



STEMTALENT4NL FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND ROADMAP

The attraction and retention of highly skilled
(stem)talent in the Netherlands



Ministry of Asylum and Migration



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

AenM	The Dutch Ministry of Asylum and Migration
EU/EER	European Union/European Economic Area
EZ	The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs
HBO	in Dutch: 'Hoger beroepsonderwijs'. In English: Higher Vocational Education
IDW	International Credential Evaluation, an organization consisting of a collaboration between the Cooperation Organization for Vocational Education, Training, and the Labour Market (SBB) and Nuffic, commissioned by the Dutch Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, and Social Affairs and Employment
IND	The Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service
MKB	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
Nuffic	The Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Education.
OCW	The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SZW	The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
TCN	A Third-Country National: Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement , as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code) (European Commission, 2025)
UNL	Universities of the Netherlands

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report compiles concrete recommendations developed within the STEMTALENT4NL project, commissioned by the Dutch ministry of Asylum and Migration. The recommendations are based on an analysis conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), drawing from project activities, extensive desk research, and valuable input from experts and stakeholders.

We would like to sincerely thank all participants in the consultation sessions, one-on-one discussions, and working group meetings for their essential contributions. Your insights and dedication have played a crucial role in the creation of this report.

Furthermore, we extend our gratitude to those who provided feedback on the initial version of this document. Your targeted suggestions have helped refine the recommendations and enhance their applicability.

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Lastly, we wish to express our appreciation to the European Commission, which made these activities possible through its 'Technical Support Instrument' program.

With thanks,

*The STEMTALENT4NL project team,
on behalf of the International Organization for Migration*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an English summary of the Dutch report; for the original report in Dutch, please consult IOM the Netherlands' [‘STEMTALENT4NL Aanbevelingen en Actieplan’](#) report.

In December 2023, the STEMTALENT4NL project was launched, funded by the the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument. The project aimed to improve ‘the Orientation Year Permit for Highly Skilled Migrants’ (hereafter referred to as the Orientation Year Permit), against the background of growing shortages of STEM talent in the Netherlands, which are crucial for the country’s economic and innovative development. Based on this evaluation, recommendations were formulated to ensure that the Netherlands remains a sustainably attractive destination for international talent.

In general, the Orientation Year Permit is perceived positively by the consulted stakeholders. However, there are certain areas that require some adjustments, particularly in terms of the legal and regulatory framework and the ecosystem around Orientation Year permit holders. The duration of the Orientation Year Permit is often considered too short by both graduates and employers, partly due to a lack of clear information leading to late starts to the orientation year or inefficient

use. Additionally, third-country nationals (TCNs) who graduate abroad find the requirement to have studied at a university ranked in the global top 200 to be limiting. Moreover, the broader societal debate increasingly questions the relevance of such rankings. Lastly, the diploma recognition process has been regarded as a time-consuming and unclear procedure for many applicants. Confusion currently exists around some contradictions regarding specific legal concepts and phrasing in the legislation and regulations, as mentioned by the involved stakeholders. More generally, the Orientation



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Year Permit could benefit from a more sector-focused approach, aligning with labour shortages in the STEM-related industries. Regarding the broader ecosystem, three additional points require attention. There is a need for a stronger focus on language and integration, exploration of international collaborations, and for enhanced communication about the residence permit to better connect graduates, universities, and employers.

Regarding **legislation and regulations**, in the short-term (within 12 months), it is proposed to:

- include the updated titles of legislation and regulations, such as noting the official, full name of the featured educational programmes and the Immigration Act.
- add a disclaimer to the application form for TCN applicants with a foreign degree, allowing the diploma recognition process to run parallel to the application for the Orientation Year. This would reduce waiting times and clarify to applicants that both processes can take place simultaneously.

In the medium-term (between 12 and 24 months), it is suggested to:

- make efforts to better connect international talent with employers. If improved access to information does not yield sufficient results, an optional six-month extension of the Orientation Year Permit could be considered.

For the long-term (more than 24 months), two legislative and regulatory recommendations are put forward, specifically to:

- give consideration to splitting the current Orientation Year Permit into two separate tracks within the current legislation: one for international graduates from Dutch institutions and one for graduates from institutions outside the Netherlands. Again, differentiating between the two groups would allow for more flexibility in dealing with current labour needs and responding to specific skills. In addition, this would also allow differentiation between a governmental focus on talent retention and one on talent attraction.
- revise the ranking-based selection criteria and adopt a more flexible system, such as a shortage occupation list, to ensure alignment with labour market needs during and after the orientation year.

Regarding the **ecosystem** around the TCNs, in the medium-term (between 12 and 24 months) it is proposed to:

- explore the possibility of providing more information on current language courses during studies in the Netherlands and possible subsidy frameworks, offering (potentially subsidized) language courses to permit holders, establishing and expanding integration support and

strengthening collaborations between universities and businesses. This to help bridge the gap between international talent and employers.

In the long-term (more than 24 months), in terms of the ecosystem, further efforts can be made to:

- explore potential circular labour mobility arrangements to address specific labour shortages.
- conduct a further needs assessment to improve the accessibility of information related to the Orientation Year Permit.
- implement and support existing initiatives to support the partners of TCNs in expanding their professional and personal network.

To ensure the Netherlands remains innovative, competitive, and sustainable while successfully attracting and retaining international talents, it is essential to develop a clear, evidence-based vision for the labor market and the migration of international students to work in the Dutch labour market. This report lays the foundation for policies aimed at making the Netherlands a competitive and attractive destination. Moreover, it provides stakeholders with tools to help build a sustainable and competitive Europe through outlining a thorough and practical roadmap that can be used to further enhance the Orientation Year Permit and the ecosystem around it.

INTRODUCTION

The STEMTALENT4NL project aims to enhance the Netherlands' capacity to attract and retain highly educated international talent by evaluating the 'Orientation Year Residence Permit for Highly Skilled Migrants', as well as exploring how to better engage international talent in addressing shortages in the STEM sector. In short, this permit grants international graduates from Dutch universities, as well as specific highly skilled TCNs, a year to find employment or start a business in the Netherlands. The evaluation and enhancement of the Orientation Year Permit thus play a crucial role in attracting and retaining highly-skilled international professionals, contributing to an innovative, competitive, and sustainable Netherlands.

The project aligns closely with the priorities of the recently dissolved Cabinet-Schoof. Its coalition agreement stated that the administration seeks to focus on “highly-skilled knowledge migration” (Rijksoverheid, 2024a). Moreover, the governmental programme acknowledged that Dutch companies are facing a shortage of skilled workers, which impacts economic prosperity and the Netherlands' overall competitiveness (ibid.). The cabinet strove to continue facilitating the arrival of international talent that contributes to the innovative capacity of the Netherlands.

The project also contributes to European objectives for attracting and integrating STEM talent within the 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' (European Commission, 2022). In a recent report, Mario Draghi, former president of the European Central Bank, discussed the stagnation of European competitiveness, particularly in terms of lagging productivity growth compared to the United States (European Commission, 2024). Furthermore, the European Commission recently introduced the 'Union of Skills'¹, a plan to improve high-quality education, training, and lifelong learning in order to boost European competitiveness. Attracting and retaining TCNs is one of the four key pillars of this plan, as such, the STEMTALENT4NL project is aligned with this initiative.

Similarly, the project also aligns with the goals of the EU Skills and Talent Mobility Package, introduced in November 2023, which aims to address labour shortages and enhance the EU's attractiveness to skilled workers from outside the bloc (European Commission, 2023a). It includes measures like the establishment of an EU Talent Pool to match skilled third-country jobseekers with EU vacancies, and initiatives to simplify the recognition of qualifications earned abroad (European Commission, 2023b). The package also promotes

learning mobility and partnerships with non-EU countries to foster skills development. In March 2024, the EU presented an action plan to tackle labour and skills shortages, focusing on five key areas: activating underrepresented groups in the labour market, boosting skills development, improving working conditions, enhancing intra-EU mobility, and attracting talent from outside the EU. This plan builds on existing initiatives like the 'European Skills Agenda' and aims to meet the EU's 2030 employment and skills targets (European Commission, 2024).

The report provides an overview of the recommendations regarding potential legislative adjustments to the Orientation Year Permit, particularly concerning Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree 2000 and associated legal provisions. Additionally, the report presents a roadmap detailing concrete steps for implementing the recommendations, aiming to further enhance the permit itself, as well as the ecosystem around it, so that it may operate to its full capacity to attract and retain highly skilled international talent. The findings in this summary are based on insights from previous studies and input from various stakeholders. The [recommendations](#) and [roadmap](#) represent the final outcome of the STEMTALENT4NL project, which aims to strengthen the Orientation Year Permit to better attract and retain STEM talent in the Netherlands.

The remainder of this report begins with an overview of the methodology. The following section provides a concise summary of the current Orientation Year Permit legislation. Next, the report outlines the primary obstacles that currently exist, both in terms of legislation and within the broader ecosystem surrounding the Orientation Year Permit. This is followed by the recommendations, which are structured according to two headings: recommendations in terms of legislation and regulations, and recommendations in terms of the ecosystem around Orientation Year Permit holders, each with different timeframes that are envisioned for the steps outlined in the action plan to be implemented: short-term (a duration of up to 12 months, medium-term (a duration between 12 and 24 months, and long-term (a duration of more than 24 months). Subsequently, the report introduces a roadmap for the implementation of these recommendations, detailing the necessary steps, estimated implementation duration, and the relevant stakeholders involved. The report concludes with some closing remarks.

¹ For more information on the Union of Skills: [Union of Skills - European Commission](#)

1. METHODOLOGY



The STEMTALENT4NL project was carried out in three carefully defined phases, with the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of the current situation, identifying existing challenges, and formulating concrete recommendations to enhance the admission and retention policies for international STEM talent in the Netherlands.

PHASE 1: CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

The first phase focused on mapping out the current landscape through a combined approach that included:

- Analyzing the existing laws and regulations;
- Collecting and processing quantitative and qualitative data;
- Conducting stakeholder consultations to identify experiences and challenges.

This phase enabled the project team to determine which aspects of the current policy are effective and where improvements could be made.

