



Project guidelines

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GREENER PROJECT



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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
GPP	Green Public Procurement
CPP	Circular Public Procurement
PA	Public Authority
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
VET	Vocational Education Training
I-VET	Initial Vocational Education Training
C-VET	Continuing Vocational Education Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
MEC	Minimum Environmental criteria

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1. Introduction: Green Public Procurement and ERASMUS+ GREENER project

The European Commission (EC) defines the public procurement process as

“The process by which public authorities, such as government bodies or local authorities, purchase works, goods or services from companies”

Public procurement, at the aggregate level, accounts for over 16% of the EU's GDP, amounting to approximately € 2.448 billion per year. Globally, public procurement accounts for on average 12% of GDP in OECD countries and up to 30% of GDP in many developing countries (Hasanbeigi et al., 2019). The European Union-EU has established a common regulatory framework for the Member States, with the ultimate aim of harmonizing public procurement involving goods, works and services. The EU has intervened several times over the last few years in defining the procurement legislation - also on the sustainability of the same - with Dir. 2004 / 17-18 / EC; COM (2008) 400; Dir. 2014 / 23-24-25 / EU.

Some studies have also examined Green Public Procurement (“using Public Authorities purchasing power to choose environmentally friendly goods, services and works, they can make an important contribution to sustainable consumption and production”) as an engine for a possible advancement of welfare levels (Lundberg et al. 2009). More recently, the GPP has been indicated as one of the policy tools to support the transition to a Circular Economy¹. Orienting public procurement of all levels towards sustainability objectives, therefore, could significantly reduce the environmental impacts of the public sector and the organizations that revolve around it and improve environmental performance where there are inefficiencies.

The GPP faces various challenges that hinder its full adoption due both to common situations such as, for example, the excessive formalization of the administrative machinery, the lack of resources, insufficient turnover, or specific aspects relating to some realities (eg support from the political body). In general, both early research and more recent works have highlighted that GPP application problems derive mainly from cognitive and organizational barriers. Some studies (Cheng et al. 2018) report how the possibility of overcoming barriers and supporting GPP practices is possible through some classic tools (training), but also through the adoption of possible alternative tools, such as the analysis of the cycle of product life (or Life Cycle Assessment, in acronym LCA). These tools can also be considered useful on the companies' side.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1583933814386&uri=COM:2020:98:FIN>

In order to overcome these barriers, GREENER aims to support companies' participation in GPP with systemic effectiveness on the conditions of sustainability and business competitiveness. To do this, the skills of middle management and the more traditional profiles of the administration need to be updated. A systemic action of renewal of the VET paths addressed to these profiles is the priority of GREENER project.

The objectives of GREENER are:

1. **Improve the skills of procurers and administrative profiles focusing on SMEs**, with regard to GPP criteria, including ecolabels, material passports, product eco-design and design for recyclability, extended producer responsibility, waste prevention, packaging material and sharing, collaborative economy, reuse, and refurbishment;
2. **Enhancing the responsiveness of curricula of traditional profiles**, such as administrative professionals working in SMEs tendering departments, to the future demand of skills (upskilling – reskilling training path)
3. **Increasing the employability of VET students** facing the global challenges
4. **Improve regional actors' readiness and create knowledge awareness on the influence of green public procurement** on the adoption of sustainable consumption and production patterns by businesses operating in the region;
5. **Foster the VET attractiveness relaunching the close cooperation between VET, public administrations, government agencies and bodies established** to support SME development and SMEs, the Transparency Tools for skills validation and trainers' capacity to apply an international mindset for education.

