



# Look before you leap

*Evaluation of the public-private partnership policy for internationalisation 2017-2022*

*Conclusions and recommendations*

*Conclusions and recommendations | Evaluation of the public-private partnership policy for internationalisation 2017-2022 - conclusions and recommendations | Evaluation*



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# 1. Introduction

Public-private partnership (PPP) in the field of international business gained momentum after the advisory report *Team Nederland: Samen sterker in de wereld* (Team Netherlands: Stronger in the World Together) was published in April 2017. In the report, a public-private steering committee under the leadership of Chris Buijink<sup>1</sup> describes bottlenecks and recommendations, which have been acted upon in subsequent years. Since 2017, three organisations have been set up for this purpose: NLinBusiness (NLiB), Trade and Innovate NL (TINL) and NLWorks. To what extent are the activities to resolve bottlenecks and to act upon recommendations relevant to public and private services, and do they add something to activities of other public and private parties, i.e., what is the relevance and additionality? The aim of this evaluation is to try to answer those questions, paying particular attention to the three aforementioned organisations.

During the period 2017-2022, the three organisations received a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) for a total of EUR 9 million per year. This evaluation investigates which activities NLiB, TINL and NLWorks have performed, assesses the extent to which the objectives which were formulated for the redevelopment of the PPP ecosystem have been met<sup>2</sup>, to what extent that is attributable to the activities of the three organisations (and thereby the grant) and what lessons can be drawn for the future.

4

The main question we focus on is as follows:

**To what extent do the activities of NLiB, TINL and NLWorks contribute to the implementation of the recommendations in the Buijink report, are they relevant to and additional to the existing public and private services?**

The International Enterprise Department (DIO), MFA's policy department, which is responsible for this policy, uses the results to advise the minister whether to continue the grant, and if so, in what form.

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<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in the rest of this report, it will be referred to as the Buijink report.

<sup>2</sup> Under the PPP ecosystem, we understand all actors who perform activities for the internationalisation of Dutch trade and industry and thereby have an influence on and are influenced by the three organisations. We specify these actors in further detail in section 3 Research questions and methodology.



## 2. Conclusions and recommendations

In this section, we formulate the answer to the main question, followed by the conclusions and recommendations for each research question. One or more conclusions and recommendations follow each research question. The first research question<sup>3</sup> is purely descriptive in nature and does not lead to conclusions and recommendations. Therefore, this question is not discussed in this section. For the conclusions and recommendations presented here, it is important to consider the following points. The conclusions are a condensed representation of the findings we present at the end of each section, where a further substantiation and explanation can also be found.

The recommendations are initially focused on the MFA, which is responsible for policy and budget in this field. In practice, there is a shared responsibility, whereby MFA works closely with the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (MEAC) and VNO-NCW within the ISO NL and the ISO committee. Recommendations that do not just concern the role of the MFA, but policy in the wider sense, and options for shaping this policy, are therefore subsequently also focused on these organisations, even if they are not named. This applies emphatically to the recommendations that outline options for the future.

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<sup>3</sup> What problems and opportunities have been identified in the Buijink report and how have the recommendations been translated to policy and implementation?

## 2.1 Main research question

**To what extent do the activities of NLiB, TINL and NLWorks contribute to the implementation of the recommendations in the Buijink report, are they relevant to and additional to the existing public and private services?**

**There was insufficient clarity about the way in which the Buijink report could be translated to relevant activities.**

The Buijink report served as a starting point for formulating policy to shape the PPP ecosystem differently. The recommendations in the Buijink report have largely been incorporated in policy, but within this, they have not been reified in such a way that they are able to shape the activities of the implementers NLiB, TINL and NLWorks. Responsibility for this was largely placed with the implementers themselves. None of the parties (policymakers and implementers) had a clear view of the objective, the tasks and activities of the three implementers, thereby creating a long iterative process in which policymakers and implementers gradually started to shape this. This applied to a lesser extent to TINL, where initially there was a clearer view.

A factor explaining this is the way in which resources became available. These became available before it was clear what policy had to be pursued with them. In addition, the ISO NL (MFA, MEAC and VNO-NCW, and a number of portfolio holders) was expected to play a role in the management of the three implementers. This has barely happened in practice. The recommendation to the ISO NL, referred to in the Buijink report, to develop an internationalisation strategy has not been implemented as a result.

