.

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF MACEDONIA

The National Youth Council of Macedonia (NYCM) is a platform that represents the interests and needs of young people, acting as a link between all stakeholders and ensures the engagement and active



participation of young people in the decision-making process at every level. The NYCM is a representative body of youth organizations in Republic of North Macedonia. The Council unites unions, youth-led organizations, youth-oriented organizations, and youth wings of other organizations in order to promote and represent the youth and youth rights in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The membership of the NYCM is diverse, uniting organizations operating at national and regional level, in rural and urban areas, student organizations, branches of international organizations and other types of associations. Throughout the process of achieving its goals, the NYCM represents the interests of young people in the Republic of North Macedonia regardless of their socio-economic status, gender, race, ethnic and cultural origin, political and religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other form of difference.

PIXEL

Pixel is an education and training institution with more than 20 years of experience in the following areas: (1) Organization of international courses and seminars; (2) Planning and coordination of European projects; and (3) Organization of international events and conferences.

Pixel has successfully coordinated and managed more than 140 European projects. In Italy, Pixel collaborates with various organizations, including universities, research centers, educational and vocational training institutions, adult education institutes, and schools. At the European level, Pixel has developed cooperation agreements and partnerships with more than 500 institutions. Pixel has been organizing international conferences since 2001. Among them, three are organized annually. Pixel has obtained UNI EN ISO 9001:2000 certification and is also accredited with the Ministry of Education for education and in-service training of school personnel.

XANO

XANO, created in 2010, aims to promote growth opportunities for individuals and for society in general by creating synergies, tools and methodologies for the dissemination of culture and promotion of active citizenship among people and organizations.

The organization is an association of secondary education school teachers, vocational education teachers and trainers in different disciplines that focuses its activities on the field of education, training and cultural promotion in the European environment, qualified in fields such as youth work, student entrepreneurship, voluntary aid and other topics. Furthermore, the association works as a hub for the guidance of socially disadvantaged young people by means of strategies that insert young people into the educational system or the world of work. The activities and objectives of the organization are inspired by the principles of equal opportunities for disadvantaged people and between men and women.



Summary of national reports

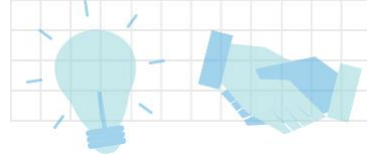
The rapidly changing labor market, post-pandemic, has highlighted the lack of practical skills among youth transitioning from education to work. Virtual internship programs are emerging as effective solutions to address youth unemployment and skill gaps. These programs utilize digital tools to facilitate internships, which have gained popularity across Europe and more specific across the countries that participate to the project (Italy, Spain, North Macedonia and Serbia), due to the pandemic-driven shift to remote work.

Starting with **Italy**, the virtual internships there are integrated into formal education as well as non-formal training programs. They offer students practical application of theoretical concepts, skill development, and networking opportunities across various fields and industries. Internships involve agreements between educational providers, host companies, and interns, with different categories like curricular and extracurricular internships for various target groups. Various virtual internship models are adopted by companies, including Remote Team-Based, Hybrid, and Self-Directed models, each with its benefits and challenges. Furthermore, Italy has introduced "school-to-work alternation" to bridge the gap between education and work. While originally in-person, recent adaptations allow elements of this program to be conducted online. This integrated pathway helps students gain practical experience, with a combination of curricular and extracurricular internships.

Furthermore, in **North Macedonia**, there is legal framework governing internships, defined by a 2019 law, which differentiates internships from other work arrangements. The law mandates paid internships lasting up to six months, benefiting individuals up to 34 years old who aren't employed regularly. However, despite legislation, universities often lack regulated internship programs and the actual internship experiences are quite limited, with practical training being particularly prominent in vocational schools. Virtual internships in North Macedonia are underdeveloped, and often confused with remote practical training programs. Private companies, skill development organizations, and civil society groups are pioneering virtual internships while European initiatives are advocating for paid traineeships. Overall, while virtual internships are nascent, North Macedonia's ecosystem demonstrates potential for growth in this area.

Last but not least, in **Serbia**, young people face a high unemployment rate and challenges transitioning from education to the job market and internships play a crucial role in bridging this gap. While internships have been prevalent, more than half of young people report not receiving financial compensation, and lack of information and time are common reasons for not participating. According to the findings, internships also fail to provide meaningful learning experiences, contributing to a cycle of joblessness.

Internship implementation in Serbia takes various forms, often defined by legal frameworks. Mandatory internships are integrated into formal education programs, and some professions require internships as prerequisites. Still currently, there is no specific legal framework regulating work internships and advocacy efforts have focused on the quality of internships based on European recommendations, emphasizing agreements, learning objectives, mentorship, working conditions, limited duration, and recognition of acquired skills.



In **Spain**, while not being at the forefront of virtual internships, there's a robust ecosystem focused on youth development. This collective effort has the potential to leverage digital technology to enhance Spanish youth employability. Internships, a cornerstone of formal and non-formal education, offer practical experience and bridge theoretical knowledge with real-world application. The legal framework, vocational training, and different types of internships contribute to Spain's youth development strategy. Additionally, European-level internships provide opportunities for cultural exchange and skill enhancement. The adoption of virtual internships in Spain has been influenced by technology, the pandemic, and youth unemployment concerns. Effectiveness is determined by task quality, supervision, resources, and networking. Implementing successful virtual internship models involves government support, university partnerships, corporate programs, online platforms, and non-profit initiatives. Overall, Spain's approach aims to equip its youth with valuable skills for future employability.



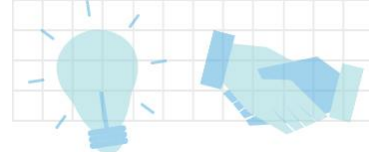
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National report on Virtual internship in **Italy**

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Abstract

The present report aims to provide an overview of the current state of virtual internships in Italy within formal and non-formal education systems, in particular covering types of models of virtual internships that have been developed, platforms used in their organization, aims of virtual internship, specific youth target groups involved and results of evaluation of existing programs.

Review of online literature on virtual internships

In the rapidly changing labour market, in the aftermath of the pandemic, youth are faced with the lack of practical skills that could help them to transit successfully from the education system to the labour market. Internship programs, as a type of work-based learning, have been recognized as an effective method for alleviating youth unemployment and equipping young people with relevant skills. However, the use of digital tools in the process of organization of internships has not been fully utilized, although the prevalence of virtual internships i.e. internship programs facilitated via computer-mediated programs and digital tools has increased significantly in the last couple of years. Virtual internships in Italy have become increasingly popular due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for remote work. Many Italian companies, organizations, and universities have adapted their internship programs to offer virtual opportunities for students and recent graduates.

In the formal education system, virtual internships are commonly used as a part of higher education programs, often integrated into existing courses or used as a standalone course. Virtual internships offer students the chance to apply theoretical concepts learned in the classroom to real-world situations, to gain practical skills and make valuable connections with professionals in their chosen field. Many Italian universities and colleges offer virtual internships as part of their curriculum, often in partnership with private companies and non-profit organizations.

Within the non-formal education systems frame, virtual internships are used as part of various training and development programs. Virtual internships can be a part of youth development programs, vocational training programs, and entrepreneurship training programs, offering young people the opportunity to develop their professional skills in various fields, such as communications, marketing, finance, and sustainable development and to gain work experience in a variety of industries. Many organizations and institutions offer virtual internships for youth, including NGOs, government agencies, and private companies.

They also offer the opportunity to work with companies and organizations located in different parts of the world, which can broaden students perspectives and provide a global outlook: among these opportunities, some examples of organizations that offer virtual internships in Italy include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Italian Chamber of Commerce in West Canada and the University of Bologna.

These programs provide students with the chance to work remotely and gain experience in their chosen fields, even if they are unable to travel to Italy.

Although some Italian business leaders are concerned that virtual internships overextend the concept of "smart-working", believing that the benefits of face-to-face internships, such as strengthening



interpersonal relationships and teamwork may get lost in virtual ones, depriving young people of the opportunity to gain both the skills and understanding of how the professional world operates and to benefit from the personal network that is sometimes created during coffee breaks or in office meetings, the general trend tends more and more to highlight the undeniable benefits that might flow from these, namely:

- **Flexibility:** virtual internships offer greater flexibility to students, as they can work from anywhere in the world and do not need to be physically present at the company in Italy. This allows students to balance their internship with other commitments, such as coursework, part-time jobs, or family obligations.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** virtual internships can be less expensive than traditional in-person internships, as students do not need to pay for travel, accommodation, and other expenses associated with living in a foreign country or in different cities. Such a feature could be extremely advantageous, especially within a context, such as that of Italy, characterized by a very high mobility of young people on the north-south direction of the country.
- **Global experience:** virtual internships provide students with the opportunity to work with companies and organizations located in different parts of the world, which can broaden their perspectives and provide a global outlook.
- **Networking:** virtual internships allow students to build professional relationships and network with people from diverse backgrounds, which can be beneficial for their future careers.
- **Skill development:** virtual internships offer students the chance to develop their skills in various fields, such as communications, marketing, finance, and sustainable development, and gain valuable work experience that can enhance their resumes, ensuring this regardless of exogenous shocks that could undermine the chances of providing adequate in-person training.

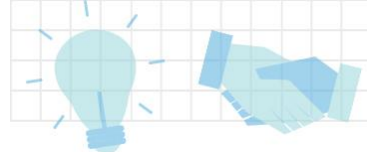
But true success will depend on the willingness of Italian companies to support virtual interns with robust on-boarding, e-learning, and communication tools and their commitment to forming a team to track their progress. In that perspective that virtual internships could prove to be a positive progeny of the wave of smart-working inherited from the pre-existing pandemic situation. And in any case, nothing would deprive a "young person", interfacing with the world of work for the first time, of the opportunity to start first as a remote intern and then later physically join the company. An online internship gives both the employer time to assess the operations of a possible team member and the prospective employee time to understand whether the company best reflects for his or her skills and needs.

An overview of the Italian framework and relevant legislation

Within the Italian legislative landscape, the internship is not configured as an employment relationship. The internship is understood as a period of orientation and training, carried out in a work context and aimed at the insertion of young people into the world of work.

According to the Italian legislation, three subjects must be involved in the organization of internships:

- Training/education provider
- Company hosting the internship



- Intern

The three subjects must sign an Internship Agreement specifying the purpose of the internship as well as the duration and the appointed internship tutor (more details are available below).

The Italian legislation concerning virtual internships, although still limited, allows for them to be carried out remotely, using communication tools such as videoconferencing, provided that the same training and learning opportunities are guaranteed as those of traditional in-person internships.

In Italy, virtual internships can be organized as:

- Virtual internship in Public administrations: public administration can offer virtual internships, with the aim of providing participants with practical and training experience. However, there are a few virtual internship experiences organized so far in public administrations.
- Virtual Internship with private companies: private companies can offer the possibility to have a virtual internship, although, again, this is still uncommon in Italy.
- Virtual Internship with online companies: online companies often offer virtual internships, which allow participants to gain practical skills and work on real projects, even remotely.
- Virtual international internship: this type of internship can be organized in private and public organizations allowing participants to gain work and cultural experience abroad, without having to physically move. It usually takes place in collaboration with international partners and involves the use of technological tools for remote communication.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive, an even larger list of categories being possible depending on the specific subject matter of the internship but it comes useful in providing a frame of reference in order to better contextualize the topic of our relevance.

The internships in Italy can be brought under the umbrella of two much broader categories, according to the —Guidelines on Internships an Agreement signed in 2017, between the Italian State and the Italian Regions and Autonomous Provinces aimed at giving consistency to the allocation of competencies between the state and regions in order to ensure greater uniformity in the matter. The two categories are:

- Curricular internships, aimed at young people and carried out within an education or training course, are promoted by universities or educational institutions. The types of extracurricular internships that can be activated are as follows:
 - training and orientation internships;
 - work placement or reintegration internships;
 - orientation and/or job placement or reintegration internships;
- Extra-curricular internships, aimed at facilitating people's career choices through a period of training in a productive environment and thus with direct knowledge of the world of work. However, common minimum standards are defined at the national level, referring, for example, to the qualifying elements of the internship, the manner in which the trainee performs his or her activity, and the minimum allowance.

