

Science for Environment Policy

More information and training on green public procurement could increase its uptake

Public authorities in EU Member States are encouraged to purchase more environmentally-friendly goods and services through Green Public Procurement (GPP). A recent survey of purchasing managers in Italy has identified some factors that influence their adoption of this strategy, and suggests that a broad knowledge of GPP is key to its implementation.

GPP is a voluntary process that public authorities in EU Member States can implement to ensure that the goods or services they buy minimise negative impacts on the environment. These goods and services cover everything from office equipment and transport vehicles, to catering, construction and cleaning. Since public authorities in Europe spend approximately two trillion euros every year, equivalent to 19% of the EU's gross domestic product¹, this 'green purchasing' can help support the market for environmentally-friendly goods and services. Previous research has focused on the benefits of GPP, but there is a lack of information on the factors that affect its uptake.

Public authorities in three Italian regions, Lazio, Liguria and Emilia Romagna, were interviewed by telephone to establish their awareness and use of 'green initiatives'. In total, 156 purchasing managers or environmental managers were interviewed.

The surveys, funded by the EU's LIFE+ programme², suggest that the more aware public authorities are of GPP initiatives and tools, the more likely they are to choose to adopt GPP and take environmental considerations into tenders for goods and services.

The results also found that the size of an area covered by a public authority can play a role in the implementation of GPP. Small public organisations may not have specialised personnel or full-time managers dealing with GPP. Support from external experts for purchasing goods and services was also found to encourage the development of GPP practices.

In contrast to previous studies, no link was found between public authorities adopting the ISO 14001 certificate, which maps out a framework for an effective environmental management system, and the implementation of GPP. The lack of relationship may be because GPP and voluntary certifications, such as ISOs, are often considered two different ways of tackling environmental concerns, despite the fact that they can work in harmony. As a result, resources are often only invested in one of the two schemes.

The findings can be used to guide policymakers and managers of public organisations interested in GPP. As greater awareness and understanding of GPP among staff in public authorities was seen to encourage its uptake, better information and training schemes in the technical, legal and economic aspects of purchasing more environmentally-friendly goods and services is therefore seen as an effective strategy for encouraging GPP.

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1. See: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/what_en.htm

2. The project, LIFE + PROMISE PROduct Main Impacts Sustainability through Eco-communication, was funded by LIFE+. See: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/about/index.htm>