



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING

FINAL REPORT

Evaluation of the Y-MED Project

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About the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP)

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote conditions to enable the resolution of conflict, reduce violence and contribute to a durable peace across Europe, its neighbour, and the world. AP is the first Italian organization specializing in peacebuilding. This allows us to occupy a unique role in the European landscape: on the one hand, we interpret and synthesize relevant topics for the benefit of Italian agencies and institutions working on peace and security; on the other, we highlight experiences, capacities, and resources specific to the Italian system, which can contribute to the resolution of violent conflict.

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Executive summary

The report presents the findings from the final evaluation of the Y-MED project, implemented by IOM Italy in coordination with IOM missions in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The project was funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and took place between November 2017 and December 2022.

Project background

The project falls within the IOM's action aimed to strengthen the linkages between migration and development: it sets out to support the development and transfer of young people's professional skills across Mediterranean countries and to facilitate their job-placement to ultimately promote their agency in sustainable development processes.

The first project edition supported the internship of young Moroccans at Italian enterprises based in Morocco. The second and third editions provided young students and graduates from Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt with the opportunity to develop their skills and carry out internships at companies in Italy. Upon their completion of the internship, the project facilitated the interns' job placement in countries of origin.

To date, the Y-MED project has involved a total of 78 interns from the four North African countries and involved 44 Italian companies based in Morocco and in two Italian regions (Veneto and Lazio).

Evaluation background

The overall goal of the evaluation is to provide an external and independent assessment of the project as a whole, and specifically to identify achievements, challenges and lessons learned. Furthermore, the evaluation aims to determine factors enabling or limiting the project's scalability and replicability and to formulate recommendations to inform the design of the project's fourth edition.

Approach and methodology

The approach developed for the evaluation is informed by the principles of action research: evaluation questions guided data collection and analysis and were finalized jointly with IOM for each of the evaluation criteria indicated in the ToRs (relevance, efficiency, coherence, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and cross-cutting issues).

The evaluation relied on both primary (staff members, project partners, interns and representatives of Italian companies) and secondary (documents, minutes and other material produced by project staff and partners and grey literature) data sources. The evaluation was also based on mixed methods, meaning that it used both qualitative and quantitative data to draw its findings: data collection tools included document review, key informant interviews and online questionnaires.

In terms of data analysis, data collected through different tools were analysed relationally and, where possible, were triangulated by cross-checking different sources in order to obtain a diversity of perspectives and minimize potential bias.

The main challenge faced during data collection was the difficulty to reach some informants, particularly companies and stakeholders in countries of origin, who are therefore underrepresented compared to their Italian counterparts.

Evaluation findings

Findings are summarised for each criterion: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and cross-cutting issues.

Relevance. The general assessment is positive as Y-MED was found to be relevant not only for its direct beneficiaries, interns and Italian companies, but also for the many public and private actors involved in employment and professional training policies. The project offered interns the possibility to gain soft skills and on-the-job training abroad and responded to the need of Italian companies for increasing cultural diversity and developing their internationalisation. Though to a lesser extent, the interest in finding a job abroad (in Italy or elsewhere) and the need to address labour shortages (by hiring interns at the end of the internship) were also indicated by interns and Italian companies as motivations for participating in the project.

The project is also relevant to the local contexts of targeted countries. By enhancing interns' employability, Y-MED contributes to addressing the issue of youth unemployment in North Africa that is particularly high for young university graduates. With respect to the Italian context, the project set an example of how to expand and improve the use of the legal migration channel foreseen by the Italian immigration law for TCNs residing abroad and wishing to complete an internship in Italy.

Finally, the Y-MED project is aligned with two IOM policy frameworks: the IOM Institutional Strategy on Migration and Sustainable Development, and the Private Sector Partnership Strategy. Indeed, the project contributes to empowering migrants as development actors for countries of origin and destination and envisages the private sector as an active player contributing to and benefitting from the circulation of skilled young people.

Coherence. Y-MED complements several interventions that sustain skills development and mobility between European and North African countries. Although informal exchanges have occurred with some projects during learning events, no exchange forum has so far been put in place to share data, results, challenges and lessons learned. Therefore, synergies among these interventions that have high levels of complementarity are still to be fully explored.

No risk of duplication between Y-MED and other interventions was detected: Y-MED is the only project supporting a circular labour migration scheme between Italy on the one side and Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia on the other. Furthermore, it presents a distinctive focus on skills and labour needs in countries of origin and on facilitating the transition from higher/vocational education to work for young people. Finally, Y-MED is the only skills development and mobility intervention that include Libya among its target countries.

Effectiveness. The project delivered its planned results of improving soft skills of interns and raising the knowledge of Italian enterprises on cultural diversity and cross-cultural management issues. Achievements related to the development of interns' technical skills were overall good with some limitations in certain cases. These were due to a mismatch between interns' competences and professional goals on the one hand, and the tasks they were assigned or their hosting companies' sectors of activity on the other.

Results delivered with respect to the number of internships were lower than expected as the goal of 45 internships set for the second and the third editions was not reached. The limited circulation of internship vacancies and, as a consequence, the reduced number of applications received in each country of origin account for this limitation.

Project activities were progressively defined and improved during the different editions and the development of operating procedures was key to ensuring their effective and consistent implementation across countries and may facilitate the replicability of the project in other

contexts. However, some inconsistencies were identified in relation to the implementation of job placement activities which need to be further fine-tuned to ensure the engagement of companies in countries of origin.

An important challenge faced by the project during its second edition was the dropout of 12 Moroccan interns who decided not to return to Morocco to participate in the job placement phase. The desire to find a job in Italy or Europe is the main reason explaining this decision which was reinforced by the long-established emigration tradition characterising the region of Beni-Mellal from which many of them originated.

Efficiency. The general assessment of the project's management and learning systems as well of its mechanisms of coordination is positive as they proved to be appropriate to achieve results. Some challenges were, however, identified. The project relied on the contribution of several stakeholders but, in some countries, the choice of local partners did not allow having all the expertise required to achieve the same standards in implementing the different activities.

Delays related to visa processing and issuance affected, in some cases, the length of internships which, according to both companies and interns, should be of at least six months to allow for appropriate skill development. This occurred despite IOM missions in target countries contacted the relevant embassies to streamline the process.

The monitoring and learning systems of the project were gradually developed throughout project editions and a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan has recently been developed by IOM Italy. The adopted tools have strengthened the project's monitoring framework and improved the capacity of the project management team to identify achievements, constraints and delays.

The coordination mechanisms among IOM missions allowed for regular exchanges but those between them and the stakeholders involved in project implementation took place only for specific activities and did not always ensure the full commitment of key partners.

Impact. The project has contributed to increasing the employability of interns by enabling them to enter into employment or improving the quality of pre-existing occupations. The project has also contributed to increasing Italian companies' awareness of the value of skill circulation and cultural diversity as they had the opportunity to experience (often for the first time) and benefit from cultural diversity at the workplace.

Following their participation in the project, however, public stakeholders have not enhanced their engagement in the development and circulation of skills in the Mediterranean. Notwithstanding the interest of public sector actors in fostering international mobility and circular migration schemes, Y-MED has so far offered to its partners few possibilities to get in contact and develop relations that might foster international mobility channels for internship purposes.

As regards private sector stakeholders, the project has not facilitated synergies between participating companies in Italy and target countries. Although this was not the object of specific activities, exploring new avenues for collaboration and market opportunities has been among the project's ambitions since the design of the second edition, but the evaluation found that the project has so far yielded limited results in this area.

Sustainability. Overall, the sustainability of soft and technical skills developed by interns appear strong, particularly among those who were hired by the hosting company since they still have the opportunity to practice the knowledge and skills learned.

The sustainability of results related to Italian companies is more challenging: although they affirmed being interested in hosting international interns again in the future, they did not adopt procedures or practices to facilitate the activation of international internships.

In the last edition, the project has laid the grounds for its financial sustainability by requiring hosting companies to cover part of the costs. This may also facilitate the scalability of the project since it allows reducing the costs per participant and eventually increasing the number of beneficiaries.

The political sustainability of the project appears promising: the increasing interest of private and public institutions in skills mobility schemes suggests that actions in this field, including Y-MED, are likely to enjoy continuing political support in the coming years.

Cross-cutting issues. The project adopted a gender equality approach, took into consideration the specific needs of women as they emerged and put in place effective measures to ensure equal access to internship opportunities for men and women. Furthermore, the project team collected and analysed sex disaggregated data to monitor and report on project's results, which allowed to identify the gendered effects of implementation and address related issues in a timely manner.

Despite the lack of a communication and visibility plan, the project developed several communication tools such as videos, brochures, factsheets and held online events for all three editions. Overall, these instruments were appropriately used to disseminate the project, but their further development in terms of both content and channels could increase the project's visibility among young people and stakeholders and, as a consequence, could be an additional tool to scale up the project.

Conclusions

The evaluation identified positive elements related to all evaluation criteria. The most important elements relate to the project's relevance for its direct beneficiaries and target countries, its achievements as regards the improvements of interns' skills and employability as well as the Italian companies' understanding of cultural diversity and awareness of the value of skill circulation.

That said, some challenges were also highlighted. The main ones concern the number of internships activated, which remained lower than initially planned, the limited commitment of private and public sector stakeholders in some target countries and the non-adoption of structures, resources or procedures facilitating the implementation of circular migration schemes in the future by participating companies and public institutions.

Lessons learned

On the basis of the evaluation findings, the following lessons learned have been identified:

- The participation of interns with a job or previous working experience (more than 1 year) is not consistent with the project's aim to enhance participants' employability and facilitate their integration into the labour markets of their home countries.
- The project staff correctly informed interns about the risks and challenges connected to irregular stay in Italy after the internship. Together with strengthening the job placement support upon return to countries of origin, the project has no other tools to prevent irregular overstay as it cannot interfere with interns' agency.
- During the third edition, the project staff addressed in an appropriate and transparent way the expectations of interns and Italian companies, including those diverging from the objectives pursued by the project and the kind of support provided in line with these objectives.
- Employment opportunities for returned interns in countries of origin increased when the private sector in these countries was involved since the project's inception phase; in addition, they are more likely to materialize when Italian hosting companies operate or have business collaborations in countries of origin.

Recommendations

The evaluation concludes with the following recommendations:

- **Build synergies with other interventions on skill development and circulation.** Regular exchanges of results, challenges and lessons learned with interventions aiming to sustain skills mobility schemes may advance efforts to create an environment conducive to skills mobility schemes.
- **Foster the engagement of public actors in departure countries.** Establish better contacts with embassies to expedite the visa issuance process. Engage with relevant embassies and consulates in due advance and follow up with them if needed to possibly speed up and streamline the visa-issuance process. Involve public actors (e.g. public employment agencies and foreign investment agencies) to possibly contribute to create a conducive environment for interns' return.
- **Strengthen private sector engagement in all countries and across the Mediterranean.** Involve Italian companies that operate or have business collaborations in countries of origin. Involving companies operating in these countries or working with local companies may facilitate the employment of interns upon their return and their circular labour mobility in the future.
 - **In Italy:** liaise with business associations (e.g. Confindustria, Assafrica & Mediterraneo) that could provide information on their members with connections in departure countries and support Y-med in disseminating its internship opportunities. Increase the participation of Italian companies in information sessions on cultural diversity and cross-cultural management issues. The project team could ask each company to designate one or two persons who will be responsible for attending the event, increase the number of sessions held online, record and share online meetings and training materials.
 - **In countries of origin:** more efforts should be made to increase the contribution of local companies to the project, particularly in the job placement phase. A wider range of private stakeholders should also be involved to create a conducive environment particularly during the placement phase (e.g. local employment agencies).
 - **Across geographies:** provide avenues for exchange and networking opportunities to Y-med companies based on both sides of the Mediterranean could facilitate the creation of synergies within the private sector.
- **Increase cooperation between relevant private and public sector partners and promote networking opportunities between them.** IOM missions should broaden the range of public and private partners that can make key contributions to achieving results and convene events to facilitate mutual knowledge, potential synergies and direct contacts. Effective cooperation between private and public stakeholders is also a pre-condition for Y-med potential scale-up.
- **Widen the number of universities participating in the project.** Involving a wider range of universities would allow to widen the diversity of candidates in terms of socio-economic background and geographical location and scale up the number of interns.
- **Strengthen the placement phase:** post-internship job placement activities and assistance should be strengthened. IOM should design articulated and exhaustive placement plans, including the possibility to access tailored learning opportunities. Such plans should be developed in close collaboration with private sector actors in departure countries to ensure interns are provided with adequate and relevant professional opportunities upon their return.
- **Develop a communication and visibility strategy and communication plans for all target countries.** The project would benefit from a comprehensive communication and visibility strategy, to be operationalised in context-specific communication plans, to better reach targets and key project stakeholders in departure countries.

