

## **Study Report**

# **FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR A 2<sup>ND</sup> TRACK OF THE MOBILISE TALENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

## **Synthesis and implementation implications**

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October 2025

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union, contracted by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) through the Migration Partnership Facility. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Maastricht School of Management and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

The MOBILISE project aims at launching a scalable and institutionally entrenched circular talent development program between the Netherlands and Tunisia, Egypt and Ethiopia for the strengthening of climate-smart agriculture. The project, which specifically targets the agricultural sector, seeks to meet the demands of the labor market in the participating countries by involving partners from the public and private sector while developing cooperation with local higher educational institutions.

MOBILISE, October 2025

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ANETI	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant (Tunisia)
AVFA	Agence de Vulgarisation et de Formation Agricole (Tunisia)
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (Tunisia)
EHPEA	Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association
ESA	École Supérieure d'Agriculture (Tunisia)
ESIA	École Supérieure d'Ingénieurs Agronomes (Tunisia)
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EU	European Union
GVVA	Gecombineerde Vergunning Verblijf en Arbeid (Combined Residence and Work Permit, Netherlands)
HBO	Hoger Beroepsonderwijs (Higher Professional Education, Netherlands)
HEIA	Horticultural Export Improvement Association (Egypt)
HUSD	Heliopolis University for Sustainable Development (Egypt)
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
IND	Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst (Immigration and Naturalisation Service, Netherlands)
INAT	Institut National Agronomique de Tunisie (Tunisia)
ISA-CM	Institut Supérieur Agronomique de Chott Mariem (Tunisia)
MBO	Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs (Secondary Vocational Education, Netherlands)
MPF	Migration Partnership Facility
MSM	Maastricht School of Management
ROI	Return on Investment
TWV	Tewerkstellingsvergunning (Work Permit, Netherlands)
UWV	Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (Employee Insurance Agency, Netherlands)
WEP	Work Experience Placement
WO	Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (University Education, Netherlands)

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## 1 Introduction

The MOBILISE project, funded by the European Union (EU) through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), aims to establish a scalable and sustainable circular talent development programme between the Netherlands and selected partner countries (Tunisia, Egypt, and Ethiopia). Following a first pilot mobility track targeting students in higher education, the project has launched a second round of feasibility studies to explore the potential for a new track focusing on skilled workers, recent graduates, and young professionals in the agricultural and horticultural sectors. Separate country studies were conducted in the Netherlands, Tunisia, Egypt, and Ethiopia to assess the legal, institutional, and labour market conditions for such a programme.

This synthesis report consolidates the findings from the four feasibility studies conducted in each country. Its purpose is to provide a comparative analysis of labour market needs, legal and administrative frameworks, and stakeholder perspectives in both countries of origin and destination. By identifying common opportunities, obstacles, and enabling factors across contexts, the synthesis aims to inform strategic choices for the design of the second MOBILISE mobility pilot, ensuring that selected participant profiles and program modalities are both legally feasible and operationally sustainable.

It is worth mentioning that, based on the experience of the first two intakes and on interviews with Dutch companies, the MOBILISE tracks are not primarily intended to address long-term labour shortages in the Netherlands. In practice, Dutch firms also consider the return on investment of hosting participants, viewing the internships as a way to identify promising talent for future collaboration. Some companies have explored the possibility of retaining trainees or recalling them for a subsequent season, but this has proven very difficult under the current legal framework, because it does not facilitate this type of circularity nor allows a straightforward transition to regular employment for this category of skilled workers, who do not qualify as highly skilled migrants.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the feasibility of a second pilot with a different participant target group is evaluated on the same basis as the first program with students — namely, its added value in talent development, skills transfer, and in strengthening international business relations between Dutch horticultural companies and their counterparts in Egypt, Tunisia, and Ethiopia.

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<sup>1</sup> During the first mobility intake, one company tried to retain the trainee or to re-hire him for the next season while he was still in the Netherlands finishing his traineeship, but the procedure was too complex and long to be completed within his visa duration and discouraged the company to continue. From the same intake, two companies tried the next season to hire again former participants, but were discouraged by the requirements of the work permit,

## 2 Legal and administrative framework

The feasibility of a second mobility track is determined first and foremost by the Dutch legal and administrative framework governing the entry and employment of non-EU nationals. Dutch regulations distinguish between stays of up to 90 days and those exceeding 90 days. In practice, however, the categories of work permits available are largely the same, with the main differences relating to the procedures, the authorities involved, and the need for a residence permit in the case of longer stays.

For stays **shorter than 90 days**, participants require a work permit (*Tewerkstellingsvergunning*, **TWV**) issued by the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), in combination with a **Schengen visa**. For stays **longer than 90 days**, they fall under the single permit system (*Gecombineerde Vergunning Verblijf en Arbeid*, **GVVA**), which combines residence and work authorization and is processed by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) with advice from UWV. The substantive conditions are broadly similar, though the GVVA entails longer processing times, higher costs, and the submission of legalized and translated documentation.

