

GENDER-RESPONSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

EIB guidance note



European
Investment Bank

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INTRODUCTION

Gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) is an approach that uses public procurement as a driver of inclusive and sustainable development. By integrating gender equality considerations into every stage of the procurement cycle – from early planning and market engagement to contract award and performance monitoring – this approach ensures that public spending generates not only economic value, but also meaningful social impact.

Public procurement represents a substantial share of national budgets and global gross domestic product (GDP). Used strategically, it can help reduce gender gaps, expand access to opportunities and promote inclusive growth. The European Investment Bank (EIB) reflects this ambition in its [approach to strategic procurement](#), which aligns procurement with broader policy goals. Gender-responsive public procurement is central to this vision, enabling decisions that advance gender equality, social inclusion and economic empowerment.

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union and a key objective of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EIB promotes equal access to the goods, services, benefits and opportunities generated by its investments. Since 2018, the Bank has integrated gender equality and women's empowerment goals into its business model and continues to expand its gender-focused financing and advisory work within Europe and beyond, in line with EU policies and the [Global Gateway](#) initiative.

This guidance note provides a comprehensive framework for integrating gender equality considerations into procurement processes. It positions gender-responsive public procurement as a strategic tool to advance SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 12.7 (Sustainable Public Procurement), and offers practical guidance for EIB promoters and stakeholders to implement gender objectives in line with EIB policies and national legal frameworks.

Through this approach, the EIB supports projects that are not only technically and financially sound but also socially inclusive. This includes encouraging the participation of women-owned and gender-responsive enterprises, promoting fair labour practices and ensuring that infrastructure and services are responsive to the needs of all genders.

Despite progress in education and legal rights, women remain underrepresented in public contracting and economic decision-making. Gender-responsive public procurement helps address these gaps by building inclusive supply chains, incentivising gender-sensitive business practices and ensuring that public investments reflect transparency and fairness.

Importantly, gender-responsive public procurement should not be a standalone initiative. Its success depends on collaboration among procurement professionals, gender experts, project promoters, suppliers, contractors and policymakers. It requires shared objectives, strong institutional frameworks and the capacity to turn plans into action. The Gender-Responsive Public Procurement Roadmap in this guidance note sets out 11 key steps to guide this process.

This is not about ticking boxes. It is about using public procurement to drive real change. When we work together and act with purpose, gender-responsive procurement can become a catalyst for building more inclusive economies and equitable societies – ensuring that public spending benefits everyone.

How to use this guidance

This guidance covers voluntary measures that can help promoters improve the gender equality contributions of their projects financed by the EIB. These considerations are assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering the specific objectives and context of each project. This guidance is therefore not mandatory. It has been developed with two main purposes:

1. Raising awareness and strengthening the capabilities of EIB promoters in gender-responsive public procurement: By improving understanding and building skills, this guidance aims to help promoters align their procurement practices with gender-related objectives.
2. Providing a comprehensive, practical framework for integrating gender objectives throughout the procurement lifecycle: This includes clear, step-by-step guidance that can be applied at every stage – from needs assessment and market engagement to contract management and performance evaluation.

The guidance is intentionally not sector specific. It sets out principles and methods that can be adapted to different procurement contexts across industries. It serves as a foundation for embedding gender considerations into procurement strategies, regardless of project size or sector. Because this is a fast-evolving area, the guidance will be updated regularly.

This guidance note is designed as a modular resource that users can consult throughout the procurement process.

Section 1: Gender and procurement at the EIB outlines the Bank’s approach to procurement and gender.

Section 2: Key concepts introduces the core principles of gender-responsive public procurement. It explains how procurement, traditionally focused on cost and efficiency, can also advance broader development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 12.7 (Sustainable Public Procurement). Each sub-section ends with key takeaways.

Section 3: Throughout the procurement cycle provides a roadmap for integrating gender considerations into every phase of the public procurement cycle. It supports EIB promoters and other stakeholders in systematically applying these principles during project planning, tendering and contract implementation.

Each sub-section corresponds to a different stage of the process – from needs assessment and market engagement to contract award and post-contract management. For each stage, the guidance outlines objectives, identifies opportunities to promote gender equality, and offers practical advice and examples aligned with the EIB’s approach to strategic procurement and its [Gender Action Plan](#).

Users are encouraged to consult the sections most relevant to their projects and return to the guidance note as needed throughout planning and implementation.

GLOSSARY¹

Gender

The social, behavioural and cultural attributes, expectations, norms and opportunities associated with an individual's biological sex, sexual orientation, or sexual or gender identity.

Gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP)

Public procurement that incorporates gender equality requirements and uses purchasing decisions as a tool to advance gender equality. This includes practices that actively promote equal opportunities through the acquisition of work, supplies or services by public entities.

Gender equality

A situation in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities in every sphere of life, as defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality.

Gender gap

The measurable disparity between women and men in areas such as participation, access, rights, pay or benefits.

Women-owned business

A business that is at least 51% owned, controlled and managed by one or more women, as defined by the [2X Challenge criteria](#).

Gender-responsive enterprise

An enterprise that integrates gender equality and women's empowerment principles into its policies and practices, regardless of ownership.

Procurement cycle

The complete process of public procurement, including pre-tender, tender and post-tender stages.

Strategic procurement

An approach that aligns purchasing decisions with broader policy goals such as sustainability, innovation and inclusion.

Technical specifications

Detailed descriptions of the goods, services or works to be procured, including mandatory requirements and performance expectations.

Award criteria

The factors used to evaluate and select the most economically advantageous tender, often including price, quality and social considerations.

Selection criteria

Requirements used to assess a bidder's capacity, experience and suitability to deliver the contract.

¹ These definitions were taken from European Investment Bank resources, the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) and the [UN Women Gender Responsive Business Guideline](#).

Exclusion grounds

Legal or policy-based reasons for disqualifying a bidder from participating in a procurement procedure.

Contract performance conditions

Specific obligations included in the contract to ensure delivery of gender-related objectives during implementation.

Monitoring and reporting

Processes for tracking and documenting the implementation of gender-related commitments throughout the contract lifecycle.

Gender budgeting

Applying gender perspectives to the budgeting process. This involves assessing budgets through a gender lens and restructuring revenues and expenditures to promote equality in resource allocation.

Set-asides

Procurement policies that reserve a percentage of contracts for specific groups, such as women-owned businesses.

Bid preferences

Mechanisms that give priority to certain bidders, such as women-owned enterprises, in cases of equal scoring or tie-breaks.

Financing for gender equality (F4GE)

The internal EIB approach used to identify and classify operations that contribute to gender equality, aligned with the [Development Assistance Committee](#) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and 2X Challenge criteria.

Gender indicators

Tools for monitoring gender differences, gender-related changes over time and progress towards gender equality goals.

Preliminary market consultation

Engagement with contractors, suppliers and other stakeholders before launching a procurement process to assess market readiness and inform strategy.

Performance-based specifications

Specifications focused on desired outcomes rather than prescriptive inputs, allowing flexibility and innovation in delivery.

1 PROCUREMENT AND GENDER AT THE EIB

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is the lending arm of the European Union and one of the world's leading [multilateral development banks](#). Established in 1958 under the Treaty of Rome, the EIB initially financed projects within the European Community. In 1962, it was authorised to support projects beyond the European Union, marking the start of its global operations.

1.1 Procurement at the EIB

The EIB has a responsibility to ensure that its funds are used effectively. However, project promoters – not the Bank – are responsible for all aspects of procurement.



Procurement for projects financed by the EIB follows the [Guide to Procurement](#) (updated in 2024), which sets out the rules for contracts funded in whole or in part by the Bank, or under loans guaranteed by it. The guide explains what arrangements promoters must make to procure the works, goods and services required for their projects.

Although the guide applies specifically to the parts of a project financed by the Bank, it also requires that procurement for other components not undermine the project's technical, economic or financial viability.

The guide is updated regularly to reflect changes in EU procurement law, new Bank policies and international best practices. Updates are based on extensive internal and external consultation.

Recently, the EIB introduced a new initiative on strategic procurement.

Public procurement plays a vital role in investment, representing a significant share of spending by borrowers and project promoters. Traditionally, public procurement in large-scale and high-risk projects beyond the European Union has focused on compliance with formal rules and meeting immediate project needs, while upholding principles such as economy and efficiency, open international competition, equal treatment, non-discrimination, transparency and traceability.

While this compliance-based approach remains valid, new challenges like climate change, trade tensions, security concerns, the need for mature projects and limited promoter capacity require a more strategic approach. Strategic procurement seeks to integrate sustainability, climate action, innovation and circular economy considerations into the public procurement process.

Although discussion continues on how these challenges should be addressed, there is broad agreement that public procurement is a key tool for doing so.

1.1.1 The EIB approach to strategic procurement

The Bank's [approach to strategic procurement](#), addresses the challenges outlined above by complementing traditional, compliance-based procurement with a strategic, performance-driven approach focused on three key objectives:



The goal of strategic procurement is to change how promoters, economic operators and the Bank use procurement to achieve these objectives. This approach strengthens the impact of strategically important projects and aligns procurement practices with the Bank's broader priorities.

Strategic procurement brings sustainability, transparency and inclusivity into procurement processes to increase the positive impact of development projects. This includes prioritising contractors that meet environmental and social standards, building local capacity, integrating digital tools and innovation, and encouraging competition to ensure value for money.

Over time, this approach aims to transform the EIB's project portfolio into a more impactful, effective instrument for delivering the strategic priorities of both the Bank and the European Union.

This procurement guide supports the implementation of sustainable procurement in projects financed by the EIB, aligning gender-responsive practices with the goals of the strategic procurement initiative.

1.2 Gender at the EIB

Advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment is critical to boosting competitiveness, driving global development and accelerating the green transition.

As the European Union's financial arm, the EIB has embedded gender equality into its business model since 2018. Promoting long-term economic growth and advancing gender equality through the financial and technical expertise it brings to projects it finances, the Bank has more than doubled its financing for gender equality over the past five years, to over €30 billion.

Gender considerations are integrated into all the Bank's activities, within the European Union and internationally.

The EIB Group [Gender Action Plan](#) sets out how the EIB Group – which comprises the EIB and the European Investment Fund – integrates gender considerations into its operations. It sets out how the Group will continue to promote inclusive growth and work towards:

- creating new economic opportunities for women through improved access to finance, leadership roles, jobs and skills;
- supporting inclusive infrastructure and services, including health services that advance gender equality, expand economic participation and improve daily lives;
- upholding safety, security, dignity and equal rights in all operations.

This work supports the policy goals of the EIB Group, the European Commission's [Roadmap for Women's Rights](#), the EU [LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026-2030](#) and EU [Global Gateway](#) priorities.

Key takeaways

- The European Investment Bank is the lending arm of the European Union and one of the world's leading multilateral development banks.
- The EIB Guide to Procurement ensures that funds are used efficiently and transparently. Recently, the Bank introduced its strategic procurement initiative.
- The EIB Group has embedded gender equality into its business model since 2018. The Group's Gender Action Plan sets out the approach for embedding gender considerations into its operations.

2 KEY CONCEPTS

2.1 What is gender-responsive public procurement?

The global public procurement market is estimated at about \$13 trillion annually, representing around 13% of GDP across **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** members (Open Contracting Partnership, 2020). Traditionally, procurement focused on meeting specific needs by delivering the right goods and services at the right time and place. Today, it has become a strategic instrument that creates value and supports broader policy objectives (**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**, 2021). When used effectively, procurement can help governments achieve important societal and economic objectives.

Public procurement has shifted from a purely transactional process to a strategic tool for achieving development goals. How governments spend public funds can shape societal objectives, such as advancing gender equality and empowering women throughout the procurement cycle. By integrating gender considerations into procurement, contracting authorities can help drive the economic inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Despite its potential, gender-responsive procurement is still uncommon. Few countries have mandatory policies, and research shows equality measures are rarely applied in practice (Sarter, 2020). (Box 1 provides examples of countries that do have such policies.) The World Bank estimates that only 1% of the \$13 trillion spent annually on public procurement, goes to women-owned businesses (World Bank, 2021).