**Involvement of the three implementers in long-term programming is limited.**

6 The Buijink report also contained the recommendation to programme for the long term. In 2020, the long-term programming working group made a start to this by determining fifteen market-theme combinations (MT combinations). In order to shape an MT combination, one or more private parties, supported by a market-theme team, work on plans for market development. For the private party in the lead, the budget they receive for this is the main advantage. Although public and private come together in this combination, their reach and the control ensuing from this is still limited to those who are directly involved.

The role of the three implementers in the long-term programming is limited to participation in a supporting working group. There is not, or hardly a relationship with the activities of the organisations they represent, so their participation is largely irrelevant. However, private parties consider an overarching representative on the private side, a role fulfilled by NLiB, necessary given the dominance of public-private parties in these and other working groups.

**Joining forces via the TINL network has largely been successful, but on the private side, via NLiB, there is barely any evidence of this.**

A third overarching recommendation from the Buijink report was the joining of forces on both the private and public side. On the private side, NLiB has barely fulfilled this. Thanks to legal restrictions, among other things, NLiB has only offered support to top sectors<sup>4</sup> and trade associations on a small scale, so their performance has not changed substantially as a result of NLiB's actions. On the public side, greater collectivity has been achieved between the various TINL partners: they are more aware of each other's activities, synchronise them to a certain level and are able to reach each other's constituency of businesses. It is true that several TINL partners already had the intention to increase their collaboration before TINL was formed, but thanks to TINL's actions, the network has been formed more quickly and likely in a better-structured manner.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2011, the top sectors policy was introduced. Top sectors are the sectors in which the Netherlands excels internationally and in which extra is being done to stimulate the Dutch knowledge economy. In the top sectors, companies, science and the government work together on innovation and knowledge sharing. The top sectors are agriculture & food, the chemical industry, the creative industry, energy, life sciences & health (LSH), logistics, high-tech systems and materials (HTSM), horticulture and seed stocks, water & maritime (see: [Topsectoren.nl](https://topsectoren.nl)).

**The NL Business Hubs may have advantages when making referrals to commercial parties, but their own commercial services go hand-in-hand with risks and their ability to differentiate is still low.**

Ultimately, NLiB has mainly started focusing on NL Business Hubs<sup>5</sup> and a digital portal. The NL Business Hubs may be relevant and additional to be able to refer Dutch companies, specifically to foreign commercial service providers who operate in the same market; something that the missions are unable to do due to their neutral character. However, few parties involved make use of the hubs because it isn't sufficiently clear how the hubs differ from the missions. What's more, NLiB expects that hubs will start to offer their own commercial services. However, this brings with it risks of market disruption, because NLiB, and sometimes also the mission in the same city, prefer the hubs compared to other commercial service providers.

**NLiB's digital portal is still not widely known among entrepreneurs.**

The digital portal is still not widely known among entrepreneurs, so they don't benefit much from the opportunities. The portal serves as a platform on which commercial service providers can present themselves. However, partly thanks to the lack of familiarity, this delivers few extra contacts for participants. Limited familiarity with NLiB also has negative consequences for the other parts of the digital portal: the International Business Academy<sup>6</sup> and the Virtual Gateway<sup>7</sup>. Positive exceptions are the NIO connector and white label software.<sup>8</sup>

**The role of NLWorks is mainly limited to process and relationship management.**

The original idea was that NLWorks would translate the strategy of the ISO NL into concrete programmes. But since no strategy existed, the emphasis shifted to developing the MT combinations. However, this role was also too ambitious for NLWorks and was ultimately taken over by other parties. The role of NLWorks has therefore gradually largely been limited to its primary task: the execution of long-term impact programmes. The role of NLWorks in those programmes is mainly focused on process and relationship management and is less substantive in nature. As a result, NLWorks only contributes to a limited extent to the actual realisation of progress. Therefore, the additionality is still low, because such a task can also be placed relatively easily with a commercial party.