- **Improve the replicability and scalability of the project.** The approach informing the project phases should be further refined and clearly presented in the operating procedures to facilitate the project's replicability. Furthermore, internship vacancies should be richer in information, circulated among more stakeholders (e.g. more universities, diaspora business etc.) and publicised for longer periods in order to scale the project up.

List of acronyms

ANAPEC	Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences
AP	Agency for Peacebuilding
FEI	Federation of Egyptian Industries
GSP	Global Skills Partnership
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IVC	Italian Voluntary Contribution
M&D	Migration and Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OFPPT	Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail
PDO	Pre-Departure Orientation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMP	Skills Mobility Partnership
TP	Talent Partnership
TCN	Third Country Nationals

Context and purpose of the evaluation

Project background

The Y-MED project is part of the broader International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s action to strengthen the linkages between Migration and Development (M&D) in particular by empowering migrant and diaspora actors as development agents in both origin and destination countries.

The project is funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation through the Italian Voluntary Contribution (IVC). The total budget assigned to the project since its first edition to date amounts to about 1.520.340 euros.

Within this framework, the project was conceived as an intervention aiming at supporting the development and transfer of young people's professional skills across Mediterranean countries and at facilitating their job-placement to ultimately promote their agency in sustainable development processes.

At first, the project implemented a pilot edition supporting the internship of young Moroccans at Italian enterprises based in Morocco. Selected interns were young vocational training graduates from areas characterized by high emigration rates towards Italy, notably from the region of Beni Mellal-Khénifra. This pilot action set out to increase the long-term employability of Moroccan youth, thereby providing the participants an alternative to migration while offering them the opportunity to get familiar with the Italian business culture. In total, internships were activated for 11 people and involved 3 Italian companies. Interns received a monthly salary, a rent allowance and technical equipment. The intervention was jointly implemented by IOM Morocco and IOM Italy between November 2017 and July 2019 in partnership with several institutional stakeholders. In particular, the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competences (Agence Nationale de Promotion de l'Emploi et des Compétences - ANAPEC) led the interns' selection process and IOM identified the enterprises where internships were activated, following mapping and need assessment of Italian companies operating in the Moroccan territory.

With the two following editions, the Y-MED project widened its scope by targeting young people not only from Morocco but also from Egypt, Libya and Tunisia and, most importantly, by providing internships to be carried out at companies in Italy. Therefore, in addition to skills development and job placement, the aims of the project have broadened as to also include facilitating youth skills circulation as well as safe and regular migration. In so doing, the project sets out to address the issue of youth un/under employment in the targeted North African countries and to better harness the existing regular migration venues for "international" interns, i.e. non-European Union (EU) nationals residing outside the EU. Indeed, the Italian immigration law specifically regulates the entry and stay of Third Country Nationals (TCNs) for traineeship purposes for a period of up to 12 months.¹ In addition, in case of a job offer and under certain conditions, it provides for their residence rights to be extended for labour purposes.² Upon their completion of the internship in Italy, the project provides interns with job placement training and assistance in order to enhance their ability to find employment in countries of origin.

¹Article 27 of the Legislative Decree no. 286 of 1998 and article 40 paragraph 9 of the Decree of the President of the Republic no. 394 of 1999.

² Article 14 of the Decree of the President of the Republic no. 394 of 1999.

While support for job placement in Italy, most likely at companies which hosted interns, is not offered by Y-MED, it may be one of the outcomes of the project as it adopts a people-centred approach and does not interfere with interns' decision to stay in Italy, leave for the country of origin or further migrate. Given the reach of its action involving different Mediterranean countries, Y-MED is envisaged by IOM as an intervention promoting youth circular migration as well. Although the intervention does not support repeated migration movements³ between Italy and interns' countries of origin, it does provide young graduates with skill-upgrading opportunities and professional experience that facilitate their integration in the job markets of both origin and destination countries.

To ensure the effective implementation of the project, IOM Italy and IOM missions in the involved countries worked in close collaboration with public and private partners active in the fields of employment, professional training and education. These stakeholders played an important role in the selection of interns as well as the identification of companies in Italy and countries of origin interested in hosting interns or hiring them upon their return. Indeed, the engagement of both private and public actors was specifically sought by the project in order to facilitate synergies on priority sectors among participating companies. This was also aimed to pave the way for future collaborations to further promote youth skills circulation, as well as safe and regular migration.

Among actors involved in project implementation in Italy, a key role was played by promoting agencies (*enti promotori*). These are private or public entities to which the Italian regulatory framework on international internships assigns the role of intermediaries between interns and hosting companies. In particular, the promoting agency signs the internship agreement and drafts each intern's individual formative project (*progetto formativo individuale*) with the hosting company and monitors the internship program. Several Italian public institutions are involved in the process: the Ministry of Interior issues the decree setting out entry quotas for international interns, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (through its diplomatic representations worldwide) is responsible for processing and issuing visas and Italian local authorities at the regional or provincial level are in charge of reviewing and approving the internship formative project.

The second edition of the project took place between 2019 and 2021 and involved 20 companies based in the Veneto region and 35 young people from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia holding a diploma granted by a vocational or a higher education institution. The third and latest edition, implemented in the years 2021-2022, allowed 30⁴ young university graduates from Egypt, Libya and Tunisia to carry out an internship at one of the 20 enterprises situated in the Veneto and Lazio regions that participated in the project.

To sum up, the last two project editions foresaw the following phases:

- The selection of Italian companies, promoting agencies (i.e., those necessary to activate international internships in Italy) and interns;
- Pre-Departure Orientation courses (PDOs) and Italian language courses for selected interns;
- Internship programmes at Italian companies, which ran up to 6 months;
- Continuous monitoring of skills development during the internship period; and
- Facilitation of interns' job placement in countries of origin upon their completion of the internship.

³ Such is the definition of circular migration adopted by IOM: "a form of migration in which people repeatedly move back and forth between two or more countries". See IOM, *Glossary on Migration. International Migration Law*, No. 34 (Geneva, 2019).

⁴ Two additional candidates participated in Pre-Departure Orientation courses (PDOs), but dropped out before starting the internship.

To date, the Y-MED project has involved a total of 78 interns from four countries (Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt) and involved 44 Italian companies based in Morocco and in two Italian regions (Veneto and Lazio).

Evaluation background, scope and purpose

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) has been recruited by the IOM to conduct the external final evaluation of the Y-MED project. The evaluation assignment covers the entire project implementation period from November 2017 to December 2022 and all the countries where activities took place, namely Italy, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an external and independent review of the project, which can help IOM Italy identify and understand achievements and challenges, good practices and lessons learned. Furthermore, the evaluation will formulate recommendations to inform the design of the project's fourth edition, also taking into account those elements that emerged during the internal learning exercise recently launched by IOM Italy. More specifically, the objectives are summarised as follows:

- To assess the relevance of the programme considering its design and structure;
- To identify the main factors enabling or limiting the contribution of the project to promoting circular migration schemes in the Mediterranean region where youth, the public and the private sectors act as key agents of sustainable development;
- To provide an in-depth analysis of Y-MED's implementation modalities as well as its coordination mechanisms across countries and stakeholders; and
- To provide learning elements and recommendations for the next edition of the project.

The focus of the assignment is therefore on learning that is on understanding why and how positive changes have occurred as well as identifying limiting factors that inhibit the project's growth, scalability and replicability. To this end, the evaluation is mainly intended for the IOM staff engaged in the design and implementation of future editions of the Y-MED project but could also serve as an accountability and communication tool for a wide range of project stakeholders and partners.

Approach and methodology

The methodology proposed for the assessment is based on principles of action research: on the basis of IOM's priorities and objectives for the Y-MED project, evaluation questions were jointly finalized. These questions then guided data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the proposed methodology is theory-based, participatory and based on mixed-methods. These elements are detailed below:

- Participatory refers to how the consultants worked with IOM staff and stakeholders in order to ensure that the evaluation addressed their concerns and priorities;
- Theory-based means that questions related to impact and effectiveness were framed in relation to the intervention logic or theory of change, and whether outcomes observed in reality proved (or disproved) the causal pathways assumed in the project; and
- Using mixed methods means that the consultants relied on both qualitative and quantitative data.

As indicated in the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the assignment, the evaluation assessed the performance of the project through the following OECD-DAC **evaluation criteria**: relevance, efficiency, coherence, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. In addition, the evaluation also sought to answer two final questions related to cross-cutting issues relevant

to other IOM strategic interests. For each criterion, the evaluation responded to the following questions:

Evaluation criterion	Evaluation Question
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the project continue to make sense in the current context, and to what extent are project objectives and outcome valid and pertinent? Does the project still respond to the needs of the project beneficiaries and stakeholders? Is the project appropriate to the local contexts? Is the project aligned with and supportive of IOM national, regional, and/or global strategies, particularly on circular migration and mobility?
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were the project activities coordinated with other actors? Were there other actors involved in the same type of activities, and to what extent are they complementary to IOM's activities?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the project achieved its planned results? Have project results been inclusive? What are the major factors influencing the achievement of the expected results?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the project being implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternative means of implementation? Has the project been implemented in a timely way?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What significant change(s) can be observed, whether positive or negative, intended or unintended, in regard to the project's overall objective (i.e., the creation of a conducive environment in the Mediterranean region where youth, the public and the private sector act as key agents to drive sustainable development)?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the benefits generated by the project continue or are they likely to continue after its conclusion?
Cross-cutting issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent gender needs and other gender-related issues have been adequately considered in the project design and implementation? Have the communication and visibility actions been implemented in an appropriate manner?

The evaluation questions represented the starting point for the evaluation. These are presented in the attached Evaluation Matrix (Annex 2), together with the sub-questions, the indicators, the expected sources of data and the data collection tools.

The evaluation took into account both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources included staff members, project partners, interns and representatives of Italian companies. Informants were identified together with IOM staff, based on their knowledge and experience of the project, to ensure the inclusion of a variety of actors in terms of sex, country of origin, professional profile and expertise. Secondary sources included reports, documents, minutes and other material produced by project staff and partners, as well as relevant external sources, including reports and grey literature, from relevant institutions (other NGOs, think tanks, government agencies, etc.).

The following **data collection tools** were then developed and used:

- Document review – The consultants collected and reviewed relevant documents related to the project, as well as relevant external publications, with the aim of producing an initial set of findings.

