

MASTER'S DEGREE
ECONOMICS AND HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The Impact of International Traineeships on Career Development: A Study on Former Trainees of the European Parliament

Daniela Alexandra Viana Nunes

M

2025



FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA



THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL TRAINEESHIPS ON CAREER
DEVELOPMENT: A Study on Former Trainees of the European Parliament

Daniela Alexandra Viana Nunes

Dissertation

Master's in Economics and Human Resources Management

Supervised by
Carlos José Cabral Cardoso

2025

Abstract

The importance of international experience has been increasingly recognised in the labour market as a strategic experience that allows individuals to stand out in a world where people have more and more qualifications. However, empirical research about the long-term outcomes of participation in international traineeships is limited.

The main aim of this study is to understand the perceived career impact of participating in the Schuman traineeship at the European Parliament on career development. This study argues that these experiences can significantly improve trainees' career capital.

This study uses a qualitative research methodology. To collect the data were conducted 13 semi-structured interviews. A sample of 13 responses was obtained, and data were analysed using NVivo 15.

The results show that former trainees perceive this experience as positive and as a way to improve their competencies, such as adaptability, cross-cultural communication and professional confidence. Skills that are seen as transferable for their future jobs. However, the study demonstrates that they also faced some challenges, like the limited recognition of international experiences on the part of some national labour markets.

This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding about how international traineeships can affect career capital and career paths, providing insights that institutions, policymakers and future trainees can take away about how to recognise and maximise such experiences.

Keywords: International traineeship; Schuman traineeship; European Parliament; Career development; Career capital

Resumo

A importância das experiências internacionais tem sido cada vez mais reconhecida no mercado de trabalho como uma experiência estratégica que permite aos indivíduos destacarem-se num mundo em que as pessoas têm cada vez mais qualificações. No entanto, a investigação empírica sobre os resultados a longo prazo da participação em estágios internacionais é limitada.

O principal objetivo deste estudo é compreender o impacto percebido da participação no estágio Schuman no Parlamento Europeu no desenvolvimento da carreira. Este estudo defende que estas experiências podem melhorar significativamente o capital de carreira dos estagiários.

Este estudo utiliza uma metodologia de investigação qualitativa. Para recolher os dados, foram realizadas 13 entrevistas semiestruturadas. Foi obtida uma amostra de 13 respostas e os dados foram analisados utilizando o NVivo 15.

Os resultados mostram que os ex-estagiários consideram esta experiência positiva e uma forma de melhorar as suas competências, como a adaptabilidade, a comunicação intercultural e a confiança profissional. Competências que são consideradas transferíveis para os seus futuros empregos. No entanto, o estudo demonstra que eles também enfrentaram alguns desafios, como o reconhecimento limitado das experiências internacionais por parte de alguns mercados de trabalho nacionais.

Esta pesquisa contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda sobre como os estágios internacionais podem afetar o capital de carreira e as trajetórias profissionais, fornecendo informações que as instituições, os decisores políticos e os futuros estagiários podem utilizar para reconhecer e maximizar estas experiências.

Palavras-chave: Estágios internacionais; Estágios Schuman; Parlamento Europeu; Desenvolvimento de carreira; Capital de carreira

Index

Abstract.....	i
Resumo.....	ii
Index of tables	v
List of Acronyms	vi
1. Introduction	1
2. Literature review	3
2.1 Traineeships and the Relevance of International Traineeships.....	3
2.2 The Schuman Traineeships at the European Parliament	5
2.3 Career Development: Concepts, Dimensions and Dynamics	7
2.4 Theoretical Frameworks for Career Development in International Contexts.....	8
2.5 International Experience and Career Capital.....	12
2.6 Social Capital and Networking in International Settings	14
2.7 Career Outcomes of International Experience.....	15
2.8 Challenges and Limitations of International Experiences	15
2.9 The Importance of International Experiences	16
3. Methodology	17
3.1 Methodological approach and data collection procedures.....	17
3.2 Sample.....	18
3.3 Data analysis	20
4. Results	21
4.1 Motivations to Apply.....	21
4.2 Barriers to Access	22
4.3 Skill Development.....	23
4.3.1 Soft Skills	24
4.3.2 Hard Skills	25
4.4 Social Capital and Networking.....	26

4.4.1	Impact of Networking.....	29
4.5	Employability and Career Outcomes	30
4.5.1	Time to Employment After the Traineeship	30
4.5.2	Where people went	30
4.5.3	The Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme.....	31
4.5.4	Impact on Employability.....	32
4.6	Expectations vs Reality	33
4.7	Long-Term Impact	35
4.8	Recommendations to Future Trainees	37
5.	Discussion.....	39
5.1	The Development of Career Competencies.....	39
5.1.1	Knowing-How	39
5.1.2	Knowing-Whom.....	39
5.1.3	Knowing-Why.....	40
1.1	Unit Dynamics and Career Outcomes.....	40
1.2	Impact on Employability and Long-Term Career.....	41
2.	Conclusion.....	43
2.1	Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.....	43
2.2	Managerial Contributions	44
3.	References.....	45
4.	Annexes.....	52
	Annexe 1 – Interview Guide.....	52
	Annexe 2 – Operational Table for Interview Script	55
	Annexe 3 – Coding structure	57

Index of tables

Table 1 – Participants' characteristics.....	19
Table 2 – Participants' recommendations.	38

List of Acronyms

IE – International Experience

EP – European Parliament

EU – European Union

HCT – Human Capital Theory

CCT – Career Capital Theory

EC – European Commission

HR – Human Resources

SRDP – Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme

DG – Directorates-General

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalised working world, professionals are expected to have a range of skills and competencies that allow them to make a career in complex, multicultural, and rapidly changing work environments. Employers tend to perceive international experience (IE) as a valuable advantage for professionals, improving their global awareness (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). In this context, traineeships, particularly those abroad, are important in filling the gap between academic learning and the labour market, giving young individuals invaluable competencies to increase their employability (Baert et al., 2021). Among all the alternatives available to young graduates and young professionals, the Schuman traineeships at the European Parliament (EP) stand out as a prestigious experience within an international environment. Trainees can get involved with the European Union (EU) policymaking processes and develop key professional competencies, such as communication and teamwork in a multicultural environment. The EP defines a trainee as someone who participates in a traineeship in the EP's Secretariat (Welle, 2021). For the purpose of the study, the terms "traineeship" and "internship" are used interchangeably to refer to the same type of experience, as well as "trainee" and "intern", recognising that although the literature differentiates between these terms at times, it refers to a similar type of experience.

This study argues that participation in the Schuman traineeships improves former trainees' career capital, particularly in terms of employability, international mobility, and self-directed career orientation. It adopts a theoretical perspective that integrates Human Capital Theory (HCT) (Becker, 1993), Career Capital Theory (CCT) (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), and contemporary frameworks such as the Protean Career (Hall, 1996) and the Boundaryless Career models (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which together frame international traineeships as a strategic investment in career development. HCT (Becker, 1993) provides a foundational understanding of how education, training, and work experiences contribute to individuals' career prospects. International traineeships, in this respect, can be perceived as an investment in human capital, with the potential to improve intrapersonal competencies, cultural understanding, and future career prospects (Di Pietro, 2022), which are expected to enhance the competitiveness of professionals. Meanwhile, CCT conceptualises career success as the accumulation of transferable knowledge, social networks, and intrinsic motivation, referred to as knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). These

forms of capital are particularly relevant in boundaryless career contexts, where mobility, adaptability, and proactive identity development are key (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

To investigate how these theoretical dynamics manifest in practice, the study adopts a qualitative methodology. It employs semi-structured interviews with former Schuman trainees to investigate their perceptions regarding skill development, network development, career orientation, and whether they find the traineeship influential on their long-term career development. It is guided by the following research questions: How do former Schuman trainees perceive the effect of their international traineeship on their long-term career development? How does the traineeship contribute to career capital development (knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why)? What were the limitations or issues stated by former trainees?

Through the perspectives of trainees who completed the Schuman programme, this study is a contribution toward understanding the value and limitations of international traineeships as instruments of sustainable career development. It attempts to bridge a knowledge gap in the existing literature, where empirical evidence is absent on the long-term career impact of international traineeships. Moreover, the findings can offer practical insights to policymakers, institutions, employers interested in developing the design of international mobility programmes and future employees seeking work within a dynamic and complex global labour market.

The study is organised in five sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides an overview of the relevant literature on traineeships, IE, and career development. The third section presents the research methodology, including data collection and data analysis, as well as the sample. The fourth section presents the results, based on the analysis of interview data. Finally, the final section presents the main conclusions, emphasising the main findings of the study, insights, limitations and recommendations of future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Traineeships and the Relevance of International Traineeships

Traineeships, also referred to as “internships or “stages””, serve as a bridge between education and employment, offering individuals practical experience in a professional setting (European Commission, 2013, p.3). While some distinctions between internships and traineeships may exist, the distinction is often blurred, as both terms are sometimes used interchangeably in academic discussions (Zopiatis, 2007), and are treated as such in this study.

Traineeships provide individuals with opportunities to apply their academic knowledge to real-world contexts, develop professional behaviours and acquire both technical and transversal skills with professionals (Maertz Jr et al., 2014; Zopiatis, 2007). These experiences differ in length, structure and objectives, and may take place in a variety of organisational settings (businesses, public institutions, non-profit organisations). They can be a compulsory part of academic qualifications, serve as an introduction to professional life within certain sectors, be in aid of labour market policies, or they can also be on the open market (European Commission, 2023). Typically, these are short to medium-term experiences, usually from a few weeks up to six months (European Commission, 2023).

The Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2023), a polling instrument designed to assess public opinion on EU-related issues across the EU member states (European Union, 2025), conducted a survey in 2023 on the integration of young people into the labour market with a focus on traineeships. It highlights that 78% of young people aged 18 to 35 across EU member states have completed at least one traineeship. This shows a significant increase compared to 2013, when just 46% of respondents had participated (European Commission, 2013). This rise highlights their growing importance as a career development instrument.

The survey revealed that 19% of its respondents had their first work experience as a traineeship (European Commission, 2023). 55% of the respondents pointed out that the last traineeship they did lasted for less than 3 months, while 11% lasted for more than six months (European Commission, 2023). As noted by Di Pietro (2022), the length of an internship is something that could play a role in the range and depth of skills learned by individuals through their experience. Usually, long-term internships that take place abroad tend to have more impact than internships that are short-term and domestic. So, while domestic traineeships are valuable, IEs offer distinct benefits that go beyond technical skill acquisition.

Increasingly, graduating to a higher education qualification is not a guaranteed passport to enter the employment market. With the growing number of people achieving the same qualifications, it has become increasingly difficult to stand out. International exposure can become a worthwhile way of acquiring a competitive advantage.

International traineeships offer the opportunity to gain experience in a different cultural and professional environment. It is reported by the European Commission (2023) that cross-border traineeships are becoming increasingly popular in the EU, with 21% of individuals reporting having completed at least one traineeship abroad. These are relevant learning opportunities that can provide industry-related skills and soft skills that can be transferable to various roles, such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving.

These traineeships are usually associated with higher adaptability, foreign language acquisition, intercultural competence, and a broader work perspective (Brislin et al., 2006; Stronkhorst, 2005). Today, employees need to be able to quickly adapt to changing situations and show flexibility and problem-solving competencies. According to the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2023) around 77% felt they had gained useful working knowledge during their traineeship. Also, studies indicate that international internships lead to better learning outcomes compared to study exchanges and domestic internships, particularly in the development of foreign language proficiency and intercultural skills (Stronkhorst, 2005).

Being exposed to diverse cultural and professional contexts contributes to the development of cultural intelligence, which is the ability to work effectively across different cultures. Individuals with strong cultural intelligence can successfully navigate across cultures. They are capable of adjusting their way of thinking and behaviour to fit new environments, but they are also aware that misunderstandings may happen (Brislin et al., 2006). Misunderstandings can also happen due to language barriers. So, being able to improve language skills is another advantage of international placements, as it allows cross-border participation and expands job prospects. According to the European Commission (EC) (2013), 79% of those who completed a traineeship abroad, in the EU, reported that they improved their proficiency in a foreign language. Additionally, these experiences allow individuals to broaden their job search radius by providing access to information on the job market conditions abroad and by expanding their global network (Di Pietro, 2022). The EC survey indicates that 69% of individuals who undertook a traineeship abroad have considered living in another country (European Commission, 2013), indicating openness to international mobility.

Research shows that traineeships have a profound effect on career prospects. Based on the 2023 Eurobarometer, around 76% of trainees agreed that their last traineeship helped them secure a regular job (European Commission, 2023). Overall, across all EU member states, two-thirds of trainees replied that they were working in the six months after their last traineeship. 39% remained employed with the same employer, while 26% found a job at another employer (European Commission, 2023). As such, traineeships, especially if abroad, have become strategic components of early career development, contributing to the building of career capital and supporting transitions into globally oriented career paths.

