

# INTERNSHIPS: THE BRIDGE FROM THE WORLD OF EDUCATION TO THE WORLD OF WORK

Intelligence Brief, 4/2021

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Employability of graduates is one of the focal points in the Bologna Process: “[...] one prevalent way to ensure that graduates gain the necessary competences is to include work placements in higher education programmes” (European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice, 2018). In 2016 almost all countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) had regulations or incentives to include practical training and work placements for at least some higher education institutions and/or programmes.

Internships as part of a study programme are aimed at being the bridge from the world of education to the world of work and thereby improving the employability of students (Knouse et al., 1999). Students gain various benefits from doing an internship. In addition to being able to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real-life situation, it also allows them to acquire practical work skills and to start building a professional network early which gives them the opportunity to gain access to a job faster after finishing their studies (Silva et al., 2016). Although Bittmann

and Zorn (2020) find no effect of mandatory internships on labour market outcomes, they do find it for the voluntary ones that were organised extracurricularly. Furthermore, students can benefit from an internship in their studies with regard to their academic outcomes (Mergoupis, 2019).

For the first time in EUROSTUDENT history, more extensive information has been collected regarding internships during studying in higher education. This intelligence brief dives deeper into this topic. Based on EUROSTUDENT VII micro data (Cuppen et al., 2021)<sup>1</sup>, the relationship between having done an internship and the feeling of preparedness for the labor market by their study programme is examined.

## Internships in country and abroad

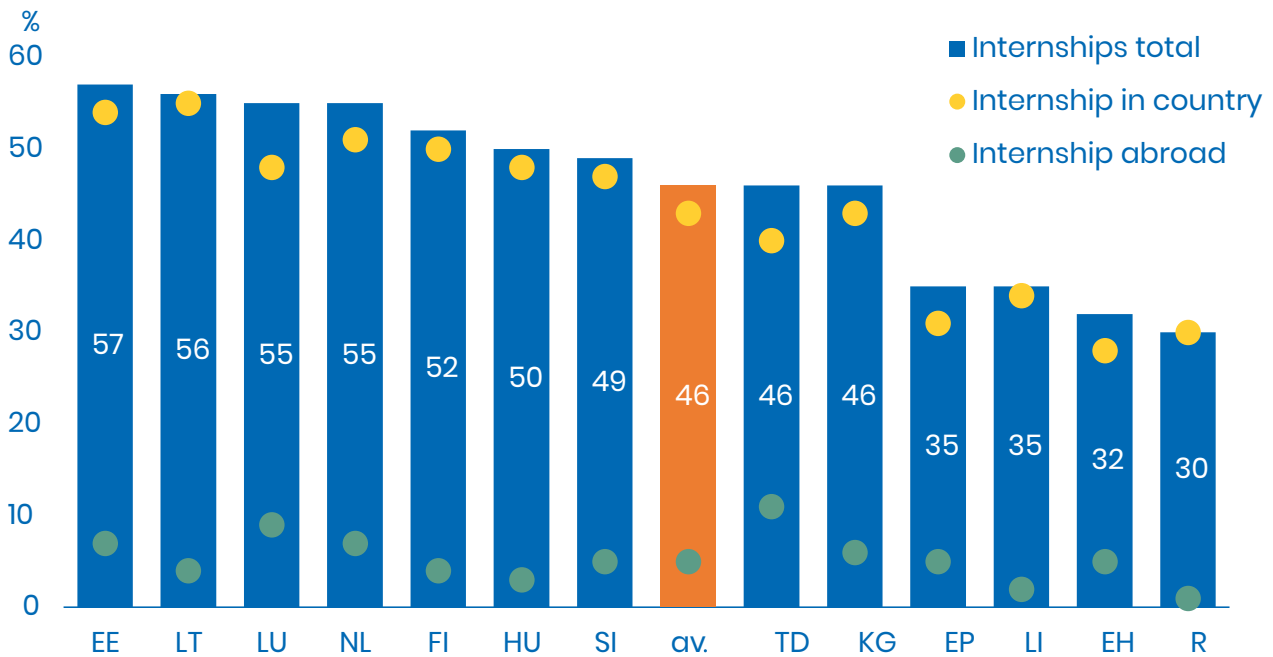
On average, 46 % of students in the selection of EUROSTUDENT countries (i.e. the 13 countries that have delivered micro data) have done an internship at some point in their studies (Figure 1). The majority (43 %) did so in the country where they study, a small part (5 %) (also) followed an internship abroad. Internships are most common in Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and the Netherlands (where 55 % and more of the students did an internship). This is not the case in Georgia, Poland, Ireland and Croatia, where no more than approximately one in every three students work as an intern during their studies.