- Key informant interviews – The consultants interviewed 40 key informants, including staff members from IOM Italy and IOM missions in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, project beneficiaries, supervisors or representatives from Italian companies and other relevant stakeholders. Interviews were semi-structured and based on annexed questionnaires developed in line with the evaluation questions (see Annex 5). The interviews engaged the following groups:

Informant group	Description	No.
Project staff	Key staff members from IOM Italy, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia	8
Interns	Young people who carried out internships in Italian companies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Egyptian interns, 1 woman and 2 men • 5 Libyan interns, 2 women and 3 men • 3 Moroccan interns, 1 woman and 2 men • 5 Tunisian interns, 3 women and 2 men • Having concluded internships at different companies in different sectors • Including interns who were hired after their internships • Including 1 intern who dropped out of the project 	16
Italian hosting companies	Supervisors and/or representatives from Italian companies where internships were carried out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 based in Morocco • 3 based in Veneto and 3 in Lazio • Working in the sectors of catering and hospitality, ICT, management services and architecture 	8
Stakeholders	Representatives from promoting agencies, partner institutions active in the fields of employment, professional training or education and acting as intermediary with local private sectors; individuals familiar with the project from relevant institutions (e.g., municipalities, government institutions, diplomatic missions, etc.)	8

- Online questionnaire – AP also developed and disseminated, through an online platform, two online surveys targeting interns and hosting companies to gather their appreciation of the project and any changes that resulted from taking part in it. The aim of the questionnaires was to reach as many informants as possible: since the number of interns and companies involved in the project is not large – as indicated above, 78 interns and 44 Italian companies – the online surveys were sent to all individuals in these groups. Questions were both open answer and multiple choice, to provide both qualitative and quantitative data. In total, 29 interns and 13 companies from the second and third editions filled out the questionnaire accounting for a survey response rate of 37% and 29%, respectively. Given the limited number of respondents, findings resulting from the survey are not statistically representative. That said, it is worth underlying that actual respondents among interns show a good level of diversity in terms of sex, nationality and professional profile: among surveyed interns, 48% are women and 52% men; 42% are Tunisians, 31% Egyptians, 17% Libyans and 10% Moroccans; profiles include engineers, cooks, architects and business analysts.
- Focus group discussion – Finally, it was possible to conduct only one virtual focus group discussion involving 3 Egyptian interns who have participated in different editions of the project. The event was semi-structured and based on the attached questionnaire developed in line with the evaluation questions (see Annex 5). Other

three focus group discussions were initially planned for Libyan, Moroccan and Tunisian interns, but these could not take place due to the unavailability of participants.

Interviewees and participants in the FGD were chosen through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, i.e. they included people from different countries and professional backgrounds or level of expertise and those who responded to requests for interviews. The purposeful sampling approach was adopted in order to identify, in collaboration with IOM Italy and IOM missions in partner countries, stakeholders with different characteristics (sex, geographical area, sector, professional profile, etc.) and with the most meaningful and useful data to respond to evaluation questions.

In terms of data analysis, qualitative and quantitative data collected through desk review, surveys and through interviews/focus group were analysed relationally in order to assess whether and how they contradict or reinforce one another. Where possible, collected data was triangulated by cross-checking different sources in order to obtain a diversity of perspectives and minimize potential bias.

With respect to the geographical areas covered by the evaluation, data were collected and analysed from all the countries targeted by the project. Due to time and budget constraints, however, data were collected through fieldwork only in Morocco and Tunisia, while stakeholders in Italy, Egypt and Libya were reached remotely.

Data collection and analysis took place between January and March 2023. AP was able to implement planned methodology and evaluation activities, though with some deviations. The main challenge was the difficulty faced to reach some informants. This was particularly the case with companies and stakeholders in countries of origin, who are therefore underrepresented compared to their Italian counterparts.

To a lesser extent, such difficulty was also experienced with regards to the interns, which hindered the organisation of focus group discussions involving Libyan, Moroccan and Tunisian interns. As a mitigation measure, additional interviews with interns from these countries were held, with the exception of Moroccan interns, of whom only three provided their availability for an interview.

Lastly, the evaluation managed to collect more information and data concerning the second and third editions of the project. Only interns and Italian companies that took part in these editions responded to online surveys, and it was possible to interview only one Moroccan intern from the first edition.

Overall, these challenges did not impede AP from providing full and rich answers to all the evaluation questions. Yet, they created some limitations in terms of the insights the evaluation was able to provide on some aspects of the project, specifically on its impact on countries of origin. Suggestions on how these can be overcome in the future are included in the recommendations section.

Evaluation findings

Relevance

Under this criterion, the evaluation set out to assess to what extent project objectives and design respond to priorities and policies of involved countries as well as to the needs of beneficiaries; whether they are appropriate to the local contexts of targeted countries and the capacities of partner organisations and institutions; and their degree of alignment with IOM relevant strategies.

Overall, the data collected show that the Y-MED project is relevant, not only for its direct beneficiaries, interns and Italian companies, but also for the many public and private actors involved in employment and professional training policies. As the project underwent significant changes in its scope and design over the course of different editions, it continued to be pertinent to target beneficiaries and countries. The project's relevance was not affected by the pandemic which represented the main change in external conditions during implementation. On the contrary, the pandemic has aggravated the economic difficulties affecting the involved countries, which has made the project's support to youth's employability even more pertinent.

The Y-MED project was developed in the context of increased interest, notably since 2000, in **skills mobility schemes among public and private institutions** working on education, training and employment. While governmental agreements for managing low-skilled labour migration were frequent in the 1960s (guest worker programmes), it is especially in the last decade that skills mobility schemes have gained momentum – with different formats and stakeholder involvement and under various names such as “Skills Mobility Partnerships” (SMPs) and “Global Skills Partnerships” (GSP). By leveraging existing regular migration channels, these partnerships foster the sharing of costs and benefits associated to skills development and mobility between countries of origin and destination and target beneficiaries at all skill, work experience and education levels.

Recent policy developments have contributed to keeping such schemes on the spotlight. The **Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration** adopted in December 2018 by the United Nations General Assembly explicitly calls for enhancing global skills partnerships among countries in Objective 18 as an innovative tool to foster skills development, circulation and mobility for the mutual benefit of countries of origin and destination. In September 2020, the European Commission released the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, which introduced the **Talent Partnerships** (TPs) as a key new instrument at the centre of EU's cooperation with third countries on legal migration. The TPs are envisioned to better match skills and labour market needs between the EU and partner countries, thereby addressing, at the same time, challenges posed by an ageing population and workforce shortages in Europe and problems connected to unemployment and the lack of training opportunities in third countries.

Against this backdrop, several multi-country interventions and bilateral agreements (often, for seasonal workers) have been implemented to promote skills and labour mobility. Italy, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia are among the countries participating in some of these initiatives with different stakeholders (employer organisations, local authorities, employment agencies), target groups (students, fresh graduates, workers) and sector focuses (healthcare, Information and communication (ICT) technology).⁵ The Y-MED posits itself within this context to facilitate the circulation of skills, on the job training and job-placement for Mediterranean youth. At the same time, Y-MED stands out for involving countries – Italy on the one side and Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia on the other side – that are not connected under any other similar intervention. Furthermore, it presents a distinctive focus on skills and labour needs in beneficiaries' countries of origin and has the intent of facilitating the transition from higher/vocational education to work for young people. Although several projects support labour mobility schemes in economic sectors that suffer from labour shortages in countries of destination or in both origin and destination countries (most often, ICT, healthcare and catering), Y-MED identifies the economic sectors where internships are carried out on the basis of needs (lack of qualified profiles) and opportunities (growth in recruitment) of countries

⁵ To name but a few: the “Pilot Project Addressing Labour shortages through Innovative labour migration Models” (PALIM) supporting skill development and mobility of ICT Moroccan workers in the Flanders region to address labour shortages in both Morocco and Belgium; the project “Enhancing Tunisian youth employability through vocational apprenticeships and professional internships in Belgian companies” providing Tunisian young graduates with the opportunity to conduct an internship at companies in Belgium and job seeking assistance upon return to Tunisia; the THAMM GIZ project supporting vocational training and apprenticeships in Germany for nationals of Egypt and Morocco.

of origin only. This element is clearly meant to maximise the development impact that the project intends to produce for Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia while also taking into account benefits for Italian companies. Besides, Y-MED features among the few projects sustaining mobility schemes for internship rather than work purposes, thereby helping young graduates to gain professional experience that is often required for entry level jobs.

Skills development and mobility between migrants' countries of origin and destination are also the object of increasing attention from **policy makers in North African countries**. Since the 1980s the contribution of migrant workers to the economic development of their home countries has been fostered by dedicated institutions⁶ and policies⁷ in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and, to a lesser extent, also Libya. However, Tunisia and Morocco have recently decided to adopt a more specific approach. Indeed, management of the international labour market and the **provision of international employment services** are two aspects that are now specifically addressed in the Tunisian National Strategy for International Employment and the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers (Stratégie nationale de l'emploi à l'international et de la protection des droits des travailleurs migrants - SNEI) adopted in January 2021.⁸ The strategy is structured around five axes, among which are the strengthening of a training system developing human capital for the needs of the national and international labour markets and the development of an intermediation system for international job placement.⁹ Morocco is following the example and is currently developing its own National Strategy of International Professional Mobility (Stratégie nationale de la mobilité professionnelle internationale - SNMPI).¹⁰

As regards the needs of beneficiaries, data collected through surveys and interviews point to the **relevance of the project for both interns and companies**. For both groups, Y-MED provided a chance to learn and open up new avenues for professional collaborations and increased diversity in the work environment.

⁶ These institutions include: in Egypt, the Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs, initially created in 1981 and re-established in 2015 in charge of governing Egyptian emigration and supporting Egyptians abroad; in Libya, the Department of Expatriate Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, set up in 2012, leading on the engagement of Libyans residing abroad; in Morocco, the Ministère chargé des Marocains résidents à l'étranger et des Affaires de la migration (MCMREAM) created in 1990, the Fondation Hassan II pour les marocains résidant à l'étranger set up in 1990 and the Conseil de la communauté marocaine à l'étranger established in 2007; in Tunisia, the Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger (OTE), created in 1988 under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs and tasked with developing economic, social, and cultural relations with Tunisians abroad.

⁷ These policies include: in Morocco, Stratégie nationale en faveur des Marocains du monde (SNFMDM) adopted in 2014; in Tunisia, the Tunisian National Migration Strategy (Stratégie nationale migratoire) which aims also at strengthening the contribution of migration to the Tunisian socio-economic development (drafted in 2012, revised in 2015 and 2017, is still pending formal approval but is currently being operationalised, also with the EU support, through the Governance and Strategy Program (ProGreS) Migration Tunisia); in Egypt, the National Strategy on Expatriates' Engagement launched in 2021 to facilitate the Egyptian expatriates' investment in Egypt and the Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad Law of 1983; Libya that has traditionally considered itself as a destination and transit country for migrants rather than a country of origin has, however, been dedicating more attention to Libyans living abroad since the fall of the Gheddafi regime in 2011, and is currently working to operationalise the mandate of the above-mentioned Department of Expatriate Affairs.

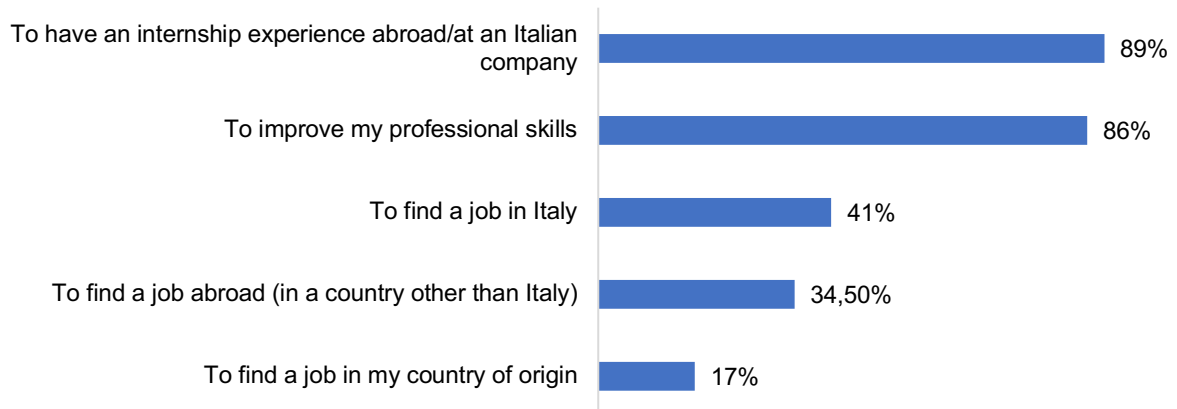
⁸ The Strategy was finalised within the framework of the project "Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Labour Mobility in North Africa" (THAMM), jointly implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and IOM, and funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

⁹ See European Training Foundation, Skills and Migration Country Fiche - Tunisia (Turin 2021), p. 9.

¹⁰ <https://aujourd'hui.ma/emploi/mobilite-professionnelle-internationale-le-processus-de-developpement-dune-strategie-nationale-lance>.

As shown in the following graph, which presents data from the online questionnaire, improving professional skills and gaining internship experience abroad were listed by interns as the main reasons for deciding to apply for the project. Finding a job – in Italy, abroad or in the country of origin – was also mentioned, though to a lesser extent.

