

iCEX

ICEX SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

IMPACT EVALUATION

ICEX SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

RESPONSIBLE OF THE EVALUATION

Evaluation Unit

Deputy Directorate of Marketing

ICEX Spain Trade & Investment

DATE OF PUBLICATION

May 2025

TYPE OF EVALUATION

Impact

TIME OF THE EVALUATION

Ex post

CODE

BECA_BEC_2019 / BECA_EMP_2019

EVALUATION STARTED IN YEAR

2019

EVALUATION COMPLETED IN YEAR

2024

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OBJECTIVE OF THE EVALUATION

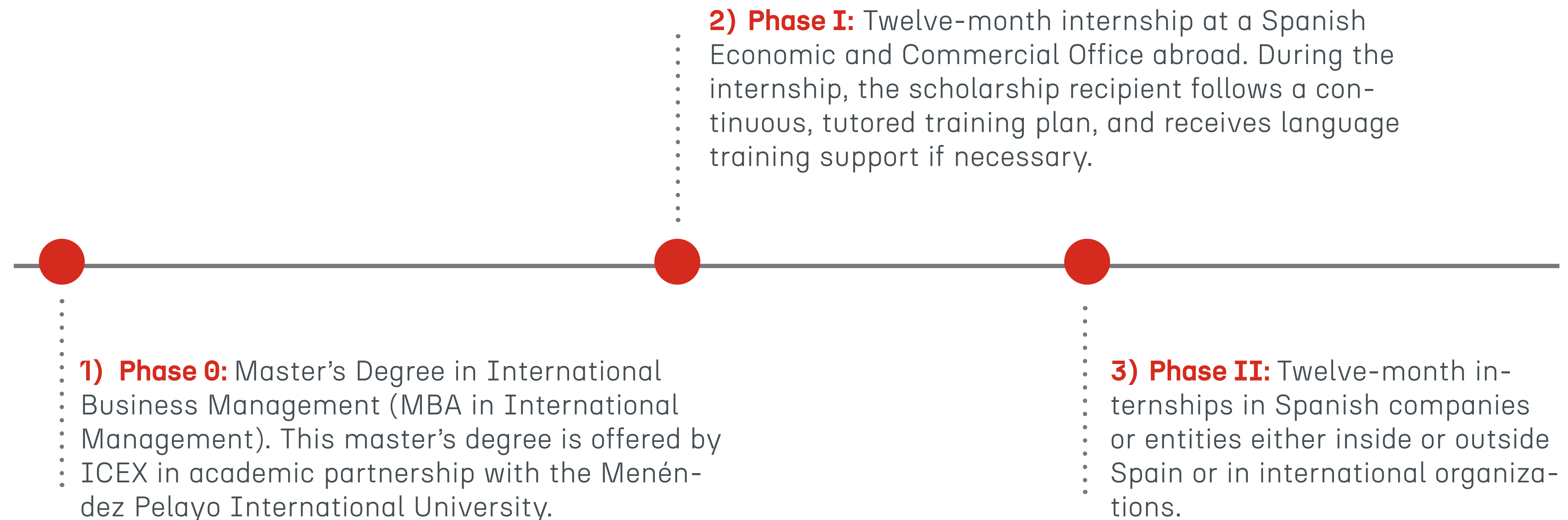


Ex post impact evaluation of the ICEX Scholarship program to gather evidence on the program's effectiveness in the medium and long term, both for scholarship recipients and for the companies that have hosted them.



WHAT IS THE ACTIVITY BEING EVALUATED?

The ICEX Scholarship Program aims to promote talent in the field of business internationalization. The program consists of **three consecutive phases**:



OBJECTIVE BUSINESS POPULATION



Immediate objective: (short term) transfer of knowledge to the companies through the incorporation of specialized personnel.



Mediate objective: (medium term) for companies to increase their international sales and (long term) to professionalize their international strategy. If this last objective is achieved, it would lead to the professionalization of the internationalization departments of Spanish companies, which in turn would improve decision-making within those companies.

OBJECTIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



Immediate objective: (short term) for scholarship recipients to obtain optimal training in all aspects of internationalization.



Mediate objective: (medium term) for them to find employment in the international arena (long term) to enhance their professional career. If this last objective is achieved, it would lead to the professionalization of the internationalization departments of Spanish companies, which in turn would improve decision-making within those companies.

Not all scholarship recipients complete Phase II. For this reason, we have carried out separate impact evaluations for those who have completed Phase I only, and for those who have completed the full program.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

BUSINESS POPULATION

What types of companies need an ICEX intern?

