

The UN Youth Strategy and internships

Youth2030, the United Nations system-wide Youth Strategy, was launched in 2018 by the Secretary-General to transform the United Nations work FOR and WITH youth. The strategy places a special emphasis on expanding opportunities and improving the fairness and quality of internships across the UN system. While the overall implementation of the strategy has seen good progress, the two annual Youth2030 Progress Reports issued in 2021 and 2022 note some critical gaps in performance of the United Nations system on internships and young talent management. The reports also point out that while several UN entities implemented promising practices on internships and young talent management, such practices have not yet been reflected in the overall efforts of the system, including the UN Country Teams. To address these gaps, the strategy's **High-Level Steering Committee** outlined key steps to strengthening internships across the system, including the establishment of an inter-agency Task Team.

The **Youth2030 Task Team on Strengthening Internships** was established in 2021. Co-chaired by the **Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth** and the **Department of Operational Support**, the Task Team is composed of Human Resources focal points¹ from interested UN secretariat and non-secretariat entities, including the **Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance**. To ensure that the agenda builds on young people's advocacy efforts and includes their perspectives, the Task Team's membership also includes youth networks – the **Fair Internships Initiative** and **Young UN**. The Task Team's work is organized across four tracks: (a) good practices; (b) operational improvements; (c) data and tracking systems, and (d) advocacy.

Understanding where we are now on internships in the UN: a review

The Task Team set out to understand the status of internships in the United Nations and to learn what is working well and what needs improvement in order to inform its future course of action.

A support tool was developed by the Task Team (please refer to the below table for areas of review) to examine internship policies and practices, as well as strategic human resources management. The tool draws from and is aligned with the recommendations and benchmarks outlined by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System in its Review of internship programmes in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2018/1).

The UN entities – both secretariat and non-secretariat – engaged in the Task Team self-reported on various components in the tool. In all, 30 policy components were reviewed, along with the patterns of implementation during two periods – pre-COVID (2019) and post-COVID (January–June 2021).

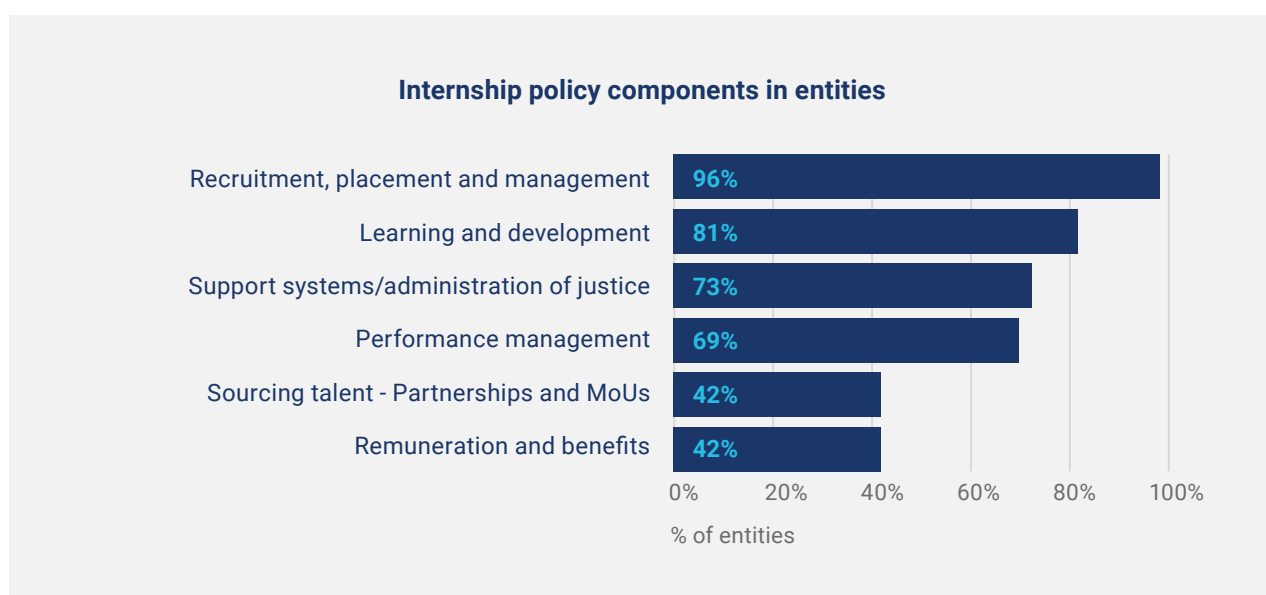
JIU benchmark areas on internships	Status of internships in the UN: areas of review by the Youth2030 Task Team (As per the tool developed by and self-reported on by the Task Team)						
1. Internship application and decision	1 Status update on applications						
	2 Selection criteria & processes	2.1 Terms of reference for internship	2.2 Selection process	2.3 Decision on selection			
	3 Joining the duty station	3.1 Time to start internship	3.2 Visa support for travel to duty station				
2. Internship period	4 Onboarding	4.1 Administrative support for onboarding	4.2 Induction package	4.3 Orientation of intern by supervisor			
	5 Work plan						
	6 Learning & development	6.1 Training courses	6.2 Field training				
	7 Leave entitlements	7.1. Annual leave	7.2 Sick leave				
	8 Working conditions	8.1 Access to office	8.2 Office space	8.3 Work desk	8.4 Work computer	8.5 Official email	
	9 Support in the event of emergency						
	10 Support in the event of abuse or conflict						
3. Completion of internship	11 Performance evaluation	11.1 Performance evaluation of intern	11.2 Certificate of completion of internship				
	12 Feedback on internship experience						
	13 Internship as work experience						
4. Alignment of internships to the values of the UN	14 Equal opportunities						
	15 Financial support	15.1 Financial support for travel to duty station	15.2 Financial support to cover living expenses	15.3 Financial support for field training			
	16 Ending mandatory break in service						

Key findings

Twenty-nine UN entities participated in the review. Clean and complete data sets available across 27 entities (15 secretariat, 12 non-secretariat entities) were included for analysis.