Interns' reasons for applying for an internship within the framework of the Y-MED project



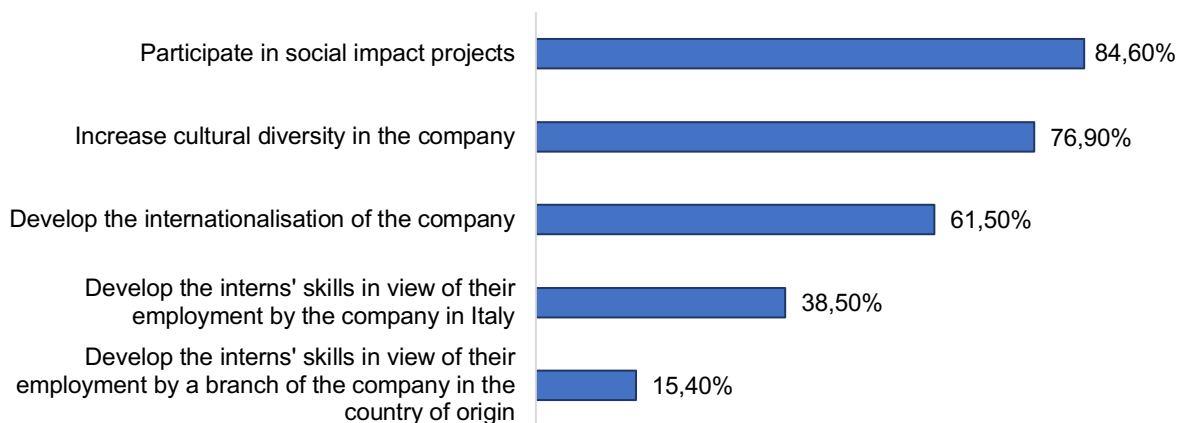
This is confirmed by interviews where interns highlighted their wish to try a different working and cultural environment, boost their career, take up the challenge to live and work in a foreign country and learn a new language. Moreover, the project offered an on-the job training opportunity abroad that was unprecedented: while the majority of surveyed interns (65,5%) had already completed an internship or worked before taking part in the project, for only few of them (17%) these experiences took place abroad. For some, this opportunity was a strictly formative one, regarded as instrumental to building a career path that they intend to pursue in their home country, where opportunities are deemed more promising. For others, however, the interest in finding a job abroad (in Italy or elsewhere) emerged as a motivation that should not be overlooked, considering that some interns, especially from Egypt and Libya, quit their job or declined a job offer in their home country in order to carry out their internship in Italy. This is also the case of some Moroccan interns participating in the first edition of the project, who considered that an internship at an Italian enterprise in Morocco could increase their future chances to work in Italy. Therefore, for a significant number of young participants the internship was also regarded as a first step towards employment in Italy or in another foreign country. According to the interviews, the main reasons accounting for this preference are disparities in salaries and, more broadly, differences in working and living conditions between countries of origin and destination. Although the project team should be aware of these expectations, they do not appear to affect the relevance of the intervention: as displayed in the above graph, although the desire to find a job out of their home country is expressed by several interns, skills development and mobility needs are prevalent among young beneficiaries, who had few opportunities of this kind.

With respect to the **aspiration of finding a job in Italy after the internship** period, the project applied different approaches throughout its implementation: for the first edition, this possibility was simply ruled out because no mobility scheme was foreseen and activities were entirely implemented in Morocco; during the second edition, although the topic was addressed in pre-departure sessions in response to interns' requests for information, the return and job placement support in countries of origin were presented to both interns and Italian companies as constitutive components of the project; in the third edition, the possibility for the Italian hosting companies to retain interns after successful completion of the internship was discussed from the outset and the availability of interns in this regard was even explored by

some Italian companies during selection interviews. However, IOM clarified to both interns and Italian companies that employment opportunities after the end of the internship would fall outside the scope of the Y-MED project.

The decision of the Italian companies to take part in the project was mainly guided by the need to enhance corporate social responsibility or address issues connected to their international openness and exposure to foreign professional approaches. According to the data collected through the survey, the main drivers were participating in social impact projects, increasing cultural diversity within the company and developing its internationalisation. A lower number of enterprises also pointed to the need to address labour shortages in Italy (by hiring interns) or in countries of origin where they have local branches.

Italian companies' reasons for participating in the Y-MED project



These data are consistent with the fact that **more than two thirds of responding companies (69%) had never hosted international interns before joining the project**, even if about half of them (54%) expressed their interest in establishing working collaborations in a Mediterranean country (mainly Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia). Indeed, the possibility to connect with professionals and companies in the interns' countries of origin is a further element of interest for a number of Italian enterprises. In this respect, envisaged collaborations may take different forms: according to data from the interviews, interested stakeholders do not necessarily seek establishing their companies in foreign markets permanently, but they rather look for opportunities to collaborate on specific projects with foreign corporate entities or freelancers, or to subcontract certain tasks and activities to them.

Furthermore, companies stressed out their interest in working with young professionals with different cultural, educational and working backgrounds. Even if some companies have business projects in foreign countries or work with foreign professionals residing abroad, few of them have foreign employees. Overall, interviews clearly confirmed that diversity and inclusion at the workplace are priorities that are increasingly embedded into the fabric of Italian enterprises. Even when hiring new personnel was an aim explicitly pursued through the participation in the project, the interest in being exposed to and enhancing cultural diversity was also underlined. In some cases, such interest is part of broader and well-defined corporate policies on social responsibility, for example, as a result of the adoption of the "benefit company" status, a business model, which requires enterprises to look for positive social impact rather than mere profit.

Beyond aspects related to corporate social responsibility and cultural diversity, similarly to what is underlined regarding the factors motivating interns to participate in the programme, the **retention of successful interns** was an important reason for participating Italian companies. Therefore, over the course of the different editions, the project design was correctly modified in order to present it as a possibility neither supported nor hindered by the

project. On the contrary, the employment of Moroccan interns was the main objective sought by Italian companies during the first edition of the project.

With respect to the local contexts of targeted countries, the project shows strong relevance. Youth unemployment is a shared concern in the North African region and is particularly high for young university graduates. Insufficient job creation, lack of available jobs for entry level candidates, low remunerations and mismatch between skills acquired through education and labour market needs are the main underlying causes of the phenomenon, as indicated by desk review and the interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Against this backdrop, the project responded to this challenge by providing young graduates with the opportunity to strengthen their soft and hard skills as well as a working experience in well-established companies abroad, and by facilitating access to companies in countries of origin. This latter element is particularly relevant: the engagement of companies interested in hiring interns upon their return and in getting in contact with Italian counterparts could be conducive to generating positive effects on local labour markets and new business opportunities. In this regard, it is also worth mentioning that an on-the-job experience appears to be highly valued in countries of origin. As mentioned above, even if the evaluation was not able to reach out to companies in the countries of origin, most of interviewed interns and stakeholders agreed that an internship abroad is highly valued because it shows the ability of job candidates to work in different languages and to adapt to unfamiliar contexts, approaches and technologies. In addition, completing an internship in Italy is positively regarded by employers in countries of origin that work with Italian or European companies.

On the contrary, the project design of the first edition paid less attention to the Moroccan local context by offering interns an allowance higher than the average salary earned by the employees of the participating companies. This not only produced disparities among co-workers but also partly affected the project objective of supporting the long-term employability of young people. Indeed, when some interns were hired at the end of their internships, their entry-level salary was significantly lower than the allowance they had received during the internship, with negative consequences on their ability to afford accommodation. This represented a significant difficulty particularly for people originating from a different region (the region of Beni Mellal or surrounding areas) than the ones where the companies were based (Rabat and Essaouira) and who could no longer count on the accommodation provided by the project.

With respect to the Italian context, the project set an example of how to expand and improve the use of the **legal migration channel foreseen by the Italian immigration law for TCNs residing abroad and wishing to complete an internship in Italy**. The last available data show that this channel is largely underused: in the years 2017-2019, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation issued 4913 visas to allow the entry of TCNs for reasons of study, internship or vocational education, whereas there were a total of 15000 quotas allocated for these purposes,¹¹ of which, 7500 were for study and 7500 for internship. This is consistent with the relatively limited number of participating Italian companies that reported having ever hosted international interns before their involvement in Y-MED. Most importantly, to identify possible interns residing in a non-EU country companies usually rely on personal networks, most often composed of the relatives of people living in Italy or employees in these companies' foreign branches. By involving the different actors with a role in this process in all the involved countries (companies, interns, promoting agencies, universities and vocational training centres), the project adopted a different approach and laid

¹¹ These data are reported in the decree of the Italian Ministry of Employment and Social Policies dated July 2020 which set the quotas for the entry of foreign citizens for the participation in vocational training and internships, for the years 2020-2022. The decree is available in Italian at <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/normative/Documents/2020/DI-del-09072020-Contingente-triennale-tirocini-formazione.pdf>.

the grounds for future partnerships based on formal, institutionalised relationships instead of personal connections.

In order to implement the project, IOM Italy and IOM missions in North African countries partnered with several stakeholders active in the fields of employment, professional training and higher education. These stakeholders were appropriately identified as they hold specific expertise to perform the assigned responsibilities and activities in their respective countries and were effective in providing the project with qualified support.

Finally, the Y-MED project is relevant to and aligned with two IOM policy frameworks: the **IOM Institutional Strategy on Migration and Sustainable Development**, and the **Private Sector Partnership Strategy** (a new Private Sector Engagement Strategy was recently developed for the period 2023-2027). The project is part of the IOM's action related to the migration and development nexus as it supports the upskilling and circular migration of young people and fosters their integration in the labour markets of their countries of origin. These are considered by the project as enabling conditions for reduced unemployment and economic growth, which may ultimately lead to enhancing development outcomes. In so doing, the project contributes to empowering migrants as development actors for countries of origin and destination, which both benefit from qualified workers and knowledge exchange. In line with this strategy, the project also aims to advance the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by better linking migration and development. In particular, the project contributes to fast track progress for reaching SDGs 4 Quality Education, 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 10 Reduced Inequalities, 17 Partnerships for the Goals. Furthermore, Y-MED contributes to IOM initiatives that engage the private sector in migration-related interventions not only as a funder but as a key stakeholder. Within Y-MED, the private sector is an active player contributing to and benefitting from the circulation of skilled youngsters through on-the-job training, increased diversity in the workplace and new business partnerships.

Coherence

Under coherence, the evaluation assessed the complementarity and coordination of the project with other interventions carried out in the same countries and on connected themes.

Y-MED fits into a wide range of skills mobility and circular migration actions carried out by different implementing partners. As mentioned above, a greater emphasis placed on these topics in recent years has resulted in a proliferation of projects and programmes aiming to facilitate skill development and mobility across countries.

As reported in project documentation, the design of the second and third editions of the project built on the lessons learned from the first pilot edition as well as on the experiences of two interventions that bear strong similarities with Y-MED: an IOM project supporting the internship of Tunisian young university students and graduates at companies based in Belgium over the period 2018-2019; and the project MENTOR that, in 2017-2018, offered young Moroccans and Tunisians the possibility to conduct an internship at Italian companies established in Milan and Turin.

Similarly, **Y-MED complements several interventions** currently implemented or recently concluded and aimed at sustaining skills development and mobility between European and North African countries. These initiatives differ on the basis of the length (temporary or long-term) and purpose (work or internship) of the mobility pattern supported and according to the employment sector targeted (mainly, ICT, healthcare and catering). Often, these projects rely on partnerships between private and public stakeholders in target countries to ensure the correct identification of skill and labour needs and effective access to employment opportunities, whether these are in countries of origin, abroad or in both destinations. In this context, therefore, the project appears also consistent with a multi-stakeholder approach that is increasingly emerging as a common standard for SMPs and similar partnerships.

Despite the considerable number of interventions, **no risk of duplication** was detected because Y-MED is the only project supporting a circular labour migration scheme between Italy on the one side and Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia on the other. The absence of such a risk is also informed by the distinctive characteristics of Y-MED that were previously mentioned, i.e. its focus on skills and labour needs in countries of origin and on facilitating the transition from education to work for young people. Also, it is worth underlining that no other intervention related to these topics has ever included Libya, which makes Y-MED a pioneering undertaking for this country, possibly paving the way for future initiatives.