Why are they requesting an ICEX intern?

What are their expectations when they request an ICEX intern? To what extent are these expectations met?

What impact has hosting a scholarship recipient had on the company?

Has there been any transfer of knowledge?

What has this transfer of knowledge actually brought about?

Did they hire the scholarship recipient after the program ended?

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

What is the profile of someone who applies for the ICEX Scholarship Program?

Why do they apply to be part of the program?

What are their expectations when applying to the program? To what extent are these expectations met?

How do they rate the scholarship program in retrospect?

What is the profile of the company they work for after completing the ICEX Scholarship Program?

What impact has the program had on their professional career?

What mark did they leave on the company where they did their internship?

EVALUATION FACT SHEET

BUSINESS POPULATION



TARGET POPULATION

Spanish companies operating on the international market

UNIVERSE

715 unique companies that have hosted an ICEX intern.

TIME FRAME

2012-2021.

SAMPLE

223 individual customers.

TYPE OF SAMPLING

Simple random sample.

RESPONSE RATE

31%

FIELDWORK

Between March and July 2023.

IMPACT ESTIMATION TECHNIQUE

Implicit question (counterfeit counterfactual). Two additional questions, called “benefits” (interpretable as value for money) and “additionality”, have been added to the implicit questions in the questionnaire, which make up the value-added section.

A logistic regression model was built to assess which impact and outcome variables (designed to capture the effects on the company after receiving support) affect the recognition of additionality and benefits of the public intervention.

The analysis was carried out by customer type. This analysis consisted of: customer impact analysis, analysis of the motivation for requesting an intern, and analysis of the suitability of the program for surmounting barriers to talent acquisition.

EVALUATION FACT SHEET

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



TARGET POPULATION

People interested in training in the field of business internationalization.

UNIVERSE

2,382 ICEX Scholarship recipients.

TIME FRAME

2011-2020.

SAMPLE

1,013 people (141 completed Phase I only and 872 completed Phase II).

TYPE OF SAMPLING

Simple random sample.

RESPONSE RATE

41% (Phase I) and 43% (Phase II).

FIELD WORK

Between March and July 2023.

IMPACT ESTIMATION TECHNIQUE

Same as for business population.

The analysis has been done by type of scholarship recipient. This analysis consisted of: scholarship recipient impact analysis, analysis of the motivation for applying for a scholarship, and analysis of the suitability of the program for surmounting barriers to training in business internationalization in order to enhance professional careers.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the program’s information system: number of spoken languages, highest language level, field of knowledge, gender, and previous experience.

There are **3 well-defined types of scholarship recipients:**

TYPE 1

Recipients with no previous experience, who speak between one and three foreign languages, one of them at least at advanced or native speaker level. This group includes a higher proportion of women than expected.

TYPE 2

Recipients with previous experience, who speak between two and five foreign languages, one of them at least at advanced level.

TYPE 3

Recipients who speak one or two foreign languages, either or both at an intermediate level. This group includes a lower proportion of women than expected.

COMPANY SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

There are 9 **well-defined customer types**:

TYPE 1

Small companies with experience. Small companies in the process of expansion with more than 11 years of international experience, half of which have some commercial and production structure abroad, as well as online sales channels. Aware of R&D&I, but not of certifications or equality management.

TYPE 2

Small and micro companies starting online. Small and micro-companies in the process of expansion with more than 6 years of international experience, that have some commercial structure although not necessarily being involved in production abroad, and a high export quota, who are beginning to make use of online sales channels. Aware of R&D&I and quality certification and environmental management, they are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of corporate social responsibility and equality management.

TYPE 3

Micro-companies with some structure. Micro-companies in the process of expansion with more than 6 years of international experience, whose sales are concentrated in a few countries, where they have some commercial structure, although not necessarily being involved in production abroad. Aware of R&D&I, they lack certifications and equality management systems.

COMPANY SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

There are 9 **well-defined customer types**:

TYPE 4

Large companies with some structure. Large companies in the process of expansion with more than 11 years of international experience and highly diversified sales that have some commercial structure, although not necessarily being involved in production abroad. Aware of R&D&I and quality and environmental certification, but not of corporate social responsibility or equality management.

TYPE 5

Large companies with productive structure. Large companies in the process of expansion with more than 20 years of international experience and highly diversified sales that have a broad commercial and production structure abroad, and are beginning to use online sales channels. Not necessarily aware of R&D&I, they do not usually hold certifications or have equality management systems.