Within this framework, three permit categories are particularly relevant for the target groups considered under MOBILISE:

- **Work Experience Placement (WEP)**. This applies to recent higher education graduates (up to two years after graduation) holding an HBO or WO degree.
- **Praktikant (Apprenticeship)**. This category applies to employees who remain under contract with a foreign employer while gaining temporary work experience in the Netherlands.
- **Seasonal Worker**. This option is only relevant for participants who do not qualify under the previous two categories.

Further details on the opportunities and challenges of the legal framework are presented in the next chapter, under the findings by participant profile. A full overview of the applicable legal rules and requirements can be found in the Dutch Feasibility Report.

### 3 Findings and strategies by participant profile

This chapter summarizes the main findings from the four country reports, focusing on the opportunities and challenges for implementing a mobility program. Each participant profile is analysed through two complementary perspectives: the Netherlands as the country of destination and the partner countries of origin (Egypt, Tunisia, and Ethiopia).

For each perspective, the findings are presented in tables that distinguish opportunities and enabling factors from obstacles and risks, allowing a clear understanding of both the Dutch operational context and the conditions in the partner countries that shape feasibility and design choices.

Building on these insights, we elaborate on the main implications for the development and implementation of the program, targeting the first two priority categories: fresh graduates and employees. The third category, based on the seasonal worker permit framework, was assessed as significantly more complex and less feasible. It has therefore been excluded from the program design.

#### 3.1 Graduates and young professionals (≤2 years, includes entrepreneurs)

##### 3.1.1 Opportunities, Enablers and Obstacles

In the Netherlands, the Work Experience Placement (WEP) permit provides a clear and financially attractive legal pathway, supported by prior experience with student mobility pilots. Fresh graduates are regarded as motivated and adaptable, and as a potential long-term talent pipeline for host companies. However, eligibility restrictions, housing affordability, documentation requirements, and the higher perceived risk of overstaying remain important obstacles.

In the countries of origin, strong corporate interest, motivated graduate profiles, and diversified recruitment channels enable program development. Fresh graduates are seen as valuable contributors to company development and sector modernization upon return. Yet significant risks must be managed, including military service obligations in Egypt, the risk of brain drain and reintegration mismatches in Tunisia, and weak return guarantees coupled with administrative delays in Ethiopia.

Netherlands (Country of Destination)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
<b>Legal viability (WEP):</b> The Work Experience Placement (WEP) applies to higher education graduates (HBO/WO)	<b>Eligibility restrictions:</b> The WEP is limited to HBO/WO graduates and excludes secondary vocational profiles

<p>up to two years after graduation. Conditions resemble the student internship permit already used in the first pilot, making the pathway administratively familiar.</p>	<p>such as Tunisia's <i>Brevet de Technicien Supérieur</i> (BTS).</p>
<p><b>Financial attractiveness:</b> Employers must provide an allowance equal to at least 50% of the minimum wage for a 21-year-old. This is financially manageable compared to other categories such as <i>praktikant</i> or seasonal worker.</p>	<p><b>Housing costs:</b> The allowance level (50% of minimum wage) may not be sufficient to cover private accommodation, necessitating either company-provided accommodation or project support.</p>
<p><b>Leveraging prior experience:</b> The WEP procedure follows the same conditions as the short-term work permit (<i>TWV stagiaire</i>) used in the first pilot, enabling the use of established procedures and networks.</p>	<p><b>High expectations:</b> Graduates may have higher expectations than students with respect to tasks and qualified work, which may not always align with host company needs. They also tend to require substantial supervision and onboarding, similar to students.</p>
<p><b>Investment in future talent:</b> Fresh graduates are regarded as a long-term talent pipeline, with potential employability following the traineeship (more likely in the country of origin).</p>	<p><b>Limited follow-up opportunities:</b> Under the current Dutch legal framework, it is difficult for companies to extend a temporary traineeship into long-term employment. International (extra-EU) hiring is feasible only for highly skilled workers.</p>
<p><b>Motivation and adaptability:</b> Graduates are typically motivated, adaptable, and eager to gain international professional experience.</p>	<p><b>Documentation complexity:</b> Applications require diploma copies with certified translations into Dutch or English, creating additional administrative requirements compared to student interns.</p>
	<p><b>Risk of stricter Visa assessment:</b> Authorities may apply stricter checks on visa applications as graduates may be considered at higher risk of remaining in the Netherlands after the traineeship. This is an assumed risk, but to be confirmed/ dismissed by Dutch authorities.</p>