*Internships refer to a period of work experience as part of a study programme (excluding practical courses or lab exercises at the higher education institution). The main purpose of an internship is gaining practical experience on the labour market.*

<sup>1</sup> To expand the range of users of EUROSTUDENT data and facilitate research by project-external researchers, EUROSTUDENT VII student-level micro data is available as a scientific use file (<https://metadata.fdz.dzhw.eu/en/data-packages/stu-es7?page=1&size=10&type=surveys&access-way=download-suf&version=1.0.0>). The first version of the EUROSTUDENT scientific use file combines EUROSTUDENT survey data from the following 13 EUROSTUDENT countries: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovenia.

**Figure 1: Internship(s) since first entering HE (in country or abroad)**

Share of students (%)



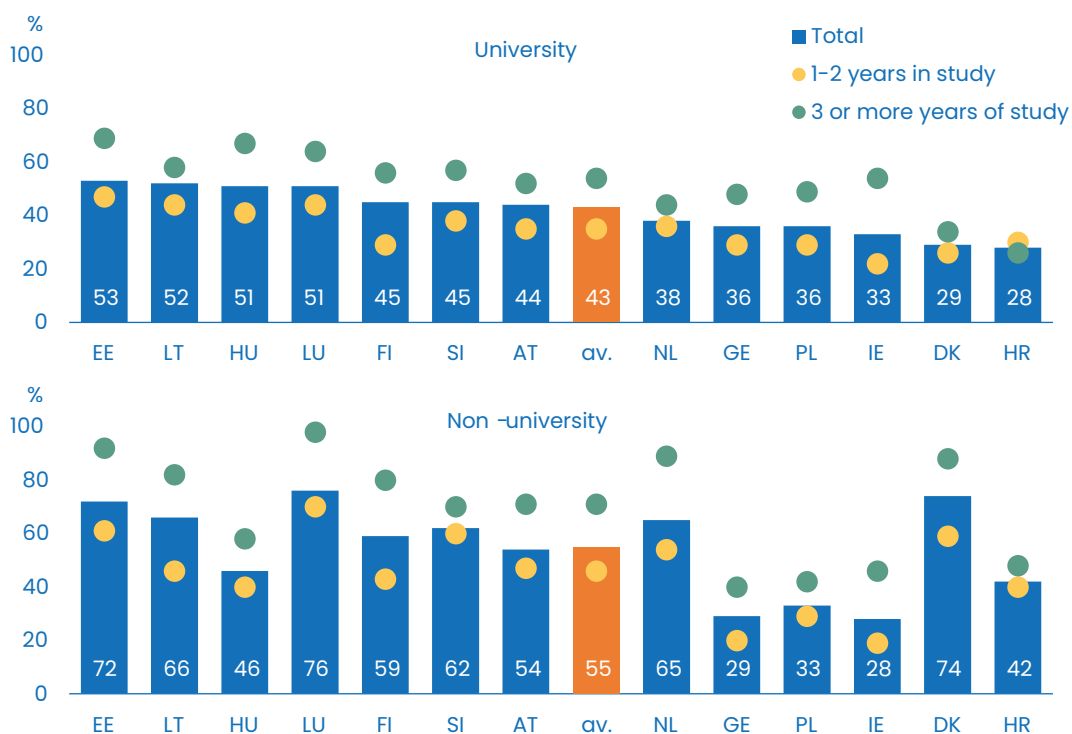
Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Differences between internships in country and abroad are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in all countries.