PHASE 2: PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND SOLUTION EXPLORATION

In the second phase, the identified obstacles were further examined and analyzed. Brainstorming sessions were conducted to explore possible solutions, incorporating insights from both national and international best practices. A key component of this phase was an international knowledge exchange with Denmark, where relevant stakeholders were consulted to gain lessons from their approach to talent attraction and retention.

PHASE 3: RECOMMENDATIONS AND ROADMAP

Based on the insights gathered in the previous phases, the third phase focused on formulating concrete and feasible recommendations. These recommendations were then translated into a practical roadmap with clear implementation steps designed to enhance policy and foster sustainable collaboration between stakeholders.

DATA COLLECTION AND

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the project, various methods were used to collect data and ensure stakeholder involvement:

- **Literature review:** Analysis of reports from organizations such as Nuffic, the IND, and Regioplan served as a foundation for further study;²
- **Kick-off meeting:** An initial meeting was held to introduce the project and align with relevant stakeholders;
- **Stakeholder mapping and outreach:** Identification of key parties to gain a comprehensive overview of relevant actors;
- **One-on-one consultations:** In-depth discussions were conducted to understand specific challenges and perspectives;
- **Consultation group discussions:** Group discussions provided deeper insights and helped establish a long-term consultation framework;
- **International knowledge exchange:** A study visit to Denmark was organized to gain inspiration and learn from best practices³;
- **Working group sessions:** Structured meetings were held with representatives from the Dutch Ministry of AenM), the IND, RVO), Nuffic, the Dutch Ministry of EZ and the Dutch Ministry of SZW.

In total, more than 50 stakeholders and experts contributed to the collection of insights and the formulation of recommendations (see Annex 1: Overview of Consulted Stakeholders). The combination of different data collection methods resulted in a broad and nuanced understanding of the effectiveness and limitations of the current Orientation Year Permit. These insights serve as the foundation for the recommendations and roadmap presented in this report.

2 See Nuffic (2023): 'Blijven na afstuderen.'; IND (2023): 'Kennisswerkers en zoekjaarders in Nederland – een cohortstudie naar verblijf van kennisswerkers en zoekjaarders in Nederland'; Regioplan (2018): 'Aantrekkelijkheid van Nederland voor kennismigranten' (Herewith included the official Cabinet's reaction and further follow-up in later letters to the House of Representatives); DenkWerk (2023): 'Migratie als motor – hoe Nederland migratie kan inzetten als drijvende kracht.'

3 Denmark was chosen as an interesting country for knowledge exchange for several reasons. First, their graduate visa model is different from the Netherlands, allowing valuable comparisons to be made. However, it should be noted that the legal framework is different, given their opt-out from Directive 2016/801 and Single Permit Directive 2011/98. Secondly, the socio-economic, political and bureaucratic conditions are similar though, which makes it a relevant case within the wider European framework.

2. THE ORIENTATION YEAR PERMIT: CURRENT LEGISLATION AND FUNCTIONING



OVERVIEW OF THE ORIENTATION YEAR PERMIT

The first version of the Orientation Year Permit for Highly Skilled Graduates (in Dutch: the ‘verblijfsvergunning zoekjaar hoogopgeleiden’) was introduced in 2004 under Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree (in Dutch: ‘Vreemdelingenbesluit’). The permit allowed non-EU/EEA graduates from Dutch universities to stay in the Netherlands for one year after graduation to seek employment. Over time, the policy has been expanded and refined.

In 2016, a major reform merged the previous schemes for highly skilled individuals and graduates into the current Orientation Year Permit⁴. Key changes included:

- Eligibility for Dutch HBO (bachelor’s) and master’s graduates.
- The extension of eligibility to PhD graduates and researchers who have completed their research in the Netherlands.

Under the current scheme, applicants must submit their permit request within three years of graduation or research completion⁵.

TOP-200 UNIVERSITY RULE

Since 2021, international graduates from top-200 universities worldwide can also apply for the Orientation Year Permit⁶, making it easier for highly skilled talent from outside the Netherlands to enter the Dutch labour market. To qualify, their foreign universities must now appear in at least two of the following three global rankings, following reports of improper use of the top 200 regulation⁷:

- a. Times Higher Education World University Rankings
- b. QS World University Rankings
- c. Academic Ranking of World Universities (Shanghai Ranking).

Additionally, applicants must meet general immigration requirements, including:

- Holding a valid passport or travel document.
- Posing no threat to public order.
- Undergoing a medical examination (unless exempted).
- Being a non-EU/EEA citizen.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND BENEFITS

- The application costs €243, and a decision is typically made within 90 days by the IND.
- Permitholders have unrestricted access to the Dutch labour market. They can take up any form of paid employment, including freelancing and internships, without requiring an additional work permit.
- If they transition to highly skilled migrant (‘kennismigrant’) status after their orientation year, they benefit from a lower salary threshold (€2,989 per month, compared to €2,989 for highly skilled migrants under 30 years and €5,688 for those over 30 years) (IND, 2025).

DIPLOMA RECOGNITION

As part of the application process, the IND uses the diploma recognition assessments of Nuffic to assess the authenticity of foreign qualifications. Diploma recognition helps ensure that highly skilled migrants can integrate more fairly into the Dutch labour market and access appropriate opportunities (Rijksoverheid, 2024b; Nederland Wereldwijd, 2024; Nuffic, 2024). Diploma recognition is especially important for regulated professions, where specific qualifications are required by law. It also provides employers with clarity on the credentials of potential hires.

4 Stb. 2016, 86. Accessed on: Staatsblad 2016, 86 | [Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen](#)

5 Article 3.42(1) of the Aliens Decree 2000

6 Stc. 2021, 27584. Accessed on: Staatscourant 2021, 27584 | [Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen](#)

7 Kamerstukken 2020/21, 30573, nr. 183. Accessed on: Kamerstuk 30573, nr. 183 | [Overheid.nl > Officiële bekendmakingen](#)

STATISTICS AND IMPACT

- In 2017, 84% of all granted permits were issued to graduates from Dutch higher education institutions (IND, 2023).
- Regarding educational background, research by the IND (2023) indicates that about three quarters of the Orientation Year Permit holders who graduated in the Netherlands have a background in the following top three fields of study: 'engineering', 'economics', and finally 'humanities, social sciences, communication and arts'.
- The number of permits issued declined from 3,052 in 2017 to 1,670 in 2022, and 1,710 in 2023 (IND, 2023; Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2024; 2025), likely in the context of the post-COVID period or the tightening of the top-200 regulation in 2021.

- The scheme has been effective in talent retention (IND, 2023):
 - Over 50% of those who obtained a permit in 2017 later transitioned to highly skilled migrant status.
 - 18% secured other residence permits, such as partner visas.
 - After three years (by 2020), 60% of 2017 permit holders were still in the Netherlands, and 90% of them were employed.

These figures indicate that the Orientation Year Permit plays a significant role in attracting and retaining highly skilled talent, supporting the Dutch economy and labour market competitiveness.



3. PROBLEM ANALYSIS



This chapter presents a problem analysis starting with an exploration of structural shortages in the Dutch STEM labour market. It then examines specific bottlenecks related to the Orientation Year Permit. The insights in this analysis were gathered during the project through consultations with former and current permit holders, universities, policymakers, researchers, employer organizations, lawyers, and other relevant stakeholders.

STEM SHORTAGES IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Orientation Year Permit plays an important role in attracting and retaining international talent, making it relevant to consider how it can help address labour shortages in the Netherlands. The OECD's 2023 report highlighted the growing labour shortages in multiple sectors in the Netherlands, particularly in technical and ICT fields, which are expected to increase due to the growing economy and the energy transition (OECD, 2023). The technical sector has seen its vacancy rate more than double in the past decade, with high vacancy rates in ICT, construction, and energy supply sectors. Additionally, the Dutch labour market faces an ageing population (Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkeling 2050, 2024; Baarsma et al., 2023; Heyma et al., 2022; CBS, 2024), and there is a structural mismatch between the degrees Dutch students pursue and the available jobs. Research by Nuffic (2024) shows that 25% of Dutch students choose a technical study degree programme, compared to 29% of international students. Based on the above information, it can be concluded that targeted labour migration could effectively address these shortages.

The current tension between strict admission policies and broader economic and labour market policies in the Netherlands is becoming more visible, including when it comes to the “Balanced Internationalisation Act” and knowledge security. On one hand, admissions and labour market policies impose strict requirements on who can live and work in the country; on the other hand, the economy and labour market require workers in shortage sectors such as healthcare, technology, and education. This creates a complex trade-off between regulation and flexibility—as labour migration (including knowledge migration) also requires investment in other areas such as the housing market, care facilities, and education (Staatscommissie Demografische Ontwikkeling 2050, 2024). In this context, the targeted attraction of international highly-skilled talent can alleviate shortages and enhance the Netherlands' competitiveness in a globalized knowledge economy.

EVALUATION OF THE ORIENTATION YEAR

PERMIT

The Orientation Year Permit is generally well-received by the stakeholders consulted. It is seen as a flexible and relatively easy-to-obtain option, as it does not require an income threshold of a job offer which is a unique feature of this

permit compared to similar initiatives in other EU countries. Policymakers highlight the success of this scheme relative to other EU countries, as it offers a good opportunity to determine whether individuals want to settle in the Netherlands. Additionally, TCNs who studied in the Netherlands report primarily positive interactions with the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND).

USERS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Duration of the Orientation Year

Currently, permit holders have one year to find a job in the Netherlands and then eventually move from an Orientation Year Permit to another permit, often a Highly Skilled Migrant visa. While some individuals succeed, consulted former and current permit holders indicated that a year is too short to secure a position that leads to a Highly Skilled Migrant status. When Orientation Year permit holders fail to find sponsored work before the end of the Orientation Year, this results in a gap between permits, causing stress and uncertainty.

A number of reasons were mentioned here. First, they indicated that much of the orientation year is taken up by important, but time-consuming peripheral matters. For instance, they often seek a part-time or full-time side job during the orientation year in order to support themselves financially, which is difficult to combine with finding a job that matches their level of education. Moreover, the search for housing is perceived as challenging. Second, many permit holders reported feeling stressed due to long recruitment processes in the Netherlands, which often take months. Additionally, the summer holiday period, during which hiring slows down, exacerbates this issue. This delay makes job seekers feel they have less time to secure a job before their permit expires. Others also reported experiences where employers offered a one-year contract for internships or traineeships without extending the contract afterward, leading to periods of unemployment and increasing feelings of stress and uncertainty.

