



Ombudsman: System of unpaid trainees in EU foreign delegations should end

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Following a complaint from a young EU trainee, the European Ombudsman, **Emily O'Reilly**, has recommended that the European External Action Service (EEAS) pay all of its trainees an appropriate allowance to allow greater access for young people of all backgrounds.

The EEAS has almost 800 trainees in its delegations around the world whose full time services are not remunerated.

The trainees must cover all of their costs including accommodation, travel and health insurance, a system which clearly discriminates against many young people with limited means.

The Ombudsman says that the allowance should ensure that young people will be encouraged to apply for a traineeship irrespective of their financial status.

"Traineeships in what is in effect the EU's foreign service can be a significant stepping stone in young people's careers and should be available to as broad a range of people as possible," said Ms O'Reilly.

"Unpaid traineeships may perpetuate social exclusion by de facto preventing some young people from enhancing their skills and qualifications, which can have a knock-on effect on their further careers."

"The EU diplomatic service should lead by example in the world by ensuring that everyone has a fair and equal chance to secure these valued traineeships. This will benefit both trainees and delegations," said the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman has proposed that an appropriate allowance could be based on the cost of living in the country where the delegation is located. The Ombudsman is aware that paying for trainees in delegations raises budgetary issues but she advises that this matter be brought up with the EU budgetary authority (European Parliament and Member States).

Background

The Complainant, an Austrian citizen, turned to the Ombudsman after working as an unpaid trainee in an EU delegation in Asia. At first the EEAS did not answer her complaint and provided little information. Over the course of the Ombudsman's inquiry, the EEAS took



steps to make information about upcoming traineeships in its delegations publicly available.

The EEAS has a network of 139 EU delegations worldwide employing nearly 6,000 people and in 2016 offered approximately 800 unpaid traineeships . Across EU institutions, other than the EEAS, paid traineeships are the norm. Brussels-based EEAS trainees are however paid.

The European Ombudsman's Recommendation is available here .