Box 1. Unlocking the potential of women-owned businesses

Government spending represents about 33% of GDP across the 176 largest economies, yet almost none of this is procured through women-owned enterprises, according to [WEConnect International](#) (Vazquez et al., 2013). This highlights a strong business case for governments to promote supplier diversity in three ways:

- Addressing market inequities by creating fairer and profitable opportunities.
- Tapping the economic potential of women-owned businesses, driving inclusive growth and improving competitiveness.
- Bringing qualified women-owned vendors into supply chains, adding value and innovation while expanding purchasing options and improving value for money.

In post-conflict contexts, governments can play a proactive role in promoting women's participation in nontraditional sectors as part of reconstruction efforts.

In Iraq, for example, in 2005, the coalition government prioritised integrating women-owned businesses into reconstruction bids. Within the first year, more than 250 Iraqi women-owned businesses vetted contracts with the US military's Gulf Region Division for reconstruction work, representing about \$200 million in construction and non-construction contracts.

These efforts enabled women-owned businesses to compete for large-scale bids and enter previously male-dominated fields – from engineering design and building to office supply contracts – winning about 15 new contracts each month (Calabria, 2006).

Only a small number of governments worldwide have supplier diversity legislation that focuses explicitly on women-owned businesses. Some emerging market economies are using procurement policies to promote small firms.

In Rwanda, the [Sustainable Public Procurement Policy Framework](#), approved in October 2024, promotes green growth and inclusive development. It embeds environmental, social and economic sustainability into public procurement processes, aligning with [Rwanda's Vision 2050](#), its [National Strategy for Transformation](#), and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

The policy promotes the purchase of eco-friendly products, supports local industries and encourages innovation. It emphasises social inclusion by advancing local economic development, empowering small firms, promoting gender equality and protecting workers' rights. The framework includes comprehensive training and skill-building programmes for procurement professionals, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track impact and progress.

But gender-responsive public procurement is about more than awarding public contracts to women-owned firms. Ownership on paper does not guarantee real control, fair working conditions or progress on gender equality. A women-led business may still fail to empower women employees. Critics may also argue that prioritising women-owned businesses can be perceived as positive discrimination, raising concerns about equal treatment and fair competition – principles that are central to procurement law and international trade agreements (ILO, UN Women, 2021).

Instead, gender-responsive procurement should take a broader, more systematic approach. Applying a gender lens means looking beyond ownership to assess how procurement decisions can affect gender equality all along the supply chain. This includes favouring companies with strong gender policies and evaluating the impact of contracts on women and men alike. Emerging practices advocate for supporting gender-responsive businesses, which actively incorporate equality and empowerment principles in their operations (ILO, UN Women, 2021), regardless of ownership. This inclusive approach ensures that both women and men benefit from fair access to business and employment opportunities.

In the European Union, gender-responsive public procurement is defined as “procurement that promotes gender equality through the purchase of works, supplies or services by public sector bodies, meaning that contracting authorities and economic operators analyse the impact of all contracted activities related to women’s and men’s interests and concerns towards designing and delivering contracts in a way that reduces gender inequalities.” ([European Institute for Gender Equality](#), 2023a).

2.1.1 Risks of gender-blind procurement

Procurement processes that ignore gender considerations can unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities (Box 2 provides an example of an untapped opportunity). When gender-specific factors are overlooked, decisions may favour larger, well-established companies – often male-dominated – while sidelining smaller, women-owned businesses. This limits opportunities for women and deepens economic disparities.

Gender-blind procurement can also fail to prioritise products and services that meet gender-specific needs, such as healthcare products designed for women, resulting in unequal access to essential resources. In addition, awarding contracts without assessing workplace practices may support companies that do not uphold gender equality, allowing issues like unequal pay and insufficient maternity leave to persist. These gaps ultimately entrench gender inequalities rather than reduce them (UN Women, 2023a).

Box 2. Small firms: An untapped opportunity for women entrepreneurs in Indonesia

Globally, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises form the backbone of economic activity, driving 90% of businesses and generating over half of all jobs worldwide.

In Indonesia, these smaller firms dominate the landscape, with 64 million businesses, or 99% of all companies in the country. They provide employment for 97% of the workforce and contribute a significant 60% to national GDP.

Women-led small businesses account for 64% of the sector in Indonesia.

Yet, despite the scale and impact of these businesses, only 0.25% benefit from government procurement spending, a stark gap that signals untapped potential for inclusive growth (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022).

Key takeaways

- Gender-responsive public procurement extends beyond awarding public contracts to women-owned businesses.
- It is a strategic tool that incorporates gender considerations into every phase of the procurement process – pre-tender, tender and contract management – to advance gender equality and empower women.
- Procurement processes that do not consider gender or ignore gender-specific needs can reinforce inequalities.

2.2 Why it matters

The OECD reports that, despite women surpassing men in educational attainment in most member countries, and despite the progress made towards equal rights, gender gaps persist. Women participate less in paid employment and, when they do, they often earn lower wages. Their career progression is typically slower, incomes are lower, and they tend to own fewer businesses. Women are also underrepresented in public office, on corporate boards and in executive positions, and they are more likely to work in the informal economy, where jobs are less secure (OECD, 2021).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. However, recent reports indicate that the world is far from meeting this target. The cost of inaction is high: According to the World Economic Forum, it will take 123 years to reach full parity – five generations beyond the 2030 goal. The gender gap in economic participation and opportunity alone is projected to take 135 years to close (World Economic Forum, 2025).

“Gender equality is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global plan agreed by leaders of all countries to meet the challenges we face. Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls specifically for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and this is central to the achievement of all the 17 SDGs.”

António Guterres, 2017

2.2.1 Promoting gender equality

SDG 12.7 calls for sustainable public procurement practices aligned with national priorities. By implementing gender-responsive public procurement policies, governments and public buyers can actively promote gender equality. These measures encourage contractors to improve their performance in empowering women, turning procurement into a powerful tool for change. Despite progress, significant gender-based inequalities remain worldwide, particularly in areas such as wages, healthcare and education. Targeted procurement strategies can help close these gaps and create fairer opportunities and outcomes for everyone (OECD, 2021).



2.2.2 Creating an inclusive supply chain

Gender-responsive public procurement can play a key role in reducing the gender pay gap and promoting inclusive employment. By integrating gender considerations into procurement processes and fostering inclusive supply chains, gender-responsive procurement helps ensure that public contracts support fair and equitable working conditions.

For example, including specific requirements to address the gender pay gap in public tenders can help ensure that wages paid under these contracts are fair and appropriate. This approach encourages contractors to adopt equitable pay practices and meet social standards, particularly in sectors where women are overrepresented, such as maintenance and cleaning, catering and care services. By setting standards for gender equality in public contracts, gender-responsive procurement sends a strong signal to the market about acceptable employment practices, fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour market.

Leveraging public spending in this way can be a powerful tool for advancing gender equality and building a more inclusive economy (World Economic Forum, 2025).

2.2.3 How gender equality drives economic growth

Research shows a strong correlation between gender equality and economic growth, particularly in developing countries. Gender equality is not just a social or moral imperative – it is also an economic necessity. When women have equal opportunities to participate in the workforce, economies experience substantial benefits.

According to research by the International Monetary Fund, reducing gender gaps in labour markets could increase GDP in emerging markets and developing economies by nearly 8% (IMF, 2023).

Similarly, the World Bank estimates that closing gender employment gaps could raise long-term GDP per capita by almost 20% on average across countries (World Bank, 2024). This is because women bring diverse skills and perspectives that foster innovation and productivity when they enter the workforce.

Women's economic empowerment also promotes economic diversification and reduces income inequality. Supporting women entrepreneurs and ensuring equal access to financial resources, markets and networks makes economies more resilient and adaptable. Closing the gender gap could add \$7 trillion to the global economy (UN Women, 2024). Moreover, empowering women economically can help reduce poverty and gender-based violence, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

2.2.4 The link between gender-responsive public procurement and gender budgeting

Globally, women and girls perform an extraordinary amount of unpaid labour. According to Oxfam, they contribute approximately 12.5 billion hours of unpaid work every day, adding an estimated \$10.8 trillion to the global economy annually, a figure three times larger than the entire technology industry (Oxfam, 2020). Despite its crucial role, this work is often undervalued, underscoring the need to integrate gender perspectives into national budgeting to address these disparities and advance gender equality.

Gender budgeting, also referred to as gender-responsive budgeting, is a strategic approach that integrates gender perspectives into every stage of the budgeting process to advance equality between women and men. It entails analysing budgets to understand their impact on different genders and ensuring that public resources are allocated in ways that address gender disparities (Box 3 provides examples of gender budgeting initiatives).

Gender-blind budgeting can exacerbate these challenges, resulting in policies that overlook the specific needs of women and girls. Such omissions perpetuate gender inequality and hinder progress towards sustainable development. Conversely, when gender disparities are identified and addressed, governments can allocate resources more effectively to reduce inequalities and foster sustainable and inclusive growth. Implementing gender-responsive budgets can strengthen justice, enhance government accountability and ensure that national budgets align with the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women, 2023b).

Gender budgeting and gender-responsive public procurement are closely interconnected, as both aim to promote gender equality through financial and procurement processes. Gender budgeting establishes the financial framework and priorities while gender-responsive procurement translates these priorities into practice, ensuring they are reflected in spending and procurement strategies. Together, these tools can ensure that public resources are used in a way that advances gender equality and empowers all genders.

Box 3. Examples of gender-responsive budgeting initiatives beyond the European Union

Morocco: In 2013, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in collaboration with UN Women, established the [Centre of Excellence for Gender Responsive Budgeting](#). This initiative provides lawmakers with evidence on how public policies influence gender equality at the local and national levels (Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WDF), 2024).

Colombia: Gender equality is fully integrated into Colombia's [National Development Plan](#). A legally mandated gender budget tracker monitors budget allocation and spending, ensuring that gender considerations are systematically embedded in fiscal policies (WDF, 2024).

South Africa: The [Women's Budget Initiative](#), driven by civil society organisations, analyses public expenditure patterns to assess their impact on women. It has been instrumental in tracking spending on gender-sensitive policy measures and ensuring that fiscal transfers align with commitments to gender equity.

Key takeaways

- At the current pace, achieving full gender equality will take 123 years.
- Implementing gender-responsive public procurement policies enables governments and public buyers to actively advance gender equality and empower women.
- By setting standards for gender equality in public contracts, gender-responsive public procurement can send a strong message to the market about acceptable practices, fostering a more inclusive and equitable labour environment.
- Closing the gender gap in labour markets could increase GDP in emerging markets and developing economies by nearly 8%, and raising women's employment rates could raise long-term GDP per capita by almost 20% on average across countries.
- Gender budgeting establishes financial priorities, while gender-responsive public procurement translates these priorities into action, ensuring that they are reflected in spending and procurement strategies.

2.3 The need for skill development

2.3.1 Implementation challenges

Implementing gender-responsive public procurement presents a range of complexities. Procurement officers frequently encounter significant legal challenges as they seek to balance procurement policies, gender equality objectives and existing legal frameworks. A key hurdle is aligning gender-responsive public procurement with the core principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination, which are fundamental to public procurement frameworks (ILO, UN Women, 2021). Navigating these legal intricacies requires a nuanced approach to ensure that gender-responsive public procurement is effective in advancing gender-related goals and compliant with applicable laws.