7

**Limited control opportunities make it difficult to reach the target group.**

A large proportion of the companies reached by NLiB and TINL already operate internationally, are well connected to the public instrumentarium and operate in growth markets to a relatively high extent. This also applies specifically to companies that are in the spotlight of NLiB and around two-thirds of which fall outside of the target group defined by NLiB. The specified target group is therefore only partially being reached, which is partially explained by the limited control opportunities for reaching certain groups. This raises the question to what extent the resources are efficiently being used, as well as which target group would or should be most eligible for support.

All in all, it can be assumed that the implementers' activities are only relevant and additional to a limited extent. The chance of them achieving the desired effects and policy objectives with the current activities is small. The implementers do not have insight into possible effects, and they are not yet trying to map out those effects either. As a result, it is currently unlikely that they will gain insight into the effects at a later stage.

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<sup>5</sup> By NLiB-accredited bilateral commercial courts who undertake trade promotion activities abroad.

<sup>6</sup> The International Business Academy provides access to partners' training courses and workshops, with the aim of preparing entrepreneurs for international business, for example training courses and workshops on cultural differences, the development of skills such as pitching, and practical matters such as customs regulations.

<sup>7</sup> The Virtual Gateway is a digital tool for Dutch companies to present themselves internationally with VR videos, for example by showing how they provide innovative solutions for global challenges.

<sup>8</sup> The NIO connector is a plug-in tool which can be used to easily display content from the NLiB platform on partners' websites. White label software is software for websites that can be connected to the NLiB platform.

## 2.2 Policy reconstruction

**To what extent are the policy and the strategy for the three organisations in line with the Buijink report and the policy on which it is based?**

**The MFA has largely incorporated the recommendations in the Buijink report into policy, but the developed policy offered insufficient direction for (further) implementation.**

Involved parties have assessed the extent to which the Buijink report provided a clear direction for implementation as rather limited. The overarching recommendations for joining forces, formulating an internationalisation strategy and long-term programming are widely supported, but the interpretation as to how to shape this differs amongst stakeholders. Overall, it can be assumed that recommendations were formulated too generally to be able to implement them straight away.

In policy letters, the identified bottlenecks and recommendations from the Buijink report come clearly to the fore. These policy letters do not, however, answer the question as to how these recommendations should be translated into practice, or do not translate them in full.

**It took a long time before the three organisations were able to implement the recommendations because policymakers had limited view of their objective, tasks and desired activities.**

Devising the objective, tasks and associated activities of the organisations and the control of and collaboration between them has taken a lot of time. This is largely attributable to insufficient elaboration at policy level of the generally formulated recommendations in the Buijink report. As a result, responsibility for the further implementation of the policy was firstly largely outsourced to the implementers themselves, and secondly partly to consultants. Because the resources were promised to VNO-NCW, this organisation had the initiative to shape this on the private side. NLIB then shaped some of the activities itself, partly based on a consultant's recommendation. This is what happened at NLWorks and TINL as well: The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) received the request to advise on the implementation and a planner's report was then drawn up for (and by) NLWorks to further explain the activities.

This division of roles largely came about through the way in which the means of implementation became available and the iterative process whereby policy formation and implementation were strongly intertwined with each other. After all, the organisations were already founded before the policy had been drafted. A second reason was the lack of impact of and control by the ISO NL, which, as an important body in the ecosystem, had the task to provide the organisations with strategy and advising them in their activities. However, it failed to do so. The result was a complex process in which implementing organisations partially had to identify and design their activities themselves and policymakers had too little view of the objective, tasks and the desired activities of these organisations.

Specifically for the MEAC, the link between the top sectors policy and strategy formation within the MT combinations – and wider, within the ecosystem – has not yet structurally been made.

### 2.2.1 Recommendations

- As the organisation with the primary responsibility for policy making and in its role as budget holder, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must take more responsibility to formulate a concrete and implementable PPP policy.

As the ministry responsible, MFA should have acted more critically to clarify the objective, tasks and desired activities of the three organisations and, in particular, to determine them too. In particular, MFA should have played a stronger, more substantive role in determining what the organisations should focus on: what is their niche and how can they tackle the perceived problem?

- Consider a stronger focus on MEAC's top sector policy in the strategy formation within the ecosystem.

The responsible parties must consider improving the substantive link between the international aspect of the top sector policy and strategy formation within the PPP ecosystem. The PPP policy is strongly tied to MFA, whereas knowledge of and priorities for the Dutch economy should be formulated from the MEAC due to their responsibility for the mission-driven top sector and innovation policy.