Consultations with employer organizations revealed that many businesses, particularly small ones, are unfamiliar with the rules surrounding the Orientation Year Permit and hesitate to hire individuals with this permit. Many employers prefer candidates who already have a work permit, as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack the resources to navigate the complex process of hiring

international talent. Additionally, employers are required to be recognized sponsors to hire under the highly skilled migrant scheme, which is often a follow-up step after the Orientation Year Permit. However, many are unaware of this requirement, causing delays in the sponsorship process. Moreover, the application itself requires financial and time investments. Therefore, transitions between permits are less smooth. Finally, it should be noted that employer demands sometimes do not align with the skill supply of Orientation Year permit holders. Employers are sometimes seeking more experienced and/or senior profiles, hence there may not always be smooth fit for Orientation Year permit holders and Dutch employer demands.

Third, it was noted that international students were surprised by the importance of the Dutch language, especially when compared to their expectations from their studies, which were often conducted in English. This bottleneck is twofold: on the one hand, it indicates unfamiliarity among TCNs with an Orientation Year Permit with the importance of the Dutch language in the Dutch labour market. Secondly, it also indicates that mastering the Dutch language is a key challenge for permit holders. While some employers have become more flexible on language requirements due to labour market shortages, many still prefer candidates with at least a B1 level of Dutch. Knowledge of Dutch is seen by employers, not only as a skill to encourage better social cohesion in the workplace, but also as a sign of potential long-term residence and integration into the company culture.

Use of Rankings Lists

As indicated above, applicants must prove their degree comes from an institution listed in at least two of the following world rankings: Times Higher Education, QS World University Rankings, or the Academic Ranking of World Universities. There is an ongoing debate in Europe about the fairness and usefulness of these rankings, as they often favor institutions from the Global North and may not reflect true educational quality (Gadd, 2023; de Lange, Oomes, Gons, & Spanikova 2019; 2019; UNL, 2023).

In addition to adhering to the rankings rule as described above, new applicants from third countries must have a master's degree to be eligible for the orientation year, excluding those with a bachelor's degree. The resulting obstacle is that STEM talents in many countries often only hold a bachelor's degree. This is partly because of the high demand for their skills, and partly because of a prevalent preference among employers and the talent for gaining practical experience on the job rather than pursuing further studies. This means that STEM talent with diplomas from universities abroad are not eligible to apply for the Orientation Year Permit in the Netherlands.

Diploma Recognition

Applicants have reported that the diploma recognition process can be time-consuming and unclear. Delays in diploma recognition have contributed to delays in applications for the Orientation Year Permit. Many applications are also delayed due to incomplete documentation, further complicating the process. Nuffic stresses the importance of timely and comprehensive information provision to ensure applicants can prepare for both the diploma recognition and the application for the Orientation Year Permit.

Terminology and Wording in Legislation and Regulations

Different stakeholders discussed in the working group sessions that the current terminology and wording in the existing legislation (Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree, 2000) are unclear or outdated in certain respects. Using more precise and refined terms could avoid unnecessary confusion. These editorial and technical adjustments are further elaborated on in the recommendations under 'Laws and Regulations, Timeframe 1: Short Term (within 12 months)'.

Sectoral Focus

Following the study visit to Denmark, the question arises as to whether the Netherlands could consider the Orientation Year Permit from a more sectoral perspective, in line with Danish policy, and/or focus on professions facing shortages. As noted earlier, the Netherlands struggles with shortages in several occupations. These shortages exist in various positions within STEM sectors (see section "STEM Shortages in the Netherlands"). Additionally, these sectors are expected to face growing labour shortages in the coming years (Heyma et al., 2022). As a result, a sectoral approach that specifically targets shortage occupations in key STEM fields may be beneficial in the long run.

THE ECOSYSTEM AROUND THE PERMIT

Language and Integration

As indicated before, the transition to employment is often difficult for permit holders due to their insufficient proficiency in Dutch, as revealed by the consultation group discussions. Comparative research (OECD, 2025) also indicates that the language skills of international graduates in the Netherlands have improved rather modestly compared to similar groups in other countries. Furthermore, international students often have a limited Dutch network, which can be valuable for finding work. There are also cultural aspects related to job searching that international graduates are often unaware of, such as the importance of LinkedIn for networking or scheduling short phone introductions with new contacts, which can be part of the application process.

International Collaboration and Mobility Schemes

Current policies primarily focus on individual graduates, leaving them to navigate the Dutch labour market independently. Other countries, such as Denmark, have established targeted partnerships with educational institutions in countries such as Indonesia and Mexico, focusing on skills matching and language support (The International Organization For Migration, 2024b). With a proactive, internationally aligned strategy, Denmark actively attracts talent through competitive programmes to fill specific shortages. Strengthening international cooperation could therefore become a focus within future policies to better address structural STEM shortages in the labour market, and help the Netherlands remain competitive and innovative for young talent.

Information Provision about the Permit

Research indicates a need for improved information provision for all relevant parties. Specifically, international talent graduating from outside the Netherlands is often unaware of the Orientation Year Permit system and therefore does not apply. Additionally, there is considerable variation in how universities provide information about the permit, leading to varying levels of access to information about the permit for students. This inconsistency can affect students' access to the permit and their understanding of the permit requirements. Universities also report that they are currently often unable to answer many questions from international students, often redirecting them to the IND. Moreover, many Dutch universities discontinue providing information after students graduate.

As indicated before, employers, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are often insufficiently informed about the Orientation Year Permit. This can result in employers realizing too late that they must apply for recognized sponsorship status to hire a graduate after the orientation year. As a result, graduates may not be able to stay and work in the Netherlands after the orientation year. Additionally, SMEs are also less frequently represented at international fairs, which limits opportunities to connect with international students.

Finally, the 'Talent Hub: Supporting retention and intra-EU mobility of skilled migrants in Denmark and the EU' research in Denmark emphasizes the importance of including data from permit holders themselves in the policy process (The International Organization for Migration, 2024b). In the Netherlands, several organizations, such as Nuffic and universities, already play an important role in collecting data and feedback from students and graduates. However, there is an opportunity to better streamline the use of this existing data, signals, and feedback to facilitate targeted actions for improved talent retention and attraction.



4. STRENGTHENING THE PERMIT: RECOMMENDATIONS



The following recommendations are divided into two different chapters, one focusing on the legislation while the other focuses on the ecosystem around the permit. Within those two chapters, recommendations are organized among three different timelines based on their level of intervention on current legislation expected implementation duration. This allows for more targeted options regarding the extent to which adjustments to the permit should be implemented, whether it is a short-term focus or a longer-term, broader approach to talent retention and attraction policy in the Netherlands.

1. LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

Short-term (within 12 months)

- Terminology and phrasing in policy
- Diploma recognition

Medium-term (between 12 and 24 months)

- Duration of the orientation year

Long-term (more than 24 months)

- Sectoral focus: Splitting pathways
- Use of rankings

2. ECOSYSTEM AROUND THE PERMIT

Medium-term (between 12 and 24 months)

- Language and integration

Long-term (more than 24 months)

- International cooperation
- Information provision
- Supporting partners and families of TCNs

1. RECOMMENDATIONS: LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

TIMEFRAME 1: SHORT-TERM

Within 12 months

TERMINOLOGY AND PHRASING IN POLICY

Recommendation: To adjust the language, incorporate updated terms and clarify certain requirements within the permit policy and legislation.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

Consultations with the IND and further discussions with other stakeholders revealed inconsistencies and outdated terminology within the legislation and regulations. This can cause confusion for applicants, lead to varying interpretations by decision-making bodies, and unnecessary administrative burdens. Some articles fail to differentiate between categories of applicants, such as postdocs and researchers, which can lead to misapplication of the policy.

The proposed changes focus on three key areas:

1. **Clarity in regulations and terminology** – Updating outdated terms and removing unclear or rarely used articles will make the policy easier to interpret and apply.
2. **More efficient assessment** – Adjusting language requirements and admission criteria will help prevent misunderstandings and reduce bureaucracy, allowing the IND to process applications more quickly and consistently.
3. **Preventing misusing of the permit** – Establishing stricter and clearer conditions for researchers will help ensure the permit is used as intended, preventing its possible misuse as an alternative residency route.

Article Adjustments in Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree 2000:

1. Change of Article 3.42, Section 1, Sub e.5 of the Aliens Decree 2000: The phrase “has completed their master’s or PhD programme in Dutch or English” should be updated to clarify the educational requirements and distinguish postdoctoral research from academic programmes.
2. Removal of Article 3.42, Section 1, Sub c of the Aliens Decree 2000: This article causes confusion regarding postdocs’ eligibility. Postdoctoral programmes are not educational programmes but temporary research positions and should fall under the research permit⁸, not the Orientation Year Permit.
3. Clarification of language requirements in Article 3.42, Section 1, Sub e.5 of the Aliens Decree 2000: Consider adjusting “completed <largely> in Dutch or English” to better define language requirements for applicants.

Eliminating Redundant or Outdated Regulations Within Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree 2000:

1. Removal of rarely used articles: Articles 1.e.3, 1.e.4, and 3.42, Section 1, Sub f of the Aliens Decree 2000 are rarely applied and may be removed.
2. Updating terminology: Some programme names are outdated, such as “Erasmus Mundus Masters Course” which should be replaced with “Erasmus Mundus Joint Master (Degree)” in Article 3.42 of the Aliens Decree 2000, in line with the new legislation. Also, ‘Civic Integration Decree’ should be replaced by ‘Civic Integration Decree 2021’ in Article 3.42(1)(e.4) in line with the new legislation.

Preventing Misuse of the Orientation Year Permit

There is a need for clearer conditions for researchers. Currently, researchers who have held a research permit for only a short time (even just one day) are eligible for the orientation year. A proposed change is to introduce a minimum research duration of, for instance, three months for researchers transitioning to the orientation year.

Proposed adjustment: Add a requirement that “scientific research of at least three months” must have been completed under a regular residence permit with a research condition.