2.2 The Schuman Traineeships at the European Parliament

Among all international traineeship opportunities available to young professionals in the EU, the Schuman traineeship stands out as a prestigious opportunity available for recently graduated and young professionals to work closely with the EU institutions (Welle, 2021). These traineeships are organised by the EP, a multicultural and multilingual institution that plays a central role in shaping EU policies and legislation, attracting staff from all over Europe. Through its commitment to education and vocational development, the EP has a range of traineeship opportunities available that seek to expose professionals to hands-on practice within the institutions (Welle, 2021).

Named after a founding father of the EU, Robert Schuman, the overall goal of the Schuman traineeships is supporting institutional transparency by allowing trainees to gain insights into how the EP works on a legislative level, but also to support their professional and personal development.

According to EP's formal definition, a trainee is a person who participates in a traineeship in the EP Secretariat with the goal of deepening their knowledge about the institution (Welle, 2021). Traineeships can be carried out across a broad range of fields, such as policy, financing, law, human resources (HR), multilingualism or administration (European Parliament, 2025b). It contributes to European integration because it attracts individuals across a range of cultural and academic backgrounds and equips them with both a range of competences and networks necessary to future careers in EU institutions and international organisations. By opening these opportunities, the EP both supports the process of professional development among graduates and ensures a regular influx of highly qualified individuals who are familiar with its procedures and values, capabilities indispensable in future work within EU institutions.

Schuman traineeships take place two times a year, and sessions typically begin in March and October. Each session usually lasts five months, but can exceptionally be extended for a maximum further duration of three months in the service's interest. Trainees can be placed in various EP departments. They can be employed in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg or within any EP's liaison office across any EU member states (Welle, 2021).

Candidates must hold a university degree (at least bachelor's) obtained at least three months before application time, be at least 18 years old, with no maximum age limit, and be a citizen of any EU Member State or a state candidate. Candidates must be proficient in a minimum of one official EU language and have a very good knowledge in another official EU language, never having worked or completed a traineeship within any institution or body within any EU institution for more than two consecutive months and never having completed a study visit in the Secretariat of EP within a duration of six months preceding a start of a traineeship (European Parliament, 2025a; Welle, 2021). Applications take place online, and shortlisted applicants may be contacted for a phone or video interview. Final eligibility checks are carried out by the EP's Trainee Outreach and Recruitment Unit.

Once accepted, trainees enter a multicultural environment where they certainly gain valuable experiences and the opportunity to develop both technical and soft skills. Trainees work hand in hand with supervisors who help and direct them during the traineeship. Responsibilities and tasks vary depending on the department to which trainees are assigned. These usually include assisting with drafting documents and reports, research and analysis work regarding EU policy, event planning, assisting with communication campaigns or administrative work and translations. By becoming integrated into this dynamic environment, trainees can consolidate both technical and transversal competencies such as cross-cultural communication, policy knowledge and ability to work with diverse teams. Considering that they work within a multicultural environment, it further improves their linguistic ability. Additionally, a fast work pace also helps them become flexible, network and improve problem-solving abilities (Welle, 2021).

Beyond providing relevant experience, it can be a stepping stone to a career within the European Institutions. Trainees can take part in the Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme (SRDP), which offers high-performing trainees the opportunity to become employees at the institution. Such trainees can be recommended by supervisors to take a series of tests, and the top-performing trainees will be added to a pool list for a

duration of a year. These individuals can be recruited for a position within the EP (European Parliament, 2025b), although it is not guaranteed.

The international environment, proximity to EU decision-making, and networking opportunities provide changes to improve career capital. Throughout the traineeship, trainees have chances to be exposed to high-level political and policy debate, contact with professionals within a broad range of professional fields, and chances to become used with the legislative process. All these aspects make these traineeships relevant to understanding identity and competencies development, employability, and long-term career trajectories.

2.3 Career Development: Concepts, Dimensions and Dynamics

A career can be understood as the sequence of work-related roles and experiences a person goes through throughout life (Greenhaus et al., 2009), both inside and outside organisations (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022). This definition takes account not only tangible transitions, such as changes in positions, fields, organisations, or industries, but also psychological interpretations, such as individual perceptions about career events and outcomes (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022; McDonald & Hite, 2023). Rather than following a predictable upward path, careers are dynamic and move laterally or downwardly or in non-linear ways rather than a linear upward rise. Therefore, careers are not only defined by visible achievements (objective careers), but by internal experiences as well, such as a feeling of purpose and how individuals feel about their goals (subjective careers) (Arthur et al., 2005).

Career development can be defined as a continuous process in which individuals set personal and professional goals and take action to achieve them. Development refers to growth, along with the continuous acquisition and application of skills (Simonsen, 1997).

Traditionally, it followed a predictable and linear path within a single organisation. However, such an idea has quickly become outdated and is now seen as a flexible, self-directed process that is determined by personal values, global experiences and fluctuating work situations. The emergence of global markets and external competition has forced organisations to internationalise their strategies, highly transforming careers by requiring exposure to global operations and a diverse workforce (Greenhaus et al., 2009).

Career success is often seen as the achievement of desirable outcomes throughout one's professional life (Arthur et al., 2005). These outcomes can be seen through both objective and subjective lenses. Subjective career success refers to personal satisfaction and fulfilment based on self-defined goals, such as work-life balance or personal development.

Objective success, on the other hand, is measurable through tangible indicators like income, job level or promotions (Van Maanen, 1977 as cited in Arthur et al., 2005). While success was traditionally measured by organisational benchmarks, there has been a shift. Both dimensions are essential in evaluating the outcomes of career-related experiences such as traineeships. Importantly, subjective success has gained increasing relevance in today's labour market. Individuals measure success more personally, often prioritise flexibility, meaning, and personal growth over traditional status indicators (Baruch & Sullivan, 2022). Also, nowadays, the ability to succeed in multicultural environments has become a key determinant of success in global organisations (Greenhaus et al., 2009). This shift places greater importance on intrinsic motivation and individual agency in shaping fulfilling career paths.

In this study, a multidimensional view of career development is adopted, integrating employability, career satisfaction, international mobility, and identity formation. This allows for a more comprehensive analysis of how the Schuman traineeship affects former participants. Rather than viewing career development as a linear or purely employer-driven process, this study takes the position that individuals actively construct their careers through accumulated experiences and reflective decision-making. Thus, the career development outcomes explored in this research include both tangible and intangible gains.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks for Career Development in International Contexts

Several theories provide valuable perspectives on how individuals make career decisions and manage their professional development over time.

HCT, introduced by Becker (1993), has been seen as a relevant theoretical basis for HR development (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Rooted in economics, the theory suggests that individuals increase their value in the job market by investing in education, training, and experience. These investments improve productivity, performance, and long-term career prospects (Becker, 1993). Essentially, the more an individual invests in building their skills and learning, the better their performance, productivity, and career outcomes are likely to be (Ramaswami et al., 2016). Therefore, doing a traineeship early in one's career may be a powerful way to accelerate both personal and professional growth. Becker (1993) further distinguished between general skills, which are transferable across organisations, and specific skills, which tend to be valuable only within the current organisation. In this context, international traineeships can be conceptualised as strategic human capital investments, offering opportunities to acquire both general and specific skills. This perspective is

supported by research suggesting that international roles provide employees with opportunities to develop general knowledge and specific international technical skills (Fink et al., 2005; McCauley et al., 1994). IE is increasingly viewed as a form of high-value learning experience that enhances new knowledge and skills (Benson & Pattie, 2008).

Motivation and resilience are also important to how individuals approach their career development. Career Motivational Theory, introduced by London (1983), presents insight into how personal traits interact with workplace environments to shape career behaviours and decisions. It refers to the individual characteristics and choices that reflect an individual's career identity, awareness of career influences, and ability to stay resilient in challenging situations (London, 1983). The theory identifies three main interrelated elements: career resilience, career insight and career identity. Career resilience is the ability to adapt and navigate challenging situations effectively. Career insight refers to being self-aware and having clear career goals, which leads to more informed decisions and proactive career planning. Meanwhile, career identity reflects how strongly individuals define themselves through their work, showing high involvement and ambition (Almıçık et al., 2012; London, 1983). These dimensions become especially relevant during international placements, where trainees must manage uncertainty, adapt to new environments, and reflect on their career aspirations. Working in a new country and culture exposes individuals to unfamiliar situations, which can help them become more adaptable and perseverant. It also leads to self-reflection and is an opportunity to gain more clarity about their goals, which helps them to better understand what they want in their careers and evaluate their ambitions. Additionally, successfully navigating the challenges of international roles can help individuals feel more connected to their career identity. It allows them to recognise themselves as capable of succeeding in different and sometimes difficult environments. In this way, international traineeships can accelerate both personal and professional growth, which is valuable in today's globalised and unpredictable job market, where those with stronger career motivation are often the ones who actively seek out challenging experiences that foster both development and identity formation. Moreover, as globalisation advances, organisations increasingly require employees who are motivated and prepared to engage in global work (Shaffer et al., 2012).

CCT highlights that individuals build their careers by accumulating valuable resources (career competencies), which they use throughout their careers to leverage their positions within companies (Brown et al., 2020). This view suggests that individual career capital

consists of three interdependent forms of knowledge: knowing-how (skills and expertise), knowing-whom (networks and social capital), and knowing-why (motivation and identity), that individuals use to move between roles or jobs during their career (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Knowing-how reflects work-related skills and knowledge, it develops through practical experience, and it may be company-specific or transferable across organisations. Knowing-whom or social capital refers to the value of relationship building, both inside and outside organisations. Knowing-why develops through introspection, by answering the question of why, relating to the personal meaning that gives purpose and a sense of identification with work (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Unlike HCT's narrow focus on productivity, CCT emphasises agency and contextual learning. CCT also introduced the idea that intelligent careers are built upon three forms of knowing: why, how, and whom (Arthur et al., 1995). The intelligent career model, while building on these same three domains, frames them as dynamic "ways of knowing" and places a stronger focus on how individuals actively manage and apply these throughout their career in response to changing environments and personal motivations. Both models highlight the importance of personal agency and resource development. However, the intelligent career model is broader, integrating insights from multiple disciplines and focusing on the adaptive nature of career management (Arthur et al., 1995). International traineeships represent a unique opportunity to develop all three dimensions simultaneously. In boundaryless and protean careers (presented below), these three dimensions become especially important as they equip individuals to adapt and thrive across shifting roles, organisations and geographic locations (Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

Recent research on global careers reveals a growing emphasis on individual agency, as the responsibility for career development shifts from employers to individuals (Hall et al., 2018). Theoretical models such as the Protean Career (Hall, 2004) and Boundaryless Career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) reflect this shift and offer good insights into the role of IE and self-management in shaping meaningful and sustainable careers.

The Protean Career model describes a career path where the individual, not the organisation, takes primary responsibility for their career development. This theory responds to the changing nature of work, where traditional career structures and lifelong employment become less common (Hall, 2004). Hall describes the protean career orientation as an attitude that emphasises self-direction and a values-driven mindset. This means that individuals are motivated to take charge of their careers and make decisions based on intrinsic motivations,

acting as agents of change (Briscoe et al., 2006). For these individuals, success is defined subjectively, through personal fulfilment and psychological satisfaction (Hall, 1976, 2004), unlike traditional models that prioritise objective indicators (Hall et al., 2018). Hall (2004) identified two key meta-competencies linked to protean careers: identity awareness and adaptability. As the new career environment evolves into a continuous learning process, these are two fundamental skills to be able to cope (Hall, 1996). The first involves having a clear understanding of who you are and what you stand for, and the latter involves being resourceful to adapt to changing contexts (Hall et al., 2018). The protean model provides a compelling lens to understand the developmental benefits of IEs. Being placed in an unfamiliar cultural and professional environment pushes individuals to adapt, solve problems, and build resilience, all central traits in the protean model (Hall, 2004). Individuals with a strong protean orientation are more likely to take initiative in managing their careers. They tend to network, seek new opportunities, and commit to continuous learning (De Vos & Soens, 2008). All these behaviours are present in the context of international traineeships, as they require trainees to take initiative, be resourceful, and navigate unfamiliar settings.

The Boundaryless Career model (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), complements the protean perspective by highlighting physical (working for various employers or across national borders) and psychological (individuals' perception of their ability to make transitions) mobility across organisational and geographic boundaries (Briscoe et al., 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Arthur (1994, pp.296), described the boundaryless career as “the antonym of the 'bounded' or 'organizational' career”. Unlike traditional career models, that emphasised long-term employment within a single organisation, the boundaryless career focuses on career paths that go beyond one employer (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994), industry, or even country and are characterised by uncertainty and flexibility (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Individuals with a boundaryless mindset take ownership of their career development and adapt to the changing job market by pursuing different types of work and experiences, while being open to moving when new opportunities arise (McDonald & Hite, 2023). To successfully manage the challenges, individuals need to keep motivated, pursue future objectives and build social networks. Thus, individuals need to have relevant career competencies (Guan et al., 2019), which should predict boundaryless career success (Eby et al., 2003). In this model, success depends on having three key career competencies: knowing-how, knowing-whom and knowing-why. These competencies help individuals adapt and succeed in diverse and changing roles, organisations and geographic locations (Inkson &

Arthur, 2001). In this context, international traineeships support the development of a boundaryless career by encouraging both physical mobility across borders and psychological adaptability. Living and working in a new country pushes individuals to be more adaptable, take initiative, and manage their own development. These experiences also develop the three core competencies, as they help individuals clarify their motivations and values (knowing-why), gain practical skills in global settings (knowing-how), and expand their professional networks across cultures (knowing-whom).