Extracurricular internships can be activated with respect to the following individuals:



- unemployed individuals referred to in Article 19 of Legislative Decree 150/2015, including also individuals who have completed upper secondary and tertiary education;
- workers who, while still in an employment relationship, benefit from income support instruments;
- workers at risk of unemployment;
- workers already employed and seeking other employment;
- disadvantaged subjects;
- asylum seekers and holders of international and humanitarian protection, holders of refugee status and subsidiary protection, as stipulated in the Presidential Decree No. 21/2015;
- victims of violence, exploitation and holders of residence permit for humanitarian reasons.

For the above-mentioned subjects, extracurricular internships that can be activated must have a minimum duration of 2 months and a maximum duration, including any extensions, of 12 months.

In addition, extracurricular internships may also be activated with subjects with disabilities, within the frame of Law No. 68/99. For the above subjects, the maximum duration including any extensions is 24 months. The minimum duration limit of 2 months may be reduced to one month for host subjects operating seasonally.

Mandatory prerequisites to the activation of internships

In accordance with Italian legislation, the activation of an internship – also including virtual internships - requires certain prerequisites to be met. In detail:

an agreement, between a promoting entity (which can be a university, a high school, an employment agency, a training center, etc.) and a host entity (as a company, a professional firm, a cooperative or a public agency) a training plan. a tutor, appointed by the promoter of the internship and the host party, which the function of helping the trainee in drawing up the training plan, in his or her insertion into the new context, in defining the organizational and educational conditions, in monitoring the training course, and in certifying the activity carried out. The skills and results achieved by the trainee are recorded in the training booklet. Although they do not constitute an employment relationship, internships regulated in the guidelines are subject to mandatory reporting by the host entity

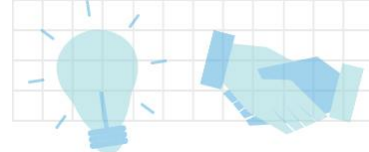
Promoting subjects:

The 2017 Guidelines on Internships in Italy broaden the range of subjects eligible to promote internships and virtual internships. Below is the list of promoting entities:

- Employment services and regional employment agencies
- Universities and AFAM (Higher Education in the field of Arts and Music)
- Educational institutions
- Foundations of Higher Technical Education (ITS)
- Public or publicly-owned vocational training and/or guidance centers as well as centers operating under an agreement with the relevant region or province, or accredited
- Therapeutic communities, auxiliary bodies and social cooperatives
- Job placement services for the disabled operated by public entities delegated by the Region



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- Private, profit or nonprofit training institutions on the basis of a specific authorization from the Region
- Subjects authorized for intermediation by the National Agency for Active Employment Policies
- Employment and subjects accredited to employment services
- National Agency for Active Employment Policies (ANPAL).

Limits to the activation of internships

In the area of non-formal education, with particular reference to the world of extracurricular internships, the 2017 Italian Guidelines include further measures to prevent incongruous uses of the internship. Three of these seem to us particularly significant: internships cannot be activated in favor of professionals licensed or qualified to internship in regulated professions for activities typical of or reserved for the profession; the same person cannot act, in relation to the same internship, as both the promoter and host subject; the internship cannot be activated in the event that the trainee has had an employment relationship with the same host entity in the two years preceding the activation of the internship. Numerical limits are forecasted within the framework of the Italian legislation, as the new Guidelines introduce changes in relation to the number of internships that can be activated simultaneously at the business units of the host entity. Unlike the previous Guidelines, the new text stipulates that the calculation of interns must be carried out considering not only permanent employees (with the exclusion of apprentices) but also those on fixed-term contracts (provided that the start date of the contract is prior to the start date of the internship and the expiration date after the end of the internship internship): business units with no employees or up to 5 fixed-term or permanent employees may host only one trainee at a time; if the employees are between 6 and 20, no more than 2 trainees may be placed at the same time; if employees are from 16 to more than 20, no more than 10% of the employees. It is well understood how the inclusion of fixed-term employees for defining the ceiling of trainees considerably increases the number of traineeships potentially achievable. The new Guidelines also introduce a "reward system" that allows for the activation of internships in derogation of the quota limits. The ability to activate internships beyond the quotas established is reserved to host entities with at least 20 permanent employees who hire their trainees with a contract of employment lasting at least six months. The number of traineeships that can be activated beyond the quota limits varies depending on the percentage of trainees hired

Temporal limits

New guidelines set maximum duration of extra-curricular internships at 12 months, with the exception of internships for disabled individuals, which, as already provided in the previous Guidelines, can last up to 24 months. A further novelty is the introduction of a minimum limit duration set at 2 months; exceptions are internships with host entities that operate seasonally (1 month) and student internships carried out in the summer period and promoted by employment services employment services (14 days).

Main platforms for searching virtual internships in Italy

As already mentioned, in the digital age and after the pandemic crisis in particular, online internships have become an important source of professional experience for young people. There are many digital



internship platforms in Italy that enable young people to find internship and apprenticeship opportunities, increasing their chances of entering the world of work. These platforms have become increasingly relevant due to the effectiveness of their search for internship opportunities, which has made it easier to find the most suitable option for each candidate.

Each platform has its own specific features and specialization, but all offer the opportunity to search and find internships online in an easy and intuitive way. These platforms collaborate with companies and organizations in every industry to offer internships in different fields, including IT, finance, marketing, fashion, and many others. In addition, these platforms usually offer tools to filter and customize the search for internship opportunities, allowing applicants to find the right option for their skills and interests. Through these platforms, young people have access to a wide range of online internship opportunities, which can help them to develop their skills and industry knowledge, enhance their careers and increase their chances of finding a job.

Among the main research platforms for internships in Italy are JobTeaser, StageUP, IFOA, EURES, Monster, InternsME, UniPlacement, Borsa Italiana Lavoro, Indeed, and Jobrapido. Some of them offer both face-to-face and virtual internships and others offer only virtual internships.

Here is an overview of the platforms offering both face-to-face and virtual internships:

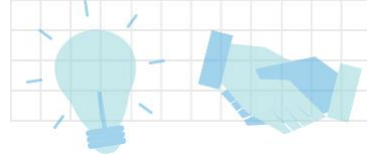
JobTeaser: This platform collaborates with many Italian universities and business schools to provide young people with many internship opportunities. JobTeaser specializes in connecting students, recent graduates and companies, offering a vast database of internships and apprenticeships in different fields. The platform offers numerous virtual internships in different fields, such as internships in digital marketing, software development, graphic design, and corporate communications. For example, JobTeaser recently posted a virtual internship as a Social Media Manager for a marketing and communications company. According to a study conducted by Kantar, data analytics and brand consulting company, based in London, JobTeaser is the preferred platform for students to search for internships, with 53 percent preference over other platforms

<https://www.jobteaser.com/it/home>

IFOA: This platform deals with training and internships, specializing in several areas, including IT and digital. IFOA works in partnership with several Italian companies, creating tailored internship paths for students and recent graduates. The educational institute offers many virtual internships in different fields, such as internships in administration, logistics, marketing, and sales. It has posted, recently, a virtual internship as a Junior Digital Marketer for a marketing and communications company. According to data published by IFOA, 60 percent of trainees who found an internship through it are hired by the same company where they did their internship.

<https://www.ifoait/>

EURES: The European platform for professional mobility offers numerous internship and job opportunities throughout Europe, with a section dedicated specifically to Italy. EURES is particularly good for young people who want to expand their work experience abroad. Within the last period, EURES posted a virtual



internship as a Junior Data Analyst for a data analysis company According to EURES' annual report, the platform has helped more than 84,000 young people in Europe search for a job or internship opportunity



https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_it

Monster: one of the world's largest job portals which offers many internship opportunities. The platform allows you to filter your search by industry and position, helping candidates find internships that fit their needs. The Monster platform offers many virtual internships in different fields, such as internships in human resources, finance, software development, and marketing. For example, Monster posted a virtual internship as a Junior HR Specialist for an HR consulting company.

<https://www.monster.com/jobs/q-internship-jobs>

Olive: Olive is a platform for internships in Italy and abroad, connecting candidates with interested companies. It offers a wide selection of industries and positions, allowing young people to find the internship best suited to their skills and interests.

<https://oliv.com/>

UniPlacement: this university internship platform is aimed primarily at students in technical faculties. It offers internship opportunities in a variety of fields, including computer science, engineering and technology, and allows applicants to customize their search.

<https://uniplacement.unifg.it/>

LinkedIn Learning: this platform offers a wide range of online courses and internships, with the added benefit of being able to earn university credits. The courses cover a broad range of subjects, including business, technology, and creative skills. The internships offered through LinkedIn Learning are designed to provide practical, hands-on experience that can be applied to real-world scenarios. With a focus on skill-building and professional development, LinkedIn Learning is an excellent platform for students and professionals looking to enhance their knowledge and abilities

<https://learning.linkedin.com/it-it>

Virtual Internships: virtual Internships offers a range of virtual internships in different areas of expertise, including business, engineering, social sciences, and technology. The platform is designed to give students the chance to gain practical experience, develop their skills, and explore their career options. The virtual internships offered by Virtual Internships are project-based, which means that students get to work on real projects and deliverables that provide them with a tangible work product they can use in their future job search

<https://www.virtualinternships.com/>

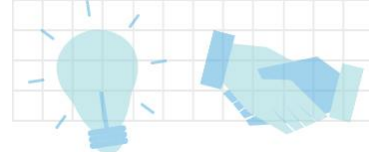
Indeed: one of the largest job search platforms in the world, Indeed also offers many internship and apprenticeship opportunities. The platform allows users to filter their search by industry and position, and offers many tools to help candidates find the right opportunity for them.

<https://it.indeed.com/>

Jobrapido: Jobrapido is a job search platform that also offers a section dedicated to digital internships. The Jobrapido platform offers virtual internships in various fields, such as internships in communications, information technology, marketing, and sales. Recently, Jobrapido posted a virtual internship as a Junior



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Web Developer for a software development company. According to data published by the platform, it has more than 85 million users worldwide and posts more than 5 million job and internship openings each month.

Chegg Internships: Chegg Internships is a platform that provides virtual internships in different areas of expertise, including finance, marketing, and technology. The platform partners with leading companies to offer students and recent graduates the opportunity to gain practical experience, develop their skills, and explore different career options. The virtual internships offered by Chegg Internships are designed to be flexible, which means that students can work on their projects at their own pace and on their own schedule.

<https://www.internships.com/>

Different models for virtual internships

There are several virtual internship models available for Italian companies seeking to provide flexible learning experiences for their interns. Each has specific benefits and challenges for interns and companies, and the choice of model depends on the needs and resources of the company and interns. The Remote Team-Based Internship Model, the Hybrid Internship Model, and the Self-Directed Internship Model are three such models. In this section of the report we will attempt to provide a brief overview aimed at highlighting the salient aspects of each of the models just mentioned

Remote Team-Based Internship Model

The Remote Team-Based Internship Model is a popular approach to providing virtual internships for students and young professionals. In this model, interns work remotely with a team of colleagues who are also located in different locations around the world. The team members collaborate and communicate using a variety of digital tools and technologies, such as email, video conferencing, instant messaging, and project management software.

One of the main benefits of the Remote Team-Based Internship Model is the opportunity for interns to work in a distributed team environment.

This type of work experience is increasingly common in today's global economy, as more and more companies have employees working remotely from different locations. By participating in a virtual team-based internship, interns gain valuable experience working in a team that is spread across different locations and time zones. This can help them develop important skills such as communication, collaboration, and project management, which are highly valued by employers.

Another advantage of the Remote Team-Based Internship Model is that it provides interns with the flexibility to work from anywhere. This means that interns can participate in a virtual internship without having to relocate, which can be a significant barrier for many students and young professionals. Additionally, working remotely allows interns to balance their internship with other commitments, such as school, work, or family obligations.



However, there are also some challenges associated with the Remote Team-Based Internship Model. For example, working remotely can be isolating and may require interns to be self-motivated and self-disciplined in order to stay focused and productive. Additionally, communication and collaboration can be more difficult when team members are not colocated. This can lead to misunderstandings or delays in project completion if team members are not proactive in communicating and sharing information.

To address these challenges, companies and organizations that offer remote team-based internships need to provide interns with the right tools and resources to succeed. This may include training on digital communication tools and technologies, as well as regular check-ins with supervisors and mentors to provide guidance and support. Additionally, companies may need to be more intentional about building a sense of community and connection among remote team members, through activities such as virtual team-building exercises or social events.

