



# The untapped potential of public procurement in promoting gender equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has recently awarded a contract to AEIDL to raise awareness and build capacity of institutions and public buyers on how to use public procurement while promoting gender equality.

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Can we wait for 60 more years to reach full gender equality in the EU? The answer is rhetoric. The latest Gender Equality Index from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that with a score of 67.9 out of 100, the EU is at least 60 years away from reaching complete gender equality, if we continue at the current pace.

Promoting gender equality is one of the objectives of the EU: it ranges from fostering equal economic independence for women and men, closing the gender pay gap, advancing gender balance in decision making, ending gender-based violence and promoting gender equality beyond the EU.

To reach this objective, EU institutions and Member States should apply gender mainstreaming to all their policies and laws. Gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns. An important role is played by public budgets. Indeed, public finance decisions must contribute to advancing gender equality, not reinforcing existing inequalities.

The same is true with EU Public Procurement. When public authorities purchase goods, works and services from third parties, they can and should design public procurement processes in a way that promotes gender equality (this is called gender-responsive public procurement – GRPP).

We are happy that EIGE has recently awarded a contract to AEIDL to raise awareness and build capacity of institutions and public buyers on how to use public procurement to achieve this goal. Public buyers are major investors in Europe, spending 14% of the EU's gross domestic product. Many public authorities are not aware that tendering processes can be used to this aim. Raising their awareness can contribute to make the difference.

Some concrete examples:

- In a contract for uniforms, a public authority examines the entire supply chain to ensure that all workers receive a fair wage (e.g. by applying fair trade principles), human and employment rights are respected, and that the uniforms are suitable and comfortable for both male and female employees to wear.
- An example taken from the guide on GRPP of the Belgian Institute for the equality of women and men: a public authority decides to procure a 'gender-sensitive study of obstacles to mobility'. The aim is to study, through a literature study and focus groups, what obstacles are experienced by citizens of working age in the context of mobility. Identifying and analysing possible differences between women and men is also part of the aims of the study. That is because men more often make a straightforward journey (from home to work) while that of women often consists of a succession of shorter steps (home-school-work-shop-school-home).

The GRPP project awarded to AEIDL will last one year and have the following tasks:

- Map, identify, select and develop good practice cases of GRPP in the EU
- Detect obstacles in strengthening gender mainstreaming in public procurement processes, and develop recommendations to overcome those obstacles
- Develop a practical toolkit to raise public buyers' capacity to implement GRPP step by step
- Test the toolkit in the frame of a 1-day competence development meeting with a sample of EIGE's staff, EU and national public buyers and relevant stakeholders
- Develop some communication products to present the findings of the project to a broad audience.