Another challenge is the lack of awareness among procurement officers regarding gender-related requirements embedded in procurement policies. These provisions, often integrated within broader equity and inclusion frameworks, are designed to promote fair and inclusive sourcing practices. However, due to limited training or insufficient visibility in operational procedures, such considerations are often overlooked during procurement planning and execution. It is therefore essential to raise awareness and provide targeted guidance to ensure that gender considerations are consistently applied throughout the procurement lifecycle (OECD, 2021).

In many cases, gender considerations in procurement processes are voluntary. Where legal frameworks do not mandate gender-responsive procurement, public officials often have discretion in prioritising outcomes. This discretion – combined with concerns that including gender considerations might be perceived as discriminatory – can lead to optional gender-related measures being disregarded in favour of strictly mandated criteria. As a result, the

potential benefits of gender-responsive procurement may not be fully realised without deliberate efforts to integrate gender considerations into procurement processes (OECD, 2021).

A further obstacle is the limited understanding of gender policies among procurement professionals. Many officials fail to recognise the importance of integrating gender considerations, resulting in resistance or superficial compliance.

One of the most significant hurdles to developing and implementing gender equality policies is the absence of comprehensive registries or databases containing relevant gender-specific directives and regulatory requirements, whether at national, local or industry levels, as well as sex-disaggregated data (PARIS21 and UN Women, 2024).

Access to this information is critical throughout the entire procurement cycle to identify gaps, measure progress and ensure that gender equality objectives are met (Williams, 2024). Moreover, sex-disaggregated data are necessary for designing and adjusting policies in a meaningful and efficient way. Building robust databases and registries is therefore essential for successfully embedding gender considerations into public procurement processes.

2.3.2 Capacity building in gender-responsive public procurement

Developing skills, knowledge and resources is crucial for making public procurement more gender responsive. This is key to advancing gender equality and driving economic growth. By equipping the public and private sectors with practical know-how, gender-responsive public procurement helps ensure that procurement processes are inclusive and fair. This work includes offering targeted training, publishing clear guidance and examples, and providing procurement teams with tools to integrate gender objectives into their activities. It also involves supporting the private sector in meeting gender equality standards and strengthening businesses that are women-owned or committed to gender-responsive practices.

Countries and organisations should invest in capacity building not only for procurement professionals, but for all relevant stakeholders, such as gender specialists involved in major projects (Box 4 provides examples of organisations that provide gender-responsive procurement guidance). This investment can take the form of specialised training programmes, practical resources and tools, and fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning. By improving skills and understanding across the procurement system, organisations can better integrate gender considerations and deliver strategic projects successfully.

The EIB recognises that gender-responsive procurement is a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and empowering women. For this reason, the Bank is committed to supporting its partners in adopting and implementing these practices.

Box 4. Walking the walk: Organisations providing gender-responsive procurement guidance

[UN Women](#), a global champion for women and girls, was established to accelerate progress in addressing the needs and promoting the rights of women and girls worldwide. The organisation has [published several resources](#), including documents, toolkits, guidance notes and a [free training module](#), aimed at building the capacity of all parties involved in gender-responsive public procurement.

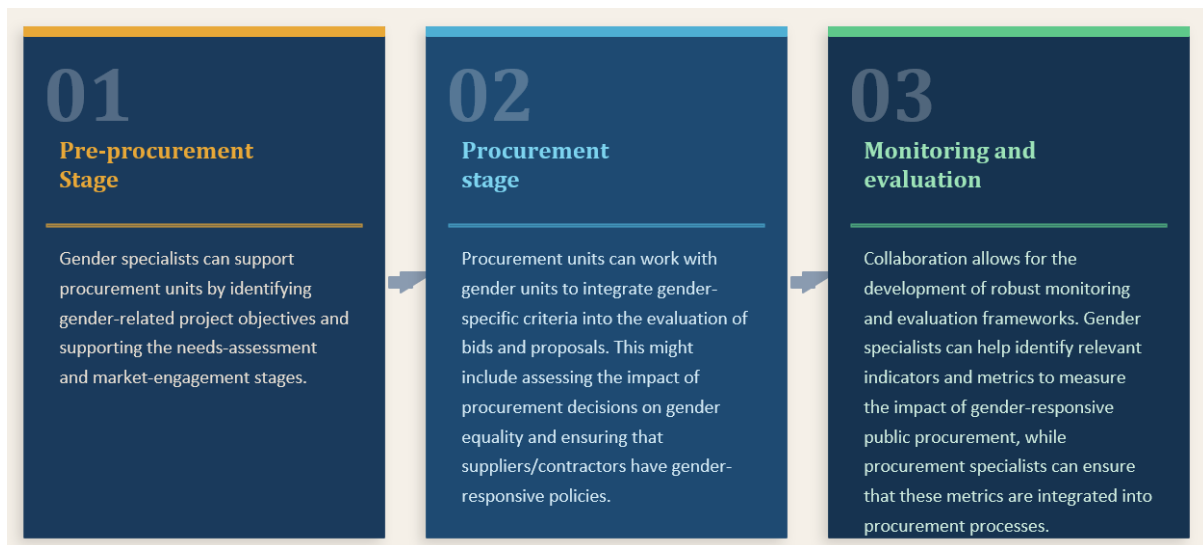
The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) is an independent body that acts as a knowledge centre on gender issues and supports gender mainstreaming (the integration of gender considerations into policies and practices). As part of its mandate, the institute has developed a comprehensive set of resources on gender-responsive procurement in the European Union, including [a toolkit](#) designed to support contracting authorities.

2.3.3 Collaboration as an enabler of gender-responsive procurement

Strong collaboration between gender-focused teams and procurement teams is essential to make procurement processes more gender-responsive (Figure 1). This partnership can be strengthened in three key areas:

- **Legal and institutional frameworks:** Clear and robust legal frameworks are the foundation for integrating gender considerations into procurement. Public procurement laws can explicitly include gender equality as an objective, ensuring it becomes a recognised goal in procurement activities. Likewise, gender equality legislation can highlight procurement as a powerful tool for advancing equality (Williams, 2024). Together, these laws create a mutually reinforcing relationship between gender equality and procurement. In addition, gender strategies and guidelines should reference procurement as a means to achieve equality goals, while procurement strategies should include gender-related objectives from the start.
- **Capacity building:** Gender and procurement teams need the right skills to implement gender-responsive procurement effectively. Gender specialists should understand how procurement can help achieve equality objectives, while procurement professionals should learn how to integrate gender considerations into their processes. Joint training sessions, workshops and knowledge-sharing platforms can foster mutual understanding and collaboration, ensuring both teams work towards the same goal.
- **Interdepartmental collaboration:** Practical mechanisms for collaboration – such as regular meetings, joint task forces and shared projects – are vital, as they enable smooth communication and cooperation between the gender and procurement teams. By working together, these teams can leverage their respective expertise to develop and implement gender-responsive procurement strategies, monitor progress and address challenges. This collaboration not only strengthens gender-responsive procurement practices but also contributes to a more inclusive and equitable system overall.

Figure 1. Collaboration throughout the procurement cycle



Key takeaways

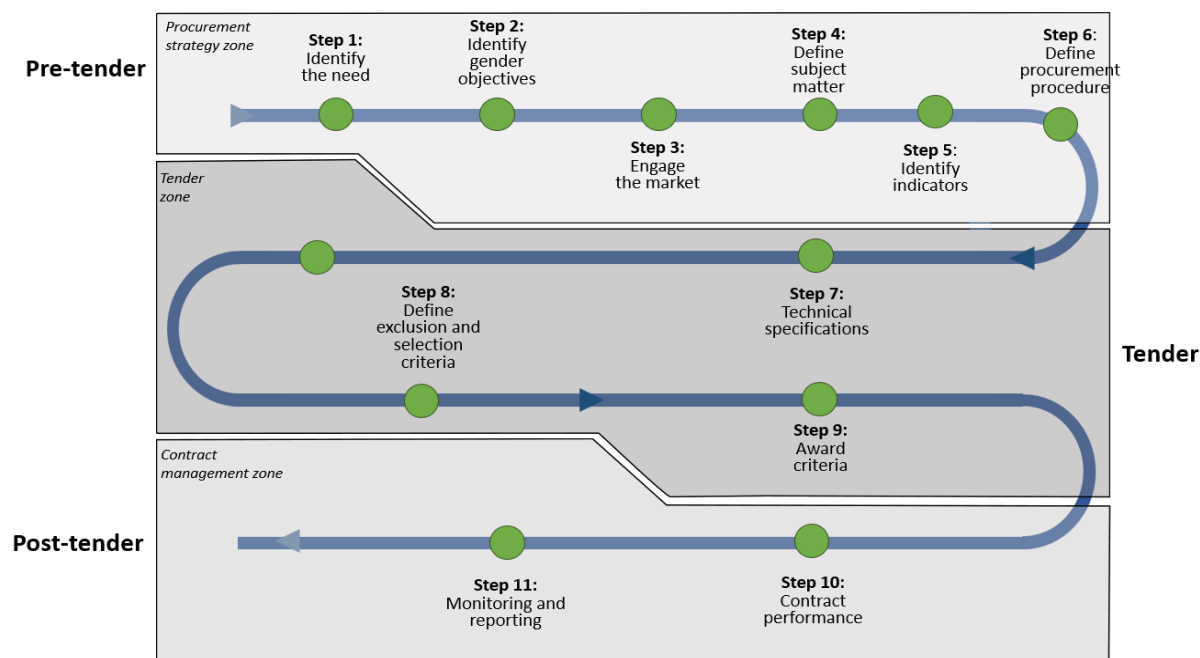
- Implementing gender-responsive public procurement presents a range of challenges – and opportunities.
- Developing skills, knowledge and resources is crucial for making public procurement more gender responsive. This is key to advancing gender equality and driving economic growth.
- Countries and organisations should invest in capacity building not only for procurement professionals, but for all relevant stakeholders, such as gender specialists involved in major projects.
- The EIB recognises that gender-responsive procurement is a powerful tool for promoting gender equality and empowering women, and is committed to supporting its partners in adopting and implementing these practices.
- Strong collaboration between gender-focused teams and procurement teams is essential to make procurement processes more gender-responsive.

3 GENDER-RESPONSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN THE PROCUREMENT CYCLE

3.1 Gender-Responsive Public Procurement Roadmap

The Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP) Roadmap (Figure 2) is designed to operate within, and be guided by, existing national legislative and regulatory frameworks governing procurement. It aligns with national gender policies and strategies, as well as other relevant policy instruments, including municipal or sector-specific regulations where applicable. In addition, it must comply with the requirements of the [Guide to Procurement for Projects Financed by the EIB](#) and other relevant EIB policies, including the [EIB Environmental and Social Standards](#) and the [EIB Group Gender Action Strategy](#).

Figure 2. Gender-Responsive Public Procurement Roadmap



Each of the following sections presents a step in the Gender-Responsive Public Procurement Roadmap, which is designed to help promoters systematically integrate gender objectives and considerations throughout every phase of the project procurement cycle. Each step is further detailed in its respective sub-section. The resulting outcomes and conclusions should be documented in the project procurement strategy, and all relevant stakeholders must be appropriately informed.

3.2 Pre-tender stage

3.2.1 Needs assessment

A needs assessment is a structured process used to identify and understand the specific requirements of primary and secondary users of goods, services or public works – both directly and indirectly. This step is the foundation of procurement planning, ensuring that purchasing decisions reflect real needs and deliver meaningful results (Box 5 provides case studies of needs assessments).

Adding a gender perspective into the needs assessment allows for a deeper look at how procurement choices may affect women and men differently – as employees, business owners and users of goods and services. These impacts can be positive, neutral or, in some cases, negative for gender equality. This analysis involves examining differences in roles, responsibilities, access to resources, and rights, helping ensure that procurement strategies are fair and inclusive (OECD, 2021).