Despite these challenges, the Remote Team-Based Internship Model remains a valuable and effective approach to providing virtual internships. By working remotely with a team of colleagues, interns can gain valuable skills and experiences that can help them succeed in today's global workforce. As more companies embrace remote work, it is likely that the Remote Team-Based Internship Model will become even more popular as a way to provide high-quality virtual internships to a diverse range of students and young professionals.

An example of an Italian company using the Remote Team-Based Internship Model might be Reply (<https://www.reply.com/it/about/careers/homepagestudent?role=Students>) a consulting, technology and innovation company that offers solutions to various industries, such as finance, automotive and telecommunications. Reply offers virtual team-based internships, in which interns work on specific projects assigned by the company's clients, under the guidance of a tutor or mentor. This model allows interns to develop practical skills in a real work environment while working remotely

Hybrid Internship Model

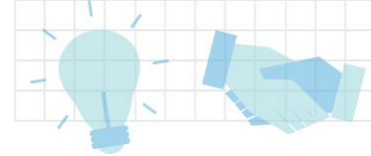
The Hybrid Internship Model is a type of internship that combines both virtual and in-person components. This model is designed to provide interns with the best of both worlds, allowing them to work remotely for a portion of their internship while also spending time on-site at the company's office or other designated location. The goal of the Hybrid Internship Model is to provide interns with the flexibility to work from anywhere while also giving them the opportunity to build relationships with their colleagues and gain a better understanding of the company's culture.

The Hybrid Internship Model can take many different forms, depending on the needs and preferences of the company and the interns. For example, some hybrid internships may involve interns working remotely for the first half of their internship and then coming to the office for the second half. Other hybrid internships may involve interns alternating between remote work and on-site work throughout their internship, depending on the nature of their projects and tasks.

One of the main benefits of the Hybrid Internship Model is the flexibility it provides to both interns and companies. By allowing interns to work remotely for a portion of their internship, companies can attract a wider range of candidates who may not be able to relocate for the entire duration of the internship.



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Additionally, remote work can be a valuable tool for companies to increase efficiency and reduce costs, while also providing a better work-life balance for interns.

At the same time, on-site work can provide interns with valuable learning opportunities that may not be possible in a virtual environment. For example, interns may be able to participate in meetings, attend training sessions, and work directly with their colleagues on projects. These experiences can help interns build relationships with their colleagues, gain a better understanding of the company's culture, and develop important skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.

However, there are also some challenges associated with the Hybrid Internship Model. One of the main challenges is coordinating the logistics of remote and on-site work, such as scheduling meetings and ensuring that all team members are on the same page. Additionally, interns may need to adjust to different working environments and may need additional support to transition from remote work to on-site work and vice versa.

To address these challenges, companies that offer hybrid internships need to be intentional about designing a structured and well-supported internship program. This may include providing interns with training on digital communication tools and technologies, as well as regular check-ins with supervisors and mentors to provide guidance and support. Additionally, companies may need to be more intentional about building a sense of community and connection among remote and on-site team members, through activities such as virtual team-building exercises or social events.

Despite these challenges, the Hybrid Internship Model remains a valuable and effective approach to providing internships that combine the flexibility of remote work with the benefits of on-site work. By giving interns the opportunity to work in different environments and build relationships with their colleagues, hybrid internships can help interns gain valuable skills and experience that can help them succeed in today's workforce. As more companies embrace remote work and hybrid work models, it is likely that the Hybrid Internship Model will become even more popular as a way to provide high-quality internships to a diverse range of students and young professionals.

An example of an Italian company using the Hybrid Internship Model is [Enel](#), Italy's largest electric utility and one of the world largest power companies. Enel offers hybrid internships, which combine remote work activities with in-person experiences such as participation in events, site visits, and workshops. This model allows interns to experience both the virtual and physical work environment, interact with other team members, and learn more about the company.

Self-Directed Internship Model

The Self-Directed Internship Model is a type of internship where the interns are responsible for setting their own goals, timelines, and deliverables. This model requires a high level of self-motivation and autonomy, as the interns are largely responsible for their own learning and professional development. The goal of the Self-Directed Internship Model is to provide interns with a more personalized and flexible learning experience, tailored to their individual goals and interests. However, this model may not be suitable for all interns. The Self-Directed Internship Model is often used in fields where they have already acquired a certain level of knowledge and experience. In this model, interns are expected to identify their



own learning goals and develop a plan to achieve those goals. This can include conducting research, participating in online courses, attending conferences or working on specific projects. The interns are also responsible for keeping track of their progress, reflecting on their learning and providing regular updates to their supervisor.

One of the benefits of the Self-Directed Internship Model is the flexibility it provides. Since the intern is largely responsible for setting his own goals and timelines, they can tailor their internship experience to their individual interests and strengths. This can help interns gain a deeper understanding of their field and develop specialized skills that can set them apart in the job market.

However, the Self-Directed Internship Model also requires a high level of self-discipline and initiative. Since the intern is largely responsible for their own learning, they need to be able to work independently and stay motivated throughout the internship. This can be challenging for some interns, particularly those who are new to the field or who may not have a clear idea of their learning goals.

To address these challenges, companies that offer Self-Directed Internships need to provide interns with clear guidelines and expectations, as well as regular support and feedback. This can include regular check-ins with a supervisor or mentor, as well as access to resources such as online courses or professional development opportunities. Additionally, companies may need to be more intentional about building a sense of community among interns, through activities such as online forums or virtual networking events.

Overall, the Self-Directed Internship Model can be a valuable approach for providing interns with a more personalized and flexible learning experience. As the job market becomes increasingly competitive, it is likely that the Self-Directed Internship Model will become more popular as a way for interns to gain specialized skills and stand out to potential employers.

An example of an Italian company using the Self-Directed Internship Model is [Leonardo](#) an Italian multinational company that operates in the defense, aerospace, and security sectors. Leonardo offers self-directed internships, in which interns have the freedom to choose the topics to focus on and the activities to be performed, under the supervision of a mentor or tutor. This model allows interns to develop specific skills and tailor the internship experience to their learning needs while working in a professional environment.

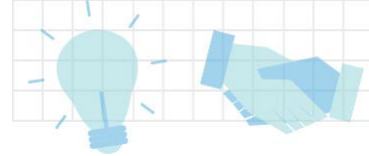
Main Internships tools

To ensure an effective and successful virtual internship experience, many Italian companies rely on a range of digital and technological tools that enable interns to work remotely and collaborate effectively with their colleagues and supervisors.

One of the main tools used in virtual internships in Italy are communication platforms, such as Slack, Microsoft Teams or Zoom. These applications allow interns to communicate in real time with the team and participate in virtual meetings, making it easier to collaborate and exchange information. Using these platforms, interns can ask questions, share ideas and discuss projects with their colleagues and mentors without necessarily having to meet in person.



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Another popular tool for virtual internships in Italy are project management platforms, such as Trello, Asana or Monday.com. These tools allow interns to organize their work and collaborate with other team members on specific projects, keeping track of tasks to be completed, deadlines and progress. With these applications, interns can work more efficiently and productively, keeping the focus on the most important tasks and using time more effectively.

Document sharing platforms, such as Google Drive or Dropbox, are another key tool for virtual internships in Italy. These services allow interns to share documents, presentations and files with the team quickly and securely, making collaboration and teamwork easier. In this way, interns can work in a more coordinated and organized way, ensuring that all team members are always up-to-date on current activities and project progress.

Online training platforms, such as Coursera, Udemy or LinkedIn Learning, are another important tool for virtual internships in Italy. These services allow interns to acquire new skills and complete online training courses, which can be useful for their professional development. Through these tools, interns can enrich their knowledge and skills, improving their productivity and their ability to contribute to the success of the team.

Activity tracking tools, such as RescueTime or Toggl, are another key tool for virtual internships in Italy. These applications allow interns to monitor their work time and keep track of their activities, helping them to better manage the tasks they are responsible for and their respective goals.

A 2021 Ixé survey found that 44% of Italian companies regularly use video conferencing platforms.

Regarding project management platforms, a 2021 BitMAT study found that 84% of Italian companies believe that using digital tools for project management is important for increasing productivity.

Regarding document sharing platforms, a 2021 study by Doxee found that 40 percent of Italian companies use cloud storage solutions, such as Google Drive and Dropbox.

Regarding online training platforms, a 2021 study by Docebo found that the online training market in Italy is growing, with 12.5 percent growth in 2020. In addition, the online training market in Italy is expected to reach 4.4 billion euros by 2024, according to a 2021 research produced by Meticulous Research.

As for activity monitoring tools, a 2021 Doxee study found that 56 percent of Italian companies use tools to monitor remote work.

An all-italian case: The institution of school-to-work alternation

The institution of "school-to-work alternation" is a form of education that involves alternating moments of study and moments of work at companies, public bodies, third sector organizations and other accredited entities. It was introduced in Italy in 2015 and is an important tool to help young people enter the world of work. School-to-work alternation takes the form of an integrated educational path between school and the world of work, which involves the active participation of students in concrete activities and projects, aimed at consolidating the knowledge acquired in the classroom and acquiring new skills. The



main objective of school-to-work alternation is to facilitate the transition between school training and entry into the world of work, promoting direct knowledge of professions, businesses and territorial realities. In order to participate in school-to-work alternation, schools must enter into specific agreements with companies and accredited bodies in order to define the training path and activities to be carried out. School-to-work alternation can be organized in different forms, including: Curricular internships: activities carried out by children during school hours and aimed at the implementation of a specific project. The maximum duration is 200 hours per year. Extracurricular internships: activities carried out by the boys outside school hours, at times agreed with the company or accredited institution. The maximum duration is 400 hours per year. Alternation projects: activities carried out by boys during the summer period or during school vacations, at times agreed with the company or accredited institution. To ensure the quality of school-to-work alternation, the law provides for some specific regulations. In particular, schools must define the criteria for the selection of students and company tutors, as well as the duration and modalities of the activities. In addition, students must be insured against accidents and occupational diseases, and they must always be accompanied by a school or company mentor. It is important to note that school-to-work alternation is an integrated educational pathway, and not an actual work activity. As a result, no remuneration is provided for students participating in school-to-work alternation. However, it is possible to provide reimbursement for any expenses incurred during the activities at the company or accredited institution.

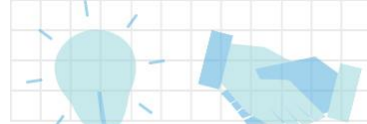
The institute we refer to was originally conceived as an exclusively face-to-face training period, so with regard to the possibility of conducting school-to-work alternation online, the law does not explicitly provide for this mode. However, the Ministry of Education, following the Covid pandemic, has recently clarified that it is possible to carry out part of the internship activities in digital mode, while complying with the requirements and objectives set out in the school work alternation pathway. Some examples of conducting school-work alternation online can be activities such as:

Participation in webinars or video conferences on issues related to the company or industry in which it operates
Conducting research and documentation activities on specific topics related to the company or industry
Participation in online projects in which students collaborate with the company or other students to solve problems or develop new ideas
Conducting internship activities or working remotely, when possible and provided for in the course of training.

In any case, it is important that these online activities are an integral part of the alternating school-work pathway, and do not constitute its entirety. In addition, it is necessary that activities carried out online are always accompanied by activities carried out in-presence, to ensure the full training of students. The new school-to-work alternation is regulated by paragraphs 33 to 43 of Law 107/2015 (La Buona Scuola).



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National report on Virtual internship in **North Macedonia**

Authors:

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Iva Naskova, National Youth Council of Macedonia



Preface

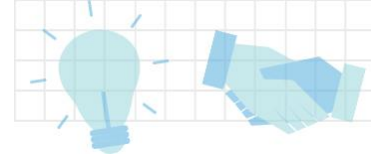
In an increasingly interconnected and digital world where technology fuels innovation, internships are also adjusting to the modern developments of society. Virtual internships have emerged as an opportunity for the youth to explore, learn, and put their acquired knowledge into internships.

Internships in general offer a transformative bridge between the theoretical realm of education and the practical landscape of professional life. They serve as a launchpad for young individuals, propelling them beyond the classrooms, and into the workspace.

Internships bridge the gap between academic education and employment, smoothing the often challenging transition from student to professional, especially in North Macedonia, where the youth unemployment rate is still very high. They equip young individuals with practical skills, industry knowledge, and a network of contacts, thus supporting their personal and professional development.

Another important aspect of virtual internships, is that they also hold the promise of diversity and inclusivity. By overcoming physical barriers, they create opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds, regardless of geographical location or socioeconomic factors.