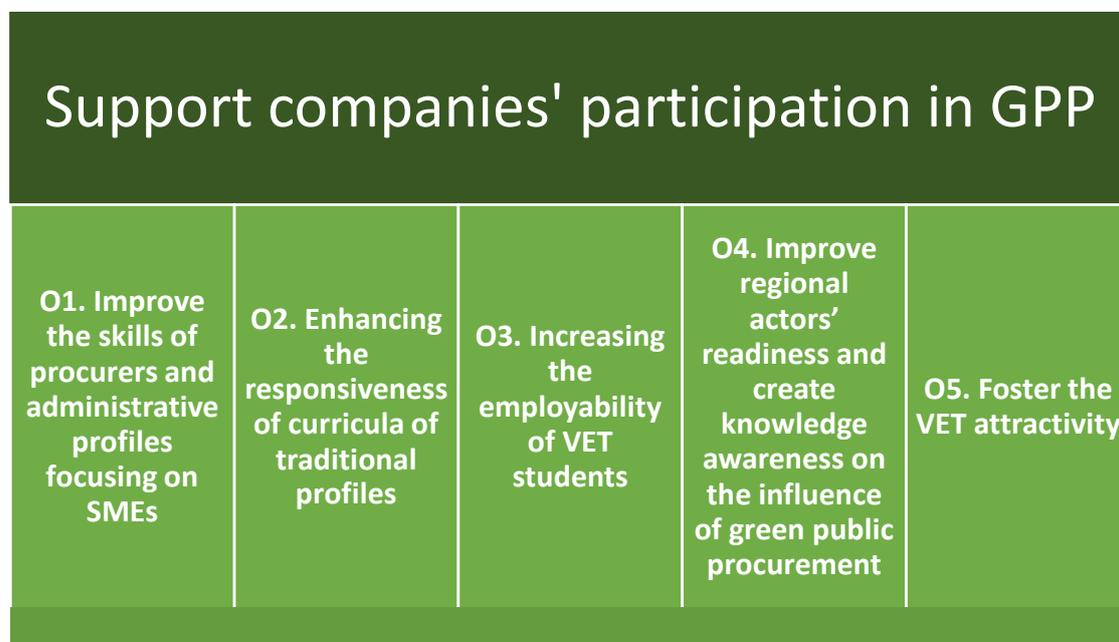


Figure 1. GREENER objectives

2. How to Design of a skills framework for professionals in circular/strategic sustainable procurement

The general idea of GREENER project is to strengthen the capacity of the industry to increase successful participation in GPP processes by improving the skills of Administrative and Middle management profiles. Moreover, the aim of the project is to build a new professional inside the companies that will deal with public procurement. This new professional will be part of the administrative and middle management staff and will serve as an internal advisor to enable the company to comply with the needs of the Public Authorities looking for green and circular purchases.

NEW PROFESSIONAL

- part of the administrative and middle management staff
- serve as an internal advisor to enable the company to comply with the needs of the Public Authorities

2.1: Identification of companies' skills gaps (ie. impeding diffusion of GPP)

To identify Companies' skills gap to the GPP, the GREENER consortium has developed an instrument that includes 2 sources of information:

- Online survey and
- Interviews with public authorities and SMEs.

The **online** survey was designed to address SMEs needs and to identify the skills gaps. To avoid any misunderstanding and provide significant data it was translated for each partner country - Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain. An English version also was developed to address potential other participants across Europe.

The survey was divided in several sections. First, it was addressed to enterprises that have participated into public tenders and to the ones that have not participated yet. Different questions were therefore present corresponding to the category in which participants identified their organisations.

For the second part of the process of identification of the companies' skills gaps, GREENER consortium has developed a questionnaire for **interviewing** the main target groups in Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain. The consortium developed questionnaire for structured interview and created a protocol template to be followed from all partners. The information collected in the interviews comes to enrich and enhance the value of the results from the survey.

This 2-step model is applicable to any sector and company and is easy to replicate. At the end of the process, the summary of the results gives a clear picture of the current situation and skills gaps can be easily detected.

2.2: Definition of a common skills framework for professional profiles (ie. involved in GPP)

The identification of a common skills framework and the development of a transnational training course will foster industry engagement in the GPP and, consequently, in the Green Deal full implementation.

GPP skills framework developed within GREENER project steps on the European competency framework for public procurement professionals², enriching it with emerging green competencies that the new experts inside the companies should acquire.

Based on the results from the skill's gaps identification model, the framework contains knowledge and skills divided in 3 areas: Procurement specific competencies; Soft Competencies and Green competencies – which can be considered as GREENER's main innovation and contribution to the existing frameworks.



Figure 2. GREENER skills framework

²https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/tools-public-buyers/professionalisation-public-buyers/procurcompeu-european-competency-framework-public-procurement-professionals_ga

In the development of GREENER skills framework, we lay on self-assessment methodology, knowing that assess yourself is a critical skill for making progress. Each participant can evaluate his/her knowledge from Lack of knowledge to Advanced C2. This will permit participants to receive a clear map of knowledge and skills in GPP and reflect on their future professional development, for organisations - to assess their competency gaps and maturity.

This framework will be used as a base for the next step - to create a modular training program adapted to local industry stakeholder needs. Using this framework, each participant could assess his/her level of skills and knowledge and take the module/s needed.

2.3: How to identify a Curriculum (ie. for GPP for companies)

The skills gaps identified, and the skills framework developed can be used to infer some useful insights for the creation of a draft of curriculum for companies that want to approach to green public tenders.

Curriculum Components:

- **Goals:** Most often, goals are made explicit in the form of a scope and sequence of skills to be addressed.
- **Methods:** Methods are the instructional decisions, approaches, procedures, and routines used to engage all trainees in meaningful learning.
- **Materials:** Materials are the tools selected to implement methods and achieve the goals of the curriculum. Material choices reflect trainees' interest, cultural diversity, world perspectives, and address all types of diverse stakeholders.
- **Assessment:** Assessment are the ways to document what the trainees knows, understands, and can do with their knowledge and skills.