Such external coherence of the project is also the result of the participatory approach adopted at the design stage when IOM Italy, in its capacity as project coordinator, engaged with IOM missions in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, which then consulted with relevant stakeholders (employment agencies, universities, employers, etc.) in these countries. This approach ensured that local contexts and interventions carried out therein by other actors were taken into account. Notwithstanding the high level of complementarity among these interventions, and their desired intent to advance the forming of partnerships, no exchange forum has so far been put in place to share data, results, challenges and lessons learned. Informal exchanges have, however, occurred with some projects, for instance Mentor, during learning events. Nevertheless, synergies among these efforts are still to be fully explored.

Finally, **Y-MED complements interventions against irregular migration** as it enhances the access to already existing regular migration pathways, thereby offering alternatives to irregular migration in countries of origin. By so doing, the project also promotes a different vision of migration in a country of destination like Italy where migrants are often depicted as lacking sufficient levels of education, skills and human capital.

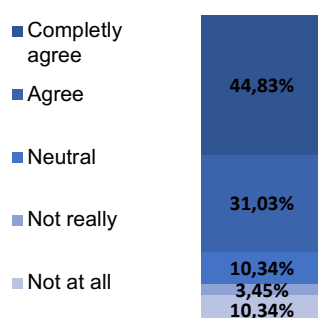
Effectiveness

Under this criterion, the evaluation sought to assess whether and to what extent the project's expected results were achieved and how challenges were addressed.

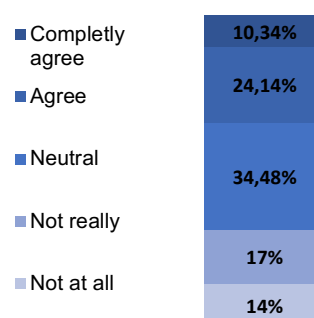
First of all, it is necessary to specify how the results that will be examined in this section differ from those analysed in the section dedicated to the project impact. This is particularly important since a logical framework that clearly indicates the different levels of project results – outputs, outcome and overall objective – has been developed only recently, for the next project edition (4th) starting in 2023. Indeed, as required by the donor, Y-MED's results and indicators were thus far included in the same logical framework developed for all IOM Italy initiatives funded by the same instrument, the Italian Voluntary Contribution (IVC). The project's results considered in this section are those under the control of the intervention and directly attributable to it, namely those resulting from the implementation of project activities: pre-departure soft skill trainings, Italian language course, internships, job placement support and cultural diversity information sessions. In the Impact section, the evaluation examined higher-level and broader changes to which the project has contributed, specifically results related to interns' employability and the awareness of private and public actors on the values of skills' circulation and cultural diversity at workplace.

Overall, the project **delivered its planned result of improving soft skills of interns**, while **achievements related to technical skills present some challenges**. It must be underlined that this conclusion applies only to interns of the second and third editions since the first edition did not foresee any soft skills development. Answers to the online questionnaire show that about 76% of interns considered that the Y-MED internship improved their soft skills, while roughly 34,5% of them expressed the same view in relation to the development of their technical skills (while it should also be noted that an equal percentage has a neutral view on this).

Interns who believe to have developed their soft skills through the Y-MED internship



Interns who believe to have gained new technical skills through the Y-MED internship



This finding is corroborated by data collected either by the project as part of its monitoring activities and in the framework of this evaluation. First, interns manifested a high level of **satisfaction with pre-departure orientation (PDO) sessions** that were specifically devised to enhance their soft skills on intercultural communication and conflict management, and thus to better prepare them for the on-the-job training phase as well as for daily life in Italy. While in each country of origin these sessions were partly adapted to the context – held online or in-person, by an external partner or IOM staff with specific expertise –, they were all based on a PDO trainer guide to ensure that relevant topics were addressed. Interns found this preparation very informative and extremely useful during their time in Italy. Second, interns further developed their abilities to communicate in foreign languages, adopt a professional and collaborative attitude and adapt to a different culture during their internship and stay in Italy. Many of them highlighted that this was their first time living by their own, outside of the family home, which led them to deal with a series of ordinary issues and helped enhance their autonomy and self-reliance.

Less relevant was the contribution to **soft skills development of post-return job placement training** delivered by project partners or service providers. Through these training courses, the project sought to provide soft skills useful for the interns' job search, such as Curricula Vitae (CVs) writing, mastering job interviews and business communication. According to project monitoring documentation related to the third edition, interns' average satisfaction with job placement support was rather low, especially among Egyptians and Libyans. Moreover, almost all interviewees from Egypt and Libya considered that the level of these activities was too basic for university graduates and, in the end, of limited help to find a job. However, it must be highlighted that, during the last project edition, the services offered to interns in Tunisia varied considerably from the ones provided to Egyptians and Libyans: only in Tunisia, in fact, interns could attend not only trainings on soft skills and job search techniques, but also tailored online technical courses on a variety of topics relevant to their professional development such as business analytics, data analytics and cybersecurity.

Among soft skills, **knowledge of the Italian language** was reported by both the interns and the companies as the least developed ability, especially for Egyptians and Libyans. This is primarily ascribable to the varying quality of Italian language courses delivered by a different partner in each country of origin and, to a lesser extent, to the online format adopted. In particular, issues were reported with regard to the course attended by Egyptians from the third project edition, who unanimously reported dissatisfaction with the teacher's preparation and training methods. On the contrary, the Italian level of Tunisian interns was particularly praised by hosting companies. The project already identified this problem during the second edition and addressed it by increasing the hours allocated to the language course. However, it must be noted that reaching the B1 level – as requested by Italian enterprises for the third edition – in a few months is a quite high benchmark for Arabic natives who are beginning learners of

Italian. After all, the good level attained by Tunisian nationals is to be explained also by their fluency in French, which undoubtedly facilitated the acquisition of Italian language skills.

The **development of interns' technical skills** was another result of the project, though with some limitations. From learning how to use new technologies and tools to being responsible for developing projects and delivering presentations, the internship allowed many participants to gain a hands-on experience in their field of study and expertise. For others, however, the internship proved limited in offering them an opportunity to develop new professional skills, which explains why results on satisfaction in this area were lower than those related to soft skills. In part, this was due to a mismatch between interns' competences and professional goals on the one hand, and the tasks they were assigned or their hosting companies' sectors of activity on the other. This is, for example, the case of architects who interned at architectural studios, but worked primarily with, and under the supervision of engineers on tasks that they judged to be different from those of their preferred field of work. Another shortcoming reported by some interviewees was the absence of a sort of professional development plan clearly setting out assignments and learning targets for interns. Still, the majority of surveyed interns (62%) maintained that skills and competences acquired during the Y-MED internship have been useful for the jobs they took up afterwards, which means that, though sometimes below expectations, the experience was anyway formative.

Lack of fluency in Italian also negatively affected the on-the-job experience: in some companies, even in multinational ones, work meetings were usually held in Italian and some staff members did not have fluency in spoken English, which is not so surprising considering that many companies have no foreign employees at all. Even though this did not prevent interns from performing the tasks that were assigned to them, it did hamper their integration into the working environment and, arguably, their chances of being hired at the end of the internship.

A similar effect was reported as a consequence of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, especially with respect to the interns of the second edition. The outbreak was the major external circumstance that the project faced during its implementation period. It affected particularly the internship phase when interns had to respect quarantine measures upon their arrival in Italy, work remotely for part of the week and comply with other restrictions due to partial lockdowns in force at that time in the Veneto region.

The adoption of **remote work**, made necessary by pandemic restrictions, limited the interactions between interns and supervisors and this had a negative impact on the whole learning experience of interns. The adverse effect of the pandemic was more pronounced for Moroccan nationals, who interned at companies working in the catering and hospitality sectors. Indeed, during the height of the health crisis and still in 2021 when Y-MED internships were carried out, restaurants and hotels experienced a significant decline in clients and workload, which also implied limited engagement of interns in working activities.

As regards the **activation of internships in Italy**, results delivered by the project were **lower than expected** as the goal of 45 internships set for each edition (the second and the third) was not reached. The main reason for this lies in the reduced number of applications received in each country of origin that, in turn, was mainly due to the limited circulation of internship vacancies in terms of timeframe and the scope of outreach (channels used to publicise vacancies). As an instance, for the third edition, only two universities in Tunisia (the Ecole Supérieure Privée d'Ingénierie et de Technologies (Esprit university) and the Tunis Business School) and in Libya (Tripoli and Benghazi universities) respectively accepted to advertise the vacancies on their platforms (websites and social media channels). The quality of information communicated to possible applicants also seems to have been scant in some cases, as a few interns reported having believed at first that the vacancy was a scam. These are elements that considerably hinder the scalability of the project and must be revised in future editions.

Results related to activities aimed at raising the **knowledge of Italian enterprises on cultural diversity and cross-cultural management issues** are overall good. Project monitoring

documents concerning the third edition show a good level of satisfaction with information sessions delivered online by an external consultant; most importantly, they were deemed as useful and practical for the professional life of participants. The survey carried out with companies in the framework of this evaluation reveals a less positive assessment of the usefulness of these sessions with half of respondents considering them as uninformative, meaning neither useful nor useless. However, one survey respondent claimed not having been informed on this opportunity while being extremely interested in the topic and only 11 out of 21 companies attended the sessions held during the last edition. Therefore, it seems that efforts should be stepped up to ensure that companies are aware of and participate in these events.

The **definition and quality of project activities** went through a process of refinement throughout the three editions. In particular, for the last two editions, the development of **operating procedures** outlining the different project phases was key to ensuring the effectiveness and consistency of activities across countries and the achievement of the above-mentioned results. Operating procedures lay down the main instructions for the organisation of activities and leave room for their operationalisation and adaptation to local contexts, taking also into account the different set of partners present in each target country. Nonetheless, some **shortcomings were identified in relation to the job placement phase** which was implemented in different ways in target countries. On the one hand, as already mentioned, this translated into a variety of training support provided to interns in their job search upon the completion of internships: in the last edition, Tunisian interns could benefit from bespoke training courses aimed to address specific skill needs that they communicated to IOM Tunisia; instead, interns from Egypt and Libya received only a training on soft skills relevant for their job search. On the other hand, the involvement of companies in countries of origin was realised through a variety of means that were autonomously identified by IOM missions. Thus, in Tunisia, job fairs and the Y-MED closing ceremony were chosen as appropriate places to reach out to companies while CVs and vacancies were disseminated by the IOM mission among the interns and the involved companies; in Egypt, IOM relied on its intermediary partners – notably, Sprints (a firm specialised in ICT learning solutions to address Tech labour market needs) and Nile University – to share the CVs of the interns among national enterprises; in Libya, instead, the IOM mission mapped and contacted several companies to inform about Y-MED and inquire about their interest in hiring candidates that participated in the project. Besides the outcomes of such activities (on this, see the Impact section), what emerges is the lack of a common approach adopted by the project to interns' job placement and private sector engagement in countries of origin.

The drafting of **operating procedures may facilitate the replicability of the project** in other countries as they provide for guidelines necessary to implement activities in any context interested in circular migration schemes. To do so, however, the overall strategy informing the different project phases should be clearly developed and presented. As underlined above, activities aimed at sustaining interns' job placement in countries of origin should be further fine-tuned to ensure the engagement of companies in these countries.

Differences related to these activities may have emerged following the **non-adoption of pre-employment agreements** by companies in countries of origin. Even if through these agreements the project sought to ensure the commitment of companies to hiring interns at the end of the project, they turned out to be inappropriate for companies that were not able to make such a commitment prior to internships, i.e. several months before the moment when the recruitment could actually occur. Moreover, this kind of agreement entails a certain degree of uncertainty for companies since it cannot prevent interns from deciding to accept a job offer in Italy or elsewhere.

The inconsistencies related to the job placement phase are reflected in the low level of satisfaction expressed by interns with the support provided by the project in this area. Nonetheless, beneficiaries' level of satisfaction with the other services delivered by the project is high. By and large, interns and Italian companies shared the conviction that without the

project's assistance they would have not been able to undertake this experience because of the complexities connected to complying with legal requirements and paperwork required by a wide range of actors (Italian consulates, promoting agencies, companies, etc.). The assessment is particularly positive with respect to the activities organised by IOM (training courses, information sessions, internship monitoring), but is also good regarding services provided by the promoting agencies (accommodation and meal vouchers).