TYPE 6

Large companies with productive structure and certifications. Large companies in the process of expansion with more than 20 years of international experience and highly diversified sales that have an extensive commercial and production structure abroad, and are beginning to use online sales channels. Aware of R&D&I as well as certifications and equality management.

COMPANY SEGMENTATION

SEGMENTATION TECHNIQUE: Hierarchical clustering based on the characterization variables included in the survey and variables collected from INFORMA D&B.

There are 9 **well-defined customer types**:

TYPE 7

Medium-sized companies with some structure. Medium-sized companies in the process of expansion with 6 to 20 years of international experience and highly diversified sales that have some commercial structure but are not necessarily involved in production abroad. Aware of both R&D&I and quality certification, and to a lesser extent environmental certification, they are relatively unaware of corporate social responsibility and equality.

TYPE 8

Government. Public bodies and government agencies.

TYPE 9

Institutions. Private business associations.

EFFECTIVENESS : BUSINESS POPULATION

- **The program is effective in most of the participating companies** and no major changes in its design or operation are recommended, except for certain minor changes that are discussed in the section on program improvements.
- The main motivation for 84% of the companies to participate in the scholarship program is to acquire talent with training and experience in internationalization for future hiring.
- There is strong evidence that **knowledge has been transferred to the company** where the scholarship recipient has completed their internship, regardless of the type and size of the business.
- After taking on the intern, two out of three companies report that s/he had enabled them to achieve results that they would not have been able to achieve on their own.
- In general, the companies participating in the program recognize additionality in improving the company's international management, and in supporting the optimization and development of the international strategic plan, even when they have not ended up hiring the scholarship recipient. In addition, almost half of the companies believe that the incorporation of the scholarship recipient has contributed to increased expansion in one or more markets.
- Specifically, there is evidence that the scholarship program has enabled participating companies to gain confidence in exploiting foreign markets and to improve their marketing strategy, which has led them to innovate and even increase spending on digital transformation.

EFFECTIVENESS : BUSINESS POPULATION

There are differences in effectiveness depending on the gender of the scholarship recipient.

- There is evidence that, differentially, **the incorporation of female scholarship recipients** has enabled participating companies to improve their strategic plan and the way they approach international projects, which in the long run has given them the confidence to bid for public tenders. This is consistent with the fact that companies that host a female scholarship recipient see her role as internal rather than operational.
- There is evidence that, differentially, **the incorporation of male scholarship recipients** has enabled participating companies to improve their operational management in the field, leading them to open up new markets. This is consistent with the fact that companies that host a male scholarship recipient see his role primarily in the operational side of the company

EFFECTIVENESS: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- **The program is effective for the majority of participating scholarship recipients** and no major changes in its design or operation are recommended, except for some minor changes discussed in the section on program improvements.
- Practically all the recipients consider that participating in the program has been a **springboard for their professional career**, and an outstanding professional and personal experience.
- 80% of recipients consider the benefits of the scholarship to be significantly higher than the cost of participating in the program.
- 70% of the recipients believe that their participation in the program has enabled them to achieve results that they would not have achieved on their own.
- **The effectiveness of the program varies depending on the phase completed and the gender of the individual.**

EFFECTIVENESS: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- **Female scholarship recipients** have a higher expectation of furthering their career and being able to work in a public agency, report having left a greater mark on the company in aspects related to marketing, and complain about having fewer promotion chances after completing their internship.
- There is evidence that, differentially, **female scholarship recipients who have completed Phase II** have acquired skills that have enabled them to leave a greater mark in the company where they completed Phase II in terms of expanding into new markets and improving marketing, which has enabled the company to undertake new public procurement projects subsequently. Some have used this background to find long-term employment in the international arena. Others, possibly due to a lack of expectations of a salary increase in the private sector, have used the skills gained to obtain a job in a Spanish public entity in the medium term.
- The **female scholarship recipients who only completed Phase I** recognize additionality in having obtained a prestigious degree, and in finding a job in a Spanish public entity when their expectations in this regard were low.