DIPLOMA RECOGNITION PROCESS – PARALLEL PROCESSES

Recommendation: To add a disclaimer to the Orientation Year Permit application form indicating that the diploma recognition process can be conducted alongside the application for the Orientation Year Permit to shorten waiting times and clarify that both processes can be handled simultaneously.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

Currently, diploma recognition can delay the application process for the orientation year, especially for candidates applying from abroad. Allowing these processes to proceed in parallel could significantly reduce waiting times. The current processing time for diploma recognition at Nuffic averages six weeks for most countries.

A potential disclaimer text could read as:

When applying for the Orientation Year Permit, please note that the diploma evaluation process can be carried out simultaneously with the application for the Orientation Year Permit. By submitting both applications at the same time, you may help shorten waiting times. You can process these two steps in parallel to make the handling of your application more efficient. We advise you to start both processes in a timely manner to avoid delays.

Despite the desire to streamline procedures, a thorough diploma evaluation remains essential to uphold the quality of international graduates and prevent unqualified candidates from gaining access to the orientation year.

Close cooperation between Nuffic, IND, and the Dutch Ministry of AenM is needed to monitor the implementation of these measures and make adjustments as necessary. Regular consultations will help identify and address potential challenges in a timely manner.

Evaluation of Future Adjustments

In the long term, further optimizations could include:

- Greater focus on labour-market-relevant skills and vital sectors, ensuring the permit better aligns with demand for specific skills in the labour market and strategic priorities in the Dutch labour market.
- Introducing a point-based system to give opportunities to practically skilled talent, especially if shortages persist in the Dutch STEM sector labor market.

⁸ For more information about the research permit, see: [Residence permit researcher \(Directive \(EU\) 2016/801\) | IND](#)

TIMEFRAME 2: MEDIUM-TERM

Between 12 and 24 months

DURATION OF THE ORIENTATION YEAR PERMIT

Recommendation: Explore ways to better connect international talent with employers and support their job search. If this does not have a positive effect on the retention rate of highly skilled talent, consider an optional extension of the Orientation Year Permit by six months⁹.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

It is important to note that the effective use of time during the orientation year is of primary importance. First and foremost, improving information provision and support for permitholders is needed to ensure a stronger alignment between graduates and the labour market. This can be organized through networking and informational meetings for permitholders, but also by establishing collaborations between knowledge institutions and companies to better match talent to labour market needs.

In addition, an optional extension of the permit could be considered. A potential extension of the Orientation Year Permit could offer multiple advantages. Currently, the Orientation Year Permit provides graduates with one year to find a job, but in practice, this period can sometimes be too short. Especially in sectors with longer recruitment processes and for candidates who are still exploring their career options, an extension could provide a solution. It would give graduates additional time to participate in longer recruitment processes, facilitate their integration into Dutch society, and strengthen their professional network within the country. Additionally, companies that are working TCNs on the Orientation Year Permit for the first time would have more time to familiarize themselves with the permit and the recognized sponsorship system. At the same time, when assessing the possible extension, decision-makers should implement measures to prevent companies from exploiting permitholders as a short-term staffing solution without genuinely considering their long-term integration as highly skilled migrants.

To further develop these initial recommendations and determine concrete next steps for implementation, several key considerations must be taken into account:

- 1. Evaluation of Impact** – Further research is needed to assess whether a longer Orientation Year Permit duration truly increases employment opportunities for international graduates and helps companies attract talent more effectively. There are also opportunities to explore the potential impact of improved information provision (see 'Information Provision' for more details and considerations).
- 2. Measures Against Possible Misuse** – It is important to assess whether an extension could lead to a higher risk of permit misuse or if graduates might remain in the Netherlands without contributing to sectors facing labour shortages. Additional conditions, such as demonstrating active job search efforts, could be considered. For example, applicants for an extension might be required to provide monthly proof of having applied for at least five job vacancies. The risk of exploitation by employers should also be evaluated by investigating common forms of abuse and implementing preventive measures to minimize such risks.
- 3. Sector-Specific Policy** – Consider whether an extension of the Orientation Year Permit could be implemented with a specific focus on sectors with the most severe labour shortages, ensuring that international talent contributes more effectively to the needs of the job market. This approach could take inspiration from the U.S. Optional Practical Training (OPT) visa¹⁰, which allows STEM graduates to remain in the U.S. for a longer period based on their degree field (having graduated with a degree from either the Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics field).
- 4. Coordination with Recognized Sponsors** – Engage companies and organizations that act as recognized sponsors to ensure they are better prepared for a longer permit duration and understand how to employ international graduates effectively.

While an extension of the Orientation Year Permit could be beneficial, it must be carefully considered. If the Netherlands aims to strengthen its position as an attractive destination for highly skilled international talent, extending the permit is a serious option—provided it is accompanied by the right conditions.

⁹ This timeframe stems from working group sessions as part of the project implementation

¹⁰ More information on the OPT visa: [Options for Alien STEM Professionals to Work in the United States | USCIS](#)

TIMEFRAME 3: LONG-TERM

More than 24 months

ADOPTING A SECTORAL FOCUS: SPLITTING UP TRAJECTORIES

Recommendation: Consider splitting the Orientation Year Permit trajectories (customer journeys) for talent who have graduated in the Netherlands versus talent who have graduated abroad, with the aim of introducing more flexibility into the policy and distinguishing between retention and attraction strategies.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

A sectoral focus in the Orientation Year Permit could help by virtue of international graduates and specialized international workers to address structural shortages the Dutch economy is facing in certain sectors (Heyma et al., 2022). To better respond to the needs of the labour market and simultaneously attract highly skilled international talent more effectively in the long run, a revision of the current legislation and regulations is worth considering.

A long-term policy adjustment could introduce two separate trajectories: the 'Graduate Permit' for third-country students who graduated in the Netherlands and the 'Orange Card' for highly skilled third-country talent. By using two different residence permits, it would be easier to differentiate, with the 'Orange Card' focusing on the (STEM)-shortages in the Dutch labour market. This system could help graduates integrate better while also specifically addressing shortages in the labour market.

The 'Graduate Permit'

- Target group: Focused on TCNs who have completed their studies in the Netherlands.
- Provides the opportunity to stay in the Netherlands longer and gain work experience without needing an employer registered as a recognized sponsor
- Encourages a smooth transition from study to work and prevents talent from leaving due to administrative barriers.

The 'Orange Card'

- Target group: Highly skilled TCNs who graduated outside the Netherlands.
- Aims to create concrete stronger connections with labour market needs regarding STEM talent and increase policy flexibility for retaining and attracting STEM-talent professionals from outside the EU.

Suggestions for thinking directions are:

- Denmark allows foreign workers to obtain residence and work permits more easily in sectors with structural shortages. The Netherlands could adopt a similar approach, using a regularly updated list of labour shortages in the Dutch market (such as the UWV 'in-demand occupations' list)¹¹.
- Inspired by Canada, Germany, and the UK, the Netherlands could develop a separate point system based on labour market shortages and research conducted by the Migration Advisory Board 'Afgewogen arbeidsmigratie: Gericht arbeidsmigratiebeleid voor brede welvaart' (Migration Advisory Board, 2024). The system could assign points based on the following:
 - *Salary level*
 - *Educational background*
 - *Sector of employment*
 - *Optional:*
 - *Availability of, and quality of, housing*
 - *(intention to obtain) Dutch language skills*¹²

USE OF RANKINGS

Recommendation: In the long term, there should be a review of the ranking system and the introduction of a more flexible selection system for the orientation year.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

One of the discussion points within the current legislation and regulations is the use of the ranking system, which relies on specific 'league' tables to assess the quality of international graduates. This approach has led to discussions about the effectiveness and fairness of using such rankings, especially as there is a general trend in Europe to revise or abolish these ranking systems, as indicated under the chapter 'Problem Analysis, Evaluation of the Permit, Users' experiences with the legal and regulatory framework Use of Ranking Lists'. If the Netherlands wants to attract more highly skilled STEM talent to address structural shortages, it is important to facilitate access to the permit without compromising the quality of the international talent being attracted. Therefore, it is proposed that, in the long term, the current ranking system be replaced in favor of a more flexible, 'case-by-case' approach, with the diploma evaluation process and concrete labour market demand at its core. However, this approach should be carefully discussed with involved stakeholders as it would place more pressure on implementing agencies.

¹¹ UWV Kansrijke beroepen 2024-2025

¹² For more information, consult the report 'Balanced labour migration: Targeted labour migration policies for broad prosperity' (Migration Advisory Council, 2024)

Moving Away from the Rankings

The rankings currently used to determine the suitability of international graduates can be limiting and cause inequality. It is proposed that, when a viable alternative is available, the ranking system be abolished in order to create a fairer selection process. This would allow the Netherlands to evaluate and recruit talent more broadly, based on the actual skills and potential of candidates. This would make the process more accessible for international talent, thereby contributing to strengthening the position of the Netherlands as an attractive destination for highly skilled professionals. A key consideration in this process is the involvement of legal experts, labour market experts (the UWV in the Netherlands) and policymakers, who, together with relevant stakeholders, must develop a clear vision of future labour market needs and required skills.

Strengthening the Diploma Evaluation Process

Instead of rankings, the diploma evaluation process, along with additional selection criteria, could serve as the foundation for selecting highly skilled talent. Cooperation with recognized bodies such as Nuffic can be crucial here. Nuffic not only assesses the level of a diploma and its authenticity, but also evaluates the quality assurance of the institution and programme through country-specific knowledge, analysis of accreditation systems and information exchange within the international ENIC-NARIC network of education comparison information centres. This ensures that the quality

of foreign diplomas can be assessed in a transparent and reliable manner. Furthermore, it would be possible to align the diploma evaluation criteria with the skills that the Dutch labour market actually needs, for example by using the in-demand occupations lists established by the UWV. The goal would be that only talent with the right qualifications and skills would be eligible to apply for the permit.

Introduction of a 'Desired Occupations List'

Another recommendation is to develop a 'desired list of occupations', which would list specific STEM skills sectors and areas of expertise occupations that match the current and future needs of the Dutch labour market. Candidates who possess these profiles would then be given priority when applying for the Orientation Year Permit. This would both increase the effectiveness of the permit and ensure that the available international talent actually contributes to the STEM-sectors most in need of additional capacity.