From a gender perspective, the needs assessment plays a critical role. It helps project planners to:

- **identify gender-specific needs and barriers**, such as access to services, safety and security concerns, or opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship;
- **understand the root causes and effects of gender disparities**, enabling targeted actions that promote equality and inclusion;
- **engage diverse stakeholders**, including women, marginalised communities and organisations focused on gender issues, so their voices influence procurement outcomes;
- **set inclusive priorities**, such as promoting women-owned businesses, incorporating gender-sensitive design features, or ensuring equal access to resources;
- **avoid unintended consequences**, such as reinforcing existing inequalities or excluding vulnerable groups from project benefits.

By considering gender at this early stage, procurement becomes more than a technical process – it becomes a strategic tool for advancing equality, inclusion and social impact.



Box 5. Needs assessment case studies

Gender-responsive urban climate adaptation in N'Djamena, Chad

In N'Djamena, Chad, a needs assessment supported by the [Global Center on Adaptation](#) revealed important insights into how climate vulnerability affected men and women differently. The assessment showed that women carried most responsibilities for childcare, water collection, energy provision and food security – tasks that become much more challenging during climate events such as floods and heatwaves.

The analysis also uncovered structural barriers that limited women's ability to adapt, including lower levels of education, limited participation in decision-making and heightened exposure to gender-based violence during climate-related crises.

In response, the proposed solutions focused on:

- reducing domestic burdens by improving access to water and energy;
- creating income opportunities for women and young people;
- improving access to information, including early warning systems;
- strengthening the role of women in community decision-making.

These recommendations aimed not only to make urban infrastructure more resilient, but also to promote women's autonomy, improve sanitation and food security, and ease economic pressures on households. (Global Center on Adaptation, 2024)

Advance gender impact assessment for infrastructure projects in Austria

In Austria, federal-level investment projects exceeding €1 million and meeting specific criteria must undergo a gender impact assessment before approval, as part of the national budgeting process. This requirement ensures that public investments are evaluated not only for economic and operational feasibility, but also for their potential impact on gender equality.

The assessment framework includes:

- analysing the underlying issue that requires government intervention or investment;
- defining intended impacts and outcomes;
- identifying measurable indicators;
- forecasting expected impacts;
- reviewing actual results after implementation.

By integrating gender considerations, these assessments help uncover hidden biases and assumptions that may influence project selection and implementation. They provide valuable insights into how proposed initiatives could affect the distribution of resources, opportunities and decision-making power between women and men.

Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that budget proposals reflect a genuine commitment to fairness and inclusion, making gender equality a core principle of public investment decisions (OECD, 2025).

GRPP Roadmap Step 1 – identify the need

As part of the needs assessment, the promoter can consider how gender-related factors might influence the project. This helps ensure the assessment reflects diverse needs and potential impacts. Below are examples of guiding questions to explore.



Guiding questions
Who are the stakeholders likely to be affected by the procurement?
Do different groups (such as women, men or young people) experience the procurement process or its outcomes differently? Have these groups been consulted to understand their needs and preferences?
Do women and men have different needs or preferences related to the works, goods or services being procured?
Are there barriers that limit women's participation in the procurement process (for example, lack of information, financial constraints, legal restrictions)?
What is the current level of participation by women-owned, women-led or gender-responsive enterprises in the relevant market? Are disaggregated data available?
Will the procurement help advance gender equality or could it unintentionally reinforce existing disparities?
Are there risks of unintended negative effects on women (for example, increased unpaid work, or exclusion from benefits)?
Are there existing policies or frameworks that support gender-responsive procurement?
What institutional capacities are in place to implement and monitor gender-responsive procurement?
How can the procurement process be designed to be more inclusive?

3.2.2 Gender-related objectives

The pre-tender stage – often called the planning phase – is a critical point for shaping the project’s strategic direction and long-term impact. It is when the project’s core objectives are defined, including those related to gender equality and inclusion. Setting gender-related objectives early ensures that they are fully integrated into the procurement process and reflected in the project’s outcomes.

3.2.2.1 National legal framework and strategies

Gender-related objectives can come from various sources. In many cases, national laws include requirements to promote gender equality. These may cover areas such as equal pay, non-discrimination, employment targets for women (for example, in work contracts), or measures to include women-owned businesses in procurement opportunities. Meeting these obligations is a legal requirement, and it helps align the project with broader societal goals.

The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) has identified key conditions for successful gender-responsive procurement. These include:

- a legal framework that clearly links gender equality and public procurement;
- public procurement policies that explicitly reference gender equality objectives;
- national gender equality action plans that recognise public procurement as a strategic tool for promoting equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

At the pre-tender stage, the promoter should review the applicable legal framework and national strategies related to gender equality and procurement. This assessment helps determine whether specific gender-related objectives need to be integrated into the project’s design and implementation (Box 6 provides examples of legal provisions supporting gender-responsive procurement).

The promoter should identify whether laws allow – or require – the use of gender-responsive measures throughout the procurement cycle. These may include legal obligations to promote gender equality through public spending, policies encouraging the inclusion of gender criteria in tendering, or official guidelines positioning procurement as a tool for advancing gender goals.

Box 6. Legal provisions enabling gender-responsive procurement

Flexibility in Canada and Palestine*

Canada and Palestine have established legislative frameworks that give contracting authorities flexibility in public procurement. These frameworks allow contracts to be awarded based on preferential criteria, provided all other bidding requirements are met (UN Women, 2023a).

This flexibility enables promoters to integrate gender considerations into procurement strategies. In practice, entities seeking to advance gender equality can lawfully include gender-responsive criteria into tendering processes. This approach ensures compliance with national procurement laws while supporting gender objectives.

Spain's law on public sector contracts

Spain's legislation (9/2017) embeds gender considerations throughout the procurement process and provides a legal basis for gender-responsive public procurement (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). Key provisions include:

- **Article 99:** Allows contracts to include social criteria, highlighting gender equality.
- **Article 100.2:** Requires tender budgets to be broken down by sex, enabling analysis of gendered impacts.
- **Article 127:** Permits contracting authorities to request gender equality certification or labels.
- **Article 71:** Prohibits companies with more than 250 employees from participating in tenders if they fail to comply with mandatory equality plans.
- **Article 145:** Enables award criteria to include gender perspectives.
- **Article 147:** Introduces tie-breaking rules, favouring bidders with stronger gender credentials.

* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

3.2.2.2 Promoter and project gender strategies

Beyond legal requirements, project promoters may also set their own gender-related agenda. Many public institutions have adopted internal gender equality strategies aligned with national laws and regulations. These strategies often outline clear expectations for integrating gender considerations into operations and projects. They may include proactive measures such as gender-sensitive design, inclusive stakeholder engagement, or promoting gender equality within supply chains.

An example of a promoter with a successful strategy that includes gender objectives is the French state-owned railway operator SNCF, which has embedded responsible procurement into its corporate social responsibility strategy. It has adopted an ethical procurement charter based on anti-discrimination principles and a zero-tolerance policy on harassment (EIB, 2024a). Box 7 provides another case study showing a successful strategy including gender objectives.

Projects themselves may also define gender objectives based on their context, sector or intended beneficiaries. For example, an education or healthcare project might aim to improve access for women and girls, while an infrastructure project could focus on creating jobs for underrepresented groups. When clearly defined and systematically implemented, these project-specific ambitions can be powerful drivers of social impact.

Box 7. Case study: Metrolínea, a mass transport system in Bucaramanga, Colombia

Context

Traditionally male-dominated, the construction sector in Colombia has seen limited female participation. The World Bank implemented a gender strategy to address this imbalance. Gender indicators were clearly defined to promote inclusive participation and equitable treatment in the project's construction.

Metrolínea is the integrated mass transport system of Bucaramanga and its metropolitan area, comprising Floridablanca, Piedecuesta and Girón.

Objective

The World Bank strategy objective in this project was to improve gender balance in the construction sector by increasing women's participation in infrastructure-related jobs.

To implement this objective, procurement was strategically employed as a key mechanism. Gender-related requirements were embedded directly into work contracts, making the inclusion of women in construction roles a contractual obligation.

Key measures

- Set a target for women to make up at least 10% of the workforce on construction sites.
- Ensure equal pay for equal work and eliminate gender-specific job roles.
- Require gender training for all workers to address discrimination, promote respect and prevent harassment.
- Use gender-neutral language in job postings to encourage female applicants in the recruitment process.
- Include gender equality clauses in procurement contracts to ensure compliance by contractors.

Outcomes

- The promoter hired 89 women in roles traditionally held by men, including ironwork, road assistance and site supervision.
- The initiative improved workplace culture and challenged gender stereotypes.
- Contractors, local authorities and the implementing agency collaborated to ensure the strategy's success.

Impact

Metrolínea and its contractors demonstrated how procurement and gender strategies can be aligned to promote gender equality in infrastructure. It also provided a replicable model for other sectors and countries aiming to increase women's participation in infrastructure (World Bank, 2020).

3.2.2.3 The EIB's commitment to integrating gender considerations into its investments

The EIB applies its [Financing for gender equality \(F4GE\)](#) approach to identify projects that are likely to significantly contribute to gender equality. This approach helps uncover opportunities to integrate gender considerations, even when gender is not the primary focus of the investment.

Assessing gender impact early on in a project's development encourages proactive planning. In line with the [OECD DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker](#) and the [2X Challenge Criteria](#), the F4GE approach offers structured methods for evaluating and improving gender-related outcomes. This early-stage approach examines how a project can contribute to gender equality through its design, sector or geographic focus.

Once gender-related objectives are identified, the next step is to determine how they can be implemented through procurement. This means turning high-level goals into concrete, actionable requirements that can be embedded in tender documents, selection and award criteria, and contract performance conditions. It also involves defining how these objectives will be monitored and evaluated throughout the project lifecycle. Close collaboration between gender and procurement specialists is key.

By embedding gender considerations from the outset, procurement becomes a strategic tool for promoting equality and inclusion.

GRPP Roadmap Step 2 – identify gender-related objectives

During the planning stage of procurement, the promoter is advised to identify gender-related objectives and requirements relevant to the contract. The following guiding questions can help shape this process:



Guiding questions
What national legal frameworks govern public procurement and gender equality?
Which gender equality considerations are permitted or required under applicable laws, and which apply to this specific procurement?
Are there any gender equality strategies or action plans that recognise public procurement or gender-responsive procurement as a tool to advance gender equality?
Does the promoter have an institutional gender strategy that acknowledges the role of public procurement in promoting gender equality and/or encourages supplier diversity?
Has the project been identified as likely to have an impact on gender equality?
Does the project include specific gender-related objectives, such as improving women's access to infrastructure, enhancing safety, security and mobility for vulnerable groups, or promoting gender-inclusive employment?
Can procurement help deliver these objectives? If so, how can they be integrated into the procurement strategy and implemented throughout the process?

3.2.3 Engage the market

After completing the needs assessment and defining gender-related objectives for the contract, it is advisable for the promoter to consult the market. Any decision to integrate gender-responsive considerations in procurement should be informed by a market engagement (UNWomen, 2024). This step is essential to assess the market's capacity to deliver on gender objectives and to ensure that procurement strategies are inclusive and feasible.

Market engagement is a strategic process that can take place before, during or after a procurement exercise. It can range from simple communications – such as publishing a notice about upcoming opportunities – to more in-depth dialogue and collaboration with potential bidders to co-develop solutions. When applied thoughtfully across the procurement lifecycle, market engagement promotes transparency, inclusivity and better procurement outcomes (ICLEI, 2017).

Engagement activities conducted before the tender stage are known as preliminary market consultation. Its purpose is to gather insights on available solutions, assess market capacity and understand current offerings before formally initiating the procurement process. Box 8 provides an illustrative example of possible preliminary market consultation ahead of a project.

Preliminary market consultation has obvious relevance for gender-responsive public procurement. By engaging suppliers, contractors and other stakeholders – such as gender equality experts – early on, promoters can better understand market capabilities and identify opportunities to promote gender equality through purchasing decisions.