EFFECTIVENESS: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- **Male interns** have higher expectations of gaining experience to set up a business or become a director in the international division of a company, and have acquired more management and operational skills.
- There is evidence that, differentially, **male scholarship recipients who have completed Phase II** have acquired skills in business development and market research, which have allowed them to leave a mark on the company where they completed Phase II by improving its strategic plan and talent management. Male recipients have been able to use these circumstances to obtain better positions and higher salaries. Some have also been able to use their participation in the program to find employment with an international organization within three to five years.
- **Male scholarship recipients who only completed Phase I** recognize additionality in being able to obtain a prestigious degree and employment in the public sector, but only recognize benefits when they have experienced a salary increase.
- **There is evidence of a difference in approach by companies based on the gender of the person incorporated as intern.** When a company takes on a female scholarship recipient, expectations regarding her contribution to strategy are somewhat lower than when taking on a male intern. Similarly, evidence has also emerged that, when a company favours financial support as a substantial part of a public program designed to promote talent in internationalization, it is more likely to choose a female intern.

EMPLOYABILITY RESULTS

- **More than 90% of scholarship recipients find employment after completing their scholarship**, and of these, more than 83% find employment within 6 months of completing their scholarship. Just over half of them stay in the company where they completed their internships. This ratio is clearly above the employability rate for higher education graduates in Spain (83.7% in 2023 according to the CYD Foundation) and above the employability rate for master's graduates (87.3% in 2019 according to the Spanish Statistical Office, INE).
- The company is more likely to hire a scholarship recipient as the motivation to do so increases when applying for the program.

CAREER AND GENDER GAP

- **Ten years after completing the scholarship program, there are differences in terms of position occupied and level of salary** obtained by participants depending on gender.
- There is a greater likelihood of holding a position as director or even area manager if the recipient is male, while for women there is a greater likelihood of remaining in a specialist or analyst position. In addition, there is evidence that for women the ceiling is to stay in an area manager position rather than jumping into a position as director.
- Male recipients are more likely to have salaries of €70,000 to €90,000, and women are more likely to have salaries below €40,000. Men are also more likely to start with salaries above 30,000 euros than women.
- Male recipients report a better chance of achieving a work-life balance five years after completing their scholarship.
- Less than 5% of all interns have an improved perception of aspects affected by the gender gap over time. These people are primarily scholarship recipients with previous experience who speak between two and five languages, one of them at least at an advanced level, regardless of gender. Those who perceive that they have fewer possibilities for promotion, are assigned less important tasks, or that they receive a lower bonus than people with a similar profile (in terms of training, experience, seniority, activities carried out, objectives and similar position), are primarily female recipients belonging to this type.

CAREER AND GENDER GAP

- **It is to be expected that one in four scholar recipients will turn down opportunities for promotion or more prestigious positions.**
- Those who have rejected these opportunities most frequently (over 30%) are men with previous experience, who speak between two and five foreign languages, one of them at least at an advanced level, or men who speak between one or two foreign languages, either or both at intermediate level.
- Those who have turned down promotion opportunities the least (below 15%) are women with no previous experience, who speak between one and three foreign languages, one of them at least at advanced or native speaker level

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENTS: BUSINESS POPULATION

- Improvement of the selection process, to make it more streamlined and fully telematic. Mention is made of the need for the company to be able to offer itself in advance to the candidates even while they are carrying out Phase I. Likewise, there is a call for the imposition of quotas on the number of scholarship recipients that a company can request in order to guarantee SMEs equal opportunities to have an intern.
- A greater variety of candidate profiles should be offered, particularly in technical and engineering fields, scholarship recipients' expectations need to be managed with a view to their incorporation into a real-life company, and an increase in the funds allocated for intern compensation should be considered.
- Some SMEs are asking for more specialized training in certain areas such as digitization, digital marketing or export of services.
- Some experienced small companies and medium-sized companies with a certain structure abroad ask for incentives to encourage the scholarship recipient to consider prioritizing the completion of Phase II in smaller companies.
- Some experienced small companies, small and micro-companies starting online, and medium-sized companies with some structure also ask that scholarship recipients be encouraged to accept an offer of employment made by the company after completion of the internship. Since the scholarship program cannot guarantee that the scholarship recipient will accept a job offer made by the company after completion of the internship, this hints at a need for some companies to improve their talent retention techniques

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENTS: SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

