

Buying green! New facts and figures on green public procurement in the EU

Public authorities across the EU can still do more for the environment and eco-innovation - by systematically considering environmental aspects when they purchase goods, services and contracts. According to a new study for the European Commission, green public procurement is practised in a significant way only in seven out of the EU's 25 Member States. The study has been presented this morning at a stakeholder conference in London organised jointly by the Commission and the UK Presidency and opened by UK Secretary of State for Environment, Margaret Beckett. The participants, mainly representatives of EU governments, will discuss the results during the conference and formulate recommendations to overcome obstacles to green public procurement. Each year, public authorities spend around 16 % of EU GDP on public purchases. If they opted for environmentally sound goods and services, they would give a big boost to eco-technologies and innovation in the EU.

Timo Makela, Director at the Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment, underlined the potential of green public procurement (GPP) to pull environment-friendly products, services and technologies onto the market. Stronger demand will lead to lower prices and thus help eco-innovations compete with conventional products and processes. This in turn will not only benefit the environment, but also provide European companies with competitive advantages on the global market for eco-technologies, which is growing at 5% per year. Mr Makela emphasised that under the Commission's Integrated Product Policy all Member States are encouraged to draft national action plans on green public procurement by 2006 (see [IP/03/858](#)).

Results of the study on GPP in the EU-25

According to the study, seven Member States – Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and the UK - practise a significant amount of GPP. In these countries, 40-70% of all tenders published on TED during the past year included environmental criteria. TED stands for Tenders Electronic Daily, which publicises all tenders above certain thresholds as defined in EU public procurement Directives. In the remaining 18 countries, this figure was below 30%. In addition, 850 replies to an electronic questionnaire, sent to 8,000 public bodies in the EU, were analysed.

Comparing the situation in both groups of countries, the study finds that the following factors are important for GPP:

- political support for GPP and national GPP programmes;
- availability of specific information sources (e.g. websites with product-related specifications);

- the use of performance-based requirements instead of standards for the goods or services, giving bidders more flexibility to offer environment-friendly products and services;
- the consideration of the costs of a product throughout its life-cycle as an award criterion,
- inviting bidders to submit both conventional and environment-friendly bids, so that the contracting authorities can choose a green bid if it proves to offer the best value for money on the basis of the award criteria,
- availability of training programmes, and
- implementation of environmental management systems by the procuring organisations.

The study identifies the following goods and services as most appropriate for greening due to the availability of clear environmental criteria and/or their high impact: sewage and disposal services, sanitation and environmental services (e.g. recycling), paper, printing services, office machinery, furniture, food products and catering services, construction work, transport equipment and electrical machinery and medical devices.

In order to strengthen GPP, the study proposes setting indicative national targets for GPP on the basis of the experience of the seven best-scoring Member States, both in terms of strategies and practical tools. The study was carried out by the Consortium TAKE-5 led by Virage n.v. from the Netherlands.

Actions by the Commission

The European Commission is actively promoting GPP. Last year, it published a [GPP Handbook](#) with many practical tips for public authorities, which is now available in all EU languages. The Commission will now further expand its GPP website to create an EU database for green purchasing strategies and environmental criteria for procurement. It also seeks to identify and disseminate purchasing techniques that will help public bodies identify recently developed environmental technologies or even trigger the development of new environmental technologies. Lastly, it advocates that green public procurement and a life-cycle approach to cost assessments become standard in public procurement training.

Next steps

TAKE-5 will now finalise its study and present the final report at a conference on 3 and 4 April 2006 in Graz. The final report will include examples of good GPP practices, technical specifications, information on the life-cycle costs of products and recommendations to the Member States who are in the process of setting up national action plans for GPP.

The results of the study will be made available on the Commission's GPP website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/gpp/>.