Effective market engagement for gender-responsive public procurement can help teams to:

- **assess supplier readiness** to meet gender-related criteria, such as inclusive employment practices or gender-sensitive product/service design;
- **identify barriers**, such as limited access to information or financial barriers, that may prevent suppliers – especially women-owned businesses or those with inclusive practices – from participating in tenders;
- **build market capacity** to meet gender-related requirements and respond to gender-specific needs (OECD, 2021);
- **inform the design of procurement strategies, tender documents and contracts**, ensuring that gender criteria are relevant, proportionate, linked to the subject matter and non-discriminatory (OECD, 2021);
- **foster dialogue and transparency**, helping suppliers understand expectations and encouraging them to improve their practices.

Market engagement also helps avoid unintended consequences, such as excluding capable suppliers due to overly rigid or unclear gender requirements. It supports the development of tailored procurement criteria that balance gender goals with market realities.

Box 8. Advancing women's participation in infrastructure construction

Fictional case study for illustrative purposes

Project overview

Increasing women's participation in construction not only addresses the growing need for skilled labour, but also introduces fresh perspectives on project management, safety and security protocols, and workplace culture. In this illustrative example, the government of *Zandora* – a fictional country – introduced the BuildHer Roads initiative to expand rural road networks and promote gender equality in the construction sector. The project aims to increase women's participation in construction, a sector traditionally dominated by men, where women make up less than 5% of the workforce.

Objectives

- Improve rural connectivity through sustainable road infrastructure.
- Increase employment opportunities for women in construction.
- Promote inclusive procurement practices that support gender equality.

Pre-market engagement strategy

To assess the feasibility of its gender-responsive goals, *Zandora's* Ministry of Infrastructure initiated a preliminary market consultation with key stakeholders, including private sector contractors, gender equality organisations, women business associations, training institutions and other civil society organisations.

Key activities

1. Supplier consultations

- Engaged construction firms to evaluate their capacity and willingness to recruit and train women.
- Identified potential barriers – such as a lack of separate on-site facilities for women and men (like bathrooms and changing rooms), availability of women-sized protective gear and equipment, and cultural perceptions.

2. Skill mapping and training partnerships

- Collaborated with vocational training centres and women's organisations to identify skilled female candidates interested in taking on roles in construction.
- Co-designed training programmes tailored to women in construction roles.
- Ensured that effective employee grievance mechanisms are in place to allow women and men to voice any potential complaints.

3. Feedback on procurement design

- Sought input from suppliers on integrating gender-responsive criteria into tenders.
- Explored realistic targets for female workforce participation.
- Identified opportunities for subcontracting to gender-responsive businesses and offering flexible work arrangements.

GRPP Roadmap Step 3 – engage the market

To validate assumptions made in early planning and inform the procurement strategy, the promoter is encouraged to conduct market engagement during the pre-tender phase. This step ensures that the procurement approach reflects market realities and aligns with supplier capabilities. The following guiding questions can help structure this process:



Guiding questions
What type of market engagement is most suitable for this contract (for example, open market consultation, request for information, supplier workshops)?
Who are the relevant stakeholders, such as the private sector, gender equality organisations, women’s business associations, vocational training centres and others relevant for the contract?
Does the sector/promoter have the capacity to deliver on the gender objectives and meet the gender-responsive criteria identified previously?
Can the promoter identify and engage women-owned businesses or gender-responsive enterprises in the sector? How can they be encouraged to participate?
How mature and ready is the market to comply with gender responsiveness requirements?
How will insights from market engagement be used to shape the procurement strategy?
What measures can the promoter take to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities through effective market engagement?

3.2.4 Subject matter

The subject matter of a contract defines the goods, services or works the promoter intends to procure. At this stage, the contract's duration and estimated value should also be determined. While defining the subject matter is often seen as the first step in the procurement process, it should only be done after defining the need and engaging the market.

Incorporating gender considerations into the subject matter communicates to potential bidders the importance of these aspects from the outset. It is recommended that promoters reflect gender considerations in the contract title, to emphasise their relevance during implementation (Box 9).

Defining the subject matter is a critical step in the procurement process for several reasons:

1. **It supports the definition of technical specifications and selection and award criteria at the tender stage.** A clear definition enables contracting authorities to determine the specific criteria for technical specifications and award decisions. Note that criteria need to be directly linked to the subject matter of the contract.
2. **It facilitates selection of the appropriate procurement procedure and contract type.** It allows the most suitable procurement procedure and contract type to be chosen, ensuring efficiency, transparency and compliance with applicable regulations.
3. **It enables the incorporation of gender-responsive criteria.** The way the subject matter is defined determines which criteria can be applied during the tender, as these must be linked to the subject matter. Therefore, it is essential to describe the goods, works or services in a way that reflects any gender-related impacts associated with their production or use (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

When defining the subject matter of the contract, ensure alignment with the core principles of public procurement: non-discrimination, equal treatment, transparency, proportionality and mutual recognition.

Box 9. Including gender in a procurement procedure's title

The 2023 competitive procurement procedure published by the European Institute for Gender Equality, titled [Gender Sensitive Communication Toolkit Update](#), illustrates how gender considerations can be incorporated into the title and subject matter of a contract.

The contract title, *Gender Sensitive Communication Toolkit Update*, explicitly includes the term gender, signalling that gender equality is central to the scope of work. This visibility helps attract bidders with proven expertise in gender-sensitive communication. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023b).

GRPP Roadmap Step 4 – define subject matter

To effectively integrate gender-related considerations, the promoter is advised to clearly define the contract’s subject matter in a way that reflects relevant gender aspects. This step ensures that gender-responsive criteria can be embedded throughout the procurement process, establishing gender objectives from the outset.



Guiding questions

What is the subject matter of the contract?

What are the estimated duration and value of the contract? Is the duration sufficient to achieve the intended gender-related objectives?

Do the contract title and scope explicitly include gender considerations?

3.2.5 Indicators

To ensure that the contract's gender objectives are not merely aspirational, they must be defined and monitored through clear, measurable indicators. These indicators – both input and output – serve as essential tools for assessing progress, guiding decision-making and holding stakeholders accountable (Table 1).

Gender indicators are essential for collecting and analysing data related to gender equality. They serve multiple purposes:

- illustrating relative positions between genders;
- tracking positive or negative trends;
- providing evidence of progress over time.

For example, changes in women's participation in the labour market or shifts in the gender composition of leadership roles are commonly used to assess the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at closing gender gaps (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019).

Indicators are particularly important during the planning and implementation phases of a project. They help translate broad commitments – such as promoting women's empowerment or reducing gender disparities – into tangible results.

Examples of common indicators include:

- proportion of women participating in project activities;
- number of women in leadership or decision-making roles;
- existence and enforcement of gender-sensitive workplace policies;
- reduction in gender pay gaps within project teams or partner organisations;
- percentage of women benefiting from training, financial support or infrastructure improvements.

Table 1. Input and outcome indicators

	Input indicators	Outcome indicator
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share of executive search requests requiring firms to actively search for women leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/percentage of women in leadership or decision-making roles
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-specific recruitment targets established and monitored (yes/no) • Share of women included as part of recruitment outreach teams • Gender-inclusive advertisements placed to reach women organisations/networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/percentage of women hired and retained in new positions
Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-inclusive outreach to identify and encourage women-owned businesses to participate in tenders (including via women’s networks and non-traditional media) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/percentage of women-owned businesses securing contracts
Infrastructure Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is meaningful stakeholder engagement planned and implemented to inform the design of products and services accessible to women and other community members? (yes/no) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility ensured for all (yes/no)

While not all project-level gender indicators can be directly implemented through public procurement, it is essential to identify those that can be meaningfully linked to procurement processes. Indicators such as the proportion of women applicants, women shortlisted and hired for project roles, the existence of gender-sensitive workplace policies, or the percentage of women benefiting from training are critical for measuring progress towards gender equality. Public procurement provides a strategic opportunity for embedding these indicators into the operational framework of a project.

At the planning stage, promoters are advised to determine which gender-related objectives – and their corresponding indicators – can be supported through procurement, and how they will be integrated into the project procurement strategy. This involves aligning procurement requirements with specific gender outcomes: by mandating gender-balanced staffing in project teams, requiring contractors to implement inclusive workplace policies, incentivising participation of women-owned businesses, etc.

Contracts can include obligations for contractors and suppliers to meet specific gender-related targets, such as ensuring a minimum percentage of women in project teams or providing gender equality training to staff.

During contract execution, contractors and suppliers should be required to report on gender indicators, providing evidence of compliance with these commitments. This reporting can be tied to performance evaluations, payment milestones or contract renewals, creating a direct incentive for contractors and suppliers to prioritise gender outcomes.

GRPP Roadmap Step 5 – identify Indicators

Based on the gender indicators identified for the project, the promoter is advised to assess which of these can be effectively implemented through procurement procedures.



Guiding questions

Have gender indicators been identified for the project?

Can the project promoter clearly determine which indicators are suitable for implementation through procurement?

How will the indicators be integrated into the procurement process – for example, through specific contract terms or evaluation criteria?

How will the indicators be monitored and reported throughout the project lifecycle?

Have all relevant considerations been fully reflected in the procurement strategy?

3.2.6 Procurement procedures

Drawing on insights from the market engagement process and the definition of the subject matter, the promoter is advised to select the most suitable procurement procedure to ensure gender considerations are effectively integrated.

The [EIB Guide to Procurement](#) includes a list of procurement procedures aligned with EU directives. Below are the most commonly used procedures when applying gender-responsive public procurement:

Open procedure	Any interested company can submit a bid. The opportunity is publicly advertised, typically in the Official Journal of the European Union and/or on the EIB website . The process is characterised by clear documentation and fair evaluation. Beyond the European Union, this is often called international competitive bidding or open tendering.
Restricted procedure	This procedure begins with a pre-qualification stage open to all interested companies, after which only selected candidates are invited to submit tenders. Like the open procedure, it requires public advertisement and ensures transparency during the tendering and evaluation stages. Internationally, it is often referred to as competitive bidding with pre-qualification.
Competitive dialogue	Used for complex contracts where technical specifications or financial or legal arrangements cannot be fully defined at the start. After publishing a contract notice, the authority engages in structured dialogue with selected candidates to refine solutions before final tenders are submitted. All bidders must be treated equally, and confidential information cannot be shared between them. The procedure may involve several stages. After informing the tenderers that the dialogue is concluded, the promoter will ask them to submit their final tenders based on the solutions presented and specified during the dialogue.
Innovation partnership²	Designed for situations where no suitable products, services or works exist on the market. The process begins with a public call for competition, outlining needs and selection criteria. Once partners are chosen, the partnership progresses through phases – starting with research and development and potentially ending with the purchase of the new solution, provided it meets the agreed performance levels and cost criteria.

Gender-responsive procurement can be applied to all the procedures described above. However, open and restricted procedures offer limited opportunities to engage with bidders and refine proposals on gender equality or similar issues (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). If these considerations are relatively straightforward, these methods may still be suitable. To prepare the market, it is best to introduce gender-responsive requirements early –

² This procedure will be introduced in the next edition of the EIB Group Guide to Procurement, expected to be published in 2026.

during the pre-procurement phase. These requirements can then be reflected in the evaluation criteria and the contract terms to ensure that gender objectives are implemented in practice.

When gender considerations are complex or represent a new area for the sector or country, more flexible procurement procedures may be needed. Procedures such as competitive dialogue or innovation partnership allow for better engagement with bidders, to explore potential solutions and refine proposals collaboratively. This flexibility helps bidders understand gender-related requirements and respond effectively. These considerations should be incorporated into the evaluation criteria and contract clauses to ensure gender-related objectives are achieved (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

Box 10. Inclusive urban design – public park redevelopment

Fictional case study illustrating an open procurement procedure

Project overview

Inclusive urban design is important because it creates cities where everyone – regardless of age, ability or background – can take part in community life, access opportunities and feel a sense of belonging. This approach brings social benefits like stronger community ties and increased resilience, as well as practical advantages such as better public health, improved safety and security, and increased economic productivity.