Students at universities are less likely to do an internship during their studies than students at non-universities (Figure 2; 43 % versus 55 %). Looking at specific countries, differences by type of higher education institution (HEI) are reversed in Hungary, Georgia, Poland and Ireland, where

students at universities are more likely to follow an internship. In addition to the difference between universities and non-universities, there is a difference according to study year: as the study progresses, the chance that students are doing or have done an internship increases.

**Figure 2: Internship(s) (in country or abroad), by type of HEI and study year**

Share of students (%)



Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Differences between universities and non-universities are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in all countries. Differences by years in study significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) in AT, DK, EE, FI, GE, HU, IE, LT, LU, NL, PL, SI and ( $p < 0.10$ ) in HR.

## Being prepared for working life

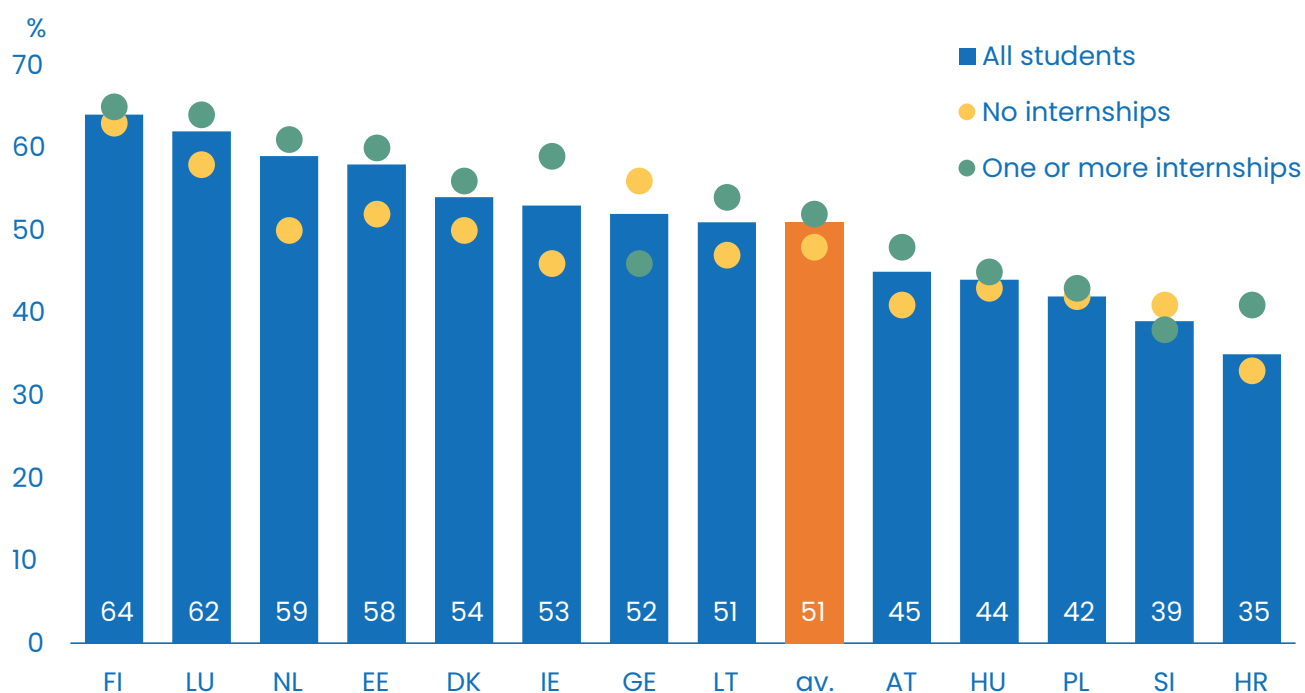
As mentioned at the beginning of this IB, policy makers have reasons to expect a positive effect of internships on the employability of students. In EUROSTUDENT a proxy for employability is given in the form of students' assessment of how well their study programme prepares them for the labour market. The further analysis is limited to students who are in their third year or further of their studies, because these students are both more likely to have done an internship as well as better able than first and second year students to assess their preparedness for the labour market.