While North Macedonia is by no means a pioneer in virtual internships, it has a strong ecosystem of youth civil society organizations, institutions, and businesses, that together can leverage digital technology in support for youth employability.



Overview of internships in North Macedonia

Legal framework

In terms of internships in North Macedonia, and how they are regulated, it's imperative to note that North Macedonia has regulated internships in a Law since 2019. This legal act defines the key terms related to internships, but also regulates how the entire process should take place. In addition to this, the Law on Higher Education regulated mandatory internships within the curriculum¹.

The Law on internships in North Macedonia defines the internship as a work activity that includes a work-through component learning and acquiring practical work skills, which is realized in a limited period of time, in order to gain practical and professional experience to improve employability and help further the transition to regular employment.

On the other hand, the Law on Labor Relations, defines and regulates apprenticeships, volunteering and trial work². However, In the Law on Internships, it is stated that internships are not apprenticeships, volunteering or a trial job, explicitly differentiating the terms.

The law itself defines the intern as a person who performs an internship with an employer for the purpose of acquiring practical knowledge and skills that will help him/her to improve their employability further in the labor market. According to the Law, the duration of the internship can last up to six months, and it can be done only once by the same person.

The intern can be a person who is not older than 34 years old, if not in regular employment and has finished at least elementary school.

Noteworthy is that the internships in North Macedonia are paid. The monthly remuneration is determined by the net amount for the full-time work depending on the duration of the internship and it can be between 42% and 74% of the minimum net salary, determined in accordance with the law, for internships up to three months and in the amount of the minimum net salary determined in accordance with the law, for the internship work over three months, counted from the fourth month.

If the internship, in accordance with the internship agreement, is realized in a period shorter than full-time, the remuneration for the internship work is calculated in proportion to the time spent on the internship in accordance with the law.

Internships are also part of the Operational Plan for active programs and measures for employment and services on the labor market. All employers from the private sector, interested in enabling young people up to the age of 29 to acquire practical knowledge and skills as interns, for a period from 3 to 6 months, can submit an application to the employment centers of the Agency for Employment. In addition, when determining the number of interns at employers, the Contract for practical work between the employer, the intern and the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia, which is concluded from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 6 months, is taken into account as procedures. At the same time, a form for

¹ Law on Internships ("Official Gazette of the RNM", No. 98/2019)

² Law on Internships ("Official Gazette of the RNM", No. 98/2019)



internship is filled out, and after the internship, the intern and the employer are obliged to fill out a form for evaluation of the internship.

Internships in formal education

When it comes to the internships carried out within the formal education, In North Macedonia, upper-secondary education typically includes vocational schools and gymnasiums. Vocational schools are offering more commonly practical training programs that allow students to gain hands-on experience in various industries. These programs can include internships where students work with local companies or organizations related to their chosen field of study. The duration and structure of these internships depend on the specific school, the program and the company/firm providing the internship.

At the university education level, internships are commonly integrated into the university education in North Macedonia, but not all of the universities offer mandatory internships or internships at all.

In terms of legislation, the Law on Higher Education regulates mandatory practical training within the curriculum, however the law only mentions them as a requirement for different areas of study in the field of medicine, dentistry or pharmacy, however it does not offer provisions that regulate how the process itself is taking place³.

In the public universities, internships can be mandatory, but also optional, depending on the university and the specific program of study. They can range from a few weeks to several months, and students may receive academic credits or grades based on their performance. It is common that internships, if mandatory, are done during the summer where students gain hands-on experiences and later on receive a confirmation from the company/firm where the internship was held. The duration of the internship is at least 30 days of work, with a minimum of one hour and up to eight hours of work. There also recurring cases where the student is the one who is finding internship opportunities upon his/her own initiative because the universities are not providing one.

According to the Rulebook on the Method and Conditions for Organizing Practical Teaching adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), internships is mandatory for all students after completing the first year of their studies⁴. Regardless of the fact that the rulebook was adopted decades ago, according to the research conducted by the Youth Educational Forum showed results that no competent institution has audited the implementation and effects of mandatory student internship for students at state and private universities in the Republic of North Macedonia⁵.

Going back to the study conducted by the Youth Educational Forum, 76.4 percent of the students during their higher education have been interns at some point during their studies, whereas 25.4% of the

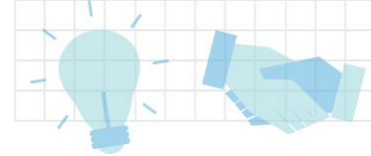
³ Law on Higher Education (“Official Gazette of the RNM”, No. 82/2018)

⁴ Rulebook on the Method and Conditions for Organizing Practical Teaching (available on [https://www.mf.ukim.edu.mk/sites/default/files/files/8_MON - Pravilnik za prakticna nastava.pdf](https://www.mf.ukim.edu.mk/sites/default/files/files/8_MON_-_Pravilnik_za_prakticna_nastava.pdf))

⁵ Zdravkovska, D., Barlakovski, P., Mitikj, S. Student Internships as a Tool for Skills for Entering the Labor Market (2017). (available on <https://epi.org.mk/docs/Od%20mladite%20za%20mladite%20%20perspektivi%20za%20opstestvenite%20predizvici.pdf>)



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students have never completed an internship. Even though all of the respondents should've completed a student internship, the research shows that the actual situation is pretty much different. As mentioned above and as the results of the research are showing, the students are often the ones who are finding internships on their own, at that percentage is 80.2. A potential reason why a certain number of students haven't done any internship, is the lack of information regarding the available offers and opportunities for doing it. Only the Faculty of Economics and Faculty for Computer sciences are publishing lists of firms and companies where students can do internships and are regularly informing their students about the possibilities for internships in these institutions, the research shows. Based on a conducted survey for the aforementioned study, devastating is the fact that the majority of respondents did not receive any form of monetary compensation, which is an indication that employers do not appreciate the intern's work (71.7%).

Internships on European level

In June 2023, the European Parliament voted in favor of the report on quality traineeships⁶, which calls for legislation to finally ban unpaid internships. The plenary adopted the report calling on the Commission to propose a directive on Quality Traineeships with 404 votes in favor, 78 against and 130 abstentions. The next phase of this process puts the focus on the European Commission to put an ambitious EU directive on the table.

The initiative to ban unpaid internships in Europe is led by the European Youth Forum (YFJ). In the policy paper conducted by the European Youth Forum, "The cost of unpaid internships", the actual cost of unpaid internship may have to be over 1028 euros for one month of unpaid internship⁷. It's notable to add that the document also contains data on North Macedonia. For example, the cost of living in North Macedonia for the year of 2021, on a 6 month basic cost-of-living expenses is 1620 euros, whereas on a monthly basis is 270 euros. What this is portraying is that a young person undertaking an unpaid internship would need access to financial resources that are equivalent to these amounts to support themselves during the time of the internship.

Review of models on virtual internships

Defining virtual internships

In North Macedonia, virtual internships are not something that is generally offered on the market, thus, they are not very much present and available. In addition to this, there is a gap in terms of defining what do virtual internships entail. For example, young people struggle differentiating virtual internships, remote internships, and virtual practical training programs. This is a result due to the lack of regulation of these terms in Macedonian legislation and policy framework.

⁶ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Quality Traineeships (available on: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-20230186_EN.html#_section2)

⁷ Moxon, D., Bacalso, C., Dolidze, S. The Cost of Unpaid Internships (2023). (available on: <https://www.youthforum.org/files/230111-DPCostUnpaidInternships.pdf>)



Implementation of models on virtual internships in North Macedonia

Virtual internships are generally implemented by private companies, companies offering skills development programs and civil society organizations, while a systematic approach for their implementation has not taken place yet. Some examples include remote internships or remote practical training programs, which actually young people are supposed to pay to participate in, which is opposite of what is defined in the Law on Internships.

Additionally, when looking into the models of virtual internships, it's imperative to point out young people's interest in engaging and creating digital solutions. One example is the work of Junior Achievement Macedonia, a civil society organization working to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in the global economy, by developing and implementing programs for entrepreneurial education and building partnerships between businesses and schools. Through their National competition for student companies, 52 high schools were competing for the best student company developed by the high school students⁸. The students from the high school "Vasil Antevski - Dren" created a platform (online application) for virtual internship in the form of a video game that allows students to manage their own business through realistic simulations. It also contains an educational corner on micro transactions, financing and advice on business concepts such as cryptocurrencies. The application was created by the students and the school itself won third place for the best student company.

Although not directly linked to the implementation of virtual internships, a notable example is the implementation of a virtual fair on internship⁹. The aim of the fair was to connect as many students and graduates as possible with companies for internships and work from all over North Macedonia, and it was organized by a private company, a Macedonian platform that connects companies with young staff for internship and employment.

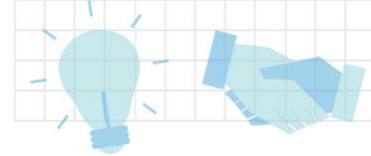
Another notable example is the work of The National Youth Council of Macedonia, in the field of internships. Specifically, through its MladiHub project, NYCM supports an internship program for over 100 young people who want to go through a two-month internship program. NYCM connects the interns with private companies and civil society organizations, and follows the implementation of the internships on a monthly basis. However, the implementation so far has been implemented with physical presence and not virtually.

Youth target groups

In terms of target groups for virtual internships, special focus should be given to different types of young people.

⁸ Selection of the best student company. High School 'Vasil Antevski Dren'. (available on <https://vasilantevskidren.edu.mk/natprevari/>)

⁹ About the Virtual Fair on Internship. Bintern. (available at: <https://vfair.bintern.com/za-saemot/>)



University students

Internships are a great mechanism for bridging the gap between education and employment, therefore a special focus should be given to university students. Based on a cross-sectoral study on youth in North Macedonia, conducted by NYCM in 2019, it's indicated that internships in the educational system in North Macedonia are required, desired, but poorly managed¹⁰. In the same study, a focus group of university students indicate that internship opportunities failed to provide them necessary skills and they received no mentorship, but on the contrary were given mundane tasks, such as picking up coffee and breakfast for staff. To that end, many university students opt to only ask business for a signature that they have completed the required time of internships.

In this field, there is an opportunity to reestablish the internship programs with stronger performance-based incentives and oversight, and accountability to students. There is also the opportunity to expand these programs with partnerships with chambers of commerce and youth civil society organizations to optimize internship programs.

Young people from rural areas

Virtual internships offer benefits for young people from rural areas, providing them with opportunities that may otherwise be limited by geographic constraints.

Virtual internships eliminate the need for physical access, allowing young people from rural areas to access internships in a wide range of industries and organizations. They can explore fields of interest that may not be available in their local communities, without necessarily forcing them to emigrate from their community. Virtual internships also bridge the opportunity gap between rural and urban areas. By providing young people from rural areas with access to quality internships, these programs contribute to reducing geographic disparities and promoting equal opportunities for professional growth.

Virtual internships have the potential to empower and uplift young people from rural areas, enabling them to gain valuable skills, broaden their horizons, and overcome geographical limitations.

Another positive aspect in this sense, is that virtual internships also eliminate the need for commuting and navigating physical spaces, which can be challenging for individuals with mobility limitations.

Youth not in employment, education or training (NEET)

When it comes to NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth, virtual internships can offer them a pathway to gain valuable skills, enhance their employability, and enter into the workforce.

They can provide NEET youth with opportunities to develop and enhance their skills in various areas, industries or fields of interest, but also the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge acquired through previous education or training to practical situations. By gaining relevant skills, industry experience, and professional connections, they can become more attractive candidates to potential employers. Virtual

¹⁰ 10 Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment in North Macedonia (2019). (available on: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WB77.pdf)



internships can also serve as a transformative opportunity for NEET youth, offering them a stepping stone towards reengaging with education or entering the job market.

Evaluation of existing virtual internships models

North Macedonia still lacks the experience in implementing virtual internships, therefore there are still no results or data regarding any evaluation conducted in terms of measuring the success of the existing virtual internship models.

Identified benefits and obstacles to virtual internships

While virtual internships offer numerous benefits, it's important for organizations and interns to address and overcome obstacles to ensure a successful and enriching virtual internship experience. Below are some identified benefits and obstacles that were identified during the implementation of the national fora.