Countries of Origin (Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
<p><b>Corporate interest and return pathways:</b> In all countries, interviewed companies expressed strong interest in collaborating with the program, both in the participant selection process and in offering opportunities upon return. Returnees are valued for the technical and soft skills acquired in the Netherlands.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Companies indicated willingness to hire graduates either before departure or upon return.<sup>2</sup></p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> some companies are available to discuss pre-employment contracts before mobility, to secure reintegration and increase incentive to return.<sup>3</sup></p> <p><i>Ethiopia:</i> Companies emphasised involvement in graduate selection to align recruitment with labour market needs.</p>	<p><b>Risk of non-return / brain drain:</b> High risk of participants not returning, as they lack study obligations anchoring them;<sup>4</sup> brain drain is a key concern.</p> <p><i>Ethiopia:</i> companies reluctant to issue binding return commitments.</p>
<p><b>Participant profile:</b> Graduates are young and motivated with a strong theoretical foundation.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Typical age 22–26; HBO/WO equivalent; motivated for international exposure; more gender-balanced than employee segment.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Highly motivated and adaptable; strong theoretical foundation; familiar with high-value crops.</p>	<p><b>Limited practical readiness:</b> University graduates often demonstrate a lack of practical, tech-driven experience. Candidates may also have low proficiency in English.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Curricula often outdated, creating skill gaps.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Lack of hands-on, tech-driven experience; need for close supervision in Dutch companies.</p> <p><i>Ethiopia:</i> Concerns about limited</p>

<sup>2</sup> According to the Egyptian feasibility study, 7 out of 8 companies interviewed showed some indicated interest, whereas 1 did not answer. See Egyptian country report,

<sup>3</sup> Four Tunisian companies were identified during the feasibility study as potentially interested in this model

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, experience from the first two student cohorts showed that study obligations alone did not guarantee return, as some participants chose to overstay in Europe and abandon their studies.

<p><b>Ethiopia:</b> Similar to Egypt and Tunisia; young, strong theoretical foundation but limited practical experience).</p>	<p>practical knowledge.</p> <p><b>Mismatch in expectations:</b> From experience with previous intakes (students), we can expect a challenge in aligning participants' expectations with placement offer in The Netherlands. Dutch companies will require a certain amount of hand work, which fresh university graduates, just as final year students, might not be expecting to have to do.</p>
<p><b>Recruitment sources:</b> Universities and professional networks provide access to a broad candidate pool.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Recruitment can be done through university databases, LinkedIn, and targeted institutions such as Cairo University and Al-Azhar. Expanding the scope beyond KFS and HUSD would already provide a substantial pool of candidates in Cairo alone, while a nationwide approach would make the pool very large.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Potential to expand beyond ISA-CM and AVFA networks to INAT, ESA Mograne, ESIA. Possibility to involve both education institutes and ANETI (Employment agency) in the scouting.</p> <p><b>Ethiopia:</b> Companies emphasize direct participation in recruitment to secure quality candidates.</p>	<p><b>Administrative barriers:</b></p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Military service obligations for male graduates (12–18 months) exclude many; documentation required to prove status.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> The WEP requirements exclude graduates with a BTS diploma, which means that candidates from AVFA, a current partner institution, cannot be recruited through this pathway.</p> <p><i>Ethiopia:</i> Long delays and high costs for passports (20,000–25,000 ETB); visa bottlenecks possible.</p>
<p><b>Benefits for local companies:</b> Companies gain access to internationally exposed, employable graduates. Returnees strengthen competitiveness by introducing new technical and soft skills and adopting digital and climate-smart practices.</p>	

## **Young entrepreneurs**

The Tunisian feasibility study identified young entrepreneurs in horticulture and digital technologies (agritech) as a particularly strategic and promising sub-group within the fresh graduate category.<sup>5</sup> Their profile combines strong potential for circular migration, innovation, and sector transformation with natural incentives to return and reinvest in their businesses.<sup>6</sup>

There also exists a specific residence permit for startups, but this is for people from outside the EU who are looking to start an innovative business in the Netherlands, hence a different category.<sup>7</sup>

### Opportunities and Enablers

According to the Tunisian country report, young entrepreneurs are well positioned to benefit from and contribute to circular migration. Unlike other profiles, they are strongly motivated to return home to grow their enterprises, significantly reducing the risk of brain drain. They recognize opportunities in their local markets and understand cultural and economic context. Their participation can stimulate innovation, bilateral collaboration, and the creation of high-value jobs in agritech-related fields (engineering, software, data science, marketing). Entrepreneurs can act as partners, distributors, or service providers for Dutch companies, enabling two-way commercial exchange. Their involvement could also foster network effects by connecting Dutch incubators, venture capitalists, and research institutes with Tunisia's emerging agritech ecosystem.

### Obstacles and Risks

Key challenges include limited financial resources, potential disruption to start-up operations during mobility, intellectual property and regulatory concerns, and cultural or business alignment risks. Additionally, young entrepreneurs would prioritize business development opportunities, hence the Dutch company for their placement should be highly relevant for their business idea.

### Support Requirements

Effective implementation requires clear eligibility criteria (e.g., business registration, turnover threshold, proof of entrepreneurial activity), targeted recruitment through national ecosystem enablers, and tailored mobility schemes. Financial assistance (e.g.,

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<sup>5</sup> The "Young entrepreneurs" should have obtained their diploma within the last two years, making them eligible under the WEP program.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed analysis, see the Tunisian Feasibility Report.

<sup>7</sup> 'Dutch residence permit for foreign startups', see <https://business.gov.nl/coming-to-the-netherlands/permits-and-visa/residence-permit-for-foreign-startups/>

airfare, accommodation), short-term flexible formats, and post-mobility support are essential to ensure reintegration.