Alignment with Employers and Sectors

Finally, it is essential to involve employers and sector organizations in determining the desired occupations and diploma requirements. Through this alignment, the system can better reflect the actual needs of the labour market and the Orientation Year Permit can be used as a valuable tool to address shortages in key sectors.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

ECOSYSTEM AROUND THE PERMIT

TIMEFRAME 1: MEDIUM-TERM

Between 12 and 24 months

LANGUAGE AND INTEGRATION

Recommendation: To facilitate access to language courses for job-seeking graduates to strengthen their Dutch language skills and strengthen existing initiatives to connect international talent with employers.

Note: This recommendation falls outside the competence of the Ministry of Asylum and Migration.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

Stakeholder consultations and working group sessions have shown that basic knowledge of the Dutch language significantly impacts the employability of international graduates. Language skills not only increase their chances in the job market but also help build personal and professional networks and integrate into Dutch society. Employers see learning Dutch as an important indicator of motivation and long-term commitment to the Netherlands. Currently, many international graduates face obstacles in finding a job, with a lack of Dutch language skills being cited as a major barrier. Research by Nuffic (2023) also indicates that knowledge of the Dutch language helps in finding a job-and in feeling at

home in the Netherlands. There is also the need for more information on how the Dutch labour market and society works, even before internationals come to the Netherlands. To promote the integration of international talent in the Netherlands and facilitate their transition into employment, the following measures could be considered:

1. More information on current language courses during studies in the Netherlands and possible subsidy frameworks

– Providing information on existing language courses can encourage international students to take language courses. For educational institutions, it would be good to gain more knowledge about the subsidy framework in order to be able to offer more (subsidized) language courses to international students.

2. (Possibly subsidized) language courses during the orientation year

– Offering accessible language courses can support Orientation Year Permit holders new to the Netherlands to improve their language skills, thereby increasing their chances in the labour market. Inspiration can be drawn from the Danish model, where subsidized language courses are available to graduates and their partners. In addition, flexible course options, such as online classes or evening classes, can be offered.

3. Establishing and expanding integration support programmes for new international talent

– Besides language skills, knowledge of the Dutch (work)culture also plays a positive role in finding employment. The Netherlands could invest in broader orientation programmes, such as:

- Information and courses on the Dutch work culture and the different organizations and employers in a sector, so international talents better understand Dutch workplace culture.
- Support and information provision to employers on integrating non-Dutch-speaking employees.
- Cultural sensitivity and diversity and knowledge of legislation and regulation trainings for employers to better prepare companies for working with international talent.
- A proactive role for universities and international (international) centers, for example, through information sessions on Dutch work culture and job application guidance.

4. Stronger collaboration between universities and businesses, as also suggested in the recommendation on the Duration of the Orientation Year Permit, and its efficient use– Many international graduates experience a gap between their education and the Dutch labour market,

partly due to a lack of networks and work experience. Closer collaboration between universities and businesses can help bridge this gap. Some concrete implementation steps include:

- Organizing regular networking events and mentorship programmes, where international students can connect with employers and professionals in their field.
- Expanding internship and traineeship opportunities specifically aimed at international talent, allowing them to gain relevant work experience.
- Regional coordination of initiatives, where universities, businesses, and the government work together to structurally support the integration of international talent.

5. Further supporting and strengthening initiatives launched by international centers – regional international centers implement a host of integration and inclusion programmes that aid in the integration of international talent. Away to further support these initiatives could be as follows:

6. Expanding information dissemination of events in the area by providing a welcome packet to TCNs moving into the area from abroad: The international centre “IN Amsterdam”, for example, provides cultural orientation sessions and networking events to help newcomers integrate into the Amsterdam area. Many of the other international centers do too. Sharing more information about these events could be done via additional communication channels, such as in an information package provided to TCNs when they arrive at their new home.

Best Practices

Regarding the above recommendation, inspiration can be drawn from the following best practices:

1. Free or subsidized language lessons:

- Maastricht University and Wageningen University, for example, offer a free “Social Dutch” course to international students¹³ The course aims not only to teach the language but also to introduce students to Dutch culture.

2. Establishing and supporting integration support programmes:

- In Belgium, there is an initiative offering free social integration courses to international students and job-seeking graduates in Brussels¹⁴. The course covers topics such as student residence status, visa extensions, student jobs, healthcare, the job search year, and more. Participants also receive guidance on diploma recognition and build a social network through the course.

¹³ For more information about the language courses, see: [Universiteit Maastricht loopt vooruit: cursus Nederlands populair onder internationale studenten - L1 Nieuws](https://www.unima.nl/en/education/courses/foreign-students/courses-for-foreign-students) and https://static.teams.cdn.office.net/evergreen-assets/safelinks/1/atp-safelinks.html?Social_Dutch_1_-_VWUR

¹⁴ For more information about the social integration course, see: [Civic integration for international students | Bon](https://www.civicsocialintegration.be/)

- In Flanders, the Flemish Employment Service (VDAB) plays an important role. They offer specialized job coaching, guide job seekers to training, language courses, and job fairs, and support employers in developing diversity policies. Additionally, language courses in Flanders are free for anyone who lives and works there.
- Companies can conduct a Lexicon workplace scan to identify existing obstacles and comprehension gaps, ensuring international employees can fully integrate into the company¹⁵.
- Companies can also complete the Employer/Company Self-Assessment – Strengths and Needs checklist, created by the IOM during the EU Talent Hub project, to gain better insight into their ability to hire international staff¹⁶.
- In Denmark, Copenhagen Capacity, as part of its BELONG project¹⁷, provides cultural sensitivity workshops to employers to better support them in hiring international staff. The project addresses psychological barriers, isolation, and cultural differences that impact the well-being and retention of international employees in Danish small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). By equipping companies with practical tools and strategies, the project sets a new standard for creating inclusive and supportive workplaces in Denmark.

3. Stronger collaboration between universities and businesses:

- Good example of networking events are the Campus The Hague Career Event at Leiden University¹⁸, Delft Career Days¹⁹, Beta Banenmarkt in Leiden²⁰, or Recruitment Days in Eindhoven²¹.
- Various initiatives have already been launched by The Hague International Center (THIC)²² and Holland Expat Center South (HECS)²³, such as the 'High Tech Institute Culture Training' organized by HECS, where newcomers can learn more about the Dutch culture and labour market, and the 'Feel at Home' evenings organized by THIC, where newcomers get a general introduction about living in the Netherlands and can build their social networks. These initiatives are also available to Orientation Year Permit Holders applying from abroad.

TIMEFRAME 2: LONG-TERM

More than 24 months

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Recommendation: Explore possible circular labour mobility arrangements with relevant countries to address labour market shortages.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

To pursue a sectoral focus, international collaborations could be considered. Specifically, partnerships with universities (within or outside the EU) can help attract specific STEM talent, for example, through joint initiatives, financial incentives, harmonization of regulations, and effective promotional campaigns (The International Organization for Migration, 2024a). Universities that have previously had collaborations with Dutch universities or Dutch ministries (e.g., UNESCO schools in secondary education) would be strong candidates for this. This could involve connecting Dutch employers with international graduates from a) STEM disciplines at Flemish universities or b) specific STEM programmes at universities outside the EU (ibid).

Best Practices

- For more guidance and recommendations on setting up Skills Mobility Partnerships, IOM's 'Skills Mobility Partnerships: Recommendations and Guidance for Policymakers and Practitioners' provides valuable insights on how to effectively design and implement these schemes²⁴.

15 For more information about the Lexicon workplace scan: Trainingen op maat: [Onze Werkvloerscan | Lexicon](#)

16 More information and access to the IOM Denmark employers checklist can be found here: [talent_hub_guidebook_stakeholder_final_corrected10jun24.pdf](#)

17 More information on the BELONG project: [BELONG: Fostering Inclusion and Wellbeing for International Employees](#)

18 For more information: [Campus The Hague Career Event 2025: Job Fair - Leiden University](#)

19 For more information: [Delft Career Days](#)

20 For more information: [Connecting Students and Companies - Stichting Bètabanenmarkt](#)

21 For more information: [Wervingsdagen - The TU/e Career Events](#)

22 For more information: [Homepage | The Hague International Centre](#)

23 For more information: [Holland Expat Center South - Welcome to Brabant! - Holland Expat Center](#)

24 For more information: [Skills Mobility Partnerships: Recommendations and Guidance for Policymakers and Practitioners | IOM Publications Platform](#)

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Recommendation: To conduct a further needs analysis of the information provision and dissemination regarding the Orientation Year Permit, both domestically and abroad, with a particular focus on informing Dutch employers about the permit and its workings.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation.

A lack of clear and accessible information about the Orientation Year Permit is a major barrier to its effectiveness. Throughout the project, it has become evident that many highly skilled international STEM professionals are simply not aware of this scheme. This means that potentially valuable candidates miss out on considering the Netherlands as a career destination simply because they do not know about this scheme and how to apply. Moreover, during the orientation year itself, there is also a need for information provision to promote rapid integration into the labour market.

Furthermore, employers – especially SMEs – are insufficiently familiar with the benefits of the scheme. As a result, many international graduates remain unnecessarily unemployed while companies struggle with a shortage of technical talent. This lack of information not only leads to underutilization of the Orientation Year Permit but also hinders the broader integration of international talent into the Dutch labour market.

To address these gaps in information provision and increase the visibility of the permit, the following measures are recommended:

- 1. Structured and consistent information campaign about the Orientation Year Permit** - Reviewing current communication practices around the permit and strengthening them is an important step in ensuring that relevant information is disseminated in a more targeted and widespread manner. A targeted information campaign could contribute to this goal. An example of this could be the video campaign launched by the IND in 2017 about the permit. The video can be found [here](#).
- 2. Uniform communication by** - Support universities to adopt a joint approach to inform STEM students in a timely and comprehensive manner about the permit, for example through mandatory information sessions or integration into student portals. In addition, input from international students indicates that their needs are mainly to receive information through social media.

3. Active promotion via foreign posts - Dutch embassies and consulates should be used to promote the permit to STEM students considering the Netherlands as a study destination. Additionally, information about the permit can be standardized and included in promotion materials provided by Nuffic and other information bodies.

4. Targeted campaigns for employers, especially SMEs - Employers should receive clearer guidelines about the benefits of hiring international graduates, including administrative simplifications and cost advantages. Online tools and webinars can be created to inform employers about the Orientation Year Permit and the Highly Skilled Migrant Visa that often follows an Orientation Year Permit.