## 2.3 Relevance

**How do parties involved in the ecosystem assess the relevance of the three organisations' activities and why?**

**Strategy formation within the market-theme combinations is public-private in nature, but the scope is still limited.**

Under the MT combinations, public-private collaboration around long-term programming is beginning to take shape, even if it is still too early to report on results. MT combinations are not, or not yet, however, a fully-fledged substitute for the proposed internationalisation strategy; there is still too little control from the MT combinations for this, and the scope is still too limited. A positive finding is that substantial overlap can be seen between country and theme priorities of parties on the public and private side. That is because in the context of the MT combinations both public and private parties were invited to contribute markets and themes to focus on. Control options are limited, however, due to the different control and financing lines of the different parties in the ecosystem. Therefore, the conclusion is that collaboration mainly exists where overlap is found between the priorities of different parties; not where strategic choices are made.

**The added value of the MT combinations for private parties is mainly the availability of the SLMD tool<sup>9</sup>, which is only used on a number of MT combinations.**

The availability of funding in the form of the SLMD tool in order to be able to shape the MT combinations and to involve parties in this, is the significant added value of the MT combinations for private parties with limited organisational ability. Due to budgetary restrictions, this tool is available for seven out of the fifteen MT combinations.

**NLiB is not or barely of added value for long-term programming and joining of forces.**

The role of NLiB in the long-term programming has remained limited to enquiring about priorities for the MT combinations on the private side, to be able to base the choice of the fifteen MT combinations on this. However, for NLiB, it appeared not to be necessary to identify private players who could implement the MT combinations and to involve them in this; the number of parties involved within the MT combinations is limited to the more major players who were already in view anyhow. The substantive contribution of NLiB to the shaping of the activities within these MT combinations consists of the funding of studies during the preliminary phase of the use of a tool within an MT combination.

The main activities for joining forces, mainly as support for top sectors, were the funding of studies and making FTEs available to support the development of an internationalisation strategy of top sectors. Top sectors have made use of the budget for studies. Top sectors are experiencing the secondment of a limited number of FTEs which all top sectors should serve in general as too cumbersome and lacking in specificity and expertise to be of added value. Therefore, the availability of FTEs has not led to structural improvements in the performance of the top sectors, which suffer from a lack of resources for shaping their internationalisation activities. Lack of relevant support is also partly attributable to legal restrictions for granting farther-reaching support to top sectors and to the sometimes-lacking capacity among top sectors to shape this on their side. NLiB's most important activity is therefore informing top sectors and sector associations of developments elsewhere in the ecosystem.

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<sup>9</sup> Strategic long-term market development (SLMD) is a 'broadened and intensified' form of long-term public-private partnership in favourable market-sector combinations. A central part of SLMD is the role of the 'preferred partner': an organisation – such as a sector organisation or another non-profit organisation – with a large reach within the specific (sub-)sector.

**The NL Business Hubs, part of the “next level” business network, may have added value when referrals are being made, but their own commercial services involve risks.**

The next level business network has mainly been shaped by creating business hubs. Whether an NL Business Hub was established in a specific city was largely dependent on the goodwill of the present mission. Partly as a result, it is not always clear why a hub is present in a particular city.

The relevance of the NL Business Hubs consists of the fact that the hubs can make referrals more directly than the missions network and that the employees have a more commercial background, making them better able to help entrepreneurs. As far as the business hubs’ own commercial services are concerned, that relevance is absent because alternatives are available.

The risk of market disruption is also present due to:

1. interference in an existing market of commercial service providers;
2. the financial importance of NLiB in the hubs’ success, bearing in mind its earnings model;
3. the preferential position that the hubs sometimes enjoy due to close links with NLiB and missions.

In addition, the question remains as to whether the organisations that will be acting as a business hub (bilateral CoCs) are able to make the change to commercial service providers. NLiB is relevant to the hubs due to the knowledge sharing between hubs, the generation of reputation of the hubs in the Netherlands and the availability of digital resources to the hubs.