These theories focus on the importance of agency, mobility, and learning as key drivers of career development within the global job market. They help this study look beyond outcomes just in terms of job status or income. Instead, the study explores how international traineeships support employability, identity development, adaptability, and long-term career paths. This reinforces the argument that the Schuman traineeship is a valuable and transformative experience that contributes to participants' career capital and their ability to create a sustainable career in different contexts.

2.5 International Experience and Career Capital

While the previous section introduced CCT as a concept, this section focuses on how it applies to IE. IE refers to professional or academic activities that take place outside of one's home country, such as studying, volunteering, internships or working abroad (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). From a strategic perspective, IE can be seen as an investment because it improves individuals' skills and knowledge in ways that are increasingly valued by employers (Becker, 1993; Carpenter et al., 2001). Often, individuals choose to go abroad to improve their career capital by developing their competencies, increasing motivation, gaining self-awareness, and expanding their social connections (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018).

For early-career professionals, an international traineeship can be important for developing the three main dimensions of career capital described by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994): knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why. These elements are highly relevant in the context of international placements.

Knowing-how refers to task-related skills, technical knowledge and interpersonal skills (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). IEs affect knowing-how capital by improving communication, adaptability, critical thinking, open-mindedness and cross-cultural collaboration, competencies that can be transferred across roles (Brown et al., 2020; Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Dickmann et al., 2018). It also contributes to cultural intelligence.

Individuals with international exposure typically show higher levels of cultural intelligence, making them more capable and willing to work abroad (Iskhakova & Kosheleva, 2023; Remhof et al., 2013). For the Schuman traineeship, knowing-how includes gaining knowledge about EU institutional processes, developing multilingual communication, improving cultural intelligence, and acquiring insights into legislative work. Such abilities can improve employability, especially in internationally oriented or public policy careers.

Knowing-whom refers to the social capital individuals gain through relationships and networks that can be beneficial to one's career (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Schuman trainees have access to their supervisors, heads of unit, unit colleagues, other trainees, and alumni networks. Such connections may help by sharing insider knowledge, mentoring and potentially open doors to future opportunities.

Knowing-why relates to self-awareness, values, and intrinsic career motivation, which is important to understand what motivates role transitions, for example (Brown et al., 2020; Defillippi & Arthur, 1994). Living and working abroad often encourages reflection on personal goals, especially in boundaryless and protean career models, where success depends more on personal meaning rather than organisational benchmarks (Hall, 2004). For Schuman trainees, it can help clarify whether to pursue public service, EU institutions, or international organisations, while boosting confidence to pursue careers across borders.

Schuman trainees make the decision to pursue professional experience abroad. By taking the initiative to relocate to a new country, they show a high level of autonomy and resilience, as they navigate cultural, linguistic, and bureaucratic challenges without being supported by institutional relocation. This requires a proactive attitude and a willingness to embrace uncertainty. All qualities that closely align with career capital accumulation. By taking initiative and assuming responsibility for their development, Schuman trainees demonstrate the mindset of modern career actors, motivated by personal growth and cultural learning. Their experience also aligns with the protean career model, which emphasises individual agency, adaptability, and intrinsic motivation (Hall, 2004).

Research supports the idea that IE strengthens all three components of career capital. For example, Suutari and Mäkelä's (2007) research has shown that international assignments enriched managers with practical skills, broadened their international professional networks and strengthened their career identity and motivation. These findings align with the career capital framework, reinforcing the idea that IE are valuable in fostering a global mindset, clarifying personal career goals, and navigating complex, multicultural work environments.

2.6 Social Capital and Networking in International Settings

Social capital has an important role in career development, as individuals create diverse professional networks. Social capital is defined as the actual or potential resources, such as information, support, and opportunities, that are available to individuals through their relationships and social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001). Unlike other forms of capital, social capital is not something an individual owns, it exists within the relations between individuals (Coleman, 1988).

In international contexts, social capital is usually associated with three dimensions. The first is bonding, which refers to close, emotionally supportive relationships between individuals of similar backgrounds. The second is bridging, which involves diverse, cross-cultural or cross-group connections that provide access to new resources and perspectives. The third is linking, which connects individuals or groups to institutions or people in a position of power or authority (Putnam, 2000; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). For international trainees, bridging capital is built through new intercultural relationships, while linking capital often develops through professional interactions at the institutions.

At the EP, trainees have the opportunity to interact and build relationships with colleagues, mentors, and peers from all across the EU. These relationships can be formal (supervisors, institutional mentors) and informal (peers, other trainees). These are valuable for gaining insider knowledge, getting informal career advice, and learning about job opportunities. It may also give access to institutional networks, such as alumni groups, which can help former trainees to remain engaged with EU institutions after the end of the traineeship, reinforcing the long-term advantages of social networks.

Research suggests that social capital is important to achieving career success. This is because these connections can offer insights into job opportunities that may contribute to one's career possibilities (Zhang et al., 2010). In practice, building social capital in international settings takes more than just being present, it requires effort and active engagement. This brings into focus the importance of networking. Gibson, Hardy, and Buckley (2014) define networking as the intentional act of building, maintaining and strategically leveraging relationships, both within and outside of an organisation, that help you grow, share resources, and reach your professional goals. For Schuman trainees, effective networking may help them gain visibility, position themselves within the institutional system, and identify future career pathways. However, the success of networking also depends on individual factors, such as personal confidence and communication style (Volmer et al.,

2021). Even so, the EP's international setting offers a great opportunity for early-career professionals. It creates space to build meaningful connections and engage in networking behaviours.

2.7 Career Outcomes of International Experience

Individuals who gain international exposure often see improved employability (Jones, 2013) and access to global job markets. Employability, a concept that differs from employment, refers to a set of achievements (skills, knowledge and personal attributes) that make individuals more likely to secure and maintain employment, as well as achieve success in their career (Yorke, 2006). Research indicates that individuals with IE report higher levels of perceived external employability (an individual's belief in how easy it would be for them to find a job) (Andresen et al., 2022). According to Crossman & Clarke's research (2010), IE seems to help develop cultural sensitivity and adaptability. It also makes graduates more appealing in a global job market. Factors that play a significant role in determining a person's employability.

IE also presents benefits such as the chance to network, acquire extra language skills, and the development of soft skills like open-mindedness, tolerance, empathy and creativity (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). Individuals with IE also have more opportunities for promotion, development of global leadership skills and access to leadership roles (Ng et al., 2009).

However, the connection between IE and career success is not linear or guaranteed. While many report significant benefits, others face challenges as soon as they return to their home country.

2.8 Challenges and Limitations of International Experiences

While IEs may be transformative and a great opportunity to build important career competencies (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022), it is important not to forget that they also bring challenges and have limitations. Some challenges include financial issues, such as unpaid work, or accessibility problems (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). There are also problems with the lack of clear criteria, standards and regulations across internship programs. According to the EC (2023), the main barriers to accessing cross-border traineeships are not having enough financial resources (selected by 30%) and not having sufficient information about traineeships (22%).

Individuals often report challenges with the different languages and the adaptation to a new cultural environment. In addition, there are often issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion that are usually overlooked. In the case of the Schuman traineeship, there is the so-called Positive Action Scheme for trainees with disabilities (European Parliament, 2025b). This program aims for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Additionally, there are also some difficulties not directly related to work, such as navigating family relationships. Some tensions or challenges may arise in maintaining friendships as well (Shaffer et al., 2012).

While IE can be transformational, its impact is not identical for all. Some individuals may not become attached to their host environment, which can weaken the long-term motivational impact of the experience. Others may face career setbacks or slower progression when returning home, which could reduce the appeal of further global work. Some studies show that repatriation leads to adjustment challenges and may be a risk to continued employment. Studies suggest that it is important for repatriates to have realistic expectations to ease the readjustment (Mehreen et al., 2025). Research also shows that they are frequently employed in positions that do not fully align with their skills, abilities or prior experience, once they return (Benson & Pattie, 2008).

2.9 The Importance of International Experiences

In the context of HR, the intensification of globalisation has created a demand for skilled individuals who are prepared to work in international contexts. As companies expand their operations across borders, they need to adapt their traditional roles and ways of managing individuals (Mockaitis et al., 2018).

Literature shows that IEs have a crucial role in the development of social, human and cultural capital. It is also shown that individuals who do international internships improve their career adaptability (Kattiyapornpong & Almeida, 2022). These experiences are also relevant to building professional networks and increasing social capital (Holvoet & Dewachter, 2023), which is linked to employability (Letnar & Širok, 2025).

However, most research focuses on academic mobility programs, such as university exchanges, or on corporate expatriates in multinational companies. Some studies address international internships, but do not explore the long-term impact of these experiences on participants' careers. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the long-term impact of the Schuman traineeships.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach and data collection procedures

This study explores the experience of Schuman trainees, exploring how the Schuman traineeship has influenced the career outcomes and professional development of its former participants. To achieve this, a qualitative research approach was adopted, allowing for a profound understanding of how former trainees perceive the impact of their IE with the EP on their employability and long-term career trajectories.

Qualitative research allows for exploring individuals' personal experiences, perspectives, perceptions and social contexts, which aligns with the exploratory nature of this study (Fossey et al., 2002). This research method is characterised by being a methodology that allows presenting a multiple and subjective reality, being extremely relevant to exploring the perceptions and experiences of individuals (Patias & Hohendorff, 2019). The study focuses on rich, detailed narratives that reveal the deeper meaning participants attribute to their traineeship experiences.

To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were employed. Having a set of prepared questions facilitates a more focused exploration of the topic while still being flexible enough to allow participants to share their experiences and insights in their own words (Fossey et al., 2002). The interview guide was designed to answer the specific research questions of this study and to explore participants' experiences through open discussion. To structure the conversation, the guide was divided into several thematic areas: background information (to understand participants' academic and professional profiles), motivations and adaptation (to explore why they applied for the Schuman traineeship and how they adjusted to a new environment), experience during the traineeship (to focus on the skills and knowledge developed and networking opportunities), and experience after the traineeship (to look at the personal and professional impact of the program on their career paths and employability). The interview guide is provided in annexe 1. The operational table for the interview script (annexe 2) explains the purpose behind each question and shows how the answers connect to the study's main research objectives.

A combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used. Convenience sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling where the researcher selects individuals who are convenient and willing to participate. Snowball sampling is also a non-probabilistic method where initial participants refer other potential participants who are qualified for the research, allowing the sample to expand. While these methods are effective

for exploratory research and are suitable when the target population is difficult to reach, they have limitations. The downside of these techniques is that they may not accurately represent the entire population. Therefore, findings from convenience and snowball samples may not be broadly generalised to the entire population (Stratton, 2021).

Initially, a post was placed on both the EP Schuman alumni network on LinkedIn and on the researcher's own LinkedIn account, calling on previous trainees to participate in the study. Seven of the participants volunteered directly, and one additional participant was obtained through a referral.

To be considered for the research, trainees should have finished their Schuman traineeship at least six months before the interview. This way they had enough time to have already reflected on their experience and what impact it had on their career.

Interviews were conducted online using WhatsApp and Zoom. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and lasted between 25 to 75 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in English, with two interviews being conducted in Portuguese at the participants' request. These were then translated from Portuguese using DeepL and checked manually for translation quality and accuracy.

All interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study, of their interview being on a voluntary basis and assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

The study was guided by the following main research question: How do former Schuman trainees perceive the long-term impact of their international traineeship on their career development?

3.2 Sample

13 individuals were interviewed, 10 women and 3 men. The nationalities of participants were diverse and varied from Portuguese, Hungarian, Romanian, Italian, Greek, German, French, Irish, and French American. Traineeship locations varied across Brussels, Luxembourg, Dublin, Bazoches, and Athens. Participants were assigned to different Directorates-General (DG), including COMM, TRAD, PERS, FINS, IPOL, and EXPO, and their traineeships lasted between five and eight months.

To guarantee anonymity, a code (P1-P13) was assigned to each participant.

Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the participants.

Code	Gender	Age	Nationality	City of Traineeship	Year of Traineeship	DG	Duration
P1	F	33	Portuguese	Dublin	2017	COMM	5
P2	F	34	Portuguese	Brussels	2023	COMM	6
P3	F	28	Hungarian	Brussels	2023	COMM	8
P4	M	32	Greek	Luxembourg	2024	TRAD	6
P5	F	30	Italian	Brussels	2023	COMM	6
P6	F	25	Portuguese	Bazoches	2022	PERS	5
P7	M	29	German	Brussels	2023	FINS	5
P8	F	24	Portuguese	Brussels	2023	COMM	5
P9	F	26	French	Brussels	2022	IPOL	5
P10	M	32	Romanian	Brussels	2023	COMM	7
P11	F	27	Greek	Athens	2023	COMM	5
P12	F	29	Irish	Brussels	2018	EXPO	5
P13	F	26	French/ American	Brussels	2022	EXPO	5

Table 1 – Participants' characteristics.