- The main issue for those who give a less favourable evaluation of their internship is the lack of adequate tutoring, as well as having been performing tasks that are in some cases far from what would be expected for people trained in international marketing. Occasionally, it has been mentioned that there are companies that participate in Phase II without any previous international activity, or hinted that companies seem to be simply looking for cheap labour.
- Some interns currently working in SMEs starting online or micro-enterprises starting out in the export business ask for an improvement in the academic level of the master's degree. Since the program is designed to apply the knowledge gained during the master in real-world operational circumstances through in-company internships, this finding highlights the need to better manage small companies' expectations that interns will meet more needs than realistically possible.
- Some recipients with previous experience and better language skills ask for an extension of the internship period and more professional career support for young talent. Those currently working in institutions or organizations agree with this last demand.
- In general, the recipients suggest creating a job exchange for ICEX, the Spanish Economic and Commercial Offices abroad and internationalized companies as part of the support offered by ICEX as part of the training of talent in internationalization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ **The evaluation shows that the program has proved effective** for most of the participating companies and individuals, and no major changes in design or in operational aspects are recommended, as the program has shown that it is fit for purpose and meets the established objectives.

In order to address some of the areas identified for improvement, the following recommendations are proposed. Some recommendations are already being implemented.

➤ **The selection process should be digitalized as much as possible.** This recommendation has been gradually implemented starting with the 46th edition, corresponding to the class of 2024. The selection process now includes a gamified system to identify both hard and soft skills, in order to match each candidate with the most suitable destination.

➤ **We recommend a review of the selection process, to allow interested companies the opportunity to make offers to scholarship recipients while they are still in Phase I.** In the call to companies corresponding to the 48th class of scholarship recipients who will join Phase II in companies and organizations in 2026, the application process has been brought forward so that in the last quarter companies can access the profiles of possible interns while they are still in Phase I of the program.

➤ **We recommend setting up a limit in the number of scholarship recipients a company can request in a given year, to ensure a higher number of participating companies.** For the 47th edition of the program, with scholarship recipients joining companies and organizations in 2025, a limit of six interns per company was set. Starting with the 48th edition, corresponding to the class that will join companies in 2026, a limit of four interns has been established.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **We recommend studying program modalities that complement the current Master's Degree in International Business Management with existing technology transfer programs** in applied science and engineering, particularly in the field of technological entrepreneurship.
- **We recommend strengthening training in areas where smaller companies have the greatest needs**, such as digitization, digital marketing, and exports of services, and ensuring that this training is practical in nature. This recommendation has been partially taken into account in advance, through successive modifications to the academic program of the master's degree undertaken in 2017 and 2024, which incorporated subjects related to entrepreneurship (understood as the creation of global companies), business analytics (BA), and artificial intelligence into the syllabus.
- **We recommend enhancing supervision and monitoring of tasks in both phases of the internship, as well as the screening of the training plan presented by companies applying for Phase II** to ensure the internship is compatible with the program's aims, and that the company can truly benefit from knowledge transfer in accordance with the program objectives. Starting with the 45th edition, which corresponded to the class of scholarship recipients who began Phase II in 2023, more stringent criteria were applied to both the plan, in terms of its compliance with the program objectives, and to companies applying again in the program.
- **We recommend improving communication to better align companies' expectations about what they can realistically demand from an ICEX intern.** After completing the program, scholarship recipients are not export managers or executives with extensive experience in the field who can perform all the tasks necessary to start up an international business or launch online sales from scratch on their own.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **We recommend continuing to raise awareness among SMEs about talent retention**, so that the interns will choose to pursue their professional careers at the company where they completed their internship and rule out other employment alternatives.
- **We recommend considering the creation of a job exchange managed by ICEX itself as an additional value-added service** to facilitate contact between professionals and companies on the lookout for talent, given the interest that the creation of a job exchange has generated among scholarship recipients and the demand for this type of mediation from companies with international reach.
- **We recommend considering setting up specialized training programs**, either in origin or in destination, as well as incorporating some kind of advisory service on new trends and labour demands in the international market, given the need for specific profiles among many of the participating companies.
- **We recommend continuing to raise awareness of the need to apply gender perspective within companies** in order to continue working towards true equality. The gender-differentiated results are consistent with gender blindness, which means that companies believe they operate on purely meritocratic criteria, despite the fact that underlying gender constructs underpin expectations and tasks assigned to each worker based on their sex.

COMPLIANCE WITH RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations set out in this evaluation have been accepted as necessary and feasible by both the organization and those responsible for providing the various ICEX services. The implementation of these recommendations will enable improvements to be made in the provision of services, bearing in mind that the improvement process is ongoing, thanks to other evaluations that are either already underway or will be launched if necessary.

PROCUREMENT INFORMATION

The fieldwork and descriptive analysis were carried out by means of a below-threshold contract awarded to the company **WEBTOOLS, S.L.**



ICEX