On average, a bit more than half of the students in this selection of EUROSTUDENT countries

feel (very) well prepared for the labour market by their study programme (Figure 3). In most countries (the Netherlands, Estonia, Denmark, Ireland, Austria, and Croatia) doing an internship during the studies helps to strengthen students' feeling of preparedness for the labour market. In Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland and Slovenia, the difference is not significant. In Georgia, the relationship between doing an internship and the degree to which students feel well prepared by their study programme for the labour market is exactly the opposite: here the students who do not follow an internship rate the preparation by their studies for the labor market as better.

**Figure 3: Preparation for the national labour market by following an internship**

Share of students who indicate their study programme prepares them (very) well for the national labour market (% score 1 (very well) and 2 (well) on a five-point-scale)



Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Only students in their 3rd year or over. Differences by character of internship significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) in AT, HR, EE, FI, DK, GE, IE, LU, NL, SI. No significant differences in HU, LT, PL.

In Finland, Georgia, Estonia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Austria, and Croatia, students for whom the internship was a mandatory part of their studies are more optimistic about how well their studies prepare them for the labour market than students who did the internship voluntarily (Figure 4). That is not the case in Luxembourg, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, though. In these countries

the effect is not significant (Hungary, Lithuania, and Poland), or in the case of Luxembourg and Poland, reversed: here the assessment is more positive in favour of voluntary internships.

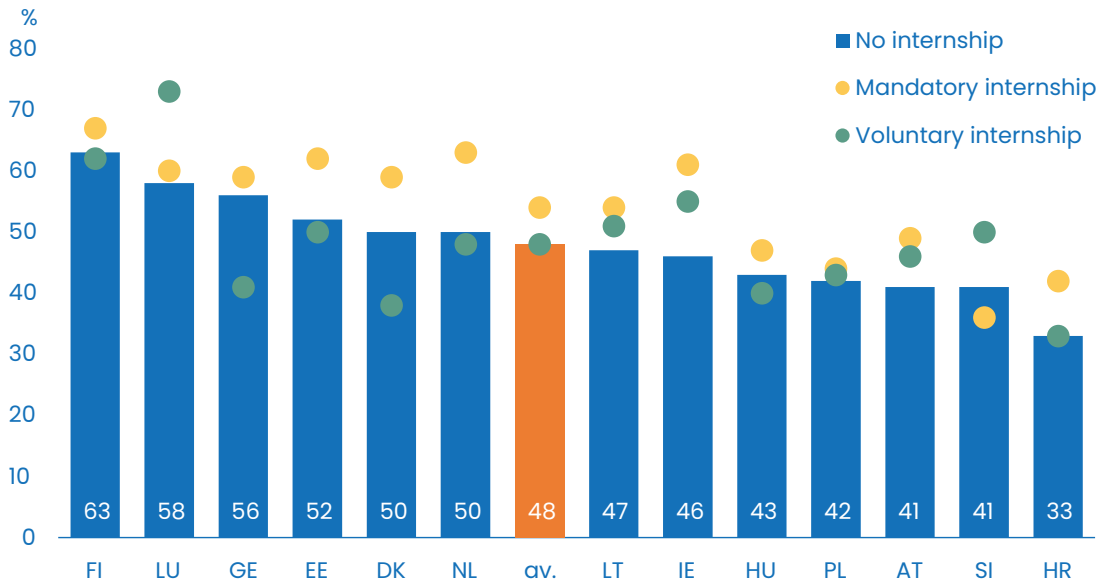
Both following an internship as such and the existence of compulsory internships are not equally distributed across the European countries in this study (Figure 5). On average, 58 % of the

students in their third year or higher followed an internship and of these internships 75 % are compulsory. The matrix clearly demonstrates that in countries where it is more common to do an internship, the internships are more often a compulsory part of the study. In the Netherlands, both the percentage of students (third year and over) who have completed an internship (77 %

and the percentage of compulsory internships (92 %) are by far the highest. Georgia is exactly on the other end of the spectrum: here it is considerably less common to do an internship (46 %) and if it is done, students do it mostly on their own initiative (only 31 % of all internships are mandatory).