Benefits of virtual internships:

One of the primary benefits of virtual internships, is their accessibility, thus promoting inclusion and diversity, as they eliminate geographical barriers, allowing individuals from diverse locations and background to participate and access opportunities they may not have locally. In line with their accessibility, they also remove financial constraints that individuals might have due to commuting or relocation to the workspace, thus reducing costs associated with transportation, accommodation, and other expenses. They also offer flexibility in terms of working hours and location, enabling interns to balance their professional commitments with their studies or other commitments.

In terms of developing skills, virtual internships provide access to a wide range of industries, allowing interns to explore different career paths and gain exposure to various sectors, but also offer practical experience and skill development opportunities in areas such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and digital literacy.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Institutions

- Establish legal framework or policies to define, regulate and protect virtual internships, and differentiate them from remote internships, and virtual training programs. Policies should address issues such as accessibility, equal opportunities, data privacy, to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for interns and businesses and organizations;
- Simplify established procedures for business and organizations to report internship programs to the Agency for Employment of North Macedonia;
- Remove legal barriers that limit intern remuneration. Businesses should not remunerate below a defined minimum, however a maximum price should not be determined in laws and policies;



- Provide funding and incentives to encourage organizations and business to offer virtual internships;
- Facilitate partnerships between educational institutions, businesses, and civil society organizations to enhance the availability and quality of virtual internships;
- Invest in technology to ensure access to virtual internships, such as improving internet connectivity in rural areas, providing access to necessary software and hardware to young people with fewer opportunities, and promoting digital literacy among young people;
- Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of virtual internship programs, but also mechanisms for that protect interns from potential abuse;

Recommendations for business

- Establish partnerships with youth civil society organizations to maximize outreach to young people seeking internships;
- Tailor virtual internships to business needs and align intern projects with ongoing initiatives, allowing interns to contribute to real-time challenges and projects;
- Utilize virtual internships as a tool to mapping potential employees by connecting intern's interests with the company or organization's expertise;
- Provide career guidance, networking connections and references and remain connected with former interns to track their progress that could lead to future collaboration or employment;

Recommendations for youth civil society

- Implement advocacy initiatives and campaigns for virtual internship opportunities, and promote the importance and value of virtual internships within civil society organizations, as a mechanism to empower and engage youth from diverse backgrounds.
- Foster collaborations between civil society organizations, educational institutions, and businesses to create virtual internship opportunities;
- Promote and advocate for accessibility and inclusivity to ensure that virtual internships are accessible and inclusive, for youth from all backgrounds, including those from marginalized communities or with limited resources;
- Monitor and evaluate impact of virtual internship programs on young people, but organizations and businesses as well.



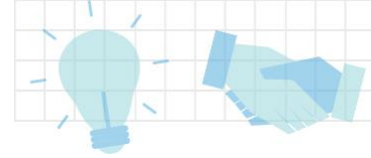
National report on Virtual internship in **Serbia**

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Preface

The national report on virtual internships serves as an overview of the current state of virtual internships in Serbia within the formal and non-formal education system, intending to present the types of models of virtual internships that were developed in the previous period, the platforms and tools used in their organization and implementation, the goals of the virtual internship, the specific target groups of participants involved (with an emphasis on young people from vulnerable social groups) and the results of the evaluation of existing programs.

The National report was prepared as part of the Belgrade Open School project "Virtual Internship for Inclusive Societies", which is implemented with the aim to increase young people's opportunities for participation and inclusion in the labor market, increasing their competence in the use of ICT tools, as well as acquire professional knowledge that will help them facilitate the process of transition from the education system to the labor market. Work internships have a lot of positive effects on young people's employability, such as shortening the transition from education to the labor market, improving knowledge, skills, and competencies, gaining experience, and exploring career options. On the other hand, experience has shown that geographical and financial barriers, as well as the lack of resources of employers for additional costs in the case of training young people, further reduce the opportunities for professional development of young people. To overcome these barriers, BOS with partners from Europe strives to establish more inclusive models of virtual internships, based on good-internship examples from all over Europe. The models of virtual internships will be oriented towards young people and the satisfaction of their professional needs will motivate young people to get involved in such models and be in line with their interests and expectations while taking into account the trends and needs of the labor market.

BOS has established four National Fora in Serbia to analyze the motivation, needs, and opportunities of young people for developing professional competencies. The fora addressed challenges and constraints faced by them and discuss support mechanisms available in public, private and civil sectors, and education system, including existing and proposed measures. The fora included representatives from youth organizations, schools, companies, and young people themselves.

Overview of Internships in Serbia

The position of young people in Serbia is characterized by a high unemployment rate and a difficult transition from education to the labor market. To get their first job, young people most often need work experience and a network of contacts, which they can acquire through participation in internship programs. According to available data from the National Employment Service, in April 2023, the percentage of unemployed youth was around 25%¹¹

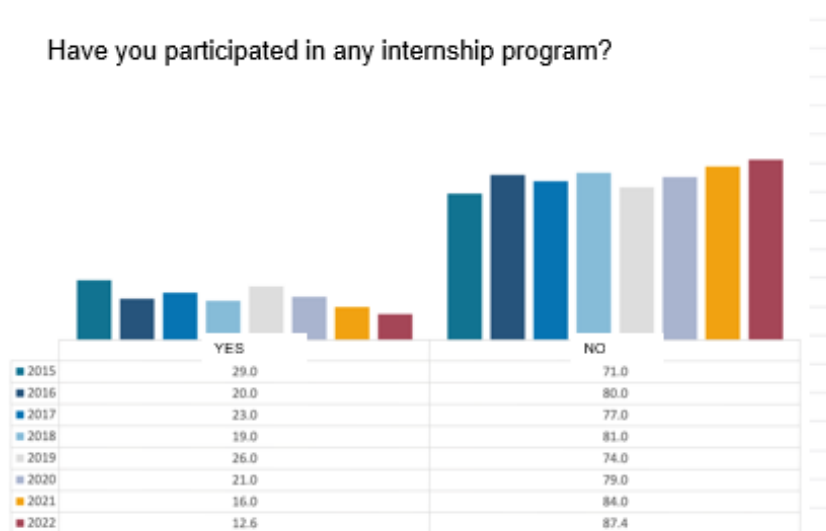
When it comes to the internships themselves, according to the Report of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth (former Ministry of Youth and Sports) on the position and needs of young people, in the previous period, the participation of young people in work internships was noticeable. In addition, more than 50% of young people state that they did not have financial compensation for doing internships, and as the

¹¹ Source: National Employment Service, statistical bulletin for April 2023.



most common reason for not participating in work internship, young people state that the first reason they state that they do not have enough information about internship programs, then that they do not have time to participate in internships, and the third most common reason is the presentation of the difficulty of participating in unpaid professional internships.

Have you participated in any internship program?



12

As a consequence of this, it often happens that they fall into a vicious circle, where they move from one internship to another, with no prospect of employment. In addition, many internships fail to fulfill their primary purpose of learning by doing, training, and developing employment-relevant skills.

There are several forms of internship implementation in Serbia, most of which are defined by the legal framework.

Internships as a mandatory part of formal education

Four legal frameworks have been identified that define internship as a mandatory part of formal education:

- Law on Dual Education
- Law on dual study model in higher education
- Law on secondary education and upbringing
- Law on Higher Education.

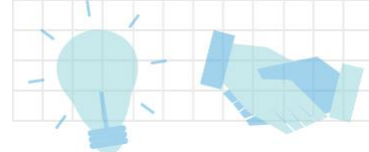
The internship program through formal education is implemented in secondary vocational schools or as part of the curriculum of study programs (formal education) and internship is part of the educational process in many European¹³ countries. The Law on Secondary Education (Article 26) defines the terms practical teaching and professional internship, which refer to compulsory educational work for a regular

¹² Source: Report on the position and needs of young people, Ministry of Youth and Sports (2022)

¹³ Improvement of the legal framework for regulating work internships in the Republic of Serbia



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student¹⁴ when they are determined by the curriculum. In higher education, a professional internship is a mandatory form of teaching within a large number of academic study programs at universities and is regulated by faculty regulations (based on faculty autonomy) and, accordingly, is associated with a certain number of ESPB points¹⁵.

The presented way of regulating this type of internship is in accordance with the internships in EU member states, where internships in secondary vocational schools are also regulated by the state, while internships within higher levels of education are regulated in more detail by the higher education institution, in accordance with the specifics of the specific study program.

Internships as a mandatory condition for performing certain professions

Internships that are a mandatory condition for performing certain occupations are present in all EU member states. Also, it is similar in our country. For example, internship as a condition for passing a professional exam is provided for healthcare workers¹⁶, performing judicial functions¹⁷, or the jobs of engineers and architects¹⁸. These regulations regulate all the details regarding the implementation of this type of internship. (Ex-ante).

Internships as a measure of active employment policy

Internships as a measure of active employment policy are a measure of acquiring internship knowledge, which implies the acquisition of practical knowledge and skills by the unemployed by performing specific tasks at an employer belonging to the private sector. Various types of internships are present in the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026 as part of additional education and training measures that are organized to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and work experience that people lack to increase employment opportunities or maintenance of employment. The concrete legal framework for the implementation of existing forms of internship as a measure of active employment policy is determined¹⁹:

- The Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance²⁰,
- Action plan for the period from 2021 to 2023 for the implementation of the Employment Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2021 to 2026²¹
- Rulebook on criteria, methods, and other issues of importance for the implementation of active employment policy measures.²²

¹⁴ All terms used in the Report in the grammatical masculine gender imply the natural masculine and feminine genders of the persons to whom they refer.

¹⁵ Same As Above

¹⁶ Rulebook on internship and professional examination of healthcare workers ("Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", br. 33/2019).

¹⁷ Law on Bar Examination ("Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", br. 16/97).

¹⁸ Rulebook on taking a professional exam in the field of spatial and urban planning, preparation of technical documentation, construction, and energy efficiency, as well as licenses for responsible persons and the register of licensed engineers, architects, and spatial planners ("Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", br. 51/2019).

¹⁹ "Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", 18/21 i 36/21 – ispravka.

²⁰ "Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", 36/2009, 88/2010, 38/2015, 113/2017, 113/2017 - dr. zakon.

²¹ "Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", 30/21.

²² "Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije", 102/2015, 5/2017, 9/2018.



My first salary

One of the measures that needs to be highlighted, which is especially aimed at young people, is *My First Salary*. The purpose of the program was to provide first contact with the labor market for a certain number of young people during the crisis caused by the pandemic, which caused a sharp drop in the demand for youth work.

This measure is still current and the third cycle of connecting young people with the labor market through the first work experience is being implemented. The measure contains several recommendations from the European Union document Recommendations on a quality framework for the implementation of internship of the Council of Ministers of the European Union (2014). Internships within this program are paid and of limited duration, young people receive mentoring support, a defined program, learning goals, and basic protection at work. According to data from the National Employment Service, over 25,000 young people have been involved since the start of the program.

However, this program has been criticized by youth organizations as well as organizations working for youth. Although the program covers some elements such as insurance against occupational injuries and occupational diseases, the recommendation for improvement is that it is necessary to reach basic international standards in the field of social security of young people.

Work should be adequately rewarded in the form of compensation that would serve as motivation for tasks well done. It is interesting that in neighboring countries, such as Bulgaria and Greece, the salary of interns is defined through labor legislation and linked to the basic salary, which, unfortunately, is not the case with My First Salary²³.

Youth Guarantee

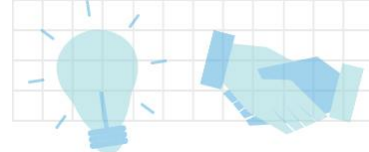
The Youth Guarantee program in European countries was launched by the European Commission in 2013, and in 2020 it was strengthened, as a political commitment of all EU member states to provide all young people under the age of 30 with a quality offer for employment, continued education, internship, or training, within 4 months of leaving the formal education system or of losing a previous job. It is planned to implement this program in Serbia as well. This EU Youth Program is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans, and Social Affairs, which carries out preparatory activities and works on the development of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. Since this is an extremely important program for young people, all partners responsible for the implementation of initiatives in the phases of mapping, outreach, preparation (activation) and offer will be involved in its implementation.

The "Youth Guarantee" program protocol on Cooperation was signed by Serbia and the European Union on June 22, 2023. It is mandatory for EU member states to provide appropriate education, employment, or internships to those under 30 years of age within four months of completing their studies or losing their job. The pilot phase, which will cover 21 municipalities in the Kruševac, Niš, and Sremska Mitrovica district branches, is set to begin in January 2024.