5. Strengthening public-private collaboration - To further support the integration of international talent, collaboration between universities and companies must be strengthened. Denmark shows that the private sector can play a role in onboarding and guidance. This could involve encouraging companies to offer internships, traineeships and mentorships specifically for international talent, universities organizing regular networking and matchmaking sessions between international students and potential employers, and companies being encouraged to offer onboarding programmes where international employees are supported in cultural and administrative integration.

6. Streamline feedback from internationals - To understand what (potential) obstacles face during their orientation year; there is a growth opportunity to better streamline feedback mechanisms for international talent. Nuffic and several universities already play an important role in collecting data and feedback from students and graduates, but there is potential to further streamline this feedback to ensure that policies remain efficient and impactful.

Best Practices

Regarding the above recommendation, inspiration can be drawn from the following best practices:

- The national public labour service in Denmark, for example, provides information, guidance, and access to digital tools to connect international talent with Danish employers (MPF, 2024)²⁵.
- Germany introduced the 'Make it in Germany' platform in 2012, which is the central welcome portal for qualified professionals from abroad (MPF, 2024). However, there is still a need for personal guidance and support as well (ibid.)²⁶.
- Another initiative in the Netherlands regarding information provision is the 'Study in the Netherlands' portal, which presents all information about studying at Dutch

²⁵ For more information: <https://www.workindenmark.dk/>

²⁶ For more information on the 'Make it in Germany' platform: <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/>

educational institutions. It also offers practical guidance for graduates to start a professional career in the Netherlands, including services and information on finding a job²⁷

- RVO offers (online and physical) information sessions for students to learn more about the various residence permits offered in the Netherlands through their 'Staying in the Netherlands' presentation. RVO also supports internationals through their 'Welcome to NL'²⁸. *Netherlands Point of Entry* portal²⁹.
- There are also more regional initiatives such as 'Make it in the North' in the Northern Netherlands with information to match internationals with international-friendly companies³⁰.

SUPPORTING PARTNERS AND FAMILIES OF TCN'S

Recommendation: implement and support existing initiatives to support the partners of TCNs to expand their professional and personal network.

[Click here](#) for the detailed roadmap to implement this recommendation

In research done by the CBS, it was found that 66 of 100 TCNs end up leaving the Netherlands within five years of graduating, but that that number significantly decreases when their partner was able to find work in the Netherlands (CBS, 2025). In general, settling in the Netherlands with a family often leads to an increase in probability of a long-term stay (ibid). As such, partners and families are important factors to consider when attempting to enhance STEM-talent retention. In the long run, this support contributes to the ultimate goal of talent retention, especially in view of TCN's who switch to a Highly Skilled Migrant Visa after their orientation year.

There are a number of ways to support the expansion of the professional (in case the partner would like to find work themselves) and personal networks of the partners of TCNs. Below are some recommended practical measures:

- **Career Coaching and Mentoring Programmes:** NGO's, municipalities, cities, and international centers and businesses can partner to offer career coaching for spouses to help them navigate the Dutch job market and build connection.
- **Volunteering Opportunities:** Municipalities and cities can promote platforms like 'NL Voor Elkaar'³¹ and 'Volunteer Center Amsterdam'³² van offer opportunities for partners who would like to take the first steps towards expanding their professional network.
- **Organizing Industry-Specific Networking Events:** when organizing networking events for permitholders themselves (see previous recommendations), also ensure to target the partners of TCNs who might want to search for a job as well. Ensure that these events are during school hours so that partners with children as free to attend.
- **Setting up Buddy Programmes:** Pair newcomers with other international partners who have lived in the Netherlands a long already or Dutch partners who can guide them through settling in and potentially aid them in language acquisition.
- **Language and Cultural Exchange Programmes:** Municipalities and cities can offer local Dutch language courses and cultural immersion activities, such as days out, celebration Dutch holidays together, to help partners connect socially.

Best practices

Regarding the above recommendation, inspiration can be drawn from the following best practice:

- **Expat Spouses Initiative:** A Brabant-based programme connecting expat partners with local job opportunities and professional networks. They offer career coaching, skill-building workshops, and networking events for international spouses³³.

27 For more information: [Homepage | Study in NL](#)

28 For more information: [Welcome to NL - Welcomes International Talent](#)

29 For more information: [Netherlands Point of Entry](#)

30 For more information: [Jobs platform for Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe](#)

31 For more information: [Home | Volunteer The Hague](#)

32 For more information: [Vrijwilligerswerk in Amsterdam](#)

33 For more information: [Expat Spouses Initiative: Empowering Internationals in the Dutch Labour Market](#)

5. ROADMAP



The goal of this roadmap is to effectively implement the proposed changes concerning the Orientation Year Permit and the ecosystem around it. This plan provides an overview of the necessary steps, the estimated duration of the implementation, and the recommended stakeholders to be involved to ensure the intended policy changes are both legally anchored and practically executable. The roadmap has been drafted based on the current understanding of the policy landscape and the anticipated changes, but it should be considered as a provisional estimate.

This roadmap is based on current insights and is intended as an estimate of the steps required for the implementation of the proposed legal changes. The roadmap does not necessarily imply any imposition or obligation to be followed. The actual execution may vary depending on external factors, policy changes, or unforeseen circumstances. Additionally, other relevant aspects and stakeholders, such as regional authorities, educational institutions, employers, and other policy organizations, may play a role in its implementation. It is important to monitor these variables and adjust the roadmap where necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the intended policy changes.

1. ROADMAP LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS

TIMEFRAME 1: SHORT-TERM

Within 12 months

TERMINOLOGY AND PHRASING IN POLICY

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

According to established procedures to amend ministerial regulations: amendment of the Ministerial Regulation: Aliens Decree 2000.

Communication and stakeholder management

- Regular consultations with stakeholders, including universities, the IND, and employers.
- Transparent communication via newsletters and policy notes.
- Information sessions and webinars for applicants and involved agencies.

Risk management

- Delay in the legislative process: Timely consultation and coordination with relevant agencies.
- Unexpected objections from stakeholders: Early consultation and participation.
- Implementation difficulties: Pilots and tests with implementing agencies.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **Dutch Ministry of Asylum and Migration and Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security**
 - Guide the process and coordinate with relevant stakeholders.
- Lawyers and legal experts: Work on the development of the changes and ensure alignment with existing regulations.
- IND and other implementing agencies: Provide practical input and test feasibility.
- Other stakeholders: Universities, research institutions, and employers are consulted.

DIPLOMA EVALUATION PROCESS - PARALLEL PROCESSES

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Preparation (months 1-3)

- Inventory potential impacts for implementing agencies.
- Consultation with Nuffic, IND, and the Dutch Ministry of Asylum and Migration to assess practical feasibility.

Phase 2: Formal adjustment and communication (months 4-6)

- Draft and approve the disclaimer text for the permit application form.
- Technical adjustment of the digital and paper application forms.

- Inform stakeholders about the changes through policy letters and meetings.
- Publish the adjusted procedure on relevant websites – add the disclaimer to relevant web pages for clarity for applicants.

Phase 3: Implementation and training (months 7-10)

- Introduction of the new procedure at IND and Nuffic.
- Training for staff of the agencies involved.
- Information sessions for applicants, universities, and employers.

Phase 4: Monitoring and evaluation (months 11-12)

- Periodic evaluation of processing times and impact on the application procedure.
- Feedback rounds with IND, Nuffic, and other stakeholders.
- Identify further optimization opportunities, such as a point system or a focus on labour market-relevant skills.

Risk Management

- Delays in implementation: Timely coordination and clear deadlines.
- Insufficient awareness among applicants: Targeted communication plan and outreach.
- Unintended misinterpretation of parallel processes: Clear guidelines and support.
- Failure to submit diploma evaluation: In this case, the Orientation Year Permit will not be issued.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **IND and Nuffic**
 - Responsible for the execution and monitoring of the diploma evaluation process.
- Dutch Ministry of AenM and Dutch Ministry of JenV.
- Hold structural consultations between IND, Nuffic, and the Dutch ministries for future adjustments and smooth communication.
- Other stakeholders: Universities, employers, and relevant agencies are involved for feedback and implementation advice.

TIMEFRAME 2: MEDIUM-TERM

Duration of 12-24 months

DURATION OF THE ORIENTATION YEAR PERMIT

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Research and Preparation (months 1-6)

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of existing support for permitholders.
- Research on the impact of a longer permit duration on finding employment.
- Analysis of sectors with labour shortages and their need for international talent.
- Inventory of potential risks of abuse and exploitation.
- Consultation with employers, recognized sponsors, and educational institutions.

Phase 2: Improvement of Labour Market Access (months 7-12)

- Implementation of improved information provision and guidance.
- Organizing networking and informational meetings for permitholders.
- Establishing collaborations between knowledge institutions and companies to better match talent to labour market needs.
- Evaluation of the effect of these measures on the retention rate.

Phase 3: Decision Making on Extension (months 13-18)

- Based on evaluation results, determine if a six-month extension is necessary.
- Formulate any conditions for an extension, such as demonstrating effort to find employment.
- Coordination with employers and recognized sponsors regarding the impact of an extension.
- Legal and policy preparation for a legislative change if needed.

Phase 4: Implementation and Monitoring (months 19-24)

- Potential adjustment of regulations and IND procedures.
- Communication of changes to international graduates and employers.
- Monitoring the effects of an extended permit duration on the labour market.
- Adjusting policy as needed based on practical experiences.

Communication and Stakeholder Management

- Regular consultation with employers, universities, and migration experts.
- Transparent communication through policy notes and information channels.
- Collaboration with IND and companies to strengthen guidance for permitholders.

Risk Management

- Formulating conditions for extension and monitoring compliance to prevent misuse of the extension.
- Limited impact effect on retention: In this case, timely evaluation and adjustment of the measures will be necessary.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **Dutch Ministry of Asylum, the Dutch Ministry of Social and Employment Affairs, and Migration and the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs**
 - Responsible for policy and legal alignment.
- IND: Ensures implementation and monitors compliance with regulations.
- Universities and knowledge institutions: Provide information and guidance to international graduates.
- Other stakeholders: Employers (with a focus on recognized sponsors).