**Figure 4: Preparation for the national labour market by character of the internship**

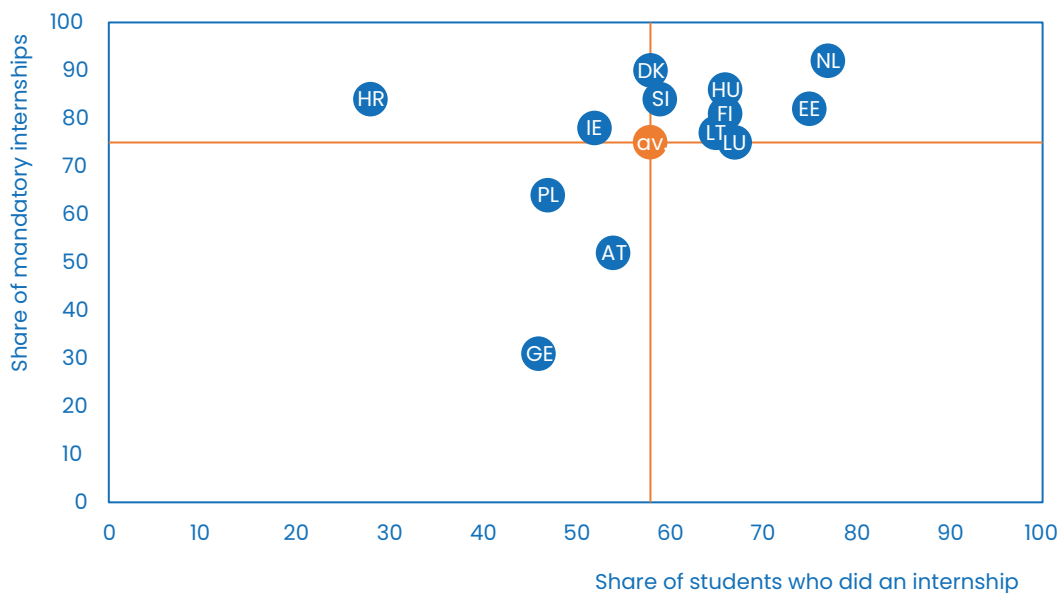
Share of students who indicate their study programme prepares them (very) well for the national labour market (% score 1 (very well) and 2 (well) on a five-point-scale)



Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Only students in their 3rd year or over. Differences by character of internship significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) in AT, HR, EE, FI, DK, GE, IE, LU, NL, SI. No significant differences in HU, LT, PL.

**Figure 5: Internships and character of the internships**

Share of students (%)