²³ <https://www.bos.rs/op/izdvajamo/1343/9051/da-li-je-moja-prva-plata-stvarno-kvalitetna.html>



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Internships on the open labor market (internships)

At the beginning of 2023, the legal framework for the implementation of labor internships in Serbia is still unregulated. The term "work internship" defines and more precisely defines those internships that young people apply for in the open labor market, which may or may not be related to the formal education of the young person applying.

In the period from 2015, BOS actively advocates the establishment of normative changes to the regime of work internships and organizes public events to promote the importance of *quality* work internships. Through its advocacy initiative, BOS focuses on the following elements of quality during the implementation of work internship, by the Recommendation on the quality framework for the implementation of internship, issued by the European Commission:

- Conclusion of a "written internship agreement/contract between the intern and the internship provider, which states the educational objectives of the internship, working conditions, whether remuneration is provided, the duration of the internship, the rights and obligations of the trainee and the internship provider, including, if relevant, provisions on confidentiality and copyright".
- Learning and training objectives - The recommendation points out that they should be stated in the written contract/agreement, and it is also emphasized that "it is necessary to encourage examples of good internship about the set learning and training objectives so that practitioners gain experience and relevant skills". Considering the examples of abuse that were related to the practitioners performing routine tasks, it was emphasized that the tasks performed by the practitioners should enable the learning and training goals to be achieved.
- Mentorship/Supervision - Internship providers should be encouraged to "assign a supervisor/mentor who will guide the trainees through the performance of the assigned tasks, monitor and evaluate their progress".
- Adequate working conditions - It is necessary to ensure adequate working conditions for all interns, including "limitation of the maximum number of working hours per week, minimum rest periods during the day and week and, if applicable, minimum holiday rights". Also, it was pointed out that it is necessary to clearly indicate whether internship providers provide insurance in case of illness or injury at work, as well as absence in case of illness. In the internship contract, it should be indicated whether the intern receives compensation, as well as its amount. The internationally accepted standard is that persons in work internship should have health and social insurance at least for cases of occupational disease or injury at work.
- Limited duration - Limiting the duration of internships is necessary to prevent young people on internships from becoming substitutes for the employed workforce. The Recommendation on the Quality Framework for Internships states that internships "should not exceed six months except in certain cases".
- Through the confirmation after the internship, the recognition and validation of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired during the internship should be promoted and the internship providers should be encouraged to evaluate them and confirm their development. In some countries, after completing the internship, the trainee should receive a certificate or a letter of recommendation stating the duration of the internship, the tasks performed by the trainee and the professional skills acquired.



Regardless of the challenges of work internship that young people and organizations point to, there is no legal framework in our legislation that regulates the relationship between practitioners and employers.

At the time of writing this report, the Draft Law on Labor Internships is being prepared, which should regulate the legal framework for the implementation of internship in the open labor market. The existing Draft Law was created by the Recommendations on the quality framework for the implementation of internships of the Council of Ministers of the European Union (2014).

The prevalence of internships in Serbia

According to the Report on the Position and Needs of young people, which is published annually by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (from 2023, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth), the actuality of internships is constantly decreasing. In 2022, only about 12% of young people state that they participated in one of the internship programs²⁴. Since 2015, when this statistic was measured, 29% of young people participated in internships, and since then this percentage has been in constant decline.

Most of the interns are girls, young people from urban areas, and with increasing age, the percentage of trainees also increases²⁵. Young people mostly attend internship in private companies (about 52%), and slightly less in the public sector (about 42%)²⁶. Two-thirds of young people had a contract concluded at all or some of the internship programs, and about 40% of young people received financial compensation, while the main reason for not participating in internships is that they do not have enough information about the internship programs themselves²⁷.

Currently, there is no relevant data on opportunities for young people from vulnerable groups to attend internships, which represents an additional problem in ensuring the quality of internships. For comparison, in the Report²⁸ to the European Commission on the integration of young people into the labor market with a special focus on internship programs, only about 15% of young people, who participated in one of the internship programs, pointed out that their peers with disabilities or from other vulnerable groups would have the same access to these programs.

Although there are a large number of benefits for young people who attend internships, where only one of them is a faster transition from the world of education to the world of work, the fact that the actuality and prevalence of internships are decreasing is worrying. On the other hand, young people largely use online tools for additional education and training, as many as 70% of them²⁹. It is assumed that the introduction of internships in a virtual environment would help their greater representation, as well as that it is necessary to rethink the models of introducing young people into the working environment, by the requirements of the modern world and the increasing participation of technology in everyday life.

²⁴ Report on the position and needs of young people (2022), Ministry of Youth and Sports

²⁵ Same As Above

²⁶ Same As Above

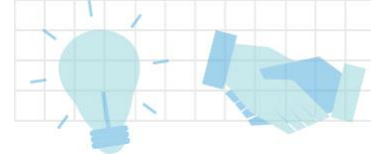
²⁷ Same As Above

²⁸ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2964>

²⁹ Same As Above



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How to get an internship?

Young people use different ways to find internships, but they rely mostly on the Internet and online tools. There are several portals in Serbia that offer young people the opportunity to go on an internship.

1. Startuj.com

Startuj.com is a site dedicated to young people, their interests, and their needs. The mission of this portal is to support young people in the process of employment and career development. Startuj.com provides information on current scholarship and study programs, as well as opportunities to start a career and improve. In addition, young people can find advice on education, choosing a career, and finding a job³⁰.

2. BG practice

BG practice is a program of cooperation between the University of Belgrade and the city of Belgrade, it has been implemented since 2010 under the name University work internship - BGPRAKSA - in public and public-utility enterprises of the city of Belgrade, then since 2011 in organizational units of the Administration, and since 2012 in cultural institutions and municipalities of the City of Belgrade. The program is the result of a joint effort for as many students as possible to acquire practical knowledge, skills, and relevant work experience during their studies and thus improve their academic education. Also, the program stemmed from the need to support as many young people as possible in professional development, but also to recognize the importance of the idea that the concept of socially responsible business should become an integral part of the business strategies of public companies in Belgrade. The BG Practice program is intended for final-year students, and graduates cannot participate in it. In addition, students of the University of Belgrade can participate, and it is not open to students from other universities.

3. Biram uspeh³¹

UNICEF in Serbia, in cooperation with the National Employment Service, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs, with professional support and partnership with Gi Group, a leading international company that provides consulting services in the field of human resources, and partners, is implementing the Employability Improvement project young people through work internships. The goal of the project is to support the social and economic inclusion of young people, especially young people from vulnerable groups, through a program of education and work internships, providing them with the opportunity for training, development of skills, and knowledge required on the labor market. The program involves training young people through a specially developed online learning platform to adapt to the work environment and acquire the skills necessary for career development, and the implementation of work internships in a given work environment that includes employers from the public, private, and civil sectors. Employers who join the program have the option of selecting trained

³⁰ <https://startuj.com/> 13. 5. 2023.

³¹ <https://biramuspeh.com/program 13>. 5. 2023.



young interns, based on the staffing needs of certain profiles within their company, and providing work internships for two months for the selected interns.

4. Student professional internship in public administration³²

This portal represents an online community made up of students, universities, and public administration bodies. Through this portal, young people can find and apply for internships in public administration. The portal provides the opportunity to participate in an online virtual and interactive internship fair where young people can find additional information about all opportunities for internships.

5. Hello World³³

Hello World contains the largest database of IT jobs in Serbia, as well as internships. It also contains all other relevant information such as the experiences of those who have already been on internship, information about salaries, companies, and other current events.

Models of virtual internships in Serbia

What do we mean when we say virtual internships? By virtual internships, we primarily mean internships that include some form of internship with the use of information and communication technology (ICT), where participants have the opportunity to communicate with each other and also with companies. Virtual internships are independent of space and time, that is, they can take place anywhere in the world.

ICT-related skills can somehow be identified as the central core of virtual internships. They are automatically mandatory for any type of internship and interested students should have at least an intermediate level of knowledge related to ICT skills such as, for example, basic computer skills, use of productivity software, skills in using certain platforms and/or tools, internet browsing skills, etc.

But virtual internships can also be defined according to their modality. The two main models of virtual internships can be identified as:

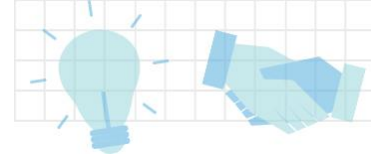
- a) Fully virtual participation in the internship that takes place entirely in an online environment, from the preparation phase to the final evaluation of the program and participants and obtaining the certificate;
- b) Mixed (hybrid) virtual internships where the interns occasionally goes to the company's headquarters. This modality opens up more space for flexibility of work, where the interns is allowed to communicate live with company representatives or get directly acquainted with certain elements of work, while on the other hand, part of the process of learning and performing work tasks can be done online.

³² <https://strucnapraksa.mduls.gov.rs/> 13. 5. 2023.

³³ https://www.helloworld.rs/prakse_13. 5. 2023.



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In this context, it should be emphasized that quality is a central aspect related to internships in general, given that they are defined as a way of gaining work experience through learning. According to the EU Charter on the Quality of Internships³⁴, quality in internships can refer to three main points:

- a) First of all, they should represent a learning experience in a professional environment;
- b) They should be defined by a contract that defines the insurance, rights, and obligations of all involved parties;
- c) They should enable practitioners to achieve recognized and certified work skills and apply them in the market, as well as provide them with adequate feedback as a mandatory part of the learning-by-doing process.

Models of virtual internships in the open labor market

Online internships in the IT sector - Levi9³⁵

Virtual internships are very often applied in the IT sector, given that learning outcomes and their implementation give the best results in this sector compared to other sectors of the economy. The company Levi9 provides the possibility of virtual internships in several fields, such as Java, JavaScript, Android, iOS, DevOps, etc. As part of the virtual internships, Levi9 offers the possibility of individual work with the practitioner, in the sense that each practitioner receives his mentor. This aspect is crucial for a virtual internship because it enables easier monitoring of work and achievement of learning goals and acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

The internship lasts three weeks, full-time, and the interns work in a team on real projects and problems. However, the main disadvantage is that this kind of internship is limited to students only, whereas other young people or young people who are not in the process of higher education do not have the opportunity to attend a virtual internship. At the time of writing, no information is available on internship opportunities for youth from vulnerable social groups.

Virtual School of the Pharmaceutical Chamber of Serbia³⁶ and EDUMED³⁷

The Pharmaceutical Chamber of Serbia has virtual internships that contain several courses within the platform for massive open online learning (MOOC). The internships are accredited, and the educational goals of the program, the knowledge, and skills that participants can acquire, as well as the knowledge verification test are listed within the course. Internships are run by the chamber itself, the Pharmacy Society of Serbia, and the Association EDUMED. Association for continuous education EDUMED is a non-governmental and non-profit association, founded to achieve goals in the field of continuous education of health workers, improvement and promotion of public health policy. EDUMED on its website contains several virtual internships consisting of virtual lectures, webinars, tests, and consultations with selected mentors.

³⁴ European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships

³⁵ <https://startit.rs/startit-poslovi/online-internship-levii-nine/> 19. 5. 2023.

³⁶ <http://vso3.farmkom.rs/> 19. 5. 2023.

³⁷ <https://testovi.edumed.org.rs/> 19. 5. 2023.



Internships are intended exclusively for graduated pharmacists and are free for members of the Chamber of Pharmacy. Other users should pay compensation for attending the internship, which is seen as a barrier to the participation of a larger number of interested participants.

Virtual internships in secondary vocational education

Training for students of Čačak Secondary Technical School with the use of ICT tools³⁸

As part of the "See, learn, apply - Competent teacher/successful student" program, high school students of the Technical School in Čačak have the opportunity to learn the basics of software skills to overcome various challenges in their future profession using ICT tools. The training is designed through several workshops that involve improving skills in the field of electrical engineering, computer systems, and software maintenance using digital tools, applications, and programs. The training includes several theoretical modules and practical application of acquired knowledge. The training aims to modernize the teaching of professional subjects and develop the digital competencies of students while increasing the application of ICT tools in education.

Information about the possibilities of participation of young people, who belong to other educational profiles, or this kind of acquisition of practical knowledge, is not available for now.