Based on both surveys and interviews conducted within GREENER project, down are listed the main conclusions drawn, that were used as base for the development of the curriculum for the modular training addressed to Middle management and administrative profiles.

- *“Lack of technical training and especially the fight with the legal department. Awarding to the cheapest option is much easier to justify.” - Spain*
- In all partner countries there is a **lack of** technical staff with depth **knowledge on GPP/CPP** on public authorities' organizations. Learning by doing seems to be the most diffused way to learn how to conduct the daily job. It should be extended capacity building strategies among the public authorities because lack of training is a huge mental and technical barrier.
- A key difficulty for public authorities to launch GPP/CPP is the necessity to **change the current mindset** from a “lower price winning” to the “best sustainable quality/price”, which also include non-quantifiable criteria.
- It is highly desirable **to have a common list of green and circular criteria**, at national/regional level, to be implemented by public authorities in their tenders. At least to have

a list of examples as ideas to be transferred in their organizations. In the same time public purchasing in Italy is subject to severe restrictions, also when dealing with environmental and social criteria, that are stated by law (CAM). The application of CAM sometimes is a matter of compromise between several offices, that must balance their skills and competencies.

- **Environmental certifications** are used to simplify the tender procedures, but even on them, sometimes **there is confusion** due to the lack of knowledge.
- **For SMEs is very difficult the participation** in this kind of public procurement tenders. SMEs have less knowledge, resources, and capacity to be involve in this kind of tenders. Big companies are doing their best, but the SMEs seems to suffer the high standards requests. SMEs that participate in public procurement usually need the support of an external agent (consultancies, business association, etc.).

We expect that GREENER project will have strong Impacts on VET Innovation and Companies' engagement in GPP. And will enhance the responsiveness of curricula of traditional profiles to the future demand of skills, as well as increase the employability of VET students facing global challenges.

2.4: Project website development

A project website (www.greener-project.eu) has been developed to promote the GREENER project, its objectives, activities and results; the benefits of being involved in Green and Circular Public Tenders; and to facilitate the use of GREENER training resources. Thus, the final objective is to not only promote GREENER results, if not also expand the knowledge on green and circular public procurement and create awareness on their potential benefits for companies. Home page is a summary of the different sections where all aspects are deeply explained.

The GREENER website highlighted in all sections that the main objective of the GREENER project is to support companies' participation in Green Public Procurement, and that the expected main results are a training course for SMEs, and a toolbox for VET providers and policy makers.

There are other sections specifically focused on the GREENER project promotion:

- **Green and circular public procurement:** defines both instruments, and links to the main websites of the European Commission.
- **Project objectives:** clarify the main project objective, the different sub-objectives to achieve the main one, and the necessary steps or phases to implement the project.
- **Project partners:** offers short descriptions of the six consortium partners and links to their websites.
- **General info:** with the basic data of the project (dates, project reference, EU funding...) and a short explanation of what is an Erasmus+ project.

- **Contact:** the project email is available for those who want to contact consortium partners for further information.

Besides of that, the website includes other sections where it could be consulted the main results of the project and that are periodically updated, such as:

- **News:** shows project and related news to the GREENER project that consortium partners considered of interest for target groups. Some news has been included and linked in the periodic newsletter.
- **Library:** contains all the reports/newsletters developed under the framework of the project. In this section it is possible to download all the main outcomes that have been produced to achieve the two main results: training resources and toolbox.

Finally, two sections show the most important project results, training resources and toolbox. Both directly linked from the home page the training resource section.

The training resource section is divided into two sub-sections: training modules and questionnaire modules, where it is possible to see and download the different training resources and do the interactive questionnaire as a self-assessment of the acquired knowledge.

Training resources are composed of five training modules and an introduction. Each module is a pdf document. As follows the list of training modules:

Module 1. Circular and Green Public Procurement, an opportunity for SMEs

Module 2. Understanding and finding public tenders

Module 3. Comply with sustainability requirements from public administrations

Module 4. To create awareness inside the SMEs on GPP opportunities

Module 5. How to improve company sustainability for a successful application to GPP

Following training modules, one interactive questionnaire is presented per module. Questionnaires have to be done online. Each questionnaire is a batch of questions with three possible answers where students must choose the correct one.