TIMEFRAME 3: LONG-TERM

Duration of 24 months

SECTORAL FOCUS: SPLITTING THE TRAJECTORIES

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

The Suggested New System

A. 'Graduate Permit': Retaining International Talent

- Focused on TCN graduates of Dutch educational institutions.
- Ability to stay in the Netherlands longer without direct need of a 'recognized sponsor'.
- Facilitating a smooth transition from study to work.
- Research into options for an additional support program, such as language and integration training.
- In collaboration with employer organizations and universities, ensure more internship and work experience opportunities.

B. 'Orange Card': Targeted Inflow Based on Labour

Market Needs

- Specifically for TCN talent who did not study in the Netherlands.
- Based on a 'Desired Occupations List' (inspired by Denmark), with sectors facing structural shortages.
- Faster and simpler residence and work permit procedures for specific knowledge and experience.
- Focused promotion of the scheme via embassies, consular services, and international universities.

Concrete Considerations and Steps for Implementing the 'Orange Card':

- **Option 1: If the decision is made to follow a 'Desired Occupations List':**
 - Develop a 'Desired Occupations List' of occupations in STEM-sectors where shortages are structural and well-documented, based on analyses from the UWV and other relevant institutions.
 - Involve employer organizations and sector funds in compiling and updating the list to ensure it aligns with real labour market demands.
 - Monitor the effectiveness of the new permit structure and conduct an annual evaluation in collaboration with the UWV, IND, and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.
 - Regularly update the 'Desired Occupations List' to respond to changing labour market needs.
- **Option 2: If the decision is made to implement a points-based system based on the Advisory Council on Migration's recommendations:**
 - The system could award points based on the following criteria (Adviesraad Migratie, 2024):
 - *Occupation*
 - *Sector*
 - *Availability and quality of housing*
 - Develop a points-based system tailored to STEM labour market needs: Use analyses from the UWV, CBS, and sectoral organizations to determine the most relevant criteria. Allocate points based on:
 - *Salary level (higher salaries → more points)*
 - *Occupation category (shortage occupations receive priority)*
 - *Sector (strategically important sectors, such as STEM sectors, may receive additional points)*
 - *Availability and quality of housing (to prevent additional pressure on the housing market)*
 - Establish an independent evaluation committee: Form a committee with representatives from the UWV, IND, the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, employer organizations, and trade unions. The committee will periodically assess whether the points system remains aligned with current labour market developments.

- Technical and legal implementation: Develop a digital application and assessment system that is efficient and transparent. Ensure alignment with EU legislation and Dutch migration regulations to guarantee legal feasibility.
- Increase the international visibility of these schemes to selectively and strategically attract STEM-talent, including through embassies, consular services, and partnerships with universities. A visibility campaign could also be considered, promoting RVO's 'Welcome to NL' website for further information dissemination for TCNs.

Timeline and Implementation Phases: Creating and setting up the 'Graduate Permit' and the 'Orange Card'

Phase 1: Initial Development (months 1-6)

- Analyze labour market shortages using data from the UWV, IND, and other relevant agencies.
- Engage with sector experts, employer organizations, and industry stakeholders to understand the structural needs.
- Create an initial draft of the 'Desired Occupations List'.
- Hold consultations with employer organizations and sector funds to refine the 'Desired Occupations List'.
- Organize meetings with SMEs and relevant employer organizations to ensure equitable representation of employers and data on their vacancies and needs should be collected through these consultations
- Ensure that the list is aligned with the actual labour market demand and that all relevant sectors are represented.
- Prepare a draft framework for the residence and work permit process for foreign workers.

Phase 2: Policy Finalization and Stakeholder Engagement (months 7-12)

- Update and finalize the 'Desired Occupations List'.
- Ensure that the list includes professions where there is clear evidence of labour shortages.
- Create a formal document to be used for residency and work permit applications.
- Develop and implement a simplified residence and work permit application process for foreign workers in the listed professions.
- Work with the Dutch Ministry of SZW to streamline permit issuance.
- Start working with embassies, consular services, and universities on international visibility and communication strategies.

Phase 3: Pilot Programme and Communication Strategy (months 13-18)

- Start a pilot project that allows foreign workers from specific professions on the list to apply for the 'Orange Card' under the simplified process.

- Monitor the application process to identify any challenges or bottlenecks.
- Start promoting the new scheme internationally through consular services, embassies, and collaborations with universities and research institutions.
- Launch a targeted marketing campaign to attract international talent to the Netherlands, including participation in job fairs and talent attraction events.
- Establish dedicated online portals and informational materials for potential applicants.

Phase 4: Full Implementation and Monitoring (months 19-24)

- Open the 'Orange Card' application process fully for foreign workers in professions listed on the 'Desired Occupations List'.
- Ensure that the simplified residence and work permit procedures are fully operational.
- Continue collaboration with sector organizations and SME employer organizations to assess and update the 'Desired Occupations List' as needed.
- Conduct the first annual evaluation of the 'Orange Card' programme with the UWV, IND, and the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.
- Assess the effectiveness of the programme in addressing labour shortages and attracting talent.
- Adjust policies and procedures based on feedback from applicants and stakeholders.

Phase 5: Ongoing Evaluation and Adaptation (months 24+)

- Annually update the 'Desired Occupations List' to reflect changing labour market needs.
- Continue collaboration with sector organizations to ensure the list remains relevant.
- Conduct annual reviews and evaluations in collaboration with the relevant agencies.
- Explore further opportunities to simplify procedures and enhance international visibility to attract more talent.

Expected Effects

- A clearer and more efficient separation between attracting and retaining talent.
- More targeted labour market access for highly skilled individuals and fewer administrative barriers.
- Strengthening the international competitive position of the Netherlands as a knowledge-based country and a top destination for international talent.
- Better response to sectoral shortages through active talent recruitment.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **The Dutch Ministry of Asylum and Migration, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, Ministry Economic Affairs, and the IND**
 - Responsible for the implementation and execution of changes in the Orientation Year Permit.
- Nuffic – Evaluation and recognition of international diplomas.
- Employers and sector organizations – Provide input on labour market needs and labour shortages.
- Educational institutions and universities (Universities of the Netherlands, 4TU, The European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO)) – Involved in evaluating and supporting international students.

USE OF RANKINGS

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Research and Analysis (months 1-6)

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the current ranking system.
- Benchmarking with other European countries.
- Consultation with stakeholders on alternative selection criteria.

Phase 2: Development (months 7-12)

- Formulating an alternative selection mechanism, such as a diploma evaluation system and a 'Desired Occupations List.'
- Development of regulations and policy proposals.
- Testing phase with a limited group of international graduates.

Phase 3: Implementation (months 13-18)

- Official abolition of the ranking system.
- Introduction of the renewed Orientation Year Permit with alternative selection criteria.
- Monitoring and first evaluation after six months.

Phase 4: Evaluation and Optimization (months 19-36)

- Data analysis and feedback from stakeholders.
- Adjusting policies based on initial experiences.
- Annual evaluation and update of the 'Desired Occupations List.'

Communication and Stakeholder Management

- Regular meetings with Nuffic, IND, UWV, and employer organizations to discuss progress.
- Information sessions and webinars for international students and employers regarding the new system.
- Public campaigns through embassies, consular services, and universities to promote the new system internationally.
- Digital information, such as updated websites and frequently asked questions (FAQs).

Risk Management

- Uncertainty among employers and graduates: Clear information and guidance during the transition to the new system.
- Insufficient alignment with the labour market: Continuous adjustment of the 'Desired Occupations list' and close collaboration with UWV.
- Legal challenges: Coordination with legal experts to ensure the policy is legally viable and enforceable.
- Operational complexity: Careful implementation planning and test phases to minimize problems during execution.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **The Dutch Ministry of Asylum and Migration**
- The Dutch ministries of EZ, SZW, OCW, BZ – Policy development and regulations regarding international talent recruitment.
- Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) – Implementation and execution of changes to the Orientation Year Permit.
- Nuffic – Evaluation and recognition of international diplomas.
- UWV – Determining in-demand professions and skills in the labour market.
- Employers and sector organizations – Providing input on labour market needs and the integration of international talent.
- Educational institutions and universities (Universities of the Netherlands, 4TU, The European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO)) – Involved in the evaluation and support of international students.

2. ROADMAP: ECOSYSTEM

TIMEFRAME 1: MEDIUM-TERM

Between 12 and 24 months

LANGUAGE AND INTEGRATION

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Research and Planning (months 1-6)

- Inventory existing language, orientation programmes, subsidy frameworks and quality standards.
- Research the language skill needs of employers and international graduates.
- Compare with successful foreign models (e.g., Denmark).
- Establish partnerships between universities, employers, and language institutes.

Phase 2: Pilot Phase and Initial Implementation (months 7-12)

- Start (possibly subsidized) language courses for permitholders through universities and language institutes.
- Set up flexible learning options, such as online classes and evening courses.
- Launch mentoring programmes and networking events between international graduates and employers.
- Expand cultural and professional orientation programmes, including workshops on Dutch work culture sector specific information.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Scaling Up (months 13-18)

- Evaluate the effectiveness of language courses and orientation programmes.
- Gather feedback from participants and employers on the impact of these initiatives.
- Make adjustments based on evaluation results.
- Scale up successful programmes and strengthen collaborations.

Phase 4: Institutionalization and Monitoring (months 19-24)

- Consider institutionalizing language courses as a component of the Orientation Year Permit.
- Integrate networking events and mentoring programmes within universities and international centers.
- Regular monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of measures.
- Encourage employers to actively contribute to the integration of international talent.

Communication and Stakeholder Management

- Inform international graduates through Dutch foreign offices abroad, universities, IND, and international centers.
- Regular coordination with employers and language institutes about needs and expectations.
- Use of online platforms and social media to make programmes accessible.

Risk Management

- Low participation rate: Actively promote language courses and orientation programmes.
- Funding challenges: Collaborate with private and public partners for subsidies.
- Mismatch between programmes and labour market needs: Ongoing consultation with employers to align courses and support with practical needs.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment**
 - Coordination of subsidy and policy measures.
- Universities and Colleges: Organize and promote language courses and orientation programmes.
- Language Institutes and International Centers: Execute courses and provide guidance for permitholders.
- Employers and Business Associations: Involved in mentoring programmes and workplace integration.