Digital School Awards³⁹

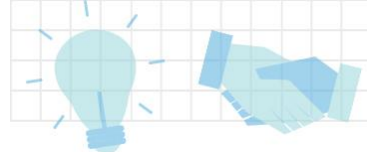
The Digital School is a European educational initiative founded with a focus on providing support to schools to better integrate digital technologies into the teaching and learning process by connecting employees in educational institutions, state administration bodies, and the IT industry to exchange knowledge and experience. The Digital School portal offers the possibility of opening a school account and conducting a self-evaluation using the Selfie instrument⁴⁰, which provides a reference framework based on which schools can measure progress in the field of digitization of teaching. The platform contains various resources such as webinars, blogs, case studies, checklists, images, and video materials that are available to users and serve to improve school programs and the competencies of teaching staff and students. After using all available tools and materials on the platform, during the next evaluation, feedback from students is also taken into account, who give their opinion and impressions on the effectiveness and usefulness of available digital tools on their advancement and acquisition of professional competencies. Digital school is a certified program, in which schools can obtain a Digital School certificate after meeting the requirements.

The Digital School program is free and all interested schools can apply, however, the very progress and integration of digital technologies into the school system depends on school resources and does not

³⁸ <https://www.tehnickacacak.edu.rs/Erazmus2.html> 19. 5. 2023.

³⁹ <https://www.awards4selfie.eu/sr/> 19. 5. 2023.

⁴⁰ [Selfie instrument](#) 19. 5. 2023.



guarantee safe digitization and development of staff and student skills. According to available information, 27 schools from the territory of Serbia participate in this program.

Conclusion

Due to the barriers that young people face, such as an unfavorable financial situation or belonging to one of the vulnerable social groups, this group faces reduced opportunities for internships and employment after leaving the education system, which further results in an increased risk of social exclusion. As young people state, in the case of getting their first job, the key things they recognize as obstacles are the lack of previous experience and a network of contacts. These circumstances also affected the youth unemployment rate, which is 25%

In Serbia, the percentage of young people participating in any internship model is decreasing, as are the opportunities for participating in the same, while the most common reasons given by young people for not participating are lack of information and lack of financial compensation. Nevertheless, young people show motivation to acquire new knowledge. As they state, they most often improve their skills and knowledge through portals and information they collect on the Internet. In addition, depending on the category, young people have different options for acquiring skills and improving knowledge important for their future occupation. The possibility of young people participating in some internship models in secondary schools depends on the resources of the school to ensure the acquisition and development of professional skills. Students, depending on their educational profile, have the opportunity to improve through various professional and mandatory internship programs within the curriculum. Young people in the labor market can reach some of the options for gaining practical experience, where they do not have clearly defined contractual obligations about the program provider, they are faced with time constraints, lack of certification, and also often the absence of monetary compensation.

Internships should provide young people with a framework for training and developing skills for future employment. In order for young people to be motivated to join one of the programs, it is necessary that the standard of an internship is in line with the social well-being of young people, that it provides adequate information about the program itself and its benefits, but also be in line with the trends of social progress, because 70% young people use some of the online tools to acquire additional knowledge. By including a virtual component in internship models, access to young people regardless of their geographic location will be enabled, the costs of including young people in the work environment will be reduced, but also the possibility of developing skills through independent work and mentor evaluation. The European Commission's report showed that internship models are a resource for empowering and supporting young people to navigate the labor market in the future. As many as 70% of young people state that the internship program provided an adequate opportunity to develop the necessary skills, while the process of finding a job after completing the internship was easier and enabled them to find a job in the environment where they did the internship, within the same industry or they acquired knowledge for self-employment. Based on these data, it should be emphasized that internships really represent the potential for empowering young people on a personal and professional level.



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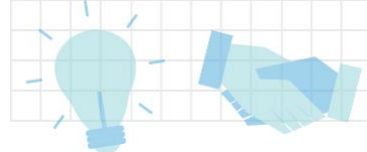


National report on Virtual internship in **Spain**

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Preface

As our world continues to grow more interconnected and technologically advanced, the traditional concept of internships is rapidly adapting to match the pace of contemporary societal changes. Virtual internships have now become a promising avenue for young Spaniards to explore, gain knowledge, and implement what they've learned in real-world scenarios.

Internships play an instrumental role in forming a conduit between the academic world and the dynamic sphere of professional life. They act as a springboard for emerging talent, shifting young individuals from the confines of their educational institutions into the wider professional landscape. In Spain, where the paradox of high educational attainment yet persistent youth unemployment exists, internships are even more pivotal. They endow young individuals with practical competencies, comprehension of various industries, and a rich network of professional connections, thereby advancing their personal and career growth.

A particularly noteworthy feature of virtual internships is their capacity to enhance diversity and inclusivity. By transcending the constraints of geography, they grant opportunities to individuals from diverse backgrounds, irrespective of their physical location or socioeconomic circumstances.

Although Spain may not be leading the charge in the domain of virtual internships, it prides itself on a vigorous ecosystem of organizations, institutions, and businesses focusing on youth development. Collectively, they have the potential to exploit digital technology to improve the employability of Spanish youth.

In Spain, internships are a fundamental part of both formal and non-formal education and a common way for students to gain practical experience in their chosen field, to apply the knowledge they have acquired in their studies and provide students with valuable experience and a potential pathway into future employment. There are several types of internships available, depending on the level of education and the organization providing them:

Overview of internships in Spain

Legal framework

The legal framework for internships in Spain is defined by the Royal Decree 592/2014, on internships of university students and graduates. This legislation sets the conditions for the development of internships and establishes the obligations of the educational institutions, the hosting companies, and the interns.

Internships in Spain are considered a training activity, not a job, which means that interns do not have the same rights and obligations as employees. However, they are entitled to certain protections, such as insurance coverage, and the institution and the hosting company must ensure the educational nature of the internship.



However, in Spain, we have dual vocational training as an educational model that combines theoretical training in an educational centre with practical training in a work environment. This law called Formación Dual or FP came into force in 2022 and aims to improve the motivation of students, reduce the high dropout rate, promote the employability of young people and provide a better link between the training offer and the needs of companies.

Internships in formal education

In formal education, internships are typically carried out by upper secondary, VET and university students as part of their curriculum. These internships may be obligatory or non-obligatory, depending on the requirements of the educational institution and the degree program.

Obligatory internships are usually included as a mandatory component of a degree program and require students to complete a certain number of hours of work experience in their chosen field. Non-obligatory internships are usually optional and may be completed for academic credit or simply to gain practical experience.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) internships, also known as traineeships or "Formación en Centros de Trabajo" (FCT) in Spain, are a crucial part of vocational training programs. These internships provide students with the opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills they've acquired during their vocational training in a real-world work environment. In the case of uppersecondary education (Bachillerato) and university education, internships are typically carried out as part of the curriculum. At university level, these internships can be either curricular (obligatory and form part of the academic program) or extracurricular (optional and supplement the academic program).

Curricular internships are typically conducted in the latter years of a degree, allowing students to apply the knowledge and skills they have gained during their studies in a practical setting. The duration, nature, and specific requirements of these internships vary by course and institution.

The number of young people participating in internships in Spain is difficult to estimate, as data is not consistently collected across different regions and sectors. However, it is estimated that approximately 50% of university students in Spain participate in internships during their studies.

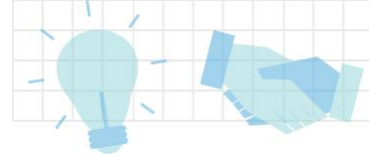
In contrast, extracurricular internships are not part of the academic curriculum but are still recognized and supported by the educational institution. These can be undertaken at any time during a student's university career and often extend into the summer months.

Internships in non-formal education

In the case of non-formal education, internships usually serve as a way for individuals who are not currently enrolled in a formal education program, but who are seeking to gain practical experience in a specific field. These internships may be offered by private companies, non-profit organizations, or



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government agencies. They may not be associated with a particular educational institution or program and thus are typically more flexible.

Internships on European level

Internships at the European level hold significant value, especially in the context of Spain, which is part of the larger European Union (EU) network. The EU, through various initiatives and programs, encourages internships that provide valuable practical experience and promote mobility among young people across member states.

The Erasmus+ program, for instance, is a flagship initiative by the European Union that supports education, training, youth, and sports in Europe. It offers students, including those from Spain, an opportunity to study, train, and gain work experience abroad, thus encouraging cultural exchange and enhancing employability.

The European Solidarity Corps is another initiative that offers internships and volunteering opportunities to young people across the EU. These programs aim to strengthen solidarity, promote social inclusion, and improve the soft skills of young Europeans, while also offering them practical experience in various fields.

In Spain, these European level internships are particularly beneficial as they not only provide young people with a chance to broaden their professional and personal horizons but also aid in addressing the relatively high youth unemployment rate. European internships expose Spanish youth to diverse work cultures, techniques, and environments, improving their adaptability, and enhancing their skills.

Furthermore, EU-based internships give Spanish youth access to a broad network of professionals and industries across the continent, enriching their professional connections. The experience and insights gained through these internships can significantly boost their employability, both within Spain and across Europe.

However, it's important to note that while these opportunities are numerous, awareness and accessibility can sometimes be an issue, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed, upon examining the responses from the Spanish Forum, it was revealed that a staggering 90% of participants were unaware of the myriad of available opportunities in the realm of virtual internships. Therefore, both Spanish and European institutions should continue working on outreach and support mechanisms to ensure these opportunities are inclusive and available to all youth, regardless of their socioeconomic status.



Review of models on virtual internships

Defining virtual internships

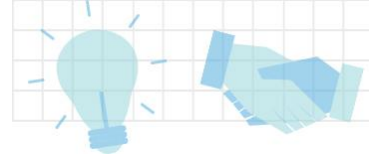
In the context of Spain, the adoption of virtual internships has been particularly influenced by factors such as the widespread use of digital technologies, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on work arrangements, and the persistent high youth unemployment rate. By offering a flexible, cost-effective means of gaining professional experience, virtual internships are seen as an innovative solution to enhance youth employability.

However, it's worth noting that the effectiveness of virtual internships can be influenced by several factors. These include the quality of tasks assigned, the level of supervision and feedback, the intern's access to necessary resources, and the opportunities for networking and social interaction. Thus, designing and implementing a successful virtual internship model requires thoughtful consideration of these factors.

Implementation of models on virtual internships in Spain

The implementation of virtual internship models in Spain calls for a multi-stakeholder approach, involving collaboration between government agencies, educational institutions, corporations, and civil society organizations. Each has a role to play in creating an environment conducive to virtual internships and ensuring that they provide meaningful experiences for interns. Here are some ways in which virtual internship models can be implemented in Spain:

1. **Government Initiatives:** The government can provide funding and policy support for virtual internships, particularly in sectors of strategic importance like technology and digital innovation. This might involve creating incentives for companies to offer virtual internships or funding platforms that connect students with remote internship opportunities.
2. **University Partnerships:** Universities can partner with companies to provide virtual internship opportunities for their students. These internships can be integrated into the curriculum, allowing students to gain practical experience while earning course credits. Universities can also provide support services for virtual interns, such as career counseling and online networking events.
3. **Corporate Internship Programs:** Companies, both large multinationals and smaller local firms, can implement virtual internships as part of their talent development strategy. This might involve adapting existing internship programs for a virtual format, or creating new remote internship opportunities. Companies can provide a structured program with clear expectations, regular feedback, and opportunities for interns to engage with various aspects of the business.
4. **Third-Party Platforms:** Online platforms that connect students with virtual internship opportunities can play a crucial role in implementing these models. These platforms can provide a centralized location for students to search for internships, submit applications, and receive support throughout their internship.



5. **Non-profit and Civil Society Initiatives:** Non-profit organizations can also offer virtual internships, particularly in fields like social work, environmental conservation, and community development. These organizations can provide interns with valuable experiences while advancing their social missions.

In implementing these models, it's important to ensure that virtual internships provide meaningful, valuable experiences for interns. This includes providing engaging and challenging work, offering regular feedback and mentorship, and creating opportunities for interns to connect with each other and with professionals in their field. Furthermore, attention should be given to promoting inclusivity and accessibility in virtual internships, ensuring that these opportunities are available to all youth, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographical location. Indeed, as articulated by a participant in the Spanish Forum, "Virtual internships could enhance inclusivity, as the chance of an employer's bias based on physical appearance or disability could be significantly reduced in the remote hiring process."

Youth target groups

In Spain, youth target groups for internships, including virtual internships, are quite diverse and can be segmented based on various factors including their educational background, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and career interests. Understanding these target groups is critical in designing effective internship programs and ensuring they meet the needs of the youth they aim to serve.