1. Overview of internships

- All UN entities are guided by their organization's internship policies. Entities include several components in their internship policies, as shown below:



- Internships in the United Nations follow **centralized (56%), decentralized (11%) or mixed (33%)** models of management. **Focal point(s) for coordination of internships** are available across 96% of entities. Such focal points are **full time** in 65% and **part time** in 35% of entities.
- Entities have invested in efforts to build **organizational capacity** to improve the quality of internship programmes. These include (a) **guidelines (only) for supervisors** in 89% of entities, (b) **training curriculum (only) for supervisors** in 13% of entities and (c) **both** in 11% of entities.
- 68% of entities include internships in their routine **Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS)**. HRIS is used for (a) **recruitment and management purposes** in 75% of entities, (b) **recruitment only** in 13% of entities and (c) **administration/management only** in 13% of entities. 27% of entities include a **dashboard on internships** in their HRIS to make available real-time data.
- 65% of entities include internships in their **annual HR planning processes**, and 60% include information on internships in their **annual reports, which are publicly available**.
- Availability of information and data on internships is variable across entities**. While much information exists on (a) total number of interns, (b) duration of internships, (c) modalities of internships (in-person, online, hybrid) and (d) age, gender and geographical distribution, information on availability of interns from vulnerable population groups is limited.

2. Internship policies in UN entities and their alignment to JIU benchmarks on internships

- Overall, among the **policy components** reviewed, **45%** (13 of 30) were **aligned to the JIU benchmarks on internships across ≥ 80% of UN entities**. These include administrative support for onboarding, terms of reference for internship, orientation of intern by supervisor, access to office, support in the event of emergency, support in the event of abuse or conflict, certificate of completion of internship, equal opportunities for eligible candidates, office space, providing sufficient time to start, visa support for travel to duty station, work desk and work computer. In the above areas, alignment of policies to JIU benchmarks was higher across a larger proportion of non-secretariat entities than of secretariat entities.
- Five areas where the policies were **most aligned to the JIU benchmarks on internships** (across ≥85% of secretariat and non-secretariat entities) include:
 - **Administrative support for onboarding:** All (**93%**), secretariat (**87%**), non-secretariat (**100%**)
 - **Terms of reference for internship:** All (**89%**), secretariat (**87%**), non-secretariat (**92%**)
 - **Orientation of intern by supervisor:** All (**89%**), secretariat (**87%**), non-secretariat (**92%**)
 - **Certificate of completion of internship:** All (**89%**), secretariat (**87%**), non-secretariat (**92%**)
 - **Support in the event of emergency:** All (**89%**), secretariat (**87%**), non-secretariat (**92%**)
- Five areas where the policies were least aligned (≤50% all entities aligned) include:
 - **Financial support for travel to duty station:** All (**15%**), secretariat (**7%**), non-secretariat (**25%**)
 - **Financial support for field training:** All (**22%**), secretariat (**7%**), non-secretariat (**42%**)
 - **Financial support to cover living expenses:** All (**30%**), secretariat (**7%**), non-secretariat (**58%**)
 - **Elimination of mandatory break in service:** All (**41%**), secretariat (**20%**), non-secretariat (**67%**)
 - **Annual leave, sick leave:** All (**44%**), secretariat (**20%**), non-secretariat (**75%**)

3. Translation of policies into practice

- The availability of information on the proportion of interns needing a service/assistance/application of policy vs those availing of them was limited across all areas. Where data were available, a gap between the existence of policies and their actual implementation was evident.
- Better levels of implementation of policies were seen where there was a good availability of tools for implementation – for example, administrative support for onboarding, selection process and certificate of completion of internship. The availability of common, system-wide tools was low.
- Several good practices to strengthen implementation were noted across various policy areas.

Moving forward

The new United Nations Youth Office, mandated by General Assembly resolution [A/RES/76/306](#), will take forward the joint, system-wide work on strengthening Internships as part of its mandate on **coordination and accountability on youth across the UN system**. Action will include:

1. Launching of the full report on “**Internships in the United Nations: Where are we now?**” in September 2023. The report will provide data and insights on all the areas of review cited above.
2. Supporting the **exchange of knowledge and good practices** on internships in entities across the UN system.
3. Continuing **advocacy efforts** for policy changes to expand opportunities and improve the fairness and quality of internships in the United Nations.
4. Supporting the **establishment of system-wide mechanisms to periodically track progress** on the above.

1. 88 human resources focal points on internships from 36 UN entities, 3 UN Country Teams, 3 youth groups and 1 multistakeholder initiative.