### 3.1.2 Implications for program implementation – Fresh graduates

#### Promotion and Recruitment

Program visibility and outreach need to extend beyond the alumni networks of existing partners to ensure a sufficient and diverse pool of candidates of fresh graduates. Partner universities can play a central role by promoting the program among their graduates, but complementary strategies are necessary to reach qualified applicants from other institutions offering relevant degrees.

- **Expansion of recruitment base:** In Egypt, the program must decide whether to focus on the Cairo area or adopt a national recruitment strategy, which would require broader institutional partnerships. In Tunisia, the limited number of horticulture graduates from ISACM (fewer than 20 per year) makes it necessary to engage other agricultural faculties and agro-engineering programs to enlarge the candidate pool.
- **Engagement of external intermediaries:** Public employment agencies such as ANETI in Tunisia could be strategic partners, given their experience with international mobility and recruitment programs. In Egypt, no comparable partnerships currently exist but could be explored. Digital platforms advertising study and work abroad opportunities may complement this effort.
- **Targeted promotion for entrepreneurs:** If the program prioritizes young entrepreneurs, visibility should be reinforced through incubators and entrepreneurship programs already active in the partner countries (e.g., Orange Corners, ANETI entrepreneurship programs).

These strategies imply an initial investment in mapping and engaging new institutional and digital partners, supported by a clear communication strategy tailored to different target audiences.

#### Participant Selection

Participant selection will probably require additional coordination and administrative capacity in each country. Local coordinators must be appointed to manage application collection, eligibility screening, and co-evaluation with Dutch partners.

- **Institutional setup:** Existing partners can manage their alumni's applications, but additional subcontracting or administrative support may be necessary for candidates from outside their alumni base. In Egypt, Heliopolis University could assume this role given its private status and operational flexibility. In Tunisia, a

public agency such as ANETI could play this role, though formal cooperation procedures may be lengthy.

- **Selection process and requirements:** The eligibility criteria must explicitly specify degree levels equivalent to HBO or WO. Applicants must provide certified diploma copies with English or Dutch translations. Language proficiency must be formally demonstrated through an English certificate or verified through in-person testing, which may require decentralized testing arrangements. The existing three-step selection process (eligibility check, video pitch, interview) should be reviewed for practicality given the wider applicant base.
- **Entrepreneurship-specific selection:** For an entrepreneurship-oriented track, the program should define the expected maturity level of business ideas and possibly integrate the selection process with that of existing incubation programs.

### Pre-departure Training and Orientation

Pre-departure training must be adapted to the profile of graduates, who should be more flexible than students enrolled in a degree program. A more intensive and modular format (e.g., two weeks full-time or a few multi-day sessions over one to two months) is recommended.

- **Training providers:** In Egypt, Heliopolis University can deliver tailor-made programs for external participants. In Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA) Training Center could provide similar support for horticulture graduates and employees. In Tunisia, the implementing partner must be identified and enabled to offer flexible training modules.
- **Curriculum focus:** The curriculum should address both technical and soft-skill gaps. Sector-specific components—such as cold chain logistics, smart irrigation, or export compliance—could be developed jointly with local companies, which may also host short preparatory internships to reinforce technical readiness. Core soft-skill modules should include communication, teamwork, leadership, and business etiquette. This should be taken into account in the development of the pre-departure programme, as graduates are likely to come from more varied academic backgrounds across different universities, degree programmes, and graduation years, making cohort homogenisation more complex and requiring content that is adapted for graduates rather than designed for students with similar profiles.
- **Expectation management:** Graduates may anticipate more qualified roles than those typically offered in training placements. The pre-departure orientation should therefore build on the experience of current and former graduates, using practical examples of roles and tasks to clarify what kind of jobs graduates are

typically hired for and to align expectations with the learning objectives of the mobility experience..

### Mobility in the Netherlands

The structure and content of the Dutch mobility phase can remain largely consistent with that of the student traineeships. Participants will continue to be individually matched with companies and travel under a short-term Schengen visa combined with a TWV *stagiare* (WEP) permit. The program should maintain a strong training and guidance component, in line with the WEP requirement of a learning objective and considering the limited professional experience of fresh graduates.

- **Timing flexibility:** Working with graduates allows greater flexibility in scheduling mobility periods outside the summer months, potentially alleviating housing constraints and enabling participation of companies unavailable during peak periods. Nonetheless, maintaining a cohort-based approach remains advantageous for logistical reasons and for organizing group training/orientation weeks at Aeres University.
- **Host company profile:** Participating Dutch companies are expected to be similar to those already engaged in the student mobility track. For entrepreneur-focused participants, however, placements should prioritize innovative companies or those aligned with the participant's business idea.
- **Housing and logistics:** The same challenges identified for student trainees apply, particularly concerning accommodation and transport. Off-peak placements could mitigate costs and availability issues.