**NLiB’s digital platform partially meets a need but is still not widely known among entrepreneurs.**

Particularly the NIO connector and white label website are digital resources that contribute to the prevention of fragmentation. In theory, this also applies to the portal of commercial service providers, but its relevance is limited because companies are not very familiar with NLiB; 88 percent of the respondents in a survey stated they don’t know NLiB. This limited familiarity also has a negative influence on the relevance of the other digital services that are dependent on the entrepreneurs’ ability to find them: the International Business Academy and digital presence of the business hubs. Finally, the Virtual Gateway, is mainly used by parties outside of the Netherlands to increase familiarity with the Netherlands. This happens by means of virtual reality goggles developed by NLiB which are sold, in particular, to missions and business hubs, which raises questions as long as NLiB is a publicly funded organisation.

**The TINL network has contributed to more joint activities on the public side, however their contribution to the MT combinations is very limited.**

Joining of forces via the TINL network has resulted in the TINL partners informing each other better, which in turn has led to improved coordination and, in part, to more joint activities too. Partners in the TINL network maintain a joint diary where they announce activities and open them up for participation by the other partners’ constituents. Around half of the attendees at TINL events come from a region other than that of the organising partner(s), which indicates that opening the activities up to a wider audience meets a demand.

It should be noted, however, that in the TINL network demand from partners’ own constituents remains leading and there is therefore a limit to the level of collaboration. Furthermore, the collaboration mainly focuses on the three countries (Germany, the US and China) and the theme (Smart Cities) for which working groups have been set up in a TINL context. Finally, the connection is yet to be made with the MT combinations, so activities are yet to be structurally tailored to each other. This is also expressed in the limited added value of the presence of TINL in the long-term programming working group.

**NLWorks’ role is mainly relevant to process and relationship management, but virtually absent when it comes to the progress within the impact programmes.**

For both long-term programming and the impact programmes, the added value of NLWorks is mainly linked to process and relationship management. In the case of long-term programming, that role consists of the chairing of the long-term programming working group (since 2020) and the tracking of progress within the fifteen MT combinations. A substantive role consists of the use of contacts acquired within its own impact programmes.

The instigation of and progress within the impact programmes is mainly dependent on the partners within the consortium. NLWorks steps in once an (initial) consortium has already been formed, which has produced an initial problem analysis. NLWorks doesn't have the necessary specialist knowledge to achieve progress, although it has a small budget to hire in knowledge to fill that gap. In addition, NLWorks facilitates the parties within the consortium when applying for public funding. Because NLWorks is not a full partner in the consortium and doesn't have any concrete tools to force the partners to make a breakthrough or a decision, it is only able to facilitate the consortium partners as effectively as possible during the process.

### 2.3.1 Recommendations

- If public-private strategy formation is deemed important, focusing more on the market-theme combinations and supporting them more should be considered.

For the MT combinations to play a central role, this calls for a stronger link with the MFA (DIO/missions), the MEAC (top sectors) and TINL (regional development agencies (RDAs)) to develop more widely supported strategies. In addition, additional support for private parties would help them to contribute to this.

- If it is deemed desirable to focus more on the top sectors, additional support for the top sectors would be necessary.

A possible decision to focus more on internationalisation of the top sectors requires additional support for the top sectors, as most of them lack the organisational ability to shape internationalisation.

- As MFA, be clear about the desirability of the NL Business Hubs and formulate more explicitly the conditions under which an NL Business Hub has the right to exist before opening one.

The dependence on the goodwill of a mission in a specific city combined with risks of market disruption by the hubs is reason to recommend that the MFA considers these risks and draws a single line as far as the desirability of the hubs is concerned (as long as NLiB is supported with public money).

In addition, in order to better substantiate the choice of cities for hubs, NLiB should prove when a hub has the right to exist in a certain market. Minimal aspects that could be included in this are:

1. the added value compared to the mission present;
2. the added value of NLiB compared to the 'underlying' organisation (bilateral CoC). This applies both to CoCs that are focused more on social activities, where the question is whether it is possible to make the switch to commercial services, and to the better functioning CoCs, where support may be less necessary;
3. the economic rationale behind the choice of a specific city;
4. the added value compared to networks and private service providers in this city that already exist;
5. the added value as far as functions are concerned: is a hub intended to make (paid) referrals to private service providers that are already present (and to potentially accredit them) or to provide services itself?

- Reconsider the objective to set up an own earnings model for NLiB.