The sample age, when they enrolled on the traineeship, varied between 22 and 32 years, with the average being approximately 27. Most participants did not have an extension of their traineeship, only five stayed longer than the standard five months.

Eight former trainees did not return to their home country after the traineeship (P2, P3, P6, P7, P9, P10, P12, P13), one did the traineeship in the same country (P11), and four returned right after completing the traineeship (P1, P4, P5 and P8).

Most interviewees have different academic and work backgrounds, as some came from political science, communications, translation, HR, journalism, and international relations, for example. While some were recent graduates or were about to complete their studies, others already had some years of work experience. Almost all of them had IEs before starting the traineeship, such as Erasmus exchanges or voluntary work. This diversity helped gather different motivations, expectations and career trajectories.

3.3 Data analysis

The analysis for this study was based on two primary sources: data from relevant academic literature, reports and official web pages of the EP, and empirical data collected through semi-structured interviews with former trainees.

To support the analysis of the data collected, NVivo 15 software was utilised. The software helped organise information by allowing the coding, categorisation and retrieval of qualitative data, helping with the identification of patterns.

After uploading the interview transcripts, individual cases were created for each participant. The most relevant parts of each conversation were coded under the categories created, representing the different topics to analyse. Each research topic was analysed based on the theory and collected data, allowing to later interpret the data and create solid evidence-based insights.

4. Results

This chapter presents the key findings from the interviews with 13 former Schuman trainees. The results are structured around the main themes identified, reflecting participants' motivations, experience during the traineeship and outcomes. Annexe 3 shows the coding structure of the interview analysis.

4.1 Motivations to Apply

When asked about the reasons to apply for the Schuman traineeship, participants shared a diverse set of motivations. While some were driven by an interest in the EU or wanted to have an IE, some applied spontaneously, without long-term objectives.

For many, the traineeship represented a strategic career step. Several mentioned their previous interest in the European Institutions, as follows: P1: *"I had an excellent professor [...] she motivated me [...] I gained a natural interest in following the European Parliament and European institutions' affairs."*; P6: *"I was already very interested in the European Institutions [...] I wanted to do a traineeship for the institutions, and then I just started applying"*; P9: *"I always wanted to have a traineeship in the institutions. We were told it was very difficult and very competitive. I also wanted to discover what Brussels was like, because studying EU law, as you hear a lot about what is happening in Brussels discussions between the different EU institutions."*; P13: *"I wanted to work on EU policy, and I wanted to work on development, cooperation, human rights, and this was the opportunity that I found"*.

For others, the motivation came from an aspiration to work in an international environment. P10 shared that *"I had the desire to make a change and work in an international environment. I was curious to see what it is like to work in another country. My colleague's experience was nice, and I said let's try"*. P8 said that *"I started thinking about possibilities [...] to leave my country and have other experiences"*. While for P2, *"this was my third time applying [...] I would say that I was really trying to have this experience. I think that I was just curious about how the Parliament works and wanted to be in the middle of one of the most influential institutions and people. I wanted to know how the international environment and attitude towards work would be there"*.

Two participants mentioned they had never done an Erasmus and saw the traineeship as an alternative to compensate for that, and finally, having an IE. P1 mentioned that *"since I had not had the opportunity to do an Erasmus, I wanted to have an international experience in my CV"*.

P7 also shared that *“I could not do Erasmus. It was planned, but I could not. And then my thought was to do something similar to make up for the Erasmus, so I wanted just to have some international experience”*.

For two, the traineeship was a way to complement their studies and the knowledge they previously acquired. P4 said that *“the master’s was the main reason, because I had to do a traineeship anyway [...] also, I would somehow envision myself translating European Union texts anyway, because we had done a few during our master’s, and I found them pretty enjoyable”*. While P12 said that *“what motivated me was having literally just finished a degree in Politics and International Relations and like I had done a lot of model United Nations at school [...] So, I knew that I was interested in the work of international organisations”*.

Several participants did the traineeship as a way to explore different paths and clarify their professional goals. P11 referred: *“I wanted to try different professional places, in order to choose what I want to do in my life. I was very confused about my professional career, and I was looking for different paths, so I joined the Schuman traineeship in order to see how the parliament and the European Union work from the inside and check out if I want to go on with that in my career”*.

However, two participants mentioned they never dreamed about working at the EU institutions. P3 said that *“I never really wanted to work for the institutions. The thing is, for me, I moved to Brussels, and all the jobs were in French or Dutch. So, I just needed an English-speaking job”*. While P8 mentioned that *“It was not something planned, not something thought through, not a dream, not at all a personal or professional goal”*.

4.2 Barriers to Access

When asked to reflect on the challenges they faced when accessing the traineeship. The majority mentioned not having any major issues (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8). Others pointed out some challenges, such as logistical, linguistic or procedural.

Several described the application and first steps as clear. For P3 was easier because *“I already lived here, and it was not like I suddenly needed to move countries [...] it was pretty straightforward”*. It is relevant to mention that P3 was already working on an external and temporary contract before starting the traineeship, in the same unit that was later assigned for the traineeship. This clearly made the adaptation easier. While P4 mentioned that *“they were very transparent and very straightforward with the way you were supposed to apply, the time windows in which you would get*

updates on whether your application was accepted or not”.

A barrier mentioned by two participants was the overwhelming amount of options, to then just be able to apply to three. Indeed, during the application process, there are a lot of traineeship offers available, but applicants must select a maximum of three to apply to (European Parliament, 2025a). Participants noted this made the decision process longer. P2 referred that *“there are a lot of options to apply to, and you can only apply to 3, and that was difficult to try to understand what the best fit could be”*. P6 said that *“the biggest challenge for me is that you have a lot of options [...] you have 400 something, I think, and you can only choose three. I think it is very nice that they show us, of course, and that we can apply to specific things, but sometimes it is a little bit difficult to make the right choice for you because, humanly, it is not possible to read that many job offers”*.

Another barrier mentioned by one participant was the lack of transparency and communication during the recruitment process. P9 mentioned that *“the process is a bit long, and it is a bit frustrating for candidates when they are stuck in it, and they never know when they will get replies and so on. Yeah, I think it is also a bit random. It could be more transparent as to who they pick, whom they choose, because I know they have quotas, you know, but I feel like there is no transparency whatsoever concerning the recruitment processes”*.

Additionally, P6 mentioned that the dissemination of information is not well done: *“I found the one I did, that was quite specific, on LinkedIn, someone who posted about it, and so I found out about it. So, I think there is also a discrepancy in dissemination in the different DGs”*.

Participants also mentioned logistical barriers. They mentioned having difficulties in finding accommodation within a short amount of time. P2 said that *“the most difficult part is finding a place to stay in a short amount of time”*. Something also expressed by P10, *“I had more logistical challenges, like finding suitable accommodation. I remember that it was a bit hard enough to find before coming to Brussels”*.

While not all participants experienced access difficulties, these reflections reveal specific pressure points in the process.

4.3 Skill Development

Most participants identified the Schuman traineeship as an opportunity for development of soft skills, such as adaptability, communication, resilience, empathy and

cultural sensitivity, as well as hard skills, such as digital tools, policymaking, translation or content creation.

4.3.1 Soft Skills

Regarding soft skills, two of the most mentioned were adaptability and resilience (P1, P2, P8, P10, P12). Living and working in a new country had challenges that encouraged them to improve their ability to deal with adversity. P12 said, *“I would say I became more resilient and adaptable”*. For P8, *“living in a different country, with language barriers, having to adapt, obviously led me to develop a greater ability to improvise [...] Adaptability as well [...] being adaptable, flexible to contexts. Realising that not all people think like we do, and understanding that, and also adapting ourselves to those circumstances”*. P10 shared about the need to be *“patient and resilient in an environment that is not, let's say, so flexible”*. While P12 said that *“there is a lot of resilience that you build up. It was not my first time living abroad, but my first time living abroad in like an adult capacity, in a less structured capacity. And so that was really huge. And I guess, resilience, adaptability, in that sense”*.

Several participants (P2, P7, P10, P11, P12) also referred to communication and language skills. They reported gaining confidence in public speaking and networking. P2 said it *“improved my communication and language skills and I learned how to adapt in a multicultural and multilingual environment. There are a lot of different people, from different countries and backgrounds, so it was interesting to navigate that kind of environment daily”*. P7 mentioned that *“my English was okay or good when I started, but [...] especially in the first days, it was kind of challenging to be able to do small talk or just to be smooth about it, like every day. So that is a soft skill, I would say that I definitely learned or practised there”*. For P12, it was *“obviously language skills, like I was picking up more French while I was there”*. While P11 *“did not have much experience in public speaking before, because as a student, and especially as, let's say, an entry-level worker, I had not had that opportunity to present in front of a lot of people, which I extensively did in the European Parliament, and now I feel much more comfortable”*.

Participants also developed cross-cultural awareness and the ability to engage with different perspectives. P1 said that *“just by changing space, you gain different perspectives”*. P2 mentioned that *“there are a lot of different people, from different countries and backgrounds, so it was interesting to navigate that kind of environment daily”*. P9 said that *“they taught me to work with different cultures and with people who have also very different backgrounds”*.

Some also mentioned they developed their problem-solving skills. For P8 was *“definitely problem-solving, and that is also thanks to my boss being absent. So, a lot of times I found myself in kind of impossible situations [...] I definitely think I learned a lot of flexibility and being proactive just to do my basic job”*. P8 shared that the experience *“led me to develop a greater ability to improvise, more directed towards finding solutions. There are always unexpected events, something always happens”*.

P8 reported becoming more empathetic as a result of exposure to a different social reality: *“Empathy, I think, is something you develop a lot living abroad. Because you are also in a disadvantaged position, you pay more attention to other people”*.

Other soft skills cited included prioritisation (P9), people management (P12), and professional boundary setting (P12), reflecting a variety of workplace learning experiences.

4.3.2 Hard Skills

Regarding hard skills, although the type of work varied depending on the unit and the DG participants were assigned to, they reported gaining a diverse set of skills.

The most frequently mentioned were learning new digital tools and software.

“I learned to use their internal HR software, Cisco Webex, a software for doing surveys, and used Confluence, which was their wiki platform and also learned how to use Sli.do.” P2

“A lot of digital skills with the different applications [...] you had to learn HRM.” P3

“There are many tools translators use [...] and the one the European Union uses as well, is called Trados. So, I had some experience with it from my master's, but I got to work with it every day during my traineeship, so I really dove into that, so I learned it much, much better, which helped me out immensely during my traineeship and also afterwards, during my professional life. [...] I also got to use some other programs [...] at some point had to record some flash news and then edit the sound bites so they could be uploaded. So, I learned to use Audacity for that purpose.” P4

“With the chatbot, that was something that was not part of my skill set and became part of it. Which is super important because now in the world we deal a lot with artificial intelligence, and it is almost impossible not to use some type of AI in digital communication. So, it was also a really good introduction at a time when things were starting.” P8

“I learn at least two very useful software programs, like Power BI, which were something that I did not know at that point.” P10

Some participants also mentioned gaining insights into policy-making processes. P12 said, *“I can only learn so much about the technical policy-making element when I had not done my degree, I started my master’s that September. So, I kind of was able to use my practical experience and apply it to my theoretical experience while studying”*. P13 shared they *“get to attend committee meetings and you get to see firsthand, these are some steps of the policy-making process”*.

Other participants were engaged in communication and journalism, which led them to develop their writing/drafting skills. For P1, *“it was the first time I managed social media and worked in a press office as a communication officer”*. P8 improved *“in terms of content analysis, political communication, because, in the end, I had to read many laws, reports, etc., to be able to write the articles that were published on the Parliament website”*. P9 said that *“it also improved my legal drafting skills, because I was drafting legal seminars, legal analysis, at times, and this was my favourite type of task”*.

P4 and P8 also mentioned improving their translation skills: *“I got to translate some texts every day, so I am now training as a translator”*; *“What I did was both translate articles from English into Portuguese”*.

However, P6 indicated limited learning of hard skills, mentioning that the main takeaway was learning how the institutions work: *“I learned some things, but I was more assisting them in their tasks. I did not feel like I was learning something completely new. I was assisting based on the competencies I already had. More than learning something new, I think, of course, I gained some awareness about European institutions”*.

This shows how relevant these experiences can be for developing skills. Although some hard skills may not be directly transferable to other jobs, such as specific software applications, they still demonstrate that participants are capable of learning new tools. While the soft skills are highly transferable to different industries, sectors or roles.

4.4 Social Capital and Networking

Networking was a significant part of the traineeship experience. Most participants said they built meaningful professional and personal relationships with supervisors, colleagues and other trainees.

Almost all participants described having close and often informal relationships with

their supervisor and colleagues.