### Return and Reintegration

The principal implementation challenge lies in ensuring return and reintegration after the Netherlands placement. Since graduates are no longer bound by academic obligations, the risk of overstay increases. Two complementary strategies can mitigate this risk:

- **Entrepreneurship-based reintegration:** Targeting young entrepreneurs who are already developing their own business offers a strong incentive to return. Participants could be selected from existing (pre-)incubation programs, with placements in Dutch companies that provide relevant exposure and innovation insights.
- **Employer engagement in countries of origin:** Early involvement of local companies can strengthen return prospects. These companies could commit to offering short-term positions or internships upon return, possibly forming a

dual-track program combining a three-month mobility in the Netherlands with a three- to six-month follow-up placement in the home country, if not a job position.

## 3.2 Employees of companies

### 3.2.1 Opportunities, Enablers and Obstacles

In the Netherlands, a clear legal pathway exists for mid-career professionals through the *Werkvergunning praktikant* (practitioner permit), allowing employees to gain structured work experience while maintaining their employment in the country of origin. This arrangement is supported by Dutch companies' conditional interest, particularly where placements are longer and linked to existing partnerships. However, high salary requirements, limited funding eligibility under EU regulations, and short mobility durations permitted by African employers reduce the overall attractiveness for Dutch hosts.

In the countries of origin, employer commitment and cost-sharing willingness constitute major enablers, reinforced by reliable return mechanisms and strong interest in upskilling managerial and technical capacities. Yet, the short duration preferences, financial disparities, and skill-level mismatches between local staff profiles and available tasks in the Netherlands remain significant operational and structural barriers to implementation.

Netherlands (Country of Destination)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
<b>Legal pathway (<i>Werkvergunning praktikant</i>):</b> A valid and structured permit exists for employed candidates (MBO, HBO, or WO level) undertaking temporary practical training under a cooperation agreement.	<b>High financial requirements:</b> The <i>praktikant</i> must be paid at Dutch market wage levels, making placements considerably costlier than standard internships.
<b>Structured upskilling mechanism:</b> The scheme enables Dutch companies with branches or partners in Egypt, Tunisia, or Ethiopia to strengthen bilateral cooperation and upskill their own staff.	<b>Funding ineligibility:</b> EU-funded projects cannot cover intra-company mobility costs (visa, travel, accommodation), which must be borne by the participant, employer, or host.
<b>Employer interest:</b> Dutch companies demonstrate conditional willingness to host, particularly where the placement	<b>Short duration vs. ROI:</b> Typical placements proposed by companies of origin ( $\leq 4$ weeks) are considered too

duration and skill level align with operational needs.	short to justify the intensive supervision and onboarding effort required.
<b>Direct professional experience:</b> Participants' prior employment ensures work readiness and minimal need for basic training.	<b>Task mismatch:</b> Experienced employees may find operational or technical tasks too basic, resulting in expectation gaps.
<b>Reliable return prospects:</b> Employees have established professional and family commitments, reducing overstay risks.	<b>Limited employer engagement:</b> Overall interest remains cautious; Dutch firms are reluctant to invest without clear long-term cooperation benefits.

Countries of Origin (Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
<p><b>Corporate interest and return pathways:</b> Across all three countries, employers show strong buy-in and readiness to collaborate in selecting participants and financing their participation. Return is reinforced by established employment ties and family commitments. Specific mechanism could be set-up to encourage return, such as financial trust receipts (EGY) or secondment agreements protecting employment status (TUN).</p> <p>However, larger companies often already operate internal talent or leadership development programs, which may reduce their motivation to engage in externally funded mobility schemes.</p>	<p><b>Duration mismatch:</b> Companies in all three countries favour short mobility periods that are insufficient for Dutch hosts to recover training costs. Furthermore, different companies have varying preferences for the timing of mobility, depending on their production cycles, making it difficult to coordinate a single cohort of employees. The temporary absence of key staff can also disrupt operations and generate additional costs for replacing employees during the mobility period, as well as a risk of non-return or external recruitment offers.</p>

<p><b>Participant profile and training needs:</b> Employees already possess practical experience, making them well suited for short, targeted upskilling.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Focus on managerial and soft skills (communication, reporting, leadership).</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Target group (1–3 years’ experience) identified as strategic for productivity and rapid knowledge application.</p> <p><b>Ethiopia:</b> Demand for both soft skills (leadership, communication) and technical expertise (greenhouse management, integrated pest management).</p>	<p><b>Skill-level mismatch:</b> Available placements in Dutch horticulture often target operational or lower-skilled roles, while participants are mid-level professionals seeking advanced technical exposure. Furthermore, interest by some companies of origin is that employees develop very (product) specific competences, and not just a generic exposure to the company processes.</p>
<p><b>Recruitment sources and reliability:</b> Companies can directly select employees they trust to return.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Pre-selection based on established relationships ensures reliability.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Reintegration facilitated through secondment agreements.</p> <p><b>Ethiopia:</b> Employers propose follow-up mentorship to consolidate learning outcomes.</p>	<p><b>Financial inequality and short-stay preferences:</b> The high costs of mobility combined with short-stay expectations (e.g., 7–10 days in Tunisia) limit the program’s operational feasibility and sustainability.</p>
<p><b>Financial engagement and cost-sharing:</b> some companies are willing to share mobility costs.</p> <p><i>Tunisia:</i> Firms express readiness to co-finance travel and accommodation.</p> <p><i>Egypt:</i> Most employers accept partial coverage of travel and replacement costs.</p> <p><b>Ethiopia: Some companies prepared to pay visa and travel fees.</b></p>	<p><b>Financial limitations:</b> The number of companies confirming participation remains limited (reflecting the small sample interviewed). Travel and local training expenses may need to be co-financed by the Dutch host company or their employer of origin to ensure feasibility. In addition, employers must account for salary costs incurred during the employee’s absence, which further reduces their capacity or willingness to participate.</p>