Based on its current activities, it is very unlikely that NLiB will be able to generate sufficient income to stand on its own two feet. None of the sources of income that have been tapped into are able to fill the gap that would occur if the grant is stopped. It must also be considered that if NLiB were to have its own earnings model, this would give rise to undesirable situations, whereby knowledge or VR goggles are produced from public funding which are subsequently sold, sometimes even back to public organisations such as missions. It would also have consequences for the relationship with the NL Business Hubs, whereby the generation of income now has priority and commercial activities are thereby being encouraged within the NL Business Hubs. This may result in market disruption.

## 2.4 Additionality

**To what extent are the three implementers' activities (sufficiently) distinctive and complementary compared to the activities that are already being offered and implemented by other public and private parties?**

**NLiB is additional in the representation of private parties in discussion forums within the ecosystem.**

The presence of NLiB in discussion forums, in particular in the long-term programming working group, as an overarching representative of the private side, is important in a field that is further dominated by public parties. This role cannot easily be assumed by an individual party on the private side, due to the personal interests of members' organisations or individual companies.

**There has been no evidence of additionality at NLiB when it comes to joining forces. Additionality is more likely for divisions of the NL Business Hubs and the digital platform.**

Due to the lack of relevant activities on the private side for joining forces, additionality barely plays a role. Studies could have also been funded relatively easily in a different way. Additionality can therefore mainly be found in specific functions of the NL Business Hubs that the missions network is unable to fulfil: more specific referrals to commercial service providers; due to their neutral role, missions work with lists of service providers. However, this specific role is yet to prove itself; for the time being, parties in the ecosystem are still failing to notice the distinctive nature of the hubs compared to the missions network to a satisfactory extent. This is also to do with the strong position of the missions network, making it difficult for the hubs to acquire a position too.

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As for the digital platform, the Virtual Gateway in particular is an additional service. The other services (the NIO connector, white label website, International Business Academy and the commercial service providers' portal) have been developed more quickly or used more widely than would have been the case without NLiB. The survey has shown, however, that out of the twelve percent of companies that are familiar with NLiB, just twenty-three percent have made use of one or more of NLiB's services. The main reason for this is that there doesn't appear to be a need for it; up to now, companies have been able to find their own contacts and have often already developed a good international network, in part thanks to the activities of other longer-standing organisations such as RVO. Sixty-two percent of the entrepreneurs also say they find it unclear what the added value of NLiB's services is compared to what RVO, the missions network or other parties have to offer.

**The task of being additional has been placed too unilaterally with NLiB.**

NLiB had the task of developing activities which were additional and complementary to existing activities. In a number of fields, in particular trade missions or the NL Business Hubs, it was difficult to find a position due to the strong position that RVO and the missions network have developed. The wider question as to whether public activities may displace those of private parties (which NLiB is considered to be) or make them impossible, has not been asked to a sufficient extent.

**The network under the TINL flag has been established earlier and in a better structured manner than would have probably happened without TINL.**

Although a number of regional development agencies and RVO already had the intention to collaborate more before the Buijink resources came available, the formation of TINL made a significant contribution to the speed, structure and national coverage with which the network was formed. But of the current activities being carried out in the context of TINL, several them are covered with regular RVO positions. TINL's main role is to manage the network's secretariat.

**Due to the role as relationship and process manager, NLWorks' additionality is still low.**

As far as both the long-term programming and the impact programmes are concerned, NLWorks' main role is to facilitate the process – a role that could be carried out relatively easily by a different party.

### 2.4.1 Recommendations

- In future policy, the MFA must define the term additionality again and more clearly, so that it can improve the balance between public and private.

The MFA must make a broader assessment and thereby not simply expect that new activities are additional to existing ones, but also consider whether existing activities are getting in the way of new ones. The central question is whether public activities aren't displacing those of private parties or making them impossible. Wanting to place certain activities on the private side, as has happened with NLiB, should go hand in hand with an ex-ante analysis as to whether public parties are able to pull out (or partially pull out) in that area. If it is commercially possible to allow a business hub to operate in a market, that could go hand in hand with the withdrawal of public services. The same applies to the organisation of missions.