In this fictional example, the *city of Eloria* launched an open procedure for redeveloping its central public park. The tender was publicly advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union and on the EIB website, inviting construction and landscape design firms to participate.

To ensure the park would be inclusive, the city integrated gender-responsive criteria to the tender documents. These included:

- **Designing park facilities that are safe and accessible for women and children**, with features such as well-lit pathways and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities.
- **Engaging the community during the design phase**, including input from women's groups and other underrepresented stakeholders.
- **Collecting gender-disaggregated employment data** during construction and offering incentives for firms that promote gender equality in hiring and training.

The contract also required regular reporting on gender-related outcomes and included provisions for corrective action if targets were not met.

By introducing these measures at the pre-procurement stage, the city gave potential bidders time to prepare for the gender-related requirements. This resulted in a competitive and inclusive tendering process.

GRPP Roadmap Step 6 – define procurement procedure

Based on the results of market engagement and the defined scope of the contract, the promoter can select the procurement procedure that best supports the integration of gender-related considerations throughout the process.



Guiding questions

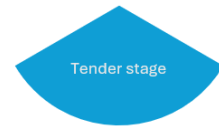
Are gender-related requirements clear enough to use an open restricted procedure?

If the requirements are complex, would a more flexible procurement procedure such as competitive dialogue or innovation partnerships be more suitable?

Does the chosen procurement procedure comply with the EIB Guide to Procurement and national legislation?

Does it provide enough scope for bidders to propose gender-responsive solutions and show alignment with relevant gender policies?

3.3 Tender stage



Tender criteria help ensure that public procurement is fair, transparent and competitive. They are used to assess and compare bids from different bidders. The main goal is to achieve the best value for money while adhering to principles such as non-discrimination, equal treatment and transparency. These criteria can cover a range of factors, including price, quality, technical merit, design and functionality, environmental and social effects and lifecycle costs. Considering these factors enables contracting authorities to make balanced decisions that support broader strategic objectives, such as sustainability and gender objectives.

In practice, the criteria must be clearly stated and shared with all potential bidders in the tender documents. The criteria should be objective and measurable so that bids can be compared fairly. EU procurement directives also emphasise proportionality, meaning the criteria should be relevant and proportionate to the subject matter of the contract in question. This helps avoid giving any bidder an unfair advantage and supports a competitive, open market. All criteria must relate directly to the goods, services or works being purchased (See Section 3.2.4).

Promoters must take care not to mix up different types of criteria, and to use each for its intended purpose:



Source: European Commission, 2018.

Table 2. Gender-responsive criteria can be included in different stages of the procurement process

Criteria type	Purpose	Example	Further Information
Technical specifications/ Terms of reference	Define the contract’s subject matter. Meeting these specifications or terms of reference is a prerequisite for a bid to be considered. Only products or services that meet these requirements can be considered for contract award.	The design must include a gender-sensitive approach, ensuring that infrastructure, layout and facilities address the needs, safety and security, accessibility, and usage patterns of all genders.	See Section 3.3.1
Exclusion grounds	Assess whether a bidder is eligible to participate or must be excluded.	According to the EIB Guide to Procurement , the Bank will not provide or otherwise make funds available, directly or indirectly, to or for the benefit of an individual or entity that is subject to financial sanctions imposed by the European Union ³ either autonomously or pursuant to the financial sanctions decided by the United Nations Security Council on the basis of Article 41 of the United Nations Charter.	See Section 3.3.2
Selection criteria	Assess whether a bidder is capable of delivering the contract. This includes legal, financial, technical and professional capacity, to successfully execute the contract in case of award.	Bidders must provide evidence of successfully completing previous contracts that included similar gender requirements (European Commission, 2021).	See Section 3.3.3
Award criteria	Used to evaluate and select the most economically advantageous tender. The primary goal is to ensure that the contract is awarded to the tender that offers the best value for money.	In Israel, the Mandatory Tender Regulation No. 57-1993, section 2B, states that if two bids receive the same top score, the contract is awarded to the bidder that certifies it is a woman-controlled business (OECD, 2021).	See Section 3.3.4
Contract performance conditions	Specify how the contract should be carried out.	The contractor shall ensure that at least 10% of the workforce engaged in the execution of the contract consists of women, and provide regular reports, including gender-disaggregated employment data.	See Section 3.4.1

³ Pursuant to Chapter 2 of Title V of the Treaty on European Union, and the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy set out in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

3.3.1 Technical specifications

Once the subject matter of a contract is defined, it should be expressed as clear and detailed requirements.

Technical specifications explain exactly what is being procured and can include social considerations – such as gender objectives – when these are essential to delivering the contract. If gender aspects are part of the subject matter of the contract, the specifications must reflect them to ensure that the requirements support the project’s gender goals.

Only mandatory requirements should be included in the technical specifications, as any tender that does not meet these requirements must be rejected. Features that are desirable but not essential should be reflected in the award criteria instead (European Commission, 2021).

Specifications can be written in different ways: by referring to recognised European, international or national standards, or by using performance-based or functional requirements. Performance-based specifications are especially useful for service contracts that aim for social outcomes, because they focus on measurable outcomes, rather than prescribing how they should be achieved. This approach gives bidders flexibility to propose innovative solutions while meeting objectives such as gender inclusion (for an example of possible gender-responsive technical specifications, see Box 11).

Whenever relevant, gender specialists should help develop technical specifications (see Section 3.5.3) to ensure gender equality is properly integrated. Any gender-related terms used must be clearly defined so that all bidders can understand them (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). Specifications should include essential gender considerations without creating unnecessary barriers to competition.

Box 11. Example of possible gender-responsive technical specifications for metro construction

The metro infrastructure must be designed and built to promote gender equality, safety and security, and accessibility for all users. The contractor must demonstrate how gender considerations are integrated into the following areas.

Design and accessibility

- Stations must include well-lit, clearly marked pathways and waiting areas.
- Signage should be inclusive and easy to understand.
- Elevators and ramps must be available to accommodate users with mobility challenges, including pregnant women and caregivers with children.
- Consider designating two women-only compartments for use during peak hours to reduce harassment and improve comfort.

Safety and security features

- Stations and trains must include surveillance systems, emergency communication devices and visible help points.
- Design should minimise hidden or isolated areas.
- Gender-sensitive safety and security audits must be conducted during the design phase.

Sanitary facilities

- Toilets must be available in all stations, with separate, clearly marked facilities for women and men, as well as gender-neutral options.
- Facilities should include baby-changing stations and menstrual hygiene facilities, and be accessible to people with disabilities.
- Toilets must be located in safe and secure, visible and easily accessible areas within stations.

Lighting and visibility

- Provide adequate lighting in all public areas, including entrances, exits, platforms and surrounding walkways, to enhance safety and security – particularly for women travelling at night.
- Install closed-circuit cameras and emergency help buttons in strategic locations to strengthen security.

Consultation and participation

- The contractor must show evidence of consultation with gender experts or representatives from women's groups during the design phase.
- If direct consultation was not possible, a documented gender equality review of the specifications must be provided.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Collect gender-disaggregated data through user satisfaction surveys and safety and security assessments.
- Use this data to inform future improvements and ensure ongoing gender responsiveness.

3.3.1.1 Use of variants

Promoters may choose to allow variants in tenders. Variants give potential bidders the chance to propose alternative solutions, encouraging innovation and enabling options that better support gender equality objectives, such as improved safety, security, accessibility and inclusivity for all users.

When allowing variants, promoters are advised to keep in mind the following:

- Promoters can allow or require bidders to submit variants but must indicate this in the contract notice or request for expressions of interest. Variants are not permitted without such indication, and must always be related to the subject matter of the contract.
- If variants are permitted or required, the tender documents must specify the minimum requirements and any specific conditions for submitting them. The documents should also indicate if variants can only be submitted alongside a non-variant tender.
- The award criteria must be applicable to both variants and non-variant tenders that meet the minimum requirements.
- Only variants meeting the promoter's minimum requirements can be considered (European Commission, 2016).

GRPP Roadmap Step 7 – draft technical specifications

Once the subject matter of the contract is defined, the market consulted and gender equality objectives set, these requirements should be translated into clear and detailed technical specifications. These specifications must give bidders a precise understanding of what is being procured.



Guiding questions

Do the technical specifications clearly reflect the gender-related objectives of the contract?

Where appropriate, have gender specialists been involved in drafting the specifications?

Are all gender-related terms clearly defined?

Do the specifications avoid unnecessary restrictions that could limit competition?

If variants are permitted, is this clearly stated in the contract notice or request for expressions of interest?

3.3.2 Exclusion grounds

Exclusion grounds are used to identify bidders who are not eligible to participate in the procurement process and must therefore be excluded. In restricted procedures, exclusion grounds are applied in the first stage (prequalification).



Exclusion Policy

February 2018



According to the [EIB Guide to Procurement](#), “the Bank will not provide or otherwise make funds available, directly or indirectly, to or for the benefit of an individual or entity that is subject to financial sanctions imposed by the European Union,⁴ either autonomously or pursuant to the financial sanctions decided by the United Nations Security Council on the basis of Article 41 of the United Nations Charter.”

In addition, under its [Exclusion Policy](#), the Bank may declare a project-related party ineligible to be awarded a contract under any EIB project, or to enter into any relationship with the Bank. The current list of excluded entities can be consulted on the relevant [page of the EIB website](#).

Other exclusion criteria related to gender and social considerations include:

- mandatory exclusion for involvement in human trafficking or child labour;
- serious or repeated failures to meet key obligations under a previous contract, leading to termination or similar sanctions;
- non-payment of tax or social security contributions;
- failure to comply with social and employment laws, including obligations under collective agreements;
- misrepresentation of any of the above or inability to provide supporting documents.

The [EIB Guide to Procurement](#) requires bidders and subcontractors to comply with the principles of the International Labour Organization’s fundamental conventions, including the explicit prohibition of child labour and forced labour. Box 12 provides real examples of gender-responsive exclusion measures in public procurement.

For operations beyond the European Union, promoters must include in procurement documents and resulting contracts a provision requiring tenderers and contractors to complete and submit an environmental and social covenant. A template for this covenant is provided in Annex 6 of the EIB Guide to Procurement. The Bank reserves the right not to finance any contract where the bidder or contractor has not submitted a signed covenant to the promoter.

For works contracts, contractors must also develop and implement a code of conduct for all workers, including subcontractors. This code must include specific measures to prevent and address gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

⁴ Pursuant to Chapter 2 of Title V of the Treaty on European Union, and the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy set out in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Box 12. Examples of gender-responsive exclusion measures in public procurement

Switzerland: Equality pay requirement

In Switzerland, the Federal Office for Gender Equality has enshrined the principle of equal pay for men and women in national procurement law. All companies participating in public tenders must commit to this principle. As part of the bidding process, suppliers are required to sign a formal declaration confirming that equal pay is applied within their organisation. Failure to provide this guarantee results in exclusion from the procedure (UN Women, 2023a).

Australia: Compliance with gender equality standards

Australia uses a compliance-based exclusion mechanism in public procurement. Under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, private sector organisations with 100 or more employees must demonstrate compliance with gender equality standards to qualify for government contracts. This includes reporting on indicators such as workforce and leadership gender composition, equal pay, flexible work arrangements, and measures to prevent sex-based harassment and discrimination. Minimum standards for these indicators are set by law, and failure to meet them can lead to exclusion (OECD, 2021).

Spain: Mandatory equality plans

Spain's Public Procurement Law (Act No. 9/2017) requires contracting authorities to exclude bidders with more than 250 employees if they do not comply with the legal obligation to have an equality plan in place. This requirement is based on Article 45 of Organic Law 3/2007, which mandates that equality plans include concrete measures to eliminate gender-based barriers and promote equal treatment and opportunities across the workforce (OECD, 2021).