### 3.2.2 Implications for program implementation – Company employees

The mobility program targeting employees of horticulture companies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Ethiopia follows a distinct, industry-oriented logic. It focuses on strengthening enterprise capacity through staff development and international exposure. Two alternative models can be envisaged:

- (1) an apprenticeship scheme under the *praktikant* framework, in which selected employees undertake short professional placements in Dutch companies; or
- (2) a short-term industry exposure program, combining executive training and company visits.

Both pursue similar objectives but differ significantly in operational setup, duration, and financing — aspects that are elaborated below.

#### Promotion and Recruitment

The promotion of the apprenticeship track should primarily target companies already engaged in international partnerships or those demonstrating interest in staff capacity development.

- **Existing networks as entry point:** The program can build upon the MOBILISE network and its affiliated companies. Further promotion should occur through relevant business associations and sectoral platforms such as the Horticultural Export Improvement Association (HEIA) in Egypt, the EHPEA in Ethiopia, and the Netherlands–Tunisia Chamber of Commerce.
- **Need for further scoping:** The pool of companies expressing initial interest remains small—particularly in Egypt and Tunisia—necessitating targeted outreach to identify additional potential participants and to clarify their training needs, preferred periods, and cost-sharing capacity.

#### Participant Selection

Given that participants are company employees, the selection process should be streamlined and embedded within company HR systems.

- **Joint selection mechanisms:** Eligibility criteria should be agreed jointly between the Dutch coordinators and the companies of origin, ensuring alignment with available apprenticeships in the Netherlands. Local companies would then nominate employees who meet these requirements, allowing a simplified process based on internal performance and motivation. The Dutch project partners would validate final selections through an online interview, focusing on motivation, English proficiency, and alignment of expectations.
- **Host company involvement:** Because of the higher costs of hosting skilled employees, Dutch companies are likely to request participation in the final

selection stage to ensure the match between candidate profiles and company needs.

- **Eligibility focus:** Candidates should possess relevant technical expertise and a proven employment relationship with the sending company.

### **Pre-departure Training and Orientation**

Pre-departure training for company employees must be short, focused, and practice-oriented. Participants already possess technical experience and have limited availability outside their regular duties.

The content and format of the pre-departure training should be adapted to the type of mobility activity, whether it is an apprenticeship scheme under the *Praktikant* framework with short professional placements in Dutch companies, or a short-term industry exposure programme combining executive training and company visits.

- **Duration and structure:** Training should be condensed into short, intensive modules lasting one to two days, ideally delivered in person.
- **Training focus:** Companies across all partner countries consistently emphasized management and soft skills as priority areas. Core modules should therefore combine leadership, communication, report writing, presentation, critical thinking, and human resources management with essential orientation on life and work in the Netherlands. Topics should include Dutch work culture, labor regulations, and intercultural communication, ensuring that participants are well-prepared to integrate into the host company environment. Complementary technical sessions may address advanced technologies, modern production processes, and innovation management relevant to each participant's function.
- **Trainers and institutions:** Egyptian companies highlighted the need for practical, field-based instruction delivered by practitioners rather than academics. This implies the need to find new local partners / subcontractors that can deliver such a training.
- **Administrative support:** Many companies may require assistance in handling mobility documentation and procedures. This support could be provided through the Dutch project coordinators or delegated to local subcontractors if needed.

### **Mobility in the Netherlands**

The apprenticeship phase in the Netherlands must be industry-focused and adapted to the higher skill level and job seniority of participants. Here, two alternative models could be considered.

## 1. Apprenticeship under the *praktikant* scheme

- Employees would complete an apprenticeship of one to three months in a Dutch company, traveling with a short-term Schengen visa and TWV *praktikant* permit.
- Dutch host companies should operate in the same sector or with similar production processes as the employee's company of origin to ensure task relevance.
- Target companies include those with subsidiaries or business partnerships in the participant's country, or those seeking to expand in African horticultural markets.
- The program requires commitment from home companies to release employees for at least one month and to cover travel and visa costs.
- Given the professional profile of participants, an extensive onboarding period at Aeres, may be unnecessary. A short, practical orientation (bank account, registration) could be sufficient..
- Cohort mobility is unlikely; departures will be individualized, requiring flexible arrangements for accommodation and coordination.
- Housing arrangements: Priority should be given to Dutch host companies that can provide accommodation directly, ensuring convenience and cost efficiency. Where this is not possible, the project could facilitate the search for suitable housing through trusted agencies, with rental costs to be fully covered by the participant. Given that apprentices under the *praktikant* scheme receive market-level wages, such expenses are expected to be financially manageable.