- **Students:** This group includes high school students looking for early professional experience, university students seeking practical applications of their academic knowledge, and postgraduate students seeking more specialized professional experience.
- **Recent Graduates:** Young people who have recently finished their academic studies often seek internships to gain practical work experience and increase their employability.
- **Unemployed Youth:** With the youth unemployment rate in Spain remaining significantly high, internships can provide these individuals with valuable work experience, skills, and networking opportunities to help them enter or re-enter the job market.
- **Career Changers:** Some young people may be looking to switch industries or fields and use internships as a stepping stone to gain experience in their new chosen field.
- **Underprivileged Youth:** Young individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may face barriers in accessing quality education and employment opportunities. Tailored internship programs can provide these individuals with the skills and networks necessary to improve their career prospects.
- **Rural Youth:** Young people living in rural areas might have limited local employment opportunities. Virtual internships can be particularly beneficial for this group, offering them access to a wider range of possibilities without the need to relocate.
- **Non-native Youth:** This includes immigrants and refugees who may lack local professional networks and face language or cultural barriers to employment. Internships can provide valuable local experience and help these individuals integrate into the Spanish job market.



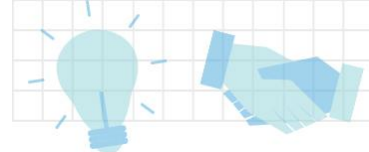
- Youth with Disabilities: For young individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities, virtual internships may offer more accessible and flexible opportunities to gain work experience.

Evaluation of existing virtual internships models

The evaluation of existing virtual internship models in Spain is an important aspect of understanding their effectiveness and potential for improvement. This process involves examining various aspects such as structure, accessibility, benefits, and challenges associated with these models. Here are a few points of consideration:

- Structure and Organization: Virtual internships should have a clear structure and defined goals. The roles and responsibilities of the intern should be clearly articulated. Regular check-ins and mentorship sessions should be part of the program to monitor progress and provide guidance.
- Accessibility and Inclusivity: How accessible are these internships to a diverse range of students? Are they inclusive of individuals from different geographical regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and physical abilities? Are language barriers or technological requirements limiting access for certain groups?
- Skill Development: Virtual internships should aim to provide interns with tangible skills that enhance their employability. This could include industry-specific knowledge, but also soft skills like communication, time management, and self-discipline that are essential for remote work.
- Networking Opportunities: Despite being remote, virtual internships should still provide opportunities for networking. This can be facilitated through virtual meetings, group projects, and online company events.
- Feedback and Learning Opportunities: Regular feedback is crucial in any learning process. Companies should provide constructive feedback to interns, and there should be mechanisms in place for interns to share their experiences and suggestions.
- Recognition and Compensation: It's important to evaluate how interns are recognized for their work. Are they given certificates upon completion? Are their contributions acknowledged in tangible ways? Also, are these internships paid or unpaid, and how does this impact the demographic of students who can afford to participate?
- Transition to Employment: One of the goals of internships is to ease the transition from education to employment. An evaluation should consider whether and how these virtual internships are leading to job opportunities for the interns.

By evaluating these aspects, Spain can gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of existing virtual internship models, identify best internships, and implement improvements to enhance the value of these experiences for their youth.



Identified benefits and obstacles to virtual internships

Benefits of Virtual Internships:

- **Flexibility:** Virtual internships offer flexibility in terms of location and often in terms of working hours as well. This can be particularly beneficial for students who may have other responsibilities or constraints.
- **Broadened Opportunities:** Virtual internships can provide access to opportunities with organizations that are geographically distant. This can be especially beneficial for students in remote or rural areas, or for those looking for internships in a specific industry that may not be available in their local area.
- **Skill Development:** Participating in a virtual internship can help interns develop important digital and remote working skills, which are increasingly valuable in today's digital economy.
- **Reduced Costs:** Virtual internships eliminate commuting or relocation costs for interns, making them more financially accessible. For organizations, it can reduce overhead costs associated with on-site interns.
- **Sustainability.** Virtual internships are clearly more sustainable as they reduce environmental costs (transport, etc.).

Obstacles of Virtual Internships:

- **Digital Divide:** Although virtual internships can broaden access in some ways, they can also exclude those who lack reliable internet access or suitable devices.
- **Lack of Face-to-Face Interaction:** The absence of in-person interaction can make it more difficult for interns to build relationships, network, and absorb the company culture. This can also result in the intern feeling isolated or disconnected. "They will not benefit from the working environment, where they can see how everything works in reality".
- **Supervision and Communication Challenges:** Supervising and communicating with interns remotely can be challenging. It requires a higher level of organization and clear communication from both supervisors and interns to ensure tasks are understood and completed on time. "Virtual Internships demand a level of responsibility that many students do not have".
- **Hands-On Experience:** Depending on the industry, some roles may require hands-on experience or use of specific equipment that cannot be replicated in a virtual environment.
- **Work-Life Balance:** With the lines between personal life and work blurred, interns may struggle with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. "Flexible working hours and being able to be at home improve the work-life balance and well-being of the workers".
- To maximize the benefits and overcome the obstacles of virtual internships, it's important to implement best internships for remote work, such as regular communication, clear



expectations, and adequate support and training for interns. Additionally, steps should be taken to ensure digital accessibility for all interns.

- Another point to take into account is the blended internships as the best option to be implemented in all specialties for the future. For example, a Cooker can do the “scandallo” online and the cooking lessons in person.

Recommendations

Recommendations for institutions

- Promote Awareness: Institutions should conduct awareness campaigns about the benefits of virtual internships and the opportunities available, encouraging students to participate and gain valuable work experience.
- Collaborate with Industry Partners: By partnering with corporations and businesses, institutions can ensure that their internship programs are relevant and up-to-date with industry needs. Such collaboration can lead to more meaningful and effective internship experiences for students.
- Integrate Virtual Internships into Curricula: Institutions should consider integrating virtual internships into their academic curricula, allowing students to earn course credits while gaining practical experience. This would encourage more students to participate and would also formalize the process.
- Provide Technological Support: Institutions should provide the necessary technological support for students to participate in virtual internships. This could involve lending laptops or providing internet access to students who need them.
- Offer Mentorship and Support: Institutions can play a key role in offering mentorship and support to students during their internships. This could involve regular check-ins to track their progress, providing feedback, or even offering career counseling.
- Foster Inclusive Opportunities: Ensure that opportunities are accessible to all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background. This might involve providing financial support or resources for those who need them to participate in virtual internships.
- Track and Evaluate Outcomes: Institutions should keep track of the outcomes of their virtual internships, including student feedback, skills gained, and employment opportunities. This information can be used to continually improve and adapt the programs.

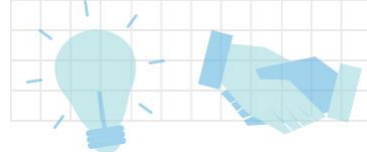
Implementing these recommendations can help institutions in Spain leverage virtual internships as a valuable tool for enhancing the skills, employability, and career prospects of their students.

Recommendations for business

Businesses are an essential part of the virtual internship ecosystem. They can derive significant benefits from these programs, such as access to fresh talent, increased diversity, and flexible staffing. However, to



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ensure a successful internship experience for both the company and the interns, businesses should consider the following recommendations:

- **Define Clear Objectives:** Companies should set clear objectives for their virtual internships, outlining the skills they want their interns to develop, the tasks they will be performing, and the goals they should aim to achieve.
- **Develop a Structured Program:** Interns should be given a structured program with clear expectations. This might involve a thorough orientation, regular check-ins, and feedback sessions. Even though the internship is virtual, interns should feel part of the team.
- **Provide Necessary Resources:** Companies need to ensure that interns have access to the necessary tools and technology to successfully complete their tasks. This may include software, hardware, or specific data.
- **Foster a Supportive Environment:** Assigning a mentor or supervisor to the interns can be beneficial. These mentors can guide interns through their tasks, provide feedback, and answer any queries they might have. This support can significantly enhance the intern's learning experience.
- **Encourage Networking:** Companies should facilitate networking opportunities for their virtual interns. This could be in the form of online meetups, group projects, or virtual company events. Networking is a vital part of professional growth and can greatly enhance the interns' experience.
- **Recognize and Reward Efforts:** Recognition can go a long way in motivating interns. This could be in the form of a certificate upon completion, a letter of recommendation, or even potential job opportunities within the company. If possible, companies should also consider providing fair compensation for the work interns do.
- **Collect and Utilize Feedback:** Finally, companies should make it a point to collect feedback from their interns. This feedback can be invaluable in refining and improving their virtual internship programs.

By implementing these recommendations, businesses in Spain can create successful virtual internship programs that benefit not just the interns but also the companies themselves.

Recommendations for youth civil society

Civil society organizations focused on youth development play a crucial role in promoting and facilitating virtual internships. Here are some recommendations for how these organizations can optimize their approach:

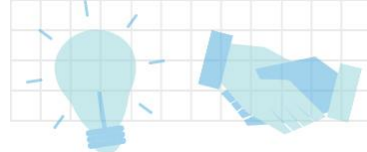
- **Advocate for Fair Internships:** Civil society organizations can play an essential role in advocating for fair and ethical internships in virtual internships, such as adequate compensation, respectful treatment, and providing meaningful work experiences.
- **Raise Awareness:** These organizations can work to raise awareness about the benefits and opportunities of virtual internships among youth, particularly those who might not have



considered this path. They can organize workshops, seminars, or informational campaigns to educate young people about these opportunities.

- **Provide Guidance and Support:** Many young people may need support in finding and applying for virtual internships. Civil society organizations can provide guidance in these areas, helping with tasks such as writing resumes, preparing for interviews, and choosing the right internships.
- **Foster Partnerships:** By building partnerships with educational institutions and businesses, these organizations can facilitate the creation of more virtual internship opportunities. They can also work together with these institutions to ensure that these opportunities are accessible and beneficial to youth.
- **Encourage Skill Development:** Civil society organizations can help youth develop the skills they need to succeed in virtual internships, such as digital literacy, self-discipline, and communication. They can offer training programs or resources to help youth develop these skills.
- **Promote Inclusivity:** These organizations can advocate for inclusive opportunities that consider the diverse needs and circumstances of all youth, regardless of their socio-economic background, physical abilities, or geographical location.
- **Gather and Use Feedback:** Civil society organizations should gather feedback from youth who participate in virtual internships, to understand their experiences and challenges. This feedback can be used to advocate for improvements in these programs.

By implementing these recommendations, youth civil society organizations in Spain can help ensure that virtual internships provide valuable and beneficial experiences for all youth, helping to boost their career prospects and contribute to their personal and professional development.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of virtual internships across **Italy, Spain, Serbia, and North Macedonia** underscores several crucial insights that can shape the future of remote work and experiential learning in these countries.

Firstly, the absence of a comprehensive **legal framework** surrounding virtual internships raises concerns about how students and young people can gain experience, but mostly about the rights and protections of interns, as well as the obligations of host organizations. It is evident that establishing a clear legal structure will be pivotal in ensuring equitable and safe experiences for interns, as well as fostering a sense of accountability among companies.

Secondly, the necessity to **modernize the educational system** is apparent. The traditional models of learning and skill development are evolving rapidly, driven by the demands of a digital age. Virtual internships present an opportunity to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, aligning education with the dynamic needs of the job market.

Motivating young individuals to engage in virtual internships emerges as a critical challenge. Addressing this requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. By emphasizing the potential for skill acquisition, networking, and personal growth, as well as offering incentives such as academic credit or stipends, governments and institutions can encourage greater participation in virtual internships.

The **integration of digital tools and flexibility** has emerged as a defining feature of virtual internships. However, the transformation is not solely the responsibility of interns. Companies must adapt their practices, embracing new ways of mentoring, supervising, and evaluating interns in a virtual environment. This transition necessitates the reevaluation of traditional workplace norms and the development of innovative management strategies.

In essence, the findings from the study highlight that virtual internships hold immense promise, but their successful implementation requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders. A robust legal framework, a modernized educational system, motivating incentives, and adaptable companies collectively form the bedrock for a thriving virtual internship landscape. As technology continues to reshape the global workforce, these insights will serve as guiding principles for maximizing the benefits of virtual internships in Italy, Spain, Serbia, and North Macedonia, ultimately fostering a symbiotic relationship between education, industry, and the aspirations of the youth