“They were my mentors and taught me many things, but at the same time, they trusted me to work alone [...] I was a member of the team when I was there, not just the trainee.” P1

“I have a good relationship with my supervisor and another colleague who was also giving me tasks [...] I kept talking and seeing them after the traineeship. The rest of the team was nice.” P2

“I had a really good relationship [...] I still have a good relationship with my previous team and all my colleagues. They are really nice, and they were always very helpful.” P3

“The boss was nice, good relationship, a good exchange with the assistant too. But the unit was very little [...] I have esteem for them, so I know that there are people whose perspectives and talks I like, how they work, how they stand with issues and people. So, the management, to me, was very good.” P5

“With the team that was in Bazoches, I think, were really nice, like we had very nice relations with the other people working there, it was also more family vibe.” P6

“I was very lucky with my supervisor, with my head of units, she was very professional, very, very nice. It was easy to talk to her.” P7

“My supervisor was impeccable. She was Portuguese, and that made many things easier [...] when I was sick and did not have the means to go to the hospital, she immediately messaged me [...] If I needed a ride, she would also give it. She really made herself available, far beyond what she was obliged to do.” P8

“My supervisor was amazing. I am still in touch with him, and from time to time, I ask him for a recommendation letter or a reference to be my referee. He always says yes, and he is very helpful and brilliant. The other EU staff were very welcoming.” P9

“My supervisor was an amazing person, he is doing a very good job in that position, and he helped me a lot, because he wanted to include me from the very early moment in all the meetings, all the things that he had to do in order to be informed about everything that the parliament is doing. [...] When I was working there, I felt like I was one of the team, I was working like all the rest of the personnel there.” P11

“I was friendly with my supervisor [...] Even after the traineeship, I stayed in touch with my traineeship supervisor and one of the ladies with whom I shared the office.” P13

Several participants mentioned they formed good relationships and friendships with other trainees, often describing these bonds as lasting.

“I would say that I made some friends [...] It was nice to be surrounded by people that was there with the same purpose. At the same time, we were not all best friends, but we got along well. I was glad that I also met trainees from different units and DGs with whom I got along.” P2

“With the trainees, we were way closer, I would say. Now they are friends, and we are doing

something outside of work, like in flux, or just going somewhere.” P7

“From the first day we all met, we even became a very close group. In that sense, it was simple, meeting colleagues and even creating friendships.” P8

“I really made good friends, I have to say, and found very good semi-professional relationships, because I was also in the Schumann trainee committee, and now I am on the board of the trainees of the European Parliament and the alumni of the European Parliament [...] So, I am in touch still with many former trainees and organise many events and all still for ex trainees.” P9

“With the other trainees, I had a good relationship, with some, I developed closer friendships.” P10

“You are just making new friends all the time, and you are learning different pieces of different languages all the time.” P12

While the majority of participants reported positive relationships, P12 reported having a challenging relationship with their supervisor: *“I had a very difficult supervisor [...] She was also very well known for asking a lot from her trainees. You were automatically there until nine or ten o'clock at night [...] thankfully, her colleagues knew she was a problem, and they were very supportive of me [...] I changed supervisors two months into the traineeship. So, they were very helpful in helping me adapt. I think that is a very unique situation”.*

Also, others mentioned a lack of connection with other trainees. P3 said that *“with other trainees, not super consistently, like I do not keep in touch with a lot of them anymore. I had a better relationship with my older colleagues that I was actually working with than with trainees. Because with trainees, they were all in different units, and they were doing their own things. So, I feel like we were not, like, super close, because I have any other trainee in my unit. It was just me. And so, there was not really any bonding opportunity”.* While P5 mentioned that *“with trainees, with a couple was ok, was an eye relation, but it is quite difficult, and I guess also because I was the only trainee in my unit, so I did not have another person, just to make it stronger, that kind of relation, but I was with other trainees that are in other units. So, it was like a human contact, it was not like a work-related contact that I developed”.*

Overall, during the traineeship, participants formed close and supportive relationships. Most of these connections continued after the traineeship, and many described building valuable relationships that helped them throughout the experience. However, a few not so positive experiences have been reported, mainly because these participants were the only trainees in their unit.

4.4.1 Impact of Networking

When asked if the relationships they formed had any impact on their future career opportunities, some reported that these connections directly led to job offers or had a positive influence on their future career. For others, the effects were limited, with no impact on their career.

Many participants mentioned their supervisors acted as future employment references, giving credibility to their work. P2 mentioned that *“there were no opportunities at my unit at that time. Actually, once my supervisor asked for my CV to send to another unit, but nothing happened. I would say that I just got my supervisor as my reference contact for other jobs outside the institution, so in the end, she helped me somehow”*. P6 said that the current employer *“did talk with people from Bazoches to ask, and because we had a good relationship, they recommended me”*. P9 said the supervisor *“helped by providing many recommendation letters and reference letters”*.

Some participants reported that their relationship with supervisors and colleagues led to new roles within the European Institutions. P3 said, *“I stayed after the traineeship [...] Even now that I have decided today to go out of institutions, they told me, whenever I want to come back. And I also passed the FGIV cast exam, so if I wanted, I could go back, and they would help me find something”*. For P6, it was *“way more recently, because I just started working [...] and because it is within the parliament, they did talk with people from Bazoches to ask, and because we had a good relationship, they recommended me”*. P7 shared, *“I was able to stay at my unit and work there for another one and a half years. And I think realistically, I only did it because they knew me”*. While for P10, *“the good relationship I developed with colleagues played an important role in the opportunities that I had later [...] I was offered the opportunity to continue working as an external consultant until the election. Because one of the team members who seconded to another team for a few months”*.

P12 described that networking was crucial for their career: *“Even today, I have not lived in Belgium for three years [...] I am still texting my friends and saying, has anyone heard of any jobs? And like, my friends will still text me and say, yeah, I heard about this [...] the relationships I made in this traineeship have an impact on my career thereafter. They are the reason I have a career at all”*.

A significant part reported no substantial career impact from the relationships formed, often due to returning to their national context or unrelated career choices. For

example, P4 said, *“I would not say so [...] they helped me in the sense that they told me about the exams and that they invited me to take the exams, because you need to get invited, you cannot just take the exams. But nothing happened after that, so I would not say that it had an impact on me so far”*.

P1 expressed the lack of recognition in the Portuguese job market: *“In the Portuguese market, not much. People did not value the experience in the European Parliament [...] there were people, recruiters, who did not even know what the European Parliament was [...] they did not value it”*. While P8, who also returned to Portugal, mentioned, *“as I came back to Portugal, I do not feel they had an impact on my career. [...] It is not that it is helping me professionally, but also, I am not exactly following a linear professional path. I am still exploring”*.

P5 and P13 reported no direct impact: *“No, not at all.”*; *“No, unfortunately, no, not in my experience”*. All these experiences demonstrate that networking has significant but uneven effects.

4.5 Employability and Career Outcomes

The significant majority of participants found employment right after completing their traineeship. Many felt the traineeship improved their chances of employment.

4.5.1 Time to Employment After the Traineeship

Most participants started applying for jobs while they were doing the traineeship. The majority started immediately after or within two weeks (P2, P3, P6, P7, P10, P11), others started in one to three months (P1, P4, P8, P9, P13), while others had longer transition periods (P5, P12).

P5 reported that *“a proper job, actually, could say one year. Meanwhile, of course, I worked as a freelancer”*. P12 chose to continue studying and took their master's, *“I applied for ULB, and I went and did my master's degree with them. So, it was just very clear that had to happen next, so to make sure I could get jobs afterwards.”*

4.5.2 Where people went

Right after completing their traineeship, some participants continued working in European Institutions. A few continued in the same unit (P3, P7, P10), while others went to

institutions, agencies or consultancies connected to the EU's work. P9 shared that *"I still work in the bubble, let's say, but for an association, so in lobbying, basically, and they were really looking for somebody with experience within the EU institutions"*. P13 works in *"consulting, but our clients are either EU institutions or agencies, so I still work with them, but indirectly"*.

Two chose to complete their studies and after found jobs in their expertise area. P4 said that *"after I finished the traineeship, I had to go back to Greece and finish my master's degree [...] Now I am working at that company and also doing translations for the main office in Greece that handles all European Union translations that get outsourced"*. P12 mentioned that *"I did my master's degree [...] right afterwards, I was looking for jobs in Brussels [...] Consultancies are always the ones who will hire you [...] that was the job I had directly after completing my master's degree. I did one year at the consultancy [...] and then I did one year at the permanent representation of Ireland, working as a policy officer"*.

Others went to the private sector, not connected with the institutions. P2 said that *"in the last two weeks of my traineeship, I was in a recruitment process for a consultancy, and right after I landed in Portugal, I got the job offer"*. While P8 mentioned *"I was still at the Parliament, and I had my first interview for Braga [...] It was a professional internship"*.

It is important to highlight that most participants shared that they had the initial desire to remain in the institutions. Many expressed hopes of securing positions within the EU Institutions. P13 expressed, *"I was looking really within the institutions, because in my head, I thought, you are in this traineeship, there has to be, like, at the commission, there has to be a much higher chance of getting hired. And then I quickly understood that in the parliament, it is not necessarily the case"*. P2 said that *"I started to send spontaneous applications to be an assistant at a political party"* just to stay in the same environment. P6 shared that *"I wanted to stay within the European Parliament, but I knew it would be, especially after they tell you when you arrive, they tell you clearly it is hard to stay, so at some point [...] I was already applying for other positions"*.

This illustrates the challenges faced in navigating these competitive environments. It shows how difficult it can be to transition from a traineeship to a full-time position.

4.5.3 The Schuman Recruitment and Development Programme

When asked about their opinion on the SRDP, several participants do not have a positive opinion. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, participants were not identified.

Some stated the following: *“First, to do that test, the supervisor has to put your name forward. It is not self-nomination. It is the supervisor who says that the person can do it. I think there may be situations where there is some hostility, and they do not put your name forward because they do not want to. And supposedly, the application is not about affinities. It is about whether the person is suitable or not for the areas they apply to. So, I think there is already that barrier”; “I do not think the tests really see if someone is capable of doing their job, they are general, kind of psychotechnical tests [...] the few people who pass just stay on a reserve list and may never be recruited”; “It is not related to your expertise. It is just an automatic mechanism to pass the test if you can prepare for it [...] it is kind of a mess to understand where you can study for these tests”; “If people actually got jobs afterwards, like they do at the commission, I think everyone would be more motivated”; “This is really a limitation of the parliament that, unlike the commission, they do not have a real opportunity for people to stay at the end of the traineeship [...] only allows us to be on the reserve list”.*

One of the participants actually passed the written test and shared that *“I have heard a lot of people who passed it overall, and nothing really happened out of it. I think it seems to be kind of a weird thing to do, because then if you pass it, you are still not really in a position to get a job”.*

P2 provides a recommendation regarding the SRDP: *“trainees should be properly advised and have some kind of workshop or something, first to learn how the process is and second, a proper simulation of it. We should have some kind of materials to study from, even if just a small book with some examples of the types of questions to expect and some exercises”.*

4.5.4 Impact on Employability

Many participants felt the traineeship directly opened the door for their next role or improved their chances of employment.

As mentioned before, P3, P7, and P10 managed to continue working in the same unit. P7 said it had an *“huge impact, because only for my traineeship, realistically, I only had the job afterwards because of that [...] without the traineeship, I would have never gotten a vacancy like this”.* For P13, *“it was definitely a huge selling point for my current role when I was interviewing”.* While P9 said, *“I still work in the bubble [...] they were really looking for somebody with experience within the EU institutions, because then you understand a bit more how it all functions”.* P12 mentioned that *“when I was interviewing for the consultancy, they were obviously very interested in me having internal institutional experience[...] Then, by the time I was interviewing for the perm rep, they were also very interested in it”.*

For others, the traineeship had a positive but indirect impact. P2 mentioned, *“it may have helped the fact that I had experience being in an international environment. I do not think the skills I gained mattered so much, but the ability to adapt and speak with people from different backgrounds”*. While P8 said that *“I have some difficulty saying 100 per cent yes. Because in the interview I had, they never focused on that topic”*, also saying that *“to this day, whenever I hand in my CV, they ask about the experience in the Parliament, because obviously, it is something that most people do not do [...] I cannot say that was what made me get the job, but it has weight in the image people build of me as a candidate”*.

P5 mentioned that *“as a journalist, but not related to political European affairs before, this traineeship helped me to get noticed [...] I have done a traineeship in the institution, so I know how it works. So that's why they recruit me”*.

However, for some, the traineeship had a limited impact. P6 shared, *“I don't think it was because of the traineeship, it is because it was in the same association that I did the service civic [...] I do not think my Schuman traineeship had any influence, maybe they were like okay it is always like a quality label, almost that you have in your CV, the European Parliament thought this person was interesting enough to give her a traineeship, so maybe let's take a look”*. While P1 faced clear difficulties in having recognition in her local labour market, *“I think the only thing that mattered to them was that I spoke English [...] When I returned to Portugal, I was very disappointed with my country, [...] recruiters, who did not even know what the European Parliament was [...] when I said I was a Schuman trainee, I thought, this will be fast. And I started to realise slowly, interview after interview, that, in those people's view, I was a recent graduate who could work cheaply, and my European Parliament experience did not matter”*.

