



Public procurement amounts to around 14% of the European Union's Gross Domestic Product each year, making it a powerful market force. Green Public Procurement (GPP) seeks to leverage this potential to encourage the uptake of more sustainable goods and services. To facilitate this transition, public authorities need to efficiently integrate green and social criteria in their tenders, ensuring that **sustainability becomes a core component of public procurement practices.**

GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT: EASY, AFFORDABLE, ACHIEVABLE

AN OVERVIEW OF TOOLS, BENEFITS AND BEST PRACTICES FROM ACROSS THE EU

Greening public procurement can be easy, affordable and achievable. Authorities across the EU are already setting an example by sharing expertise and best practices, and numerous tools are available to help procurers buy more sustainably.

UNLOCKING GREEN PROCUREMENT: MANUALS, TOOLS AND SUPPORT

Public institutions willing to adopt GPP have access to a wide array of resources designed to simplify the process. These include:

- **Regularly updated voluntary EU GPP criteria**
- **Handbooks and manuals, training materials and the EU GPP helpdesk**
- **The EU Ecolabel**
- **National-level guidance** from specialised organisations.

In addition, the European Commission's Good Practice Library offers case studies on successful green tenders, providing concrete examples of GPP in action.

To streamline green procurement, the European Commission and the GPP Advisory Group continually develop and update **voluntary EU GPP criteria**, which public authorities are encouraged to use. These criteria cover several goods and services, such as textiles, paints, varnishes, cleaning supplies, furniture, road transport, and construction. **Available online in most official EU languages**, they enable institutions to easily incorporate sustainability into their procurement processes.

The EU Ecolabel, the EU's official certification scheme for non-food products and services of environmental excellence, **complement these criteria**. It covers a wide range of products such as paper, cleaning products, textiles, paints, and even tourist accommodations, making it easier for procurers to identify the greenest options. Guides are available to help integrate the EU Ecolabel criteria into public tenders, such as those for paper, hard covering products or absorbent hygiene products.

Public authorities can also rely on national-level resources and expertise. Responsible ministries or specialised organisations, like IFDD/FIDO in Belgium, PIANOo in the Netherlands and naBe in Austria, offer assistance to regional and local governments and public entities. Since the early 2000s, in response to a request by the European Commission, Member States have developed non-binding national action plans for greening public procurement. Updates on the application of these plans include **contact points for national, regional and local entities that provide guidance on GPP implementation**. At the EU level, authorities can also seek help from the EU GPP Helpdesk.

WHY GO GREEN? THE BENEFITS OF GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Green public procurement criteria can be seamlessly inserted into tenders, with no need for time-consuming research. The EU GPP handbook offers guidance on verification and award processes, while certifications like the EU Ecolabel **help in formulating technical specifications**. Even if not directly included in the tenders, the EU GPP criteria and the EU Ecolabel provide a solid foundation for drafting specific requirements or complementing existing national or institution-specific criteria.

In addition, the EU Ecolabel helps procurers **identify sustainable goods and services that meet the highest environmental standards on the EU market**. Through its Product Catalogue, procurers can easily find certified products that help ensuring compliance with sustainability objectives.

Combining the EU's voluntary GPP standards and the EU Ecolabel can significantly reduce the time needed to formulate tenders. When relying on the EU Ecolabel, procurers can **save time on verification and award processes**, as the certification confirms that compliance with the underlying criteria has been independently verified. By requiring products or services to be certified under a recognised scheme like the EU Ecolabel, procurers **contribute to positive market changes**, promoting a reliable supply of sustainable products.

The EU Procurement Directive establishes purchasing procedures for public buyers and encourages public authorities to apply the **Life Cycle Costing (LCC)** approach, a key component of GPP practices. LCC prompts authorities to consider the full lifecycle cost of goods and services, including not only the purchase price, but also operating and end-of-life costs. By adopting LCC, procurers gain a comprehensive view of the total cost of a good or service over its lifetime. **GPP thus promotes investment in products that are energy- and resource-efficient**. The EU Ecolabel further simplifies this procedure by identifying products that already meet the highest standards for energy and resource saving.

Where applicable, GPP can also include product longevity criteria, such as extended warranty periods or the availability of spare parts, **promoting longer durability and reducing repurchase frequency**.

By looking beyond initial purchase prices and considering long-term costs, GPP helps generate savings over the entire product lifecycle.

FROM THEORY TO ACTION: INSPIRING EXAMPLES



Procuring Paper Products
with the help of EU GPP
criteria and the EU Ecolabel

**Belgian Federal
Government**

The [Belgian Federal Government](#) uses GPP criteria to procure paper products through the [Guide to Sustainable Purchasing for Paper Products](#), developed by the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development (IFDD/FIDO). This guide incorporates EU GPP criteria, the EU Ecolabel and national requirements. For each framework agreement, the federal government's central purchasing office follows the guide and consults IFDD/FIDO. The use of standard criteria facilitates supplier performance management. According to the federal government, procuring paper products certified with the EU Ecolabel is straight forward.



GPP made easy with the
Dutch SPP criteria tool

**Dutch Ministry of
Infrastructure and
Water Management**

Since 2017, public procurers in the Netherlands have access to the [Sustainable Public Procurement \(SPP\) Criteria Tool](#), a digital platform designed to streamline the integration of sustainability criteria into public tenders. The tool currently offers 900 tailored criteria across 48 product categories, based on EU GPP criteria, Dutch legislation and market practices. These criteria are reviewed and updated yearly, through a structured feedback process involving both experts and stakeholders. Procurers can choose among three levels of sustainability ambition: basic, significant and ambitious. Even at the basic level, the criteria are more ambitious than the minimum legal requirements, ensuring that public procurement contributes effectively to sustainability goals. The tool's user-friendly interface has facilitated widespread adoption and attracted international interest: the Flemish government has been using the Dutch tool in their procurement since May 2024, and other EU and non-EU countries are looking into developing similar platforms. In 2023, the SPP Criteria Tool was applied in public tenders with a total value of over three billion euros.



Certified Paper at every
stage of procurement

Statistics Poland

Since 2013, [Statistics Poland](#) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS) has applied green and social public procurement criteria, establishing an internal requirement to implement such criteria in every public procurement procedure, including low-value contracts. For paper and paper products, GUS mandates either the EU Ecolabel or FSC certification. Initially, suppliers were unfamiliar with these certifications and often requested their removal from tenders, citing the complexity of obtaining them. However, in recent years, both the EU Ecolabel and, more commonly, FSC have become straightforward standards met by many contractors. In fact, it has become harder to find a supplier without such certification.

Notably, GUS requires the EU Ecolabel or FSC certification not only for the paper sourced for its own use, but also for all documents used by contractors during the execution of unrelated contracts, including construction projects. All written materials related to GUS contract execution must be printed on FSC-certified paper, or this requirement is used as a non-monetary evaluation criterion in tenders.

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