TIMEFRAME 2: LONG-TERM

More than 24 months

EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Research and Analysis (months 1-8)

- Inventory of best practices in other countries with circular labour mobility schemes and Skills/Talent Mobility Partnerships.
- Assessing the feasibility and impact of such schemes on the Dutch labour market and also the country of origin.
- Consultation with stakeholders on sectoral needs and potential collaborations.

Phase 2: Development (months 9-16)

- Setting up pilot projects with partner universities and countries with proven surpluses of specific STEM-profiles.
- Formulating policy proposals for circular labour mobility and Skills Mobility Partnerships.
- Negotiations with international partners on joint talent mobility programmes.

Phase 3: Implementation (months 17-22)

- Launching pilot projects with selected universities and employers.
- Establishing a support structure for circular labour migrants, including language training and socio-cultural orientation.
- Monitoring and first evaluation after six months.

Phase 4: Evaluation and Optimization (months 23-30)

- Analyzing the effectiveness of the scheme and its impact on the labour market.
- Collecting feedback from participating universities, employers, and migrants.
- Adjusting and scaling the scheme based on the evaluation results.

Communication and Stakeholder Management

- Regular consultations with educational institutions, employer organizations, and government agencies.
- International collaboration agreements with strategic partner countries.
- Information sessions and webinars for employers and international graduates about the possibilities of circular labour mobility.
- Promotion campaigns through embassies, consular services, and universities to attract international talent.
- Digital information provision, such as updated websites and frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the scheme.

Risk Management

- Insufficient interest from employers and graduates: Active promotion and encouragement through subsidies and incentives.
- Lack of support from countries of origin: Focus on building trust through dialogue, tailored incentives, and pilot programmes that align with development goals for both parties. Ensure transparency, safeguard workers' rights, and continuously adapt the scheme based on feedback to address concerns like brain drain and exploitation.
- Mismatch between international talent and the Dutch labour market: Regular coordination between UWV and sector organizations.
- Legal and administrative complexity: Close consultation with IND and legal experts to make regulations clear and feasible.
- Possible misuse of the scheme: Clear information provision and strict monitoring and evaluation to prevent abuse.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- Involve educational institutions and facilitate international partnerships and the implementation and execution of arrangements for international skills and talent mobility.
- The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) – Policy development and regulations regarding international collaboration and labour mobility.
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Advise and provide technical assistance on circular labour mobility, Skills Mobility Partnerships, and international best practices. Additionally, IOM can aid in expertise on talent attraction and retention, targeted integration and community cohesion policies, as well as voluntary returns and preparation and inclusion of returnees.
- UWV – Identifying sectors with shortages and formulating guidelines for international labour mobility.
- Employers and sector organizations – Providing input on specific labour market needs and participating in collaboration initiatives.

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Research and Needs Analysis (months 1-6)

- Conduct a thorough analysis of the current gaps in information provision for both students and employers.
- Evaluate best practices in countries with successful orientation programmes (e.g., Denmark).
- Create a report with recommendations for targeted communication actions.
- Mapping current feedback channels around the Orientation Year Permit.

Phase 2: Development of Information Campaigns and Tools (months 7-12)

- Set up a widely supported and consistent information campaign aimed at both international graduates and SMEs.
- Develop digital tools such as an online portal, that provide clear guidelines about the permit, including step-by-step plans for both employers and graduates.
- Provide training and information for embassy staff and universities about the permit.

Phase 3: Roll-out and Promotion (months 13-24)

- Actively promote via universities, embassies, consulates, and employer networks.
- Organize webinars and information sessions for employers about the benefits and administrative simplifications of the permit.
- Integrate permit information into study materials and information sessions by Nuffic and international scholarship programmes.

Phase 4: Monitoring and Optimization (months 25+)

- Annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the information campaigns and feedback channels, and adjustments as needed.
- Ongoing collaboration with stakeholders to optimize communication channels and further increase awareness of the Orientation Year Permit.

Communication and Stakeholder Management

- Regular stakeholder meetings: Organize discussions with universities, employer organizations, and government parties to ensure the effectiveness of the information campaigns.
- Multichannel communication approach: Utilize online platforms, social media, webinars, and physical events to achieve broad outreach.
- Collaboration with influencers and alumni: Use international graduates who are former permit holders as ambassadors to share their experiences.
- Leverage local employer networks: Actively collaborate with regional development agencies and international centers to better inform SMEs about the benefits of the permit.

Risk Management

- Low employer engagement: Mitigate this risk by working closely with industry associations and targeted information campaigns for SMEs.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **Ministry of Economic Affairs, IND, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Centres.**
 - Coordinating and implementing the information campaign.
- Nuffic: Ensures the integration of information about the Orientation Year Permit into study materials and promotion to international students.
- Universities and universities of applied sciences: Responsible for uniform communication to students via portals, information sessions, and alumni networks.

- Dutch embassies and consulates: Promote awareness of the permit among potential international students and graduates abroad.
- Employer organizations (such as VNO-NCW, MKB-Nederland): Help inform companies, especially SMEs, about the benefits of hiring international graduates.
- International centers and public-private partnerships: Act as a link between employers and international talent, offering support in integration and onboarding.

SUPPORTING PARTNERS AND FAMILIES OF TCNS

[Click here](#) to be redirected back to the Recommendation outlined above.

Implementation Phases

Phase 1: Planning and Partnership Building (Months 1-12)

- Identify and onboard stakeholders, as well as existing initiatives to partner with – important partner are municipalities and international centers
- Develop partnerships with volunteering platforms and businesses and other existing initiatives.
- Explore funding opportunities from government grants, private sponsors, or EU initiatives.
- Conduct a needs assessment to collect information on existing initiatives, best practices, and what is further needed for successful implementation by stakeholders.

Phase 2: Pilot Programme Launch – Extension of Current Initiatives (Months 13-20)

- Based on initial needs assessment and negotiations had in Phase 1, work on one (or more) of the following:
 - Expand or implement initial career coaching and buddy programmes in selected regions.
 - Co-organize industry-specific networking events.
 - Promote volunteering opportunities and language/cultural exchange programmes on a regional and national level.
- Monitor participation and gather feedback.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Sustainability (Months 20-25+)

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of programme impact (e.g., TCN retention rates, partner employment success).
- Develop a long-term strategy for sustaining initiatives with continued stakeholder support.
- Explore scalability for other regions or similar contexts.
- Build awareness campaigns targeted at TCNs and their families.

Risk Management

- **Low participation:** Promote participation by designing engaging outreach campaigns and incentives (e.g., free language courses, childcare services during events).
- **Cultural Barriers:** Offer tailored programmes that respect cultural sensitivities and include multilingual facilitators and the support and participation of local organizations.
- **Stakeholder Misalignment:** Establish clear expectations and regular communication channels among stakeholders, i.e. setting up a steering group that will work on this from the Ministry and then recruit relevant stakeholder representatives from the field to create a Steering Group for this Roadmap.

These actions fall within the scope and interests of the following stakeholders (see disclaimer above - proposed focal points are in bold):

- **Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment , Municipalities, International Centers, and UWV**
 - Setting up programmes to upskill and/or allow networking for partners of TCNs to find employment or setting up additional buddy programmes or events to promote social connections between internationals and local Dutch communities.
- Businesses: employers connecting with the aforementioned entities to recruit partners with fitting skills for vacancies they have. Attending networking events organized by municipalities and international centers
- Educational institutions and local language NGOs: setting up Dutch language course and cultural events for partners to attend and enhance their Dutch language capacities.



CLOSING REMARKS

The STEMTALENT4NL project marks a first step in addressing the critical shortage of STEM talent in the Netherlands—a challenge that holds significant implications for the nation's economic and innovative development. The evaluation and enhancement of the Orientation Year Residence Permit for Highly Skilled Migrants, provide leads for policies that further position the Netherlands as a leading destination for international talent, contributing to its long-term sustainability and prosperity. Throughout this report, key areas for improvement have been identified and actionable recommendations to enhance its effectiveness and sustainability have been outlined.

As detailed in this report, the Orientation Year Permit holds substantial potential as a tool for attracting and retaining highly educated international professionals. The findings span legal and technical adjustments, improved communication strategies, and a more tailored approach to address the needs of both graduates and employers.. Short-term measures, such as streamlined processes and clearer requirements, can lay the foundation for medium and long-term strategies, including stronger connections between talent and employers, and a potential sector-focused permit framework. These steps, combined with efforts to foster international collaborations and promote integration through language initiatives, contribute to a comprehensive roadmap towards a future-proof admission policy for STEM talent.

This project would not have been possible without the collaboration of dedicated stakeholders—from policymakers and educators to employers and community organizations—whose insights and efforts have shaped the recommendations presented here. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone involved in this initiative, and to the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument programme for making this endeavor possible.

Looking ahead, the sustained commitment of all stakeholders will be essential in turning the recommendations into reality. By working together, we can ensure that the Orientation Year Permit—supported by the broader ecosystem around it— becomes a cornerstone of the Netherlands' strategy to attract, retain, and integrate international talent, reinforcing its position as a global leader in innovation and sustainability.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

OVERVIEW OF CONSULTED STAKEHOLDERS

Sector	Organization
Government and Associated	Ministry of Justice and Security
	Ministry of Asylum and Migration
	Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment
	Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND)
	Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science
	Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO)
	Advisory Council on Migration
	Ministry of Economic Affairs
	Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis
	Central Bureau of Statistics
	State Commission Demographic Developments 2050
	Nuffic
	The Hague International Center
	Holland Expat Center South
IN Amsterdam	
Private sector	ASML
	FME
	Platform Talent for Technology
	Expatriate Management Group
	VNO-NCW
	Bol.com
	MKB-Nederland
	Everaert Advocaten
	FNV
	Randstad
Universities	4TU
	TU Delft
	TU Eindhoven
	TU Twente
	Wageningen University and Research
	Radboud University
	Universities of the Netherlands
Danish stakeholders	The Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration
	Danish Ministry for Immigration and Integration
	IOM Denmark
	Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science
	Copenhagen Capacity
	University of Copenhagen
	Digital Hub Denmark
Others	Brainport Development
	(Ex) Permitholders
	Welcome to Maastricht Region
	IN Amsterdam