Employability outcomes were generally positive. The traineeship often helped by indicating institutional knowledge, providing good references and reputation and turning candidates visible for new opportunities.

4.6 Expectations vs Reality

When asked if their expectations before starting the traineeship matched their actual experience, a lot of participants reported their experience went beyond their expectations (P1, P2, P7, P8, P11, P12), although some had no expectations before joining (P3, P5, P7, P8, P10, P13), and some had really high expectations (P2, P9).

P1 called the experience “*if not the best, the second-best work experience I have ever had*”. P12 described it as “*so fabulous, I had the most incredible time [...] I was so overwhelmed by how good it was*”, despite having a difficult supervisor during the first months.

Some mentioned they were treated as team members and were positively surprised to be entrusted with much responsibility. P1 said “*I realised I was lucky with the choice I made because the Irish team was very hands-on, and trainees had to be involved in all initiatives [...] it exceeded my expectations in terms of learning and the trust they placed in me*”. P11 affirmed that “*my expectation was much lower before I went there [...] it was very interactive, and I didn't expect that [...] I felt like I was one of the team, I was working like all the rest of the personnel*”.

Three participants reported that the pace of work was slower than expected. P4 stated that “*the work aspect was a bit more relaxed than I had expected*”, and P6 said “*it is quite calm, more than people would assume*”. P10 added, “*I was surprised by the slow pace of project implementation*”.

A few participants felt that their expectations were unmet. For P13, capabilities were underutilised, “*they did not use interns to the maximum of their potential. So, I felt the work here was a lot of note-taking, summaries, considering that most people have master's and some already have previous experience*”. P3 said, “*it was very practical and logistical, and I did not do the traineeship in my field*”.

Other participants showed disappointment with the lack of opportunities to stay in the institutions. Some, before starting the traineeship, expected that this could be a life-changing experience in terms of their career.

P6 mentioned that “*what surprised me the most was, in a not that good way, that I really thought before going that it would be easier to stay. Not necessarily in the parliament, but in the EU bubble, but of course when you are not in Brussels, even if you are, it is quite hard to stay, even if you want, because it is super competitive [...] maybe I was a little bit naive in the beginning, but I did think it could have a bigger and, most importantly, a more immediate impact on my life*”. While P9 said it is “*hard to make it in after the traineeship, this is very frustrating and very saddening*”. P2 added that “*during the traineeship, the expectations about staying there [...] were built up, even from the supervisors, which should not happen because then bureaucracy and budget restrictions happen, and all falls apart, and then it is a disappointment*”.

Most participants reported that their expectations were met or exceeded, particularly in terms of learning, inclusion and trust. They were mainly surprised by the slower pace, the reduced pressure and the less formal environment than expected. However, some felt that their skills were not used to their full capacity, while others had higher expectations about staying in the institutions after their traineeship.

4.7 Long-Term Impact

When asked about how the traineeship influenced their long-term career, most participants said it had a positive impact on their career, personal goals and confidence.

Several participants mentioned that even before starting the traineeship, just the fact of being selected for the traineeship boosted their confidence. P4 said that their *“professional confidence started going up as soon as I got picked for the traineeship in first place, because [...] there were, I do not know, 100 other candidates for my post. So, I was pretty excited about that”*. P1 mentioned *“the fact of knowing by heart that in a pool of 1200 young people [...] I managed to be part of the pool of 600 who got in, knowing that it was meritocratic”*, was a huge achievement. P2 also shared the same feeling, saying that *“being selected for the traineeship was a huge achievement, because there are hundreds of candidates, and they saw something in me to be selected”*.

Some participants mentioned the traineeship helped them decide what kind of careers they wanted to pursue. P3 said, *“it definitely shows me one way of living and being [...] I guess it gave me a vision of what I could want”*, adding that the traineeship *“was the key for me to get those jobs. So, in some way, it was the door in, so it kind of opened doors for me”*. P7 mentioned that *“for me, it was always clear because I studied law, German law, and that is basically where I saw myself ever and now, not anymore. So that was also kind of shaking up things. And I am still not really sure what to do in the future, where to go if I want to live in Brussels or Germany, so it definitely shook up some things”*. P12 went even further and affirmed that the traineeship *“completely changed the trajectory of my career. I really cannot tell you, I really had no idea what the EU was, and now my entire career is about the EU [...] It taught me how to live abroad, the reason that I was able to live in London, the reason I was able to go travelling over the last year was because I went to Brussels [...] it completely changed my life”*.

Others mentioned specifically that it showed them they could now aim to work at the institutions, something some never really considered before. P13 said that *“the traineeship definitely opened my eyes to all these roles, and now I am certainly planning to stay in Brussels, and like many*

others, aiming to get back in the EU bubble". P6 mentioned that *"it impacted a lot in the sense that made me think it was possible to have a career related to the European Union, even if not necessarily in European institutions"*. Something also mentioned by P2, *"it gave me the awareness that I could belong there, that it was not a distant and impossible thing to achieve"*. P7 added that *"I am a bit more ambitious now [...] I can see that it is now possible to stay in the EU, it is possible for me to have a job in the EU, which are usually very good jobs"*.

A few participants stated that the experience gave them the certainty that they wanted to keep working in international and multicultural environments. For P2, it gave *"the certainty that I would like to keep working in a multicultural environment [...] I want to work with people from different backgrounds. I think there is a lot to learn from that"*. P10 said, *"the experience during the internship and later as an external consultant made me want to work in an international environment [...] I would say that now I have a clear idea where I would like to work"*.

Most participants (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P11, P13) reported that the traineeship improved their confidence. P6 affirmed the experience *"gave me confidence [...] now I also feel that I am a strong candidate, let's say when I think, the job is not that hard, even the jobs that we glorified, and I do have the skills, and I already did this before, so I think it helped with the confidence"*. For P2, *"it gave me the perspective that I actually could see myself working there, that I have the skills to be there"*. P1 also said that *"knowing that it is possible to find work internationally, meritocratically, even if someone does not value me in my own country, of course, that gives confidence"*.

For P9, the traineeship was a step towards becoming part of the EP trainee alumni network. P9 shared that *"now I am on the board of the trainees of the European Parliament and the alumni of the European Parliament, the TAN. It is called the trainees' alumni network. So, I am in touch still with many former trainees and organise many events and all still for ex trainees"*.

P11 mentioned that the traineeship helped to understand EU processes, which helped to make the decision to start their own nongovernmental organisation. P11 said that *"the greater influence that the traineeship had was from that moment I started exploring more openly the potential that the European Union gives to young people. So, also created a program in my NGO regarding that, so we had the program explaining how and if the young people are, let's say, unlocking the opportunities that the European Union is giving them"*.

While the majority described having positive benefits, a few participants said the traineeship did not significantly influence their career. P5 affirmed that *“in the long term, I guess it will not have a big impact”*, although later said that *“it changed the environment in which I could work. Because actually, I am used to working in just one environment, and now I can say it opened a little bit of the window and the space for other work environments”*. P8 was firmer and said, *“I think it did not influence at all. The social expectation of an answer is very different, but even today, I still maintain the goal of working in the health field”*, but added that *“I realised that, even though it is not my final place, it would be very directed towards this kind of work, which has social responsibility and impacts the world. That is why I will continue to look for this kind of work”*.

Overall, the traineeship had a significant long-term impact on most participants, especially in building confidence, finding career direction and improving employability, as mentioned previously.

4.8 Recommendations to Future Trainees

When asked about the recommendations they would give to people considering applying for a Schuman traineeship, they gave a variety of advice, as shown in Table 2.

Topic	Illustrative Quotes
Be proactive, get involved and be present (P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P10, P12)	<i>“You really need to be present and make the most out of it, because just from the traineeship itself, nothing happens.”</i> P3 <i>“It is important to live in the present and to enjoy the time.”</i> P6 <i>“It is the kind of experience that what you get out of it is directly proportional to what you put into it.”</i> P12
Network (P2, P3, P6, P8, P12)	<i>“Participate in everything the DG prepares and trainee events.”</i> P2 <i>“Go to the activities organised by the Unit [...] show up at the DG Comm party [...] listen to some of the open committees and so on, because this is where you get to meet people. This is where you can show yourself.”</i> P3 <i>“Email people, meet people with the excuse that you are a Schuman trainee [...] Network with both people working there but also with other trainees.”</i> P6 <i>“It is about the connections you make. It is about how friendly you are [...] You have no idea who is going to be interviewing you [...] in a few years.”</i> P12
Be open-minded	<i>“Be open to learn new things, talking with people.”</i> P2

and adaptable (P1, P2, P6, P7, P8, P11, P12, P13)	<i>“Be open to meeting people, and then it will be an awesome experience.” P7</i> <i>“To unlock the best potential of this environment, the best way is to be open.” P11</i>
Invest personal effort (P1, P3, P10, P12)	<i>“You really need to invest in order to get anything out of it.” P3</i> <i>“Be authentic, humble, hardworking, and also be patient with how things move within institutions [...] if you do things right, the chances of it turning into a positive experience, I would say that are higher.” P10</i> <i>“Go in there with enthusiasm and give as much of yourself to it.” P12</i>
Invest in your international profile (P2, P9)	<i>“I would recommend already having some international prior experience, even if it is just the Erasmus.” P2</i> <i>“They kind of need to really have multiple international experiences, like to have studied or worked [...] done volunteering in different countries.” P9</i>
Manage your expectations (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10, P11, P12)	<i>“Be less stressed [...] it may seem a bit over professional or stressful, but [...] they really prioritise your traineeship [...] they are really helpful.” P4</i> <i>“Take the chance as the chance it is, do not overwhelm yourself about the future, people, Brussels [...] just to take it easy, even if it is not so easy.” P5</i> <i>“Some people are thinking that if they are joining a traineeship in the European Union, they will work there forever [...] If you want to work in the European Union forever, you should prepare yourself [...] it is very difficult.” P11</i>
Be strategic about placement (P1, P6, P9, P11, P13)	<i>“Do not be afraid of not choosing Brussels or Strasbourg [...] There is a lot of value in going to learn about the European Union in other EU countries.” P1</i> <i>“Have in mind multiple things, like [...] Do I want to stay in Brussels? Because later, if I want institutions, I probably should go to Brussels.” P6</i> <i>“Research the unit and the DG they want to work for [...] within the institutions, you need to target a bit.” P9</i>

Table 2 – Participants' recommendations.

Some also gave unique suggestions, including taking advantage of the excellent health insurance (P3) and taking time to read internal publications left in the main building in Brussels (P8). These recommendations show how participants saw the traineeship as not only a professional opportunity but also a strategic investment in their future careers.

5. Discussion

This study aims to determine the impact of international traineeships on career development, focusing on former Schuman trainees. Through 13 semi-structured interviews, the results reveal that the Schuman traineeship significantly influences participants' professional trajectories by improving their skills (knowing-how), clarifying their motivations and aspirations (knowing-why), and expanding their networks (knowing-whom).

The discussion serves to connect the results shown in the previous chapter with the literature.

5.1 The Development of Career Competencies

As shown in the results, the Schuman traineeship provides opportunities for participants to develop career capital through three important dimensions: knowing-how, knowing-whom and knowing-why (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994).

5.1.1 Knowing-How

Participants reported improving hard skills, including learning new digital tools, policy-making processes and translation, and soft skills, such as adaptability, resilience and cross-cultural communication. P3, for example, described managing all mission orders for trainees to go to the plenary in Strasbourg under tight deadlines made them learn *“a lot of flexibility and being proactive [...] I really felt like if I can do this, I can probably do any other complex situation”*.

These findings are in line with studies showing that international traineeships accelerate the development of transversal skills (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Tushar & Sooraksa, 2023) that are critical to employability (Di Pietro, 2022). The HCT also supports that IEs are strategic investments in future career success, since they foster the acquisition of knowledge (Becker, 1993).

5.1.2 Knowing-Whom

The traineeship provided opportunities to expand professional and social networks. Several participants built strong relationships with supervisors and colleagues, often gaining references that facilitated future job applications or access to new roles within the EU Institutions. As P9 mentioned, the supervisor *“helped by providing many recommendation letters and reference letters”*. As for P10, the good relationship maintained with colleagues and supervisor

“played an important role in the opportunities that I had later [...] I was offered the opportunity to continue working as an external consultant”.

This supports that IEs strengthen social capital (Mathey et al., 2024) and access to broader career opportunities. Understanding who can provide valuable information, support and access to opportunities is key to transitioning between jobs (Defillippi & Arthur, 1994).

5.1.3 Knowing-Why

Participants also reported that the traineeship had an impact on their career identity by clarifying their long-term goals and improving their confidence. This aligns with CCT (Inkson & Arthur, 2001), which highlights motivation and meaning in career development. Overall, the experience made them think about what they wanted or not for their future. For some, it reinforced their motivation to work in the European Institutions as they found meaning in being involved with European projects. For example, P13 said that *“now I am certainly planning to stay in Brussels, and like many others, aiming to get back in the EU bubble”*. For P10, the experience *“made me want to work in an international environment, ideally one that involves some travel between different countries, but with the flexibility of remote work [...] I would say that now I have a clear idea where I would like to work”*. While others realised the EP was not a long-term fit, like P11, who realised that *“it was a good experience, but I could not imagine myself working there for my whole life [...] I could not deal very well with the European bureaucracy”*. These findings support the Protean Career model, as it shows self-directed career management (Briscoe et al., 2006), as individuals recognise a mismatch and reflect on pursuing a different path.