However, this is under the assumption that NLiB is becoming a private organisation, of which there has been no evidence to date and which, based on the current activities, is not expected either in the (near) future. However, it also applies to other private parties offering similar services, such as sector associations and private service providers.

## 2.5 Reach

**To what extent are the three<sup>10</sup> organisations reaching additional SMEs with potential for internationalisation?**

**A large proportion of the companies reached already operate internationally and are well connected to the public instrumentarium.**

The target group of organisations formulated in the policy consists of SMEs and start-ups, whereby the group is specified to the somewhat larger SME, which is already active in nearby markets but not yet in growth markets.

Companies that make use of services (under the flag) of NLiB and TINL, were already operating internationally to a large extent beforehand (>75 percent of the companies), of which between twenty and thirty percent of the companies also on each of the growth markets included here.<sup>11</sup> The specified target group is therefore only partially being reached. This also applies to companies that are in the spotlight of NLiB, around two-thirds of which fall outside of the target group defined by NLiB.

This makes sense given the limited control options that both organisations have to reach specific companies, the nature of the activities and the necessary neutral character of the services provided. In addition, the companies were also well connected to the RVO instruments for internationalisation (45 percent for NLiB and 60 percent for TINL). These observations are not all contradictory to the defined target group but do raise the question as to whether the activities end up with the group that has the biggest need for support.

**To what extent is the available instrumentarium being opened up better and used more efficiently via joint activities and referrals?**

**More joint activities are taking place via the TINL network; referrals via the NLiB portal for commercial service providers are still very limited.**

In several places in the ecosystem, we have gathered information about the extent to which activities are being organised in a more joint manner and the extent to which referrals are being made. We named all the activities of TINL partners that could be opened up more widely via the network, whereby half of the

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<sup>10</sup> In the study, this question was only investigated for TINL and NLiB, because NLWorks focuses virtually exclusively on the impact programmes, where in total it concerns a limited group of dozens of companies. Reach is less important in this regard.

<sup>11</sup> China, Turkey, Romania, India, Bulgaria, South Africa, Russia, Malaysia, Mexico and Thailand.

participants come from different regions. Referrals via the NLiB portal for commercial service providers take place to a very limited extent. Commercial service providers still mainly make use of their own network.

### 2.5.1 Recommendations

- When deciding on the target group that the MFA wants to reach with policy, consider the limited control options for reaching a specific target group.

The fact that the opportunities for reaching the target group are limited has consequences for policy formulation: if the MFA identifies a specific target group, there must be tools to achieve this. Now this happens only to a limited extent. If that is not possible or is only possible to a limited extent, for example due to the nature of the activities or the neutral character of the government, there is no added value in deciding on a specific target group.

In addition, the group of companies now reached raises the question as to where the efforts deliver the most result. Future policy must formulate more clearly why the MFA opts for a specific target group and how it can achieve this, with the MFA considering the limited control options.

- The MFA and implementing organisations must ensure improved monitoring, so there is greater insight into the reach of the organisations, and activities can be adjusted if necessary.

Information about reach, as we gathered for this evaluation, is readily available through Statistics Netherlands (CBS) or a survey among the companies and/or the target group reached. However, organisations fail to make use of these options, or fail to do so to a satisfactory extent, which means that it is difficult for them to monitor the reach of the organisations and to adjust the activities if necessary. Given the findings about reach, it is advisable to gather information regularly in order to gain better insight.

# List of abbreviations and acronyms

MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
CBS	Statistics Netherlands
DIO	International Enterprise Department
MEAC <sup>12</sup>	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy
IOB	Department of International Research and Policy Evaluation
ISO NL	International Strategic Consultation
ISO-C	ISO Committee
CoC	Chamber of Commerce
LIOF	Limburg Institute for Development and Finance
LTP	long-term programming
MT combination	market-theme combination
NLiB	NLinBusiness
PPP	public-private partnership
RDA	regional development agency (in this evaluation also urban development agency)
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency
SLMD	strategic long-term market development
TINL	Trade and Innovate NL
VNO-NCW	Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers
VR	Virtual Reality

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<sup>12</sup> In the period 2012-2017, the name of the ministry was: Ministry of Economic Affairs (MEA). In October 2017 (under the Rutte III cabinet), the ministry became the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (MEAC). Therefore, both are used in this report.

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