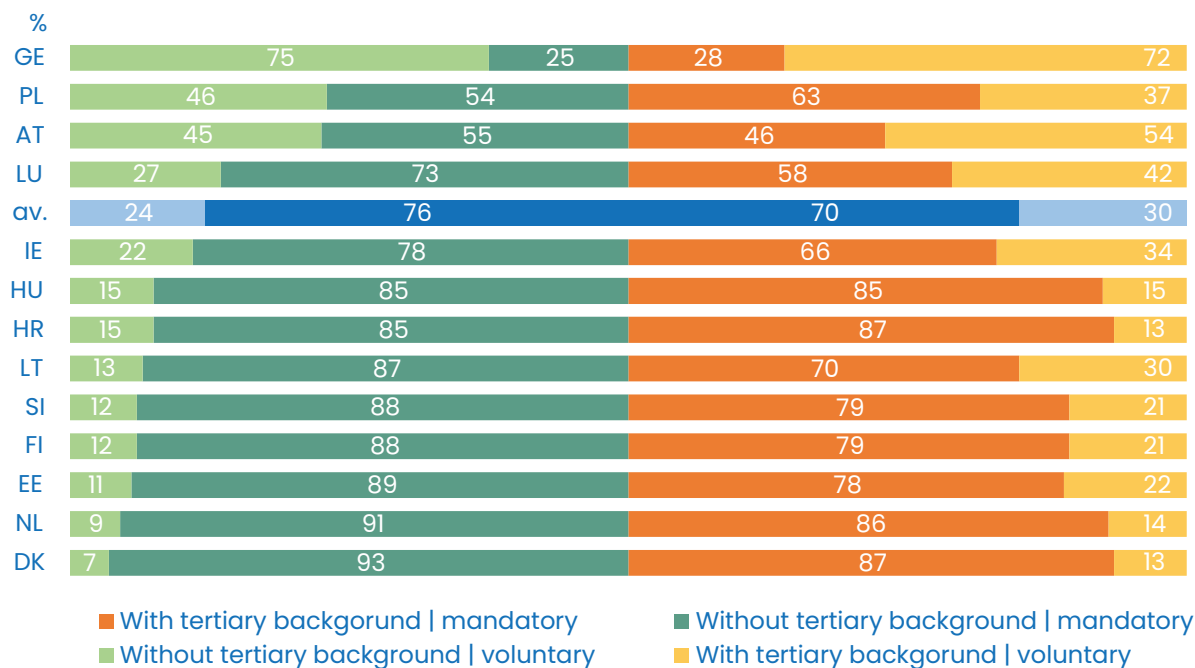
Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Only students in their 3rd year or over.

Students in their third year or over, whose parents have no tertiary education are less likely to have done internships (56 %) than students whose parents do have a tertiary education background (59 %; not in graph). In addition, in 11 of the 13 countries there is a significant difference by parental educational background in the character of the internship. In most countries

students without tertiary educated parents choose significantly less often to follow an internship on their own initiative (on average: 24 versus 30 %) (Figure 6). This is not the case in Georgia and Poland: in these countries students without tertiary educated parents more often follow a voluntary internship.

**Figure 6: Character of internships by educational background**

Share of students (%)



Source: EUROSTUDENT VII. Only students in their 3rd year or over. Differences by parental educational background ( $p < 0.05$ ) in AT, DK, EE, FI, IE, LT, LU, NL, PL, SI and ( $p < 0.10$ ) GE. No significant differences in HR, HU.

## Conclusion and policy considerations

This paper has shown that internships can help students feel better prepared for the labour market. However, it is not yet common everywhere for students to follow an internship as part of their study programme. Differences can be seen both between countries and within. If students do an internship, the majority of them do so because this is a compulsory part of their studies. A small proportion of students do an internship on a voluntary basis. However, the analysis shows that students without tertiary-educated parents are less likely to do a voluntary

internship. It is important to look for ways to make work experiences and practical training part of all study programmes in a structured way, and of course, with the changes in the student population in mind, for example with regard to combining study and work. As shown in the latest EUROSTUDENT report (Hauschildt et al., 2021) most internships are unpaid, even if they are mandatory, which implies that fulfilling internship requirements may cause problems for students relying on a paid job to finance their studies.

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## About EUROSTUDENT

The EUROSTUDENT project collates comparable student survey data on the social dimension of European higher education, collecting data on a wide range of topics, e.g. the socio-economic background, living conditions, and

temporary international mobility of students. The project strives to provide reliable and insightful cross-country comparisons. The data presented here stem from the seventh round of the EUROSTUDENT project (2018–2021).

## Countries participating in EUROSTUDENT VII

Albania (AL)**	Germany (DE)	Poland (PL)
Austria (AT)	Hungary (HU)	Portugal (PT)*
Croatia (HR)	Iceland (IS)	Romania (RO)*
Czech Republic (CZ)	Ireland (IE)	Slovenia (SI)
Denmark (DK)	Italy (IT)*	Sweden (SE)
Estonia (EE)	Lithuania (LT)	Switzerland (CH)
Finland (FI)	Luxembourg (LU)	The Netherlands (NL)
France (FR)	Malta (MT)	Turkey (TR)*
Georgia (GE)	Norway (NO)	

\* reference period during COVID-19 pandemic; \*\* results will be available in database.

## Consortium members



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