

Gender-responsive Public Procurement

Five reasons why gender-responsive public procurement is crucial in the EU context

GRPP can contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth in the EU

Public procurement accounts for a major part of the European economy. Every year, public authorities in the EU spend around 14 % of gross domestic product (GDP) on public procurement [1]. GRPP can, as a gender equality measure, lead to an increase in the productive capacity of the economy and better value for money. The EU would be able to produce more goods and services domestically and would also become more competitive in international markets [2].

Studies clearly show a link between greater gender equality and increased growth and employment

Gender equality is not only a human right: achieving gender equality also brings tremendous socioeconomic benefits. Gender equality has strong, positive impacts on GDP per capita, and these increase over time [3]. Therefore, gender equality is a highly relevant policy measure for fostering economic growth. It is estimated to lead to an increase in EU GDP per capita of 6.1–9.6 % by 2050, amounting to EUR 1.95–3.15 trillion [4]. GRPP could contribute a significant part of this, as it helps to tackle structural inequalities.

Public procurement has considerable potential to promote gender equality

GRPP offers a major opportunity to leverage public spending to pursue a fairer allocation of economic resources and improve living standards for both women and men. Achieving value for money and delivering wider benefits, such as gender equality objectives, often go hand in hand. The best outcome for society can be achieved only by taking the possible differences between the situations of women and men, in all their diversity, into account.

When contractors carry out specific actions to promote gender equality, it also helps meet the objectives of the EU gender equality strategy for 2020–2025 and UN sustainable development goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in order to fight discrimination, promote gender equality and achieve a more sustainable, inclusive and equal society^[5]. For example, in a World Bank-financed operation in Albania, standard bidding documents were amended, asking bidders to submit gender diversity action plans to increase the representation of women in the construction sector^[6].

GRPP can contribute to closing the gender pay gap and creating inclusive jobs

GRPP can include measures to address the gender pay gap in the workforce assigned to the contract. It can also help to ensure that wages paid under contracts are legal and adequate, and that bidders are not avoiding their social obligations. This is especially relevant in low-wage sectors (such as cleaning, catering, childcare and call centres), in which women represent the main workforce, and in contracts that will be performed or partly performed in developing countries, or sectors with significant gender inequalities in the workforce (e.g. financial and economic activities, which have the highest gender pay gap)^[7]. GRPP also facilitates the social and professional integration of women who suffer from multiple discrimination (e.g. women with disabilities, migrant women and women who are long-term unemployed).

GRPP is an opportunity for public buyers to send a strong message to the market about acceptable working practices and to promote more inclusive recruitment, training and promotion opportunities. In this way, public bodies can aim to ensure that outsourced contracts have similar standards of employment as public sector jobs. For example, the private sector has a higher pay gap than the public sector^[8].

GRPP supports efforts towards sustainable and socially responsible procurement

The UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development acknowledges that systematic mainstreaming of the gender perspective is crucial for implementing all the goals and targets of the agenda^[9]. This includes target 12.7, which aims to promote sustainable practices in the area of public procurement.

Taking into account the different needs of women and men in relation to the supplies, works and services to be purchased can also lead to better results in economic and environmental terms. For example, ensuring that workwear is designed to fit both women and men comfortably will help to increase its lifespan, thus reducing the environmental and economic impact of frequent replacement. The same contract might include criteria to ensure adequate pay and safe working conditions for textile workers, addressing issues such as sexual harassment in the workplace and whistle-blowing. Applying a life-cycle costing approach will ensure that any increase in the purchase price due to these measures can be weighed against increased durability and reduced waste (e.g. where poorly designed or produced uniforms are discarded). Promoting fair and safe working conditions along the whole supply chain improves the situation of women and men living in third countries, too.

Green procurement and GRPP

Contracting authorities may pursue GRPP as part of a broader policy on strategic procurement, encompassing environmental and other social objectives. While some organisations fear that these different objectives will compete, in many cases there are synergies between environmental goals and gender equality and mainstreaming. Environmental issues such as climate change and biodiversity, while affecting us all, often have a gendered impact.

In sectors such as cleaning services, textile production and food and catering, applying green procurement criteria will have benefits for the health and safety of workers, many of whom are low-paid women. On the other hand, by applying to GRPP the approaches set out in this toolkit in the same tenders that include environmental measures, public bodies can help to ensure a 'just transition' to a greener economy, which avoids replicating or exacerbating social inequalities.

GRPP can contribute to strengthening the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming

Integrating a gender perspective in the work (i.e. at the operational level) of public contracting authorities creates a significant opportunity for institutional change in the strategies, objectives and activities of the organisations (e.g. by considering **work–life balance** for parents and carers). It requires good collaboration between public procurers and **gender equality bodies**, which may extend to other areas of activity, such as **gender budgeting**.

Footnotes

[1] European Commission, 2017.

[2] EIGE, 2017.

[3] EIGE, 2017.

[4] EIGE, 2017

[5] Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, 2018.

[6] Mc Gann and Ismail Ali, 2021.

[7] Eurostat, 2019a.

[8] Eurostat, 2019b.

[9] United Nations, 2015.