Project results were also affected by other challenges. The main setback was represented by the **dropout of the 12 Moroccan interns** from the project during its second edition. At the end (or close to the end) of their internships, they all decided not to return to Morocco to participate in the job placement phase, as originally planned. They instead communicated to IOM their intention to remain in Italy without specifying whether they found a job or how they would renew their residence permits that were linked to the Y-MED internship. Consequently, IOM staff informed relevant institutions and law enforcement bodies about the issue. In fact, given the lack of any information provided by the interns, the project team assumed that most of them remained irregularly in the country, at least for a certain period of time. Therefore, besides the effects in terms of undelivered results, the dropout had an impact on the relations established with project partners, notably hosting companies and Italian public institutions, compromising the trust these actors had in the project.

Interviews with two Moroccan interns and relevant stakeholders point to several elements that might explain this dropout decision. First and foremost, finding a job in Italy or Europe seems to have been a prevalent desire among this group of interns since the beginning of their participation in the project. This attitude may have been reinforced by the long-established emigration tradition that characterises the region of Beni-Mellal from which many interns originated. Also, and connected to the previous point, the presence of relatives residing in Italy provided interns with support and accommodation.

With respect to the aspiration of taking up employment in Italy following the internship, the project held an uncertain position during its second edition: upon interns' request, the project staff provided some information regarding the possibility to extend their residence rights in Italy after the internship but, at the same time, presented return to countries of origin as an integral part of the project. This is confirmed by interviews with Italian hosting companies, which, as a consequence of the information received, did not take the recruitment of the interns into consideration.

However, it must be noted that although the intention to stay and work in Italy after the internship was expressed by several interns, only those from Morocco decided to remain, even without a job offer and an associated residence permit. Therefore, another element related to the professional profile of Moroccan interns, seems relevant for explaining this exceptional case: in Italy, irregular employment – the only available option for irregular migrants – is more common in the catering and hospitality sectors (where the Moroccan participants interned) than in ICT or engineering where Egyptian and Tunisian participants carried out their internships. Therefore, while the Moroccans who had participated in the project could continue to exercise their professions even without documents, the other two nationalities did not have the same possibility. That said, the two Moroccan interns interviewed for the evaluation reported to have regularised their stay within a few months after the end of the internship. They also underlined that restaurants, catering and hospitality enterprises in Morocco do not consider internship experiences abroad as an added value, which may have further contributed to the decision of former interns in this group to remain in Italy.

Another factor that in part affected project results was timing, specifically the **period of the year when internships took place**. During the third edition, this period overlapped with the summer break in August when business activities usually slow down and many employees are on vacation in Italy. As a result, interns' tasks were reduced or modified, which implied a discontinuity in the training and learning process. Timing was particularly challenging for Tunisian interns who, in some cases, had to reschedule their graduation. Indeed, in Tunisia in

order to graduate, university students have to defend an “end of studies project” (*projet de fin d'études*) in front of a jury. As the defence shall take place at the latest in September, and not all Tunisian universities allow holding it online, some interns had to postpone it and got their diploma later. This is not without consequences on the employability of interns since many Tunisian companies prefer recruiting candidates who have finished their studies and hold a university diploma.

Efficiency

Under efficiency, the evaluation reviewed projects' resources, its management and learning systems and mechanisms of coordination with partners to assess whether, and to what extent, these were appropriate to undertake activities and achieve results.

The project management system involved different IOM missions. While the project's first edition was jointly implemented by IOM Italy and IOM Morocco, the following editions were executed in each North-African country by the respective IOM mission under the overall coordination of IOM Italy.

The project's objectives and activities required the **involvement and contribution of several stakeholders with different sectoral expertise**. These included key local partners, such as universities (mainly public ones), companies and public institutions (embassies, public institutions in charge of employment and professional training), and service providers responsible for the delivery of training sessions.

Overall, the stakeholders involved in project implementation proved to hold the technical competences and the specific experience needed to provide project beneficiaries with appropriate support and services. Indeed, universities, companies and national agencies in charge of employment and professional training were well-positioned to circulate job descriptions and conduct pre-selection of candidates; service providers contracted to deliver different training sessions (on cultural diversity, soft skills, cybersecurity, etc.) are well-known firms or consultants with consolidated experience in the specific field. As mentioned above, some inadequacies were found regarding the quality of two training modules delivered in Egypt in the framework of the third edition, namely the Italian language course and the soft skills training for job placement. However, these point more to the need to further fine-tune some project activities than to a lack of expertise from the side of the concerned service providers which are well-established institutions (like the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo that provided the Italian course) or consolidated partners (as Sprints, the work of which related to interns' pre-selection for the second and third editions of Y-MED was positively assessed by IOM Egypt).

Still, in some countries, the choice of local partners did not allow having all the **expertise required to achieve the same standards in implementing the different activities**. In Morocco and Libya, during the second and the third editions, the local private sector was not involved in any project phase since stakeholders included only the national Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion (Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de la Promotion du Travail - OFPPT) and the universities of Tripoli and Benghazi (that, in addition, do not have career centres). Such partnerships ensured the dissemination of job description and the pre-selection of candidates for internships, but were – or would have been, in the case of Morocco – less effective in identifying job opportunities for interns after their return to home countries. Similarly, public institutions relevant for the diffusion of internship opportunities and the pre-selection of interns were involved only in some countries and for certain project editions as was the case with the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and the Moroccan ANAPEC and OFPPT during the first and second editions.

As regards **financial support**, the vast majority of interns deemed the internship allowance sufficient to cover their needs during the period spent in Italy. The same judgement applies to

accommodations that were identified and arranged by IOM Morocco for the first project edition and by promoting agencies for the other two editions. The only aspect to highlight in this regard is the request expressed particularly by female Egyptian and Libyan interns to avoid, for cultural reasons, having women and men sharing the same flat. This necessity was accommodated by the project not without difficulties since finding several accommodations for short periods of time was reported as being challenging by promoting agencies.

The **administrative support provided by IOM and promoting agencies** was perceived as very useful by the Italian companies that considered the process associated with hosting international interns quite burdensome. As already underlined, the majority of the Italian companies that participated in the project had no previous experience with this type of internship and few of them had hired foreign workers residing abroad before. Therefore, they were not familiar with the requirements and procedures of the Italian immigration law and needed the support of external stakeholders (promoting and private employment agencies) to navigate these processes.

Pre-departure processes concerning the selection of interns and matching them with hosting companies were time-consuming since they entailed CV screenings and different rounds of job interviews (for the pre- and final selection of candidates). However, they took place smoothly and saw the contribution of intermediaries in partner countries. The adoption of CV screening tools that uses automation to review applications would significantly reduce the time needed for these processes. Moreover, by streamlining the processing of an increased number of applications these tools may contribute to scaling up the project and identifying more beneficiaries. The project has already taken some steps in this direction as it is working on the development of an online platform to be launched in the next project edition that should also include the possibility to filter interns' applications. With respect to the **bureaucratic procedures to be followed in Italy** for the activation of internships, no issues or delays were identified in relation to the approval of internship formative projects by the regional authorities of Lazio and Veneto.

The **length of internships** was assessed as another key element for the achievement of project results. Interns and companies agreed that this should be of at least six months to allow for appropriate skill development. However, this was not always the case and many internships had to be reduced in length because of the delayed arrival of interns in Italy.

These **delays** affected project implementation particularly in the last two editions. These were mainly due to **visa processing and issuance**, for which Italian embassies were responsible, but that also involved service providers contracted to collect and perform a preliminary screening of applicants' documents. Although IOM missions in target countries contacted the relevant embassies to streamline the process, the completion of these processes proved to be quite lengthy. Furthermore, embassies did not always appear to be informed on the type of visa required to carry out an internship in Italy. This is the case of the Italian Embassy in Tripoli which issued an incorrect visa – namely, a visa not giving access to the internship residence permit – thereby forcing interns to return to Libya for one week to get the right entry permit.¹²

The **delayed departures of interns**, coupled with the need to close the project within the planned timeframe, engendered a reduction (by some weeks) in the length of internships and in the time available for the following job placement activities. As a result, training sessions for

¹² Italian diplomatic representations do not seem to be the only ones struggling with this matter: an EU-funded intervention, MigraSafe Africa, is currently implemented in eight African countries (Morocco, Senegal, Cape Verde, Tunisia, Egypt, Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia) to improve access to information on legal migration pathways among civil society organisations and institutional actors, including embassies and consulates of EU Member States

job search were delivered online and started when internships were still ongoing, thereby generating an overlap between activities.

The **monitoring and learning systems of the project** were gradually developed throughout project editions. During the first edition, internships were monitored by IOM Morocco through regular follow-ups with interns and supervisors and by IOM Italy through mission visits at companies' offices and operating sites. For the second and especially third editions, IOM Italy developed several tools to monitor the performance and results of activities as well as beneficiaries' satisfaction with the support and services provided by the project. In addition, templates for reporting activities were shared with IOM missions to ensure a consistent reporting framework across countries.

To further strengthen the monitoring system, IOM Italy has recently developed a **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plan** and has drafted a Y-MED logical framework for the coming edition. Indeed, the project reporting, including progress against indicators, has so far been conducted together with the other IOM Italy initiatives funded by the IVC. According to requirements set out by the donor, therefore, no reports and logical framework were drafted specifically for the Y-MED project, which contributed to the development of a piecemeal monitoring system. The adopted monitoring tools and M&E plan have then addressed these inadequacies by improving the capacity of the project management team to identify achievements, constraints and delays. Moreover, the reporting against logical framework indicators will allow for a more accurate monitoring of progress and results.

During the final phases of the project's third edition, the project team has also organised several learning events both internally, involving all the IOM missions, and with other relevant stakeholders. These learning exercises were very relevant to promote reflections on strategies and to identify approaches for future efforts, which is particularly needed in light of the many interventions implemented in the field of skills mobility schemes.

Finally, the **coordination mechanisms** among IOM missions and between them and the stakeholders involved in project implementation were mostly informal and did not always ensure the full commitment of key partners. A project steering committee was set up only for the first edition with the aim of securing the endorsement of participating Moroccan institutions and their guidance throughout implementation. During the second edition, IOM missions exchanged on a regular basis, and, in the last edition, weekly online meetings were held and minutes shared afterwards. However, for both editions, coordination with partners took place only when their involvement was needed to carry out specific activities. As a result, not all of them did fully commit to project implementation: in Egypt, for example, two key partners with expertise valuable to the project, Ghabour Automotive (a leading automotive company in the Middle East) and the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI), did not engage at all in the job placement phase, where their experience was more needed. Moreover, as reported by some IOM missions, the uneven engagement of stakeholders in countries of origin is also owed to their limited knowledge of the project and of IOM action related to skills development and mobility. In addition, relations with some private sector partners were established for the first time and need time to be strengthened. Therefore, more efforts should be made to ensure the effective contribution of partners to the project, particularly through targeted communication tools that clearly highlight the project's relevance for each and every actor.

Impact

Under this criterion, the evaluation sought to assess the extent to which the project improved the employability of interns and the awareness of private and public actors on the values of skills' circulation and cultural diversity at the workplace.

Evidence collected indicate that the project has contributed to increasing interns' ability to be employed as well as the Italian companies' understanding and positive perception of cultural

diversity, but has not yet enhanced the engagement of the public sector in skills development and circulation.

The interviews, the focus groups discussion and the review of project documents show that in addition to helping the interns develop job-specific and soft skills, such skill upgrading through participation in Y-MED has also enabled them to enter into employment or progress in their professional career by improving the quality of pre-existing occupations.¹³

Although fragmented and incomplete, available data gathered by the project and the evaluation reveal that the **majority of interns found a job** in their field of expertise after their participation in the project: 7 out of the 11 Moroccan youngsters who carried out an internship during the first edition were hired, 3 of them by the same company where they interned in; as for the second edition, 11 of the 12 Tunisian interns and 5 of the 12 Egyptian interns found a job in their respective country of origin upon their return from Italy (it is worth mentioning that the other 3 Egyptian interns decided to continue their studies and enrolled in a masters program abroad); as regards the third and latest edition, 8 out of 11 Tunisians, 3 out of 9 Egyptians and 4 out of 8 Libyans were hired either in their home country, Italy or abroad (specifically, Germany and Luxemburg).