For the majority, this experience gave them the confidence to pursue new opportunities. P4 shared that *“it would be much harder for me to apply for jobs before the traineeship, because I would have kept thinking that I did not have the confidence or the abilities”*. This reflects the concept of self-efficacy and connects to the CCT, where motivation and confidence guide career choices (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Connecting also to the Protean Career, making individuals to go into the labour market with self-direction (Briscoe et al., 2006).

1.1 Unit Dynamics and Career Outcomes

The DGs and units' participants did their traineeship shaped how skill acquisition and networking translated into actual career outcomes.

P3, P7 and P10 successfully transitioned into longer-term roles within the same unit. Based on what they shared, their experiences combined having relevant responsibilities

(knowing-how), a clear understanding of their roles (knowing-why) and access to close relationships with supervisors and colleagues (knowing-whom), reflecting the three dimensions of CCT. Curiously, P3, P7 and P10 share a common thing: none entered the traineeship with high expectations. P3 mainly saw it as a good opportunity because *“I just needed an English-speaking job”*. P7 always thought that *“for me, it was always clear, because in the end I studied law, German law, and that is basically where I saw myself ever”*. P10 initially saw the traineeship as an opportunity to have an IE and took a short break from work. So, to participate in the traineeship, P10 took unpaid leave, and shared that *“my initial plan was I will stay five months, then another two, and then I would go back”*. This may reveal that going to the traineeship with realistic or modest expectations can reduce the risk of disappointment. Going with this attitude may lead people to approach it as just an opportunity to gain experience, which may make people more open to learn and being proactive to make the most of those months.

In contrast, other participants (like P6 or P13) described receiving limited responsibilities or lacking information about possible pathways within the institutions. Although not all faced these gaps, and we cannot generalise, some identified shortcomings in at least one of these areas.

While most participants admit that it is difficult to stay in the EU institutions after completing the traineeship, a few managed to break this pattern. Their cases demonstrate how outcomes often depend on a combination of openness to opportunities, active involvement and visible engagement during the traineeship, as well as being involved in relevant responsibilities and having supportive networks. However, as P2 shared, sometimes it is just because *“there were no opportunities at my unit at that time”*.

1.2 Impact on Employability and Long-Term Career

The main objective of this study was to assess the traineeship influence on employability and career trajectories. Results show that in terms of securing jobs after the traineeship, most participants secured employment either right after concluding the traineeship or within three months after. This outcome aligns with the literature that states that IE often improves employability (Jones, 2013).

The results also reveal that, for most, the traineeship helped to pursue new paths and open their possibilities. While some secured roles in the EU institutions, others pursued careers in international organisations, effectively using the prestige and professional

references gained during their traineeships. These outcomes support studies that indicate that IEs improve career mobility and provide competitive advantages in global job markets (Di Pietro, 2022; European Commission, 2023). These results also align with the literature on boundaryless careers, which emphasises that IE foster career flexibility and mobility across organisations (Briscoe et al., 2006).

However, the results also reveal limitations. Participants who returned to their home countries, particularly Portugal, faced some challenges. As shared by P1, recruiters in Portugal were not familiar with the EP and did not see the value of the traineeship. Similarly, P2 mentioned that when returning to Portugal, *“I did not feel that in the interviews for Portuguese companies it was valued at all”*. This suggests that the impact of IEs is context-dependent. There is research that says that international labour markets tend to place a higher value on international work experience than domestic markets (Suutari et al., 2018).

It may be optimistic to assume that IE always bring value and translates into career advancements. In this case, although many faced some challenges, all were able to identify value in their experiences and identify ways in which the traineeship added value to their professional development.

2. Conclusion

Studying IEs is relevant in today's globalised world. Most companies are not only focused on their national markets, but they are also expanding. This brings the necessity of internationalisation, which means they need to be able to communicate with different people, different cultures, in different languages. This highlights the growing need for staff with the right skills to make it possible. So, studying international traineeships provides important insights into how individuals navigate international environments and the skills they develop, which are transferable to other jobs.

The results show that the traineeship positively influences career development by improving career capital. Participants developed both hard and soft skills, expanded networks and strengthened their career confidence. They also shared that the experience helped them improve their ability to adapt to new contexts, communication skills, problem-solving and drafting skills. This aligns with the literature on the value of IEs and the Eurobarometer survey findings (European Commission, 2023).

Results also help in understanding how IEs influence career trajectories. Some participants had never envisioned working for the EU Institutions, and some of those ended up staying there after completing the traineeship. While others realised that they want to pursue a career in international environments. All reported that having an IE provides a competitive advantage in international markets, but its recognition within some domestic labour markets, such as Portugal, is limited. It was reported that recruiters may undervalue their experience, creating a gap between the skills gained and opportunities. This shows that greater efforts are needed to improve the visibility and recognition of IEs within national markets.

All participants shared having a positive experience overall. They feel this experience helped them somehow in their personal and professional growth and, most importantly, to be more self-confident. Because of this, some shared that they started aiming for opportunities they never pursued before, since they believed they were not capable of achieving them before. Just this shows how relevant is having such experiences.

2.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study results must be interpreted considering the research limitations. The main limitation is the sample size. Also, the use of non-probabilistic sampling does not guarantee statistical representativeness, which makes it impossible to generalise the results. It is

recommended that future research collect data from a wider and more diverse sample.

Another limitation is the fact that the majority of participants completed their traineeship less than three years ago, with the majority finishing it in 2023. 10 out of the 13 participants completed their traineeship in 2023 (two started in 2022 but finished in 2023). This means that for some participants, the impact may not be immediate, and it may still be reflected in their future careers. A suggestion for future research would be to study the longer-term impacts on a bigger sample with participants who concluded the experience many years ago. Also, it should be done with a wider range of countries, both where participants did the traineeship and where they are originally from.

2.2 Managerial Contributions

This research presents several contributions to International HR Management, as it shows some of the motivations that lead people to apply for international traineeships. This may be useful to recruit and attract individuals with international profiles, but most importantly, to understand the skills they develop through these experiences that can be transferable to future jobs. Two participants expressed insights on this. P12 affirmed that *“living abroad is so hard to do, setting up a new bank account, finding somewhere to live. You are probably not in the country yet, and you are doing everything online. It takes so much courage, and it is so difficult that I just think there is a lot of respect that comes from somebody who is able to pick up the reins on things quite quickly and is able to adapt and really hit the ground running”*. While P2 said that *“having international experience should be something that shows you are adaptable and resilient. It takes courage to move countries, to adapt to a new culture, to speak all the time in a different language and to navigate everything that involves moving, you have to go through bureaucratic processes and be patient and agile. So, I think it should be a predictor that a person is capable of adjusting and learn new things”*. Both state that moving to a different country and everything that this process involves, requires a set of skills that are already valuable for companies and should not be underestimated.

For the EP, trainees' insights on the SRDP should not be overlooked but rather taken into consideration, especially the suggestion to provide guidance on test preparation.

To conclude, it is possible to identify that IEs expose individuals to situations that trigger both personal and professional development. Throughout the process, they deal with the stress associated with the relocation and adaptation to the new environment. This shows that they not only develop relevant hard skills but also soft skills that shape the way they carry themselves throughout their professional lives.

3. References

- Alniaçık, Ü., Alniaçık, E., Akçin, K., & Erat, S. (2012). Relationships between career motivation, affective commitment and job satisfaction. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 58, 355–362. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.1011>
- Andresen, M., Lazarova, M., Apospori, E., Cotton, R., Bosak, J., Dickmann, M., Kaše, R., & Smale, A. (2022). Does international work experience pay off? The relationship between international work experience, employability and career success: A 30-country, multi-industry study. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 32, 698–721. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12423>
- Arthur, M. B. (1994). The Boundaryless Career: A New Perspective for Organizational Inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 295–306.
- Arthur, M. B., Claman, P. H., Defillippi, R. J., & Adams, J. (1995). Intelligent Enterprise, intelligent Careers. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 9(4), 7–22. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4165285?seq=1&cid=pdf->
- Arthur, M. B., Inkson, K., & Pringle, J. K. (1999). The new careers: Individual action and economic change. In SAGE (Ed.), *SAGE Publications*.
- Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., & Wilderom, C. P. M. (2005). Career success in a boundaryless career world. In *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (Vol. 26, Issue 2, pp. 177–202). <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.290>
- Arthur, M. B., & Rousseau, D. M. (1996). *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*. Oxford University Press.
- Baert, B. S., Neyt, B., Siedler, T., Tobback, I., & Verhaest, D. (2021). Student internships and employment opportunities after graduation: A field experiment. *Economics of Education Review*, 83, 102141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ECONEDUREV.2021.102141>
- Baruch, Y., & Sullivan, S. E. (2022). The why, what and how of career research: a review and recommendations for future study. *Career Development International*, 27(1), 135–159. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-10-2021-0251>
- Becker, G. S. (1993). *HUMAN CAPITAL. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* (University of Chicago Press, Ed.; 3rd ed.). <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226041223.001.0001>
- Benson, G. S., & Pattie, M. (2008). Is expatriation good for my career? The impact of expatriate assignments on perceived and actual career outcomes. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(9), 1636–1653.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190802295058>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The forms of capital*. In J. Richardson (Ed.) (Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education, Ed.; pp. 241–258). Greenwood Press.
- Briscoe, J. P., Hall, D. T., & Frautschy DeMuth, R. L. (2006). Protean and boundaryless careers: An empirical exploration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), 30–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.09.003>
- Brislin, R., Worthley, R., & Macnab, B. (2006). Cultural intelligence: Understanding behaviors that serve people's goals. *Group and Organization Management*, 31(1), 40–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601105275262>
- Brown, C., Hooley, T., & Wond, T. (2020). Building career capital: developing business leaders' career mobility. *Career Development International*, 25(5), 445–459. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-07-2019-0186>
- Carpenter, M. A., Sanders, G., & Gregersen, H. B. (2001). Bundling Human Capital with Organizational Context: The Impact of International Assignment Experience on Multinational Firm Performance and CEO Pay. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 44(3), 493–511. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3069366>
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94, S95–S120.
- Crossman, J. E., & Clarke, M. (2010). International experience and graduate employability: Stakeholder perceptions on the connection. *Higher Education*, 59(5), 599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9268-z>
- De Vos, A., & Soens, N. (2008). Protean attitude and career success: The mediating role of self-management. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 73(3), 449–456. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2008.08.007>
- Defillippi, R. J., & Arthur, M. B. (1994). The Boundaryless Career: A Competency-Based Perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15(4), 307–324.
- Di Pietro, G. (2022). International internships and skill development: A systematic review. *Review of Education*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3363>
- Dickmann, M., & Cerdin, J. L. (2018). Exploring the development and transfer of career capital in an international governmental organization. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(15), 2253–2283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1239217>
- Dickmann, M., Suutari, V., Brewster, C., Mäkelä, L., Tanskanen, J., & Tornikoski, C. (2018).