## 2. Short-term industry exposure program

- Alternatively, participants could attend a structured executive training course combining lectures at Aeres University, practical sessions, and exposure visits to Dutch horticultural firms.
- The duration would be two to three weeks under a short-term educational visa, with participants traveling in cohorts.
- The Dutch partners (Aeres, MSM) would design and deliver the program, covering both classroom learning and field exposure.
- Accommodation would be arranged on campus or through partner institutions.
- Dutch companies would not contribute financially since participants would not be employed during the stay; therefore, costs would fall primarily on the project and the home companies.

- Funding feasibility within EU mobility rules must be confirmed. If direct financing is not permitted, a contribution fee may be required from participating companies, though this could limit participation rates.

### Return and Reintegration

Since participants remain employed during the mobility period, there is no need for reintegration into the labor market. However, structured follow-up is essential to ensure that newly acquired skills are disseminated within their organizations.

- **Post-return application of skills:** Companies should commit to integrating returning employees into roles where they can apply their new competencies immediately.
- **Knowledge transfer mechanisms:** Training-of-Trainers modules or internal workshops led by returning apprentices could help multiply the impact within the company and sector.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Short follow-up interviews and company-level feedback should be implemented to assess learning uptake and institutional benefits.

## 3.3 Graduates >2 years

### 3.3.1 Opportunities, Enablers and Obstacles

This profile covers individuals who completed their studies more than two years ago and are not currently employed, so they do not qualify under the previous two categories. In the Netherlands, this group can only be hosted under the Seasonal Worker Permit, which requires proof that no suitable EU/EEA candidate was available after three months of vacancy advertising and obliges employers to pay full market wages. Although these candidates often bring greater maturity, professional experience, and motivation to find qualified employment, the complex and costly permit conditions make this pathway largely unattractive for most Dutch companies and viable only as a last resort.

In the countries of origin, companies expressed some willingness to engage with this group, particularly where clear return pathways and targeted re-skilling can be ensured. However, concerns persist regarding non-return risks, skill mismatches, and country-specific administrative barriers such as military service or passport delays.

Netherlands (Country of Destination)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
Potential to attract candidates with more professional experience and maturity than recent graduates.	Strict labour-market test: employer must prove no EU/EEA candidate is available after three months of vacancy advertising.
Can fill more advanced roles aligned with company needs.	Lengthy recruitment period: minimum three-month search before application submission.
Participants are highly motivated to develop skills and pursue qualified employment.	Full-wage obligation: must pay market or collective-agreement salary (vs. 50 % minimum wage under WEP).
The Seasonal Worker Permit is the only applicable TWV route when no other permit fits.	Low employer attractiveness: complex procedure, long processing time (up to 90 days), preference for intra-EU seasonal labour.
	Legal complexity and low priority due to retention and overstay risks.

Countries of Origin (Egypt, Tunisia, Ethiopia)	
Opportunities / Enablers	Obstacles / Risks
<b>Corporate interest and return pathways:</b> Companies in all three countries expressed general willingness to collaborate with the MOBILISE program for this segment, particularly where return pathways and reintegration mechanisms are clearly defined. In Tunisia, pre-employment or reintegration agreements could facilitate structured return and innovation transfer.	<b>High risk of non-return:</b> The absence of secured job placement or reintegration guarantees increases the likelihood of non-return across all countries.
<b>Participant profile and motivation:</b> Graduates in this category often show strong motivation to acquire new technical and professional skills and can contribute to modernization upon return.	<b>Skill gaps and training needs:</b> Extended periods of unemployment may lead to skill obsolescence, requiring intensive pre-departure and on-the-job training.

<p><b>Recruitment sources and flexibility:</b> this group offers greater flexibility in mobility timing compared to students tied to academic calendars, and companies see potential for aligning selection with workforce needs.</p>	<p><b>Administrative barriers:</b> delays and costs in passport acquisition can create significant administrative obstacles.</p>
<p><b>Financial engagement and cost-sharing potential:</b> Companies in Egypt and Tunisia indicated openness to explore co-financed training schemes or shared investment in skill upgrading if linked to tangible reintegration benefits.</p>	<p><b>Economic and language barriers:</b> Weak English proficiency and limited digital literacy, particularly in Tunisia, reduce placement prospects. In Egypt, mandatory military service (12–18 months) restricts the eligibility of male graduates aged 18–30.</p>

## 4 Conclusions and recommendations

The feasibility studies confirm that a second mobility track under MOBILISE is viable if focused on the most suitable target groups, aligned with Dutch permit regulations, and supported by strong company engagement and cost-sharing. Two profiles stand out: employees of horticulture companies and fresh graduates within two years of graduation. The seasonal worker permit applicable to older graduates is legally cumbersome and commercially unattractive, thus excluded.