These data are consistent with answers from the online survey according to which 62% of interns found employment after their participation in Y-MED. Among these, one third were hired in their country of origin following an autonomous search for job opportunities, therefore without the job placement support of the project, which corresponds to the above-mentioned findings in this regard. Another one third of interns were hired in Italy, the majority of which in the same company where they carried out their internship and mainly in the Lazio region. The remaining respondents found a job in their home country thanks to the network of companies mobilised by the project, and a minority of them in another European country. The assistance provided by the project on this matter is quite limited: more than half of those who were not hired after the project affirmed not having received any job offer through the project.

These findings highlight that in the absence of clearly defined and effective job placement support in countries of origin, job opportunities in Italy (or in another foreign country) are more appealing. This holds even more true considering that these opportunities are among the objectives pursued by both interns and Italian companies through their participation in Y-MED, and that differences in salaries encourage interns to find employment out of their countries.

More broadly, interns highlighted that the on-the-job training in an Italian company made their **profiles more interesting for European employers** which contact them through LinkedIn (the social media platform specialised in business and employment). This appears to be especially the case of engineers – be they software, mechanical or automotive engineers – who reported being regularly solicited by companies through the platform. This holds true also for those interns who, upon their return, started to work as self-employed workers and have European companies among their clients. These findings show that the internship experience in Italy opened up new working opportunities for interns and widened the range of employers they may target.

Equally important seems to be the **interest shown by companies in countries of origin** towards the professional experience acquired by Y-MED interns. A few of them, in fact, resumed the job position they held before taking part in the project but with increased responsibilities. Though evidence in this respect is limited, it suggests that the experience gained through Y-MED is positively assessed by these companies which proved not only to

¹³ Here reference is made to the definition of employability formulated by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) which reads as follows: “A combination of factors which enable an individual to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during his/her career”. See <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/employability>.

be willing to reinstate employees who had previously resigned, but also to attach a significant professional value to the internship conducted in Italy.

As regards the **distribution of results related to interns' employability**, the project did not appear to have impacted differently on women and men. Data collected through the survey show that the employment rate among female and male interns is exactly the same, but also that all those hired in Italy by the company they interned in were men. However, a closer look at interns' characteristics reveals that other elements than gender explain this outcome. First, hired interns are mainly engineers, a job profile that hold more male than female interns participating in the project. Second, some interns, including women, declined a job offer from an Italian company because it did not match their expectations in terms of career development. Therefore, rather than being gender-based, these difference in results appear to be accounted for by the professional profiles and aspirations of the interns.

With respect to the Italian companies, data gathered indicate that the project contributed to increasing their **awareness of the value of skill circulation and cultural diversity**. As already reported in the Relevance section, many of them had no previous experience with international internships but highlighted their interest in enhancing cultural diversity within the company. A few had also started to assign more resources to this goal by setting up an internal unit dedicated to diversity and inclusion or by increasing their formal engagement in social responsibility. Following their participation in the project, their perception is strengthened: 92% of enterprises reached through the survey considered that circular migration schemes, such as the one supported by Y-MED, are useful for Italian companies.

Furthermore, Italian companies that participated in the evaluation overwhelmingly affirmed having found the experience very enriching: not only interns demonstrated a high level of professional preparation and competence, but, most importantly, they helped the teams they worked with to become more international in their outlook. A company, for example, reported having recently started to disseminate its internal communications for employees in both Italian and English. In other terms, the project allowed companies to become more aware of the value of skill circulation because it increased their chances to experience (often for the first time) and benefit from cultural diversity at the workplace. This might also enhance the capacities of Italian companies for doing business in different countries in the future: although the enterprises did not initiate investments or partnerships in the interns' countries of origin after the project, 31% of them are interested to do so.

The facilitation of **synergies between participating companies in Italy and those in target countries** has been among the project's ambitions since the design of the second edition. Though not the objective of specific project activities, this was conceived of as an indirect outcome of the intervention. The assumption made in this respect was that the involvement of private sector actors in the two sides of the Mediterranean and the circulation of interns' skills across countries would allow involved companies to explore new avenues for collaboration and seize new market opportunities. Even though it was not possible to reach out to companies in countries of origin during evaluation activities, collected data suggest that limited results have so far been yielded by the project on this matter. Italian enterprises expressed their interest in such collaborations, while companies in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia seem to appreciate young professionals with an on-the-job experience abroad. However, no contact or exchange between companies participating in the project could be identified by the evaluation. This kind of process requires time and opportunities to unfold, and these are not under the control of the project. However, more attention should be paid to facilitating interactions among enterprises and the actual engagement of companies in project implementation.

Evaluation findings show that **public sector actors** are extremely interested, and in some cases already engaged, in the development and circulation of skills in the Mediterranean, but there is no evidence that the project contributed to increasing their commitment in this area. Similar to what was described for private sector actors, the project has so far offered few

possibilities for public stakeholders to get in contact and develop relations that might foster international mobility channels for internship purposes and circular migration schemes such as Y-MED.

The willingness in establishing these relations was explicitly expressed by an Italian company and a Tunisian public university. Both stakeholders affirmed looking forward to future contacts that may give rise to agreements allowing university students or fresh graduates to carry out an internship in Italy.

Overall, the project appears to have made significant contributions to triggering changes for interns, by increasing their employability, and for Italian companies, through the enhancement of their awareness of skills circulation. In contrast, results at a higher, systemic level are still to be achieved: notwithstanding the interest from the side of public and private sector stakeholders, the project has so far not contributed to further their engagement.

Sustainability

Under this criterion the evaluation looked at the extent to which achieved results will continue to remain in place after the end of the project, and whether the project engendered organisational changes in beneficiaries and partners.

Overall, perceptions of beneficiaries and collected data suggest that results will last after the project's conclusion. However, as described in the previous section, the intervention has not yet built an enabling environment for future initiatives on circular migration schemes.

The evaluation found that soft and technical skills acquired by interns as well as the awareness reached by Italian companies in relation to skills circulation are durable achievements of the project.

Among surveyed interns, 75% affirmed that they are still making use, to some extent, of the skills and competences gained through the project. When this was not the case or acquired skills were judged to be of limited relevance and use for the positions they held at the time of the survey, explanations usually referred to the negative assessment of the overall learning experience (i.e. no skills acquired at all) or to a substantial change in tasks performed or in the specific field of employment. Conversely, the sustainability of developed competences is particularly high among those who were hired by the hosting company since they still have the opportunity to practice knowledge and skills learned.

Once again, a stronger emphasis was put on the development and **continued use of soft skills** as several interns found that the participation in the project contributed to their personal development. The ability to adapt to changing environments and to establish working relations with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are achievements that interns considered as extremely valuable, also when working in countries of origin.

In terms of the sustainability of results related to Italian companies, the findings show that achieving durable impact appears challenging, while there are also promising elements to make progress in this regard. After having participated in the project, all surveyed enterprises affirmed being interested in hosting international interns again in the future. This means that net benefits from the project are considered to be high by these stakeholders, who, it is worth reminding, had limited previous experience with this type of action.

Yet, despite such interest, none of the participating companies has adopted **procedures or practices to facilitate the activation of international internships**. On the contrary, a recurrent theme in interviews was the difficulty perceived by participating Italian companies in dealing with the process related to the identification and recruitment of potential interns abroad and their entry and stay in Italy. That is also why the services provided by the Y-MED project were deemed so crucial by the Italian enterprises, particularly the assistance related to the selection of candidates and the provision of accommodation for interns. Indeed, although

promoting agencies play an important role in the implementation of this type of internship, the relevant Italian legislation assigns several duties to hosting companies regarding the provision of the internship allowance as well as of board and lodging.

These difficulties clearly emerged when companies decided to retain successful interns and could not rely on the project assistance anymore: they entrusted a service provider with the handling of legal paperwork (necessary to convert the residence permit from internship to work purposes), but they saw for the first time interns facing ordinary issues (e.g. searching for an accommodation or health insurance) that were previously addressed by the project. For these reasons, it seems that most companies will still need support before being able to deal autonomously with these issues.

As regards **financial sustainability**, the project has laid the grounds for it by providing, in the last edition, for hosting companies to cover part of the costs, specifically the internship allowance. This is an important step towards not only sustainability but also scalability of the project since it allows reducing the costs per participant and eventually increasing the number of beneficiaries.

Beyond the Italian companies, the evaluation found that also those project partners from the public sector have not mobilised structures, resources or procedures to ensure the implementation of international internships in Italy or to facilitate other circular migration schemes in the future. As regards **institutional sustainability**, the project did not intend to strengthen the capacities of public institutions (specifically, public employment services) needed for international job (or internship) placement and, indeed, no activities were planned in this respect. Nonetheless, following their participation in the project, universities in North Africa, including public ones, appeared interested in exploring the possibility of establishing direct contacts with the private sector in Italy and possibly concluding agreements to activate internships at Italian companies for their graduates.

Furthermore, the **political sustainability** of the project appears promising: the interest of private and public institutions in skills mobility schemes, as outlined in the Relevance section, suggests that actions in this field, including Y-MED, are likely to enjoy continuing political support in the coming years. This seems to be confirmed by the publication in September 2022 of a vademecum for the activation of internships for foreign citizens residing in a third country, though which the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies intends to disseminate information and support the competent administrations in the different phases of the procedure.

Cross-cutting issues

Under this section, the evaluation examined how the project addressed issues related to gender and communication and visibility.

The project adopted a **gender equality approach** and put in place effective measures to ensure equal access to internship opportunities for men and women: while in the first edition, only one woman out of 11 interns participated in the project, in the second edition female interns who carried out an internship were 18 out of 35, and in the third edition 14 out of 30. Except for the first edition, therefore, the project was implemented to balance female and male involvement in on-the-job training and employment opportunities. This is particularly relevant considering that, as stressed out above, youth unemployment in the concerned North African countries affects women more than men.

Sex disaggregated data were collected and analysed to feed into the project's monitoring and reporting activities. The accuracy in gathering and processing these data increased throughout editions as the project management and monitoring systems were gradually developed and strengthened. This is crucial to allow the project team to identify the gendered effects of implementation and address related issues in a timely manner.

The project also took into consideration the **specific needs of women** as they emerged. For example, this first occurred when Libyan interns asked to be accompanied by their father or husband during the internship period in Italy. The project team supported the accompanying family members in the submission of their requests for visa, which, however, were ultimately rejected by diplomatic representations. As a result, two young women decided to drop out from the project and did not leave for Italy. This specific necessity, however, does not appear as a major obstacle to the participation of women from this country: interviewed Libyan interns, including female ones, underlined that the need for a male companion while travelling or leaving abroad is not predominant among young Libyan women, which is confirmed by the completion of the internship by other four Libyan female interns. Besides, it is important to specify that, without a specific ground for entry and stay such as study or work, interns' companions would be eligible for a 90-day visa only, and hence would not be able to ensure their presence in Italy for the entire internship period.

Another need voiced by female interns, particularly among Egyptians and Libyans, during project implementation was to avoid sharing the accommodation with men. The project, specifically promoting agencies, managed to accommodate this request and provided gender-separated flats whenever asked by the interns. Although logistically challenging, addressing this need since the inception phase would make the intervention more appropriate to local contexts and may increase the participation of young women in the project.

The project did not have a **communication and visibility plan** but developed several communication tools such as videos, brochures, factsheets and online events for all three editions. The communication tools aimed to reach out to beneficiaries, partners, stakeholders and the wider public, with the aim of disseminating the project goals and activities among these groups. In line with the different audiences targeted, some of these tools were public, while others were shared only with specific stakeholders.