Italy: Sanctions for discriminatory practices

In Italy, Article 41 of the National Code of Equal Opportunities between Men and Women allows authorities to exclude economic operators from public procurement procedures for up to two years if they are found to have engaged in discriminatory practices (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

3.3.3 Selection criteria

Selection criteria are used to identify qualified bidders who can deliver the contract and achieve the expected results. It is important to distinguish between selection and award stages: Selection determines which bidders are qualified to fulfil the contract based on the pre-established selection criteria. These criteria must be published in the procurement notice. Criteria used for selection cannot be reused as award criteria.

Selection criteria must adhere to the principles of transparency, equal treatment and non-discrimination. They should be proportionate with the contract, clearly linked to its subject matter and written in simple, unambiguous language to avoid misunderstandings that could jeopardise the procurement process.

In two-stage procedures, selection criteria can be used to shortlist or reduce the number of candidates invited to tender. In open procedures they may be assessed on a rated basis or as pass/fail.

Typically, selection criteria assess:

- suitability to pursue professional activity;
- economic and financial capacity;
- technical and professional ability.

According to the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#), selection criteria can support gender-responsive public procurement in two ways:

1. **Recognising gender expertise:** Valuing bidders' experience and technical capacity to integrate gender considerations into contract delivery.
2. **Promoting inclusive participation:** Ensuring that eligibility requirements do not unintentionally exclude non-traditional suppliers and contractors, such as small and medium-sized enterprises, women-owned or women-led businesses, gender-responsive enterprises and social enterprises.

It is good practice to link gender-related selection criteria to other tender requirements to create a coherent framework. For example, if technical specifications require gender-inclusive infrastructure, such as safe and accessible public spaces, the selection criteria could ask for examples of previous projects where gender considerations were integrated into design and implementation.

Some examples of gender-related selection criteria are:

- a proven track record of the organisation and/or its teams in handling social considerations related to the contract, including accessibility, gender equality and the promotion of non-discrimination;
- the requirement for companies above a certain size to have an established gender equality plan;
- submission of equal pay certification to verify compliance with pay equity standards;
- evidence of successful delivery of previous contracts that included gender-related objectives, such as recruitment, training and career advancement of women;
- proof of prior experience and capacity to deliver gender sensitivity training for staff or stakeholders.

GRPP Roadmap Step 8 – set exclusion and selection criteria

To support a project’s gender objectives and ensure market engagement, the promoter can define exclusion and selection criteria that actively promote gender equality. To be effective, these criteria must confirm that bidders have the capacity, experience and commitment to meet the project’s gender-related goals.



Guiding questions
Do exclusion criteria comply with the EIB Guide to Procurement and the relevant legal framework, and do they address social considerations?
Have you included the EIB environmental and social covenant in the tender documents and required bidders to sign and submit it?
Which gender-related selection criteria best fit the nature of the contract, its expected impact and the market’s readiness?
Are gender-related criteria clearly linked to the subject matter of the contract, and do they respect the principle of proportionality?
Do selection criteria align with technical specifications and performance requirements to ensure a coherent framework?
Could financial or administrative requirements unintentionally exclude women-owned or women-led businesses, gender-responsive enterprises, small firms or social enterprises?
Are the criteria formulated to be clear, objective and capable of being assessed during evaluation?
Have gender-responsive criteria been included in the contract notice?

3.3.4 Award criteria

Award criteria are used to evaluate and select the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT). The goal is to ensure the contract goes to the tender that offers the best value for money. After selecting bidders who meet both the exclusion grounds and the selection criteria, contracting authorities must choose the best proposal based on the award criteria. Like the selection criteria, the award criteria must be established beforehand, be published in the procurement documents, and ensure fair competition.

According to the [EIB Guide to Procurement](#),

“The tender evaluation must be based on:

- the lowest price of the compliant and technically responsive tenders; or
- the most economically advantageous tender, applying a number of criteria adapted to the contract in question, such as price, payment terms, construction or delivery period, technical merit (proposed staff, equipment, construction method and planning, technical characteristics, etc.), environmental characteristics, technical compatibility with other equipment, availability of service and spare parts, operating costs, maintenance costs.

The evaluation criteria selected must be indicated in the procurement notice and quantified in the tender documents. The award criteria specified in the tender documents must be applied in full, without omission or addition, in the evaluation of tenders. In the case where no criteria are indicated, the lowest price only will apply.”

Most economically advantageous tender

When gender objectives are part of the procurement, it is recommended that the price not be the only factor considered for contract award. In such cases, the most economically advantageous tender approach is generally the most suitable for gender-responsive procurement.

Award criteria should reflect the project’s gender ambitions and relate directly to the goods, services or works being purchased, not to general corporate policies. This ensures a clear link to the subject matter of the contract, as required. Box 13 provides examples of gender equality in public procurement regulations, which can be set as award criteria.

Promoters must include award criteria in the procurement notice. Tender documents (including any sub-criteria and their weighting), should not have been used previously as selection criteria. All criteria must comply with core procurement principles: non-discrimination, equal treatment and transparency.

The weighting of gender-related criteria should match the project’s priorities. Proper weighting is essential to ensure gender-responsive efforts have a real impact.

Box 13. Examples of gender equality in public procurement regulations related to award criteria

Spain (Basque Country): Public procurement rules require that at least 5% of the total points in award criteria be devoted to gender equality considerations (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

Italy: Recent legislation obliges public buyers to include criteria that actively promote gender equality and the women's employment. These objectives can be set as mandatory requirements or as award criteria, granting extra points to bids that demonstrate strong commitments to these goals (UN Women, 2023a).

3.3.4.1 Use of certifications, set-asides and bid preferences during contract award

To assess compliance with technical specifications or performance against award criteria, promoters may require bidders to submit third-party labels or certifications. In the context of gender-responsive public procurement, certain certifications can help companies demonstrate their commitment to gender equality and track progress over time (see Box 14 for examples of gender equality certifications).

However, for these labels or certifications to be admissible in the tendering process, they must meet minimum standards, including transparency, objective and verifiable criteria for assessment, and equal accessibility for all eligible bidders, regardless of their country or region of origin.

Box 14. Examples of gender equality certifications in public procurement

Japan

Under the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, public procurement procedures may award additional points to bidders holding recognised certifications related to gender equality and work-life balance. These certifications – such as Eruboshi and Platinum Eruboshi for promoting women's advancement, Kurumin and Platinum Kurumin for supporting childcare, and Youth Yell for encouraging youth employment – are considered during tender evaluations that assess factors beyond price (OECD, 2021).

Costa Rica

The National Institute of Women, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, created the Gender Equality Seal to encourage public and private organisations to promote gender equality. To earn the seal, companies must take structured steps: make a formal commitment, set up a gender equality committee, train staff and leadership, conduct internal assessments, develop and implement a gender equality action plan and undergo an external audit (UN Women, 2023a).

Spain

Spain's Equality in the Company label is regulated by national law and recognises businesses that demonstrate a sustained commitment to gender equality. Companies must submit annual reports to the Institute of Women and maintain high standards in their equality practices to keep the certification (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

Italy

Italy recently introduced an equality certification for employers that actively work to reduce gender gaps. The certification assesses measures such as equal opportunities for career advancement, equal pay for equal work, inclusive gender management practices and maternity protections (UN Women, 2023a).

Some countries include set-aside mechanisms in their legislation. Set-asides are legal or policy provisions that reserve a specific number or percentage of public contracts for certain categories of bidders. They are commonly used in public procurement to achieve social and economic goals – for example, increasing the participation of women-owned businesses. Several countries use set-asides strategically to improve these businesses' access to procurement opportunities.

In addition to set-asides, some countries apply bid preference mechanisms, such as tie-break rules. These can give priority to women-owned businesses when two bidders submit equally competitive bids, further supporting gender-inclusive procurement (OECD, 2021). While set-asides and bid preferences are powerful tools for promoting gender equality, they also pose challenges. One concern is misuse – where companies may list women as nominal owners to qualify for benefits without genuine involvement or leadership. This highlights the need for clear, consistent criteria and strong verification processes to accurately identify women-owned and women-led enterprises.

Box 15. Examples of gender-inclusive procurement measures

United States: Set-asides

The US government promotes fair access for women entrepreneurs by reserving specific federal contracts for participants in the [Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract](#) programme. The aim is to direct at least 5% of yearly federal contracting dollars to these businesses. To qualify, a company must be at least 51% owned and controlled by women, be a small business owned by US citizens, and have women managing daily operations and long-term decisions (US Small Business Administration, 2025).

Viet Nam: Tie-break preference

In Viet Nam, domestic bidding for consulting, construction and non-consulting services includes social inclusion criteria in the event of a tie. Bidders receive preference if at least 25% of their workforce consists of women employed under contracts of three months or more. Similar preferences apply to businesses employing wounded soldiers or people with disabilities, and micro and small enterprises. These measures aim to promote equitable participation in public procurement (UN Women, 2023a).

There is no globally standardised definition of what constitutes a women-owned or women-led business, making cross-country comparisons complex and often unreliable. Definitions typically focus on ownership and control – commonly requiring at least 51% female ownership or leadership (such as chief executive or board membership). However, these criteria vary by country, so it is essential for promoters and the EIB project teams to refer to national definitions and assess their adequacy. Importantly, safeguards should be in place to prevent tokenism or misuse, where businesses may superficially meet criteria without genuine female leadership or ownership (World Bank, 2022).

In response to the lack of a universal definition, several countries have developed their own national certification systems (see Box 16). These frameworks aim to provide clarity and credibility by establishing locally recognised criteria for identifying and verifying women-owned and women-led enterprises within procurement processes.

Box 16. Examples of national certification systems for women-owned businesses

Argentina

In 2019, Buenos Aires introduced the Women’s Company Seal as a voluntary certification initiative. This seal is available to businesses registered with the city’s unique registry of public suppliers and formally recognises women-led and women-owned enterprises. To qualify, a company must meet one of the following criteria: be legally administered by a woman, have at least 50% female ownership, or have at least 50% of its leadership and management roles held by women. Certified businesses receive preferential treatment in public contracts that include sustainability and gender equality criteria (UN Women, 2023a).

Chile

Chile introduced the Women’s Business Seal to promote gender-inclusive procurement. This certification is awarded to businesses that are at least 50% owned by women and led by a female legal representative or general manager. Since its introduction, the seal has contributed to a 25% increase in the participation of women-owned businesses on ChileCompra, the country’s central e-procurement platform (UN Women, 2023a).

GRPP Roadmap Step 9 – define award criteria

Based on the project’s gender-related objectives, insights from market engagement, the defined scope of the contract and the applicable procurement framework, the contracting authority should establish award criteria that genuinely reflect the project’s gender ambitions. These criteria should promote gender equality, ensure inclusivity and encourage the participation of women in delivering and managing the contract.

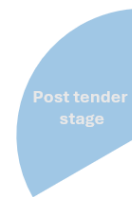


Guiding questions

Is the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) approach being applied to the award criteria?
Do the award criteria clearly align with the contract’s gender objectives and link directly to the subject matter of the procurement?
Does the weighting of the gender-related criteria appropriately reflect the project’s gender goals?
Does the national legal framework include gender-related provisions that should be incorporated in the award criteria? If so, are these provisions consistent with the principles of the EIB Guide to Procurement – such as transparency, non-discrimination and proportionality?
Are the award criteria and their respective weighting clearly published in the contract notice?

3.4 Post-tender stage

Effective contract management is a critical aspect of the procurement cycle. It requires integrating robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms, including key performance indicators, compliance checks against technical specifications, and strategies for continuous improvement. Clear roles, responsibilities and accountability structures should also be established to ensure smooth implementation.