### Employees of horticulture companies

This group shows the strongest buy-in from local firms, some of which are willing to nominate participants and share costs. Dutch companies also express conditional openness, despite higher wage obligations.<sup>8</sup> The main challenge is a mismatch in both duration and task profile. Local employers prefer short placements (2–6 weeks) to avoid disruption, whereas Dutch hosts require at least three months to justify onboarding. These gaps must be addressed through clearly defined formats and stronger demand validation on the Dutch side.

Two implementation options can be considered:

- **Option 1: Short-term industry exposure programme (1–2 weeks)**

A structured executive training programme combining lectures at Aeres University, practical sessions, and exposure visits to Dutch horticulture companies. Participants would travel in cohorts under a short-term educational visa. Dutch partners would design and deliver the programme, while accommodation would be arranged through campus or partner facilities. As participants would not be employed, Dutch companies would not contribute financially; costs would fall primarily on the project and home companies, subject to EU funding eligibility or a participation fee.

- **Option 2: Apprenticeship program (sector association-led matching)**

Placement of selected employees within the *Werkvergunning praktikant* mobility scheme, possibly through match-making facilitated by Dutch sector associations. Associations would help validate real demand, identify suitable host companies, and align task profiles with business needs. This option would require a formal partnership or facilitation mechanism but could increase relevance and return on investment for Dutch hosts, particularly where existing business links with countries of origin exist.

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<sup>8</sup> 13 out of the 20 companies interviewed were asked. 25% of companies were positive, 33% were negative, and 42% were conditional or uncertain. See the Dutch Feasibility report for more details.

## **Fresh graduates**

The Work Experience Placement (WEP) permit provides a legally straightforward and affordable pathway, requiring only 50% of the minimum wage. Graduates are flexible in timing, unrestricted by academic calendars, and often highly motivated to gain experience abroad. However, the main concern is their incentive for return and reintegration into the local job market, which must be addressed through appropriate safeguards and programme design.

Two distinct pathways can be envisaged:

- **Option 1: Individual initiative by fresh graduates**

Graduates may access mobility on an individual basis, without MOBILISE involvement in selection or matching with Dutch companies, provided they have a pre-arranged contract or internship. MOBILISE could nonetheless offer limited support, such as pre-departure orientation and, where feasible, light training or supervision during the stay in the Netherlands. However, this individualised approach raises practical challenges, particularly regarding housing, local transport, and initial settlement support in the Netherlands. These services are difficult to organise outside a cohort-based model, yet leaving them entirely to individual trainees is also problematic, as graduates often lack the experience, networks, and financial means to arrange them independently.

- **Option 2: Structured graduate mobility programme**

A programme-based approach could be developed in cooperation with partner universities, vocational schools, or public agencies responsible for the international placement of graduates. This option could also include a bilateral government agreement to provide a clear legal framework and allow stays beyond 90 days. A cohort-based model would be easier to manage from an operational perspective, particularly in terms of housing, logistics, and supervision. However, the key challenge remains ensuring participants' incentive to return to their home country. Addressing this would require a joint programme with companies in the countries of origin, offering graduates a credible post-return perspective, such as pre-agreed employment opportunities, reintegration pathways, or structured career progression following the mobility period.

## **Operational and legal considerations**

For both priority tracks, mobility should be scheduled outside the summer months to ease housing constraints, and training should combine technical and soft-skill components delivered by practitioners. EU funds cannot cover travel or accommodation

for employees, making a cost-sharing model essential—supported by the willingness of companies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Ethiopia to co-finance participation.

Given the significant differences in participant profiles, objectives, and implementation requirements, the next pilot should focus on one track only. Mixing both would increase complexity and reduce effectiveness. A focused approach will allow proper testing, monitoring, and refinement before potential expansion.

### **Scalability considerations**

Regardless of the option selected, the overall scalability of the programme is expected to remain limited. This is due, on the one hand, to the relatively small number of Dutch companies that can realistically be identified as willing to host fresh graduates or offer apprenticeship opportunities to company employees. On the other hand, scalability is constrained by the capacity of Dutch project partners to provide structured supervision, housing coordination, and day-to-day support, particularly if the model continues to rely on the same intensive support approach currently used for student mobility.

### **Relevance and benefits for Dutch companies**

Beyond feasibility considerations, it is important to underline the potential benefits for Dutch companies participating in the MOBILISE program. Given the current legal framework, these mobility tracks are not intended to address long-term labour shortages in the Netherlands. Rather, they provide an opportunity for companies to engage in international talent development, knowledge exchange, and business cooperation with strategic partners in Africa.

For fresh graduates, the program can offer an opportunity to identify and engage with emerging international talent. Dutch firms would connect with young professionals who may later be recruited either in the Netherlands (but only highly skilled workers) or within their subsidiaries, partner enterprises, or distribution networks in Africa. The program would thus support long-term cooperation and business-to-business partnerships, positioning graduates as future collaborators, agents, or innovation intermediaries.

For company employees, participation would enable mutual knowledge exchange with experienced professionals from the partner countries. Dutch firms could gain insights into different production systems, technologies, and market practices, while expanding their business networks and reinforcing partnerships with companies in Africa. In cases where the participant would come from an existing partner enterprise, the mobility experience could directly strengthen operational collaboration and supply-chain integration.