Overall, the instruments designed to communicate the project were appropriately used but the dissemination strategy would benefit from further development in terms of both content and channels. First, communication activities should be more data driven and include both qualitative and quantitative results of the project. This would help make messages more meaningful and relevant to the interests, motivations and values of the different target audiences. The M&E plan and the monitoring tools developed by the project may offer valuable data to this end. Second, a greater presence on social media channels of IOM and implementing partners would allow greater visibility among young people and could increase applications for internships. Moreover, given that the project is largely focused on young university graduates, stepping up communication efforts within universities of partner countries would be appropriate. Many interns who concluded their internships in the last two editions communicated their willingness and availability to talk about their first-hand experience during events presenting the project to future candidates. Furthermore, an effective communication strategy may attract the interest of more young people and companies both in Italy and North Africa and, as a consequence, be an additional tool to scale up the project.

Finally, although foreseen in operating procedures for the second and third editions, closing events involving stakeholders from the target countries were not held in all countries. These would offer a great opportunity not only to present the project's results and challenges but also to facilitate contacts and exchanges that may lead to creating an environment conducive for further engagements in circular migration schemes.

Conclusions

The Y-MED project was designed to facilitate the development and transfer of young people's professional skills across Mediterranean countries as well as their job-placement by providing young people from this region with the opportunity to carry out an internship at Italian companies based in Morocco (first project edition) and in Italy (second and third editions). By activating internships in Italy, the project fostered the use of existing regular migration venues for training purposes foreseen by the Italian immigration law for TCNs residing in an extra-EU country. Y-MED also set out to provide Italian enterprises with the opportunity to increase cultural diversity at the workplace and approach new market opportunities through synergies with companies in interns' countries of origin.

The project is relevant to its direct beneficiaries and target countries. Y-MED responded to the need of the interns to improve professional skills and gain an internship experience abroad. It also addressed the needs of the Italian companies for participating in social impact projects and increasing cultural diversity. The design of the intervention is also appropriate to the priorities of involved countries that are increasingly engaged in actions promoting the upskill and mobility of young people at different skill levels.

Y-MED complements several interventions sustaining skills development and mobility between European and North African countries, although no synergies with them were so far identified. The project also complements measures countering irregular migration as it provides alternatives to it and facilitates the access to regular migration venues between Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia on the one hand, and Italy on the other.

The project met its planned results of improving the interns' soft skills and, to a lesser extent, their technical skills. It also enhanced the understanding of the Italian enterprises on cultural diversity and cross-cultural management issues. That said, the main challenge in achieving results was related to the number of internships activated, which remained lower than initially planned. Another challenge was represented by the dropout of Moroccan interns from the second edition: they decided not to return to Morocco to participate in the job placement phase without providing to the project team any further information about their stay in Italy.

Resources to undertake activities and achieve results were efficiently used. Partners who contributed to project implementation hold the necessary expertise and experience, although in some countries private and public sector stakeholders were not involved or showed little commitment. Delays related to visa processing and issuance affected the length of internships, which, according to both interns and hosting companies, is a key element for achieving results and should be no less than six months to allow for appropriate skill development. The M&E system was gradually strengthened throughout editions; the current development of a logical framework specific to the project, including indicators, would further build the project accountability.

At the impact level, the project contributed to enhancing the interns' ability to find a job – either in countries of origin, in Italy or in another European country – and to improve the quality of their pre-existing occupations. The intervention also increased the awareness of hosting companies of the value of skill circulation and cultural diversity. However, there is no evidence supporting that the project has as of yet contributed to facilitating synergies between companies in Italy and North African countries, neither that it has increased the engagement of public and private sector stakeholders in skills development and mobility.

The sustainability of results related to interns appears strong, while those concerning Italian companies present some limits. No structures, resources or procedures were adopted by participating companies and public institutions to facilitate the activation of international internships in Italy and the implementation of circular migration schemes in the future.

The project appropriately took into account the needs of women and, importantly, ensured equal access to internship opportunities for men and women. Despite the lack of a

communication and visibility plan, the project team developed several tools to disseminate the project goals and activities. Nonetheless, the visibility of the project could be improved by widening the content and communication channels and by holding closing events involving stakeholders from all target countries.

Lessons learned

On the basis of the findings described in the previous sections, the following lessons learned have been identified:

- Some interns who participated in the project had already previous working experience (more than 1 year), were working at the time of their application and resigned in order to carry out the internship in Italy. In some cases, evaluation findings indicate that the on-the-job training at an Italian company further improved their employability. However, their participation is not very consistent with the project's aim to enhance participants' employability and facilitate their integration into the labour markets of their home countries. To attain such goal, students and fresh graduates represent more appropriate beneficiaries of a project such as Y-MED.
- Notwithstanding the dropout of Moroccan interns during the second project edition, the project staff correctly informed interns about the legal provisions allowing them to remain and work in Italy after the internship as well as on the risks and challenges connected to irregular stay. Besides strengthening the job placement support upon return to countries of origin, the project has no other tools to prevent irregular overstay and cannot interfere with interns' agency.
- Interns and Italian companies may have expectations related to their participation in the project (e.g. find a job in Italy/Europe or address labour shortages by hiring interns at the end of the internship) that partly diverge from the objectives pursued by the project - and the kind of support provided in line with these objectives. Building on the experience acquired in previous years, during the third edition, the project staff has appropriately addressed these issues in a transparent way by providing information upon request and offering insights into the broader context where the project is implemented and its long-term ambitions (building relations that may improve the access to already existing regular migration pathways).
- Employment opportunities for returned interns in countries of origin increased when the private sector in these countries was involved since the project's inception phase, particularly in the identification of labour market needs and the selection of candidates. Furthermore, such opportunities are more likely to materialize when Italian hosting companies operate or have business collaborations in countries of origin.

Recommendations

On the basis of the evaluation's findings, the following recommendations are therefore offered to help guide the future programming:

- **Build synergies with other interventions on skill development and circulation.** Several interventions aiming to sustain skills mobility schemes are implemented in the two sides of the Mediterranean. These are mainly led by international organisations and EU member states' development agencies and often involve some of the same local partners and countries as those of Y-MED. The project built the design of its second and third editions on the experiences of similar interventions but did not engage further with other projects during implementation. Regular exchanges of results, challenges and lessons learned may advance efforts to create an environment conducive to skills mobility schemes. For example, these exchanges might take place

within the framework of Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) that aim at coordinating the external actions of the European Union and EU Member States to enhance effectiveness and achieve greater impact.

- **Foster the engagement of public actors in departure countries:**
 - Establish better contacts with embassies to expedite the visa issuance process. Although IOM missions in North African countries got in contact with diplomatic representations to inform about the project, visa processing and issuance took a long time and caused delays in project implementation. Although such delays might also be due internal or bureaucratic issues, engaging with relevant embassies and consulates in due advance, and following up with them if needed, may contribute to speed up and streamline the process. This would ensure the issuance of correct visas and possibly also that visas are delivered at the same time for all the interns referring to the same representation.
 - Involving public actors such as public employment agencies and foreign investment agencies could contribute to create a conducive environment for interns' return. IOM could liaise with these actors to support them understanding the added value of interns' experiences and the potential positive impact they could have in their communities if their skills and knowledge were adequately recognized and leveraged. This could potentially enhance interns' placement opportunities as well as provide fertile ground to boost their impact in local communities.
- **Strengthen private sector engagement in all countries and across the Mediterranean:**
 - **In Italy:**
 - Involve Italian companies that either operate, have (or wish to have) business collaborations or are interested in expanding in Northern African markets. Few of the Italian companies participating in the second and third editions of the project have subsidiaries or established business collaborations in interns' countries of origin, but about half of those reached through the survey expressed their interest in working in a Mediterranean country. Involving companies operating in these countries or working with local companies (for example, those that are members of the Italian Chambers of Commerce established in North African countries) may facilitate the employment of interns upon their return and their circular labour mobility in the future.
 - Liaise more closely with business associations (e.g. employers' associations such as Confindustria, its regional offices, Assafrica & Mediterraneo) that could provide information on their members with connections in countries of departure and that could be interested in hosting Y-med interns. Such associations could also support Y-med in disseminating internship opportunities within their network.
 - Increase the participation of Italian companies in information sessions on cultural diversity and cross-cultural management issues. Italian companies had little experience of cultural diversity at the workplace before their participation in the project, but few of them took part in the dedicated information sessions. In order to encourage the participation of company representatives, the project team could ask each company to designate one or two persons who will be responsible for attending the event. In addition, the number of sessions held online could be increased so to allow companies to choose the preferred date according to their availabilities. Lastly, recordings of online meetings and training materials should be shared with all the enterprises to ensure a wider dissemination among employees and collaborators.

- **In countries of origin:**
 - The involvement and commitment of companies in countries of origin in the implementation of activities has proven difficult. IOM missions in target countries should intensify efforts to increase the contribution of local companies to the project, particularly in the job placement phase. In order to do so, companies could be invited to all events presenting the project and its results and encouraged to speak about their needs and experiences regarding skills development and circulation.
 - Besides companies, IOM Missions could consider involving a wider range of private stakeholders to create a conducive environment particularly during the placement phase (e.g. local employment agencies).
- **Across geographies:**
 - Providing avenues for exchange and networking opportunities to Y-med companies based on both sides of the Mediterranean could facilitate the creation of synergies within the private sector. This may pave the way for future business collaborations between companies in both origin countries and Italy.
- **Increase cooperation between relevant private and public sector partners and promote networking opportunities between them.** The project involved relevant stakeholders from both the public and private sectors in project implementation, but not in every country and project edition. Building on the aforementioned recommendations for private and public actors, IOM could foster cooperation among these actors to facilitate knowledge sharing, potential synergies and direct contacts. This may lead to the autonomous conclusions of agreements to activate internships at Italian companies for students or graduates from North African universities. Effective cooperation between private and public actors is crucial to create a conducive environment for circular migration schemes. It is also a pre-condition for Y-med potential scale-up, as larger numbers of interns and target countries would require streamlined and integrated processes by all public and private stakeholders involved.
- **Widen the number of universities participating in the project.** The project has so far seen the involvement of a limited number of universities or vocational training institutions – predominately public ones – from each country. As the project plans to focus on fresh university graduates in the coming editions, it should provide the opportunity for conducting internships in Italy to young people from a wider range of universities in order to widen the diversity of candidates in terms of socio-economic background and geographical location and scale up the number of interns.
- **Strengthen the placement phase:** post-internship job placement activities and assistance should be strengthened and made consistent across countries. IOM should design articulated and exhaustive placement plans, including the possibility to access tailored learning opportunities. Such plans should be presented to interns in detail prior the end of the internship in Italy. IOM missions should develop placement plans in close collaboration with private sector actors in their respective countries to ensure interns are provided with adequate and relevant professional opportunities upon their return. Opportunities for remote-working or hybrid working arrangements could also be envisaged as viable options in the placement phase.
- **Develop a communication and visibility strategy and communication plans for all target countries.**
 - Communication tools and events were disseminated in an uneven way in the different countries. The project would benefit from a comprehensive **communication and visibility strategy** that better targets the key project stakeholders. This would include not only the project objectives and activities, but also the results attained thus far with the aim of producing messages that resonate with the interests, motivations and values of key stakeholders. Such

- strategy should be operationalised with **context-specific communication plans** in each country.
- The strategy should identify the **key messages** to disseminate in order to spur the interest of each target audience. For instance, for companies in Italy, messages could focus on the opportunity to increase their cultural diversity and social impact. For companies in countries of departure, the potential networking and transnational benefits should be stressed.
 - Appropriate communication **channels** should be identified for each target group, to ensure the widest dissemination possible. For instance, to reach potential candidates in countries of departure, IOM missions should identify the most common channels used by students and fresh graduates for job-seeking and use them to disseminate the vacancies. Collaboration with universities and career centres could be helpful in this regard.
- **Improve the replicability and scalability of the project.** The project developed operating procedures to outline the main characteristics of project activities, provide for instructions for their implementation and, ultimately, ensure consistency of results across countries. In order to improve the replicability of the project in other countries, the approach informing project phases should be further refined and clearly presented in the operating procedures, including indications on common challenges and ways to overcome them. As regards the achievement of results, the project relied on its public and private partners in all the target countries to reach out to possible interns and companies and advocate for their participation. Nevertheless, the number of internships activated was lower than expected. To scale up the project, the circulation of internship vacancies should be strengthened. Vacancies should be richer in information, circulated among more stakeholders (e.g. more universities, diaspora businesses etc.) and publicised for longer periods.