- The career competencies of self-initiated and assigned expatriates: assessing the development of career capital over time. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(6), 2353–2371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1172657>
- Eby, L. T., Butts, M., & Lockwood, A. (2003). Predictors of success in the era of the boundaryless career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 24(6), 689–708. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.214>
- European Commission. (2013). *Flash Eurobarometer 378 The experience of traineeships in the EU*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/1091>
- European Commission. (2023). *Flash Eurobarometer 523 Integration of young people into the labour market with particular focus on traineeships*.
- European Parliament. (2025a). *Information for your application*. <https://ep-stages.gestmax.eu/website/application-informations>
- European Parliament. (2025b). *Traineeships in the European Parliament*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/work-with-us/traineeships>
- European Union. (2025). *About Eurobarometer*. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/about/eurobarometer>
- Fink, G., Meierwert, S., & Rohr, U. (2005). The use of repatriate knowledge in organizations. *Human Resource Planning*, 28(4), 30–36.
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., Mcdermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36(6), 717–732. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.01100.x>
- Gibson, C., Hardy, J. H., & Buckley, M. R. (2014). Understanding the role of networking in organizations. *Career Development International*, 19(2), 146–161. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-09-2013-0111>
- Greenhaus, J. H., Callanan, G. A., & Godshalk, V. M. (2009). *Career Management*. Sage. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315205991>
- Guan, Y., Arthur, M. B., Khapova, S. N., Hall, R. J., & Lord, R. G. (2019). Career boundarylessness and career success: A review, integration and guide to future research. In *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Vol. 110, pp. 390–402). Academic Press Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.05.013>
- Hall, D. T. (1976). *Careers in Organizations*. Scott Foresman & Co.
- Hall, D. T. (1996). Protean Careers of the 21st Century. *The Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 8–16. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4165349>

- Hall, D. T. (2004). The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.10.006>
- Hall, D. T., Yip, J., & Doiron, K. (2018). Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior Protean Careers at Work: Self-Direction and Values Orientation in Psychological Success. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 5(1), 129–156. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych>
- Holvoet, N., & Dewachter, S. (2023). Unpacking Transnational Social Capital and its Effects: Insights from an International Study Experience in Belgium. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 27(3), 427–446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153211070114>
- Inkson, K., & Arthur, M. B. (2001). How to be a successful career capitalist. *Organizational Dynamics*, 30(1), 48–61. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616\(01\)00040-7](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616(01)00040-7)
- Iskhakova, M., & Kosheleva, S. (2023). The role of international experience and cultural intelligence in the intention to work abroad (the case of geographically and politically isolated countries). *International Journal of Manpower*, 44(8), 1587–1604. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJM-07-2022-0314>
- Jones, E. (2013). Internationalization and employability: the role of intercultural experiences in the development of transferable skills. *Public Money & Management*, 33(2), 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2013.763416>
- Kattiyapornpong, U., & Almeida, S. (2022). An examination of comparative perspectives on international internships. *Education and Training*, 64(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-02-2021-0072/FULL/PDF>
- Letnar, M., & Širok, K. (2025). The Role of Social Capital in Employability Models: A Systematic Review and Suggestions for Future Research. *Sustainability*, 17(5). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17051782>
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge University Press.
- London, M. (1983). Toward a Theory of Career Motivation. *The Academy of Management Review*, 8(4), 620–630.
- Maertz Jr, C. P., Stoeberl, P. A., & Marks, J. (2014). Building successful internships: lessons from the research for interns, schools, and employers. *Career Development International*, 19(1), 123–142. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-03-2013-0025>
- Mathey, F., Lysova, E. I., & Khapova, S. N. (2024). How is social capital formed and leveraged

- in international careers? A systematic review and future research directions. *Management Review Quarterly*, 74(3), 1209–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-023-00332-w>
- McCauley, C. D., Ruderman, M. N., Ohlott, P. J., & Morrow, J. E. (1994). Assessing the developmental components of managerial jobs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 544–560. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.4.544>
- McDonald, K. S., & Hite, L. M. (2023). *Career development: A human resource development perspective*. Routledge.
- Mehreen, H., Rammal, H. G., Schulenkorf, N., & Hassanli, N. (2025). “Homeward bound”: a systematic review of the repatriation literature. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 55(2), 233–256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2024.2390789>
- Mockaitis, A. I., Zander, L., & De Cieri, H. (2018). The benefits of global teams for international organizations: HR implications. In *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (Vol. 29, Issue 14, pp. 2137–2158). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1428722>
- Ng, K. Y., Van Dyne, L., & Ang, S. (2009). Developing global leaders: The role of international experience and cultural intelligence. *Advances in Global Leadership*, 5, 225–250. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1535-1203\(2009\)0000005013/FULL/XML](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1535-1203(2009)0000005013/FULL/XML)
- Patias, N. D., & Hohendorff, J. Von. (2019). Quality criteria for qualitative research articles. *Psicologia Em Estudo*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.4025/PSICOLESTUD.V24I0.43536>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.
- Ramaswami, A., Carter, N. M., & Dreher, G. F. (2016). Expatriation and career success: A human capital perspective. *Human Relations*, 69(10), 1959–1987. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726716630390>
- Remhof, S., Gunkel, M., & Schlägel, C. (2013). Working in the ‘Global Village’: The Influence of Cultural Intelligence on the Intention to Work Abroad. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(3), 224–250. https://doi.org/10.1688/1862-0000_ZfP_2013_03_Remhof
- Shaffer, M. A., Kraimer, M. L., Chen, Y. P., & Bolino, M. C. (2012). Choices, Challenges, and Career Consequences of Global Work Experiences: A Review and Future Agenda. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 1282–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312441834>
- Simonsen, P. (1997). *Promoting a Development Culture in Your Organization: Using Career Development as a Change Agent*. Davies-Black Publishing.

- Stratton, S. J. (2021). Population Research: Convenience Sampling Strategies. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 36(4), 373–374. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X21000649>
- Stronkhorst, R. (2005). Learning outcomes of international mobility at two Dutch institutions of higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 9(4), 292–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305280938>
- Sullivan, S. E., & Arthur, M. B. (2006). The evolution of the boundaryless career concept: Examining physical and psychological mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2005.09.001>
- Suutari, V., Brewster, C., Mäkelä, L., Dickmann, M., & Tornikoski, C. (2018). The Effect of International Work Experience on the Career Success of Expatriates: A Comparison of Assigned and Self-Initiated Expatriates. *Human Resource Management*, 57(1), 37–54. <https://doi.org/10.1002/HRM.21827>
- Suutari, V., & Makela, K. (2007). The career capital of managers with global careers. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(7), 628–648. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710820073>
- Swanson, R. A. ., & Holton, E. F. . (2001). *Foundations of Human Resource Development*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Szreter, S., & Woolcock, M. (2004). Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health. In *International Journal of Epidemiology* (Vol. 33, Issue 4, pp. 650–667). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyh013>
- Tushar, H., & Sooraksa, N. (2023). Global employability skills in the 21st century workplace: A semi-systematic literature review. *Heliyon*, 9(11). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e21023>
- Volmer, J., Schulte, E. M., Handke, L., Rodenbücher, L., & Tröger, L. (2021). Do All Employees Benefit From Daily Networking? The Moderating Effect of the Affiliation Motive. *Journal of Career Development*, 48(5), 555–568. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845319873727>
- Welle, K. (2021). *Internal Rules Governing Traineeships in the Secretariat of the European Parliament*. <https://ep-stages.gestmax.eu/uploads/rules-en.pdf>
- Yorke, M. (2006). *Employability in higher education: what it is – what it is not*.
- Zhang, L., Liu, J., Loi, R., Lau, V. P., & Ngo, H. Y. (2010). Social capital and career outcomes: A study of Chinese employees. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(8), 1323–1336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2010.483862>
- Zopiatis, A. (2007). Hospitality internships in Cyprus: a genuine academic experience or a

continuing frustration? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 19(1), 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110710724170>

Note: ChatGPT-4.0 was used for text revision, with the aim of correcting/improving the grammar of the manuscript.

4. Annexes

Annexe 1 – Interview Guide

Introduction and consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This research is part of my master's dissertation on how international experiences, in particular, the Schuman traineeship, influence career development. Your insights will be very valuable for understanding this topic. The interview will take between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Your answers will remain confidential, as I am not going to mention your name. I will only refer to general information like nationality, your traineeship and professional field. With your permission, I would like to audio-record this interview to help with transcription and analysis. Do I have your consent to proceed and to record this conversation?

Background information and previous experience

1. Can you tell me your nationality, age, and current country of residence?
2. What was your academic and professional background before the traineeship?
3. Had you participated in any international academic or professional experiences before this traineeship? If so, how do you think it prepared you for this traineeship, and did it make adaptation easier?
4. What year did you participate in the traineeship, and for how long? In which DG and location were you placed?

Mobility experience (motivation and adaptation)

5. What initially motivated you to apply for the Schuman traineeship? How did it align with your career or personal goals at that time?
6. Did you encounter any barriers in accessing the Schuman traineeship? (financial, logistical, or access to information)
7. How did moving, living, and working in a new country affect you personally and professionally?
8. What challenges did you face in adapting to the new cultural and institutional environment? What made you feel supported, or helped you adjust?
9. To what extent did your expectations before the traineeship match the actual experience?

Experience during the traineeship (skills, social capital and networking)

10. What technical or job-specific skills (policy, communication, analysis) did you develop during the traineeship?
11. What cross-cultural or soft skills (adaptability, language, cultural intelligence) did you gain or improve?
12. What kinds of professional relationships did you form during the traineeship? (with supervisors, colleagues, mentors)
13. Do you feel these relationships had a lasting impact on your career or opened doors to new opportunities?

Experience after the traineeship (employability, career capital and career outcomes)

14. What was your first step after completing the traineeship? Did you consider a position within the European institutions or the private sector?
15. (If applicable: Just for those who returned to their home country) When returning to your home country, did you feel the skills gained during the traineeship were valued and utilised in your job?
16. How long did it take you to find a job after the traineeship?
17. Do you believe the traineeship helped you secure your next job? If so, how?
18. Have employers or recruiters ever mentioned your traineeship during interviews or hiring decisions?
19. Have you applied the knowledge and skills gained during the traineeship in your roles since then?

Long-term impact (long-term impact and career identity)

20. How do you feel the traineeship influenced your long-term career goals, values or professional identity?
21. Do you feel that the experience improved your professional confidence or how you perceive yourself as a job candidate?
22. Compared to colleagues who did not have international experience, do you feel your career profile stands out in the job market? Why or why not?

Reflections and recommendations

23. Looking back, what part of the experience had the most profound impact on your personal or professional development?
24. What advice would you give to someone preparing to begin a Schuman traineeship?

25. Is there anything else you would like to share about the experience that we have not covered?

Annexe 2 – Operational Table for Interview Script

Main Research Question	Specific Research Questions	Concepts / Topics	Variables	Interview Questions
How do former Schuman trainees perceive the long-term impact of their international traineeship on their career development?	Contextual	Participant Profile	Nationality, Gender, Age, Country of residence, Academic background, Professional background, Prior international experience	1, 2, 3, 4
	What were participants' motivations and expectations when applying to the Schuman traineeship?	Motivation, Expectations vs Reality	Motivation types, Level of adjustment, Career goals, Expectations	5, 9
	What barriers did participants face in accessing the traineeship opportunity?	Access, Inclusion	Financial/logistical barriers, Access to information	6
	How did participants experience the mobility and adaptation process?	Mobility, Cross-cultural adaptation	Emotional impact, Cultural adjustment, Support systems	7, 8
	What skills and knowledge did Schuman trainees acquire during the traineeship?	Career Capital (Knowing-how, Knowing-why)	Skill acquisition	10, 11

What kinds of professional connections did trainees form, and how did these influence their careers?	Social Capital, Networking (Knowing-whom)	Social capital, Networking outcomes	12, 13
How did the traineeship affect former trainees' employability and career trajectory?	Career outcomes, Employability, External Recognition	Job access, Time to employment, Skill application, Employer feedback	14, 16, 17, 18, 19
How do companies perceive the value of the traineeship experience?	Skill Transferability, Employer Recognition, Labour Market Context	Recognition in the home country, Transferable skills	15, 18, 19
How do Schuman traineeship perceive their long-term professional identity and confidence as a result of the traineeship?	Career Identity, Professional Confidence	Long-term goals, Self-perception, Career orientation	20, 21, 22
What were the most meaningful aspects of the experience, and what advice do they offer to future trainees?	Experience Interpretation, Advice	Personal reflection, Recommendations	23, 24, 25

Annexe 3 – Coding structure

Before the Traineeship	Motivations for Applying	Verbalisations related to the motivations of former trainees to apply for the Schuman traineeship.
	Background Experience	Verbalisations regarding participants' academic and professional experiences before the traineeship.
	Previous International Experience	Verbalisations about prior experiences abroad.
	Access Barriers	Verbalisations regarding difficulties such as financial, informational, or logistical barriers during the process.
During the Traineeship	Adaptation Process	Verbalisations related to how participants adjusted to the work and cultural environment.
	Expectation vs Reality	Verbalisations regarding differences between what participants expected and what they actually experienced.
	Skill Development	Verbalisations regarding learning and professional growth during the traineeship.
		Hard Skills: Verbalisations about technical or job-specific competencies gained during the traineeship.
		Soft Skills: Verbalisations about interpersonal, communication, or intercultural skills developed.
	Networking and Relationships	Verbalisations regarding connections made with peers, supervisors, or mentors during the traineeship.
		Impact on Career Opportunities: Verbalisations about how the traineeship influenced future job prospects.
	Challenges During the Traineeship	Verbalisations about obstacles, difficulties, or negative experiences faced during the traineeship.
	SRDP Test Experience	Verbalisations regarding participants' opinions of the SRDP test.

After the Traineeship	Employability	Verbalisations regarding how the traineeship influenced participants' employability.
	Recruiter-Employer Recognition:	Verbalisations about how employers or recruiters perceived and valued the traineeship experience.
	Time to Employment:	Verbalisations related to the duration between the end of the traineeship and starting new employment.
	Long-Term Impact	Verbalisations regarding the lasting effects of the traineeship on participants' careers and personal development.
	Professional Confidence:	Verbalisations about changes in confidence and self-perception.
	Competitive Advantage:	Verbalisations regarding the unique advantages gained from doing an international traineeship compared to other candidates.
	Skill Recognition	Verbalisations regarding whether the skills acquired during the traineeship were acknowledged by others.
	Home Country Recognition:	Verbalisations about how the traineeship and skills were perceived or valued in participants' home countries.
	Skill Transfer:	Verbalisations regarding the ability to apply the skills learned during the traineeship in later roles.
Advice to Future Trainees	Verbalisations related to the recommendations, suggestions, and tips that participants would give to future trainees.	