3.4.1 Contract performance conditions

To ensure that gender-related objectives and criteria defined during the pre-tender and tender stages are implemented in practice, they must be translated into enforceable contract performance conditions. This guarantees that the gender equality goals set during procurement planning are upheld throughout the project lifecycle (see examples in Boxes 17 and 18).

Promoters may include specific contractual provisions related to performance – provided these are directly linked to the subject matter of the contract (see Section 3.2.4), are clearly outlined in the contract notice or tender documentation, and are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory. These provisions can include gender-responsive measures and social inclusion requirements.

Contract performance conditions must be clearly distinguished from technical specifications, selection criteria and award criteria – they should never be embedded or disguised within these elements. The successful bidder must be capable of meeting all contract conditions from the start of contract execution. To ensure transparency and fair competition, these conditions must be stated explicitly in the procurement documents so bidders can fully understand their obligations and price their offers accordingly (OECD-Sigma, 2016).

Defining measurable performance criteria for gender-related commitments is essential to ensure that contract execution aligns with the objectives set during earlier stages. These criteria should also include mechanisms for corrective actions and penalties in cases of non-compliance, reinforcing accountability and promoting inclusive and equitable outcomes.

Box 17. Sweden: Promoting employment for women in the construction sector

Background and policy context

- The Swedish government tasked the Swedish Transport Administration (Trafikverket) with using public procurement as a tool to create jobs for people facing barriers to the labour market, including women. This model has been in place since 2016.
- The government set a target that, by 2030, at least 25% of newly employed workers in the construction sector should be women.

Current situation

- Women are significantly underrepresented in construction, especially in craft professions, where they account for less than 2% of workers.
- Overall, women make up about 10% of the construction workforce.

Procurement model and equality bonus

- Trafikverket introduced contract requirements and performance bonuses to encourage contractors to employ women in occupations such as building, metalworking, installation and service.
- Contracts included:
 - employment requirements (for example, 12-month employment);
 - internship requirements (for example, six-month placements);
 - equality bonuses for employing women in roles traditionally held by men (not roles typically associated with women, such as cleaning).

Bonus structure (illustrative)

- €10 000 for each woman employed in a qualifying occupation;
- €2 500 bonus for each woman completing an internship;
- bonuses are only paid when women perform tasks not traditionally assigned to women within the contractor's organisation.

Results (annual averages)

- Around 150 contracts per year include employment or internship requirements.
- About 200 jobs and 150 internships are created each year, with roughly 25% filled by women.
- Annual bonus payouts total about €400 000 across investment, major projects and maintenance activities.

(Fällström Jacobsen and Rang, 2025)

Box 18. Gender-related contract performance conditions

Example of how to translate award criteria into contract performance conditions

- **Award criterion: Staff training for gender equality and non-discrimination (10% of award criteria)**

The tenderer must show the quality, scope and scale of staff training programmes designed to promote gender equality and prevent discrimination during contract delivery. The evaluation will consider the relevance of training content, the frequency of sessions, the staff groups covered, the delivery methods and the mechanisms used to assess effectiveness.

- **Contract performance conditions**

The contractor shall implement the staff training programme proposed in the tender. This includes:

- delivering gender equality and non-discrimination training to all relevant staff within the first [X] months of the contract;
- keeping records of participation;
- submitting periodic reports on training outcomes;
- providing refresher sessions at suitable intervals;
- ensuring that training materials remain up to date and relevant.

Non-compliance may lead to remedial actions or penalties, as set out in the contract.

Additional examples of gender-related contract performance conditions

- The contractor shall ensure that all line managers working with staff under the contract receive training on gender-equal recruitment and employment procedures (European Commission, 2021).
- At least 40% of managerial positions under the contract must be held by individuals representing one gender (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).
- A minimum of 15% of the workforce engaged in construction activities during contract execution – including pre-training – must be women. This applies to all on-site roles, including skilled and unskilled labour, supervisory staff and technical personnel.
- Salaries for employees working under this contract will be subject to a gender pay gap review to ensure pay equity (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).
- The contractor shall comply with international standards, such as those set by the International Labour Organization (EIB, 2024b).
- The contractor shall develop, implement and enforce a comprehensive code of conduct for all personnel involved in the works contract, including subcontractors and their workers. This code must include specific measures to prevent, identify and address gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and human trafficking (EIB, 2024b).

GRPP Roadmap Step 10 – contract performance conditions

Based on the gender objectives established for the project, feedback from market consultations and the contract conditions outlined in the procurement notice and tender documentation, the promoter can ensure that these gender-related commitments are effectively translated into enforceable contract performance conditions.



Guiding questions

Are the gender-related contract conditions included in the contract notice and tender documentation also reflected in the final contract to be signed?

Have any additional commitments made by the supplier during the evaluation process been explicitly incorporated into the contract?

Does the contract include clear provisions for remedial actions and penalties in case of non-performance?

Are roles, responsibilities and reporting obligations clearly defined within the contract?

3.4.2 Monitoring and reporting

3.4.2.1 Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation are often the weakest stages of the procurement cycle, especially when enforcing gender equality requirements. To avoid superficial or symbolic actions, procurement authorities are advised to actively monitor contractors' compliance with gender-related commitments (World Bank, 2022).

During contract implementation, it is essential to communicate all relevant information clearly to stakeholders. This includes contract terms, gender equality goals, agreed deliverables and other pertinent details to ensure shared understanding and alignment.

Effective contract management ensures that gender equality objectives identified during the pre-tender phase are retained and actively pursued throughout the contract lifecycle. This involves verifying that proposed strategies – such as promoting equal opportunities and inclusive practices – are practical and deliver measurable outcomes.

To support efficient implementation, roles and responsibilities within the team should be clearly defined. This clarity enhances accountability and streamlines processes. Promoters can appoint contract managers with expertise in both contract management and gender equality principles to oversee implementation effectively.

Ongoing communication and collaboration among stakeholders are essential. Regular updates, meetings and feedback sessions help address challenges promptly and maintain alignment with project goals. A collaborative environment fosters shared ownership and drives successful delivery of gender equality outcomes.

When gender-responsive procurement elements are included in a contract, they should be subject to targeted monitoring. This may involve gender-related key performance indicators, which can be linked to payments or penalties. Contracts should specify the metrics required to support these objectives, define responsibilities for monitoring and outline consequences for unmet targets. Insights from monitoring should inform future procurement strategies and tendering processes (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

3.4.2.2 Reporting

Access to gender-related data remains a challenge. Reporting on gender-responsive public procurement is essential to determine whether gender equality objectives set during planning and tendering have been achieved. It moves beyond intentions and enables procurement teams and stakeholders to assess the real impact of their interventions.

To ensure effective implementation and monitoring, contracts should include clear and enforceable reporting obligations aligned with the project's gender targets (see example in Box 19). These obligations are essential for tracking progress, assessing impact and informing future procurement decisions. Reporting requirements should specify the type and frequency of data collection, and the parties responsible for providing the information.

In many cases, promoters may also need to report under national legal frameworks or to the European Investment Bank or its co-investors – particularly when a project is tagged as contributing

to gender equality. In such cases, reporting is not only a contractual requirement, but also a strategic tool to demonstrate alignment with broader policy goals and institutional standards.

Embedding these obligations into contracts ensures that gender equality becomes a measurable and accountable objective. This approach supports transparency, enables data-driven decision-making and strengthens the overall effectiveness of gender-responsive procurement initiatives.

Box 19. Example of gender-responsive procurement reporting obligations

Award criterion: Workforce gender representation of at least 15%

The tenderer must demonstrate a commitment to gender equality by ensuring that at least 15% of the workforce assigned to the contract are women. Evaluation will consider the feasibility of the proposed staffing plan, roles and responsibilities of female staff, and measures to support gender inclusion throughout contract delivery.

Reporting obligation (contractual requirement)

The contractor shall submit quarterly workforce reports detailing:

- the total number of staff assigned to the contract, disaggregated by gender and role;
- evidence that at least 15% of the workforce are women, supported by employment contracts or staff lists;
- any changes in staffing, and justification if the gender target is not met;
- measures taken to recruit, retain and support female staff within the scope of the contract.

GRPP Roadmap Step 11 – monitoring and reporting

To ensure the effective implementation and documentation of the contract’s gender-related objectives, the promoter is advised to establish a monitoring plan and define clear reporting requirements.



Guiding questions
Has a monitoring plan been established with clearly defined roles, responsibilities and relevant gender-related metrics?
Are all relevant stakeholders informed of their responsibilities in the gender-objective monitoring process and do they understand them?
Have reporting requirements been defined, including the frequency, required content and format of submissions?
Are the reporting requirements aligned with applicable national regulations and the EIB’s reporting obligations?
Is there a process in place to capture lessons learned to improve future gender-responsive procurements?

ANNEX A – ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

European Investment Bank (EIB)

- **Guide to Procurement for Projects Financed by the EIB**

This guide outlines the procurement principles and procedures required for projects financed by the EIB. It emphasizes transparency, efficiency and alignment with EU standards, including environmental and social safeguards. The March 2024 update incorporates recent EIB policies and international best practices.

[Read the guide](#)

- **Gender Action Plan**

The EIB Group [Gender Action Plan](#) sets out the approach for embedding gender considerations into the Group's operations.

[Explore the action plan](#)

- **Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment – Overview 2024**

Annual publication summarising the EIB's gender-focused investments, partnerships, and impact stories. Includes data on financing women entrepreneurs and gender-responsive infrastructure.

[View the overview](#)

European Institute for Gender Equality

- **Gender-responsive Public Procurement Step-by-Step Toolkit**

A practical guide for integrating gender equality into each stage of the procurement cycle, with templates and examples.

[Toolkit](#)

- **Gender-responsive public procurement brief**

Explains the concept, benefits and implementation of gender-responsive public procurement for practitioners and gender experts.

[Brief](#)

- **Gender-responsive Public Procurement in the EU: Report**

Research findings on promoting gender equality through procurement in the European Union, including case studies and policy proposals.

[Report](#)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

- **Promoting gender equality through public procurement**

This paper explores how governments can use public procurement to promote gender equality. It outlines strategies for integrating gender considerations into procurement policies and processes and discusses challenges faced by policymakers and practitioners.

[Read the publication](#)

- **Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023**

This toolkit supports governments in implementing the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life. It includes practical tools for integrating gender into budgeting, infrastructure and public procurement.

[Access the toolkit](#)

UN Women

- **Legal frameworks for gender-responsive procurement**

Comparative analysis of international and national legal systems supporting gender-responsive public procurement.

[Publication](#)

- **Building Gender-Responsive Procurement: Lessons from Research and Practice**

Findings from country studies with practical recommendations for the implementation of gender-responsive procurement.

[Guidance Note](#)

- **Rethinking gender-responsive procurement**

Expands gender-responsive procurement to include gender-responsive enterprises, regardless of ownership.

[Explore publication](#)

World Bank

- **Towards gender-responsive procurement**

Outlines strategies, legal frameworks and tools for integrating gender equality into procurement.

[Practice note](#)

- **Gender-Responsive Procurement in the Caribbean**

Policy paper exploring gender-responsive public procurement in Caribbean countries, with a focus on inclusive emergency procurement.

[Read document](#)

- **Gender PPP Toolkit**

This toolkit provides practical guidance for integrating gender considerations into public-private partnerships (PPPs). It offers tools for reducing gender inequalities throughout the project lifecycle.

[View the toolkit](#)

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

- **Gender-responsive procurement in Asia and the Pacific**

Joint report with UN Women offering strategies, case studies and recommendations for inclusive procurement.

[Download report](#)

Gender Responsive Procurement Task Force

- **Good Practices on Gender-Responsive Procurement**

Summarises gender-responsive procurement practices across UN and development organisations, including procurement cycle integration and supplier expectations.

[Good practices](#)

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