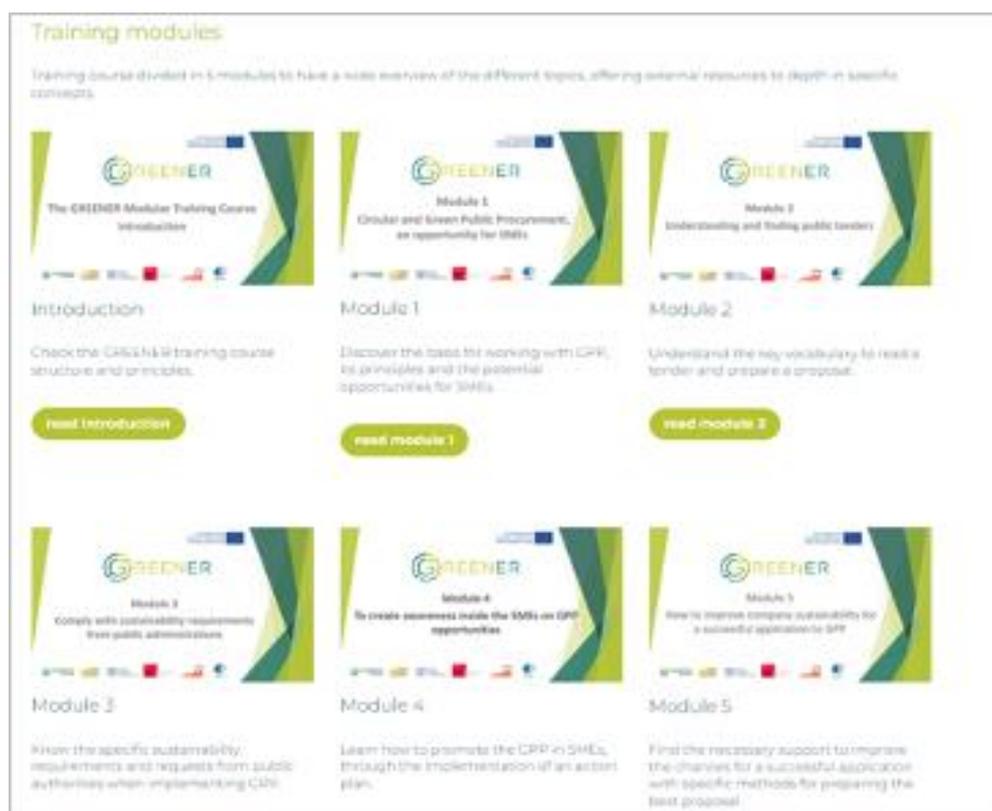


Figure 3. Training modules presentation on project website

The toolbox section offers a collection of guides and examples, developed under the framework of the GREENER project, to boost Vocational Education and Training on Green and Circular Public Procurement.

This section contains the following documents:

- **Guide on how to engage SMEs on green and circular public procurement.** Practical information to encourage companies to participate in green and circular tenders, focusing on the benefits they will get.
- **Orientation to VET providers.** Based on the GREENER project experience and the information gathered by different experts on green and circular public procurement and VET system, this guide offers tips to design initial and continuous Vocational Education Training programs on this topic.
- **Factsheets.** Examples of training and initiatives that support the improvement of general knowledge on Green and Circular Public Procurement. These examples could be useful for Vocational Education and Training providers to use in their training activity or replicate to launch new training offers.
- **National reports.** They show the current situation of Green Public Procurement in Bulgaria, Italy, Spain, and Belgium; and the conclusions of two workshops carried out with relevant actors on GPP about the GREENER project methodology and results.

3. How to develop a Training Course

3.1: From the skills gap to the creation of courses

The basic act of designing the GREENER training course consisted in surveying the skills needs. Through the survey, the SMEs and PAs difficulties in adopting GPP have been observed.

The survey was initially conducted addressing the questionnaire to SMEs' managers and administrators' profiles as well as to Public Administration referents. The interpretation of the results has been supported by the highlights emerging in the interviews conducted with SMEs and PAs representatives, both with and without previous experience in GPP.

The GREENER skill gap analysis (IO1) focuses 3 critical areas for SMEs' and PAs' access to Green Public Procurement. They are³:

1. Lack of knowledge of the Green Public Procurement tendering process.
2. Shallow knowledge of business management systems to increase compliance with environmental sustainability standards.
3. Weak provision and participation in continuing and upgrading education courses for SMEs staff, proven by a low level of investment in human resources.

From the analysis of the critical areas, significant sequences of the GPP process were defined. Each sequence is described by expressing an outcome in terms of competences to be achieved by the learner to become a GPP expert. The sequence is articulated as per the following:

1. To know what GPP is and why could be an opportunity for SMEs

2. To understand and to find public tender

3. To comply with sustainability requests from PAs

4. To create awareness inside SME on the opportunity for GPP

5. To improve the changes for a successful application (with a wider approach the improvement of company sustainability).
How to rely on external sources of information

³ See GREENER IO1 Report "COMPANIES' SKILL GAP TO THE GPP: EMERGING SKILLS IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFILES"

Subsequently, each sequence has been described in terms of Learning Outcomes (knowledge, ability, knowhow) the profile of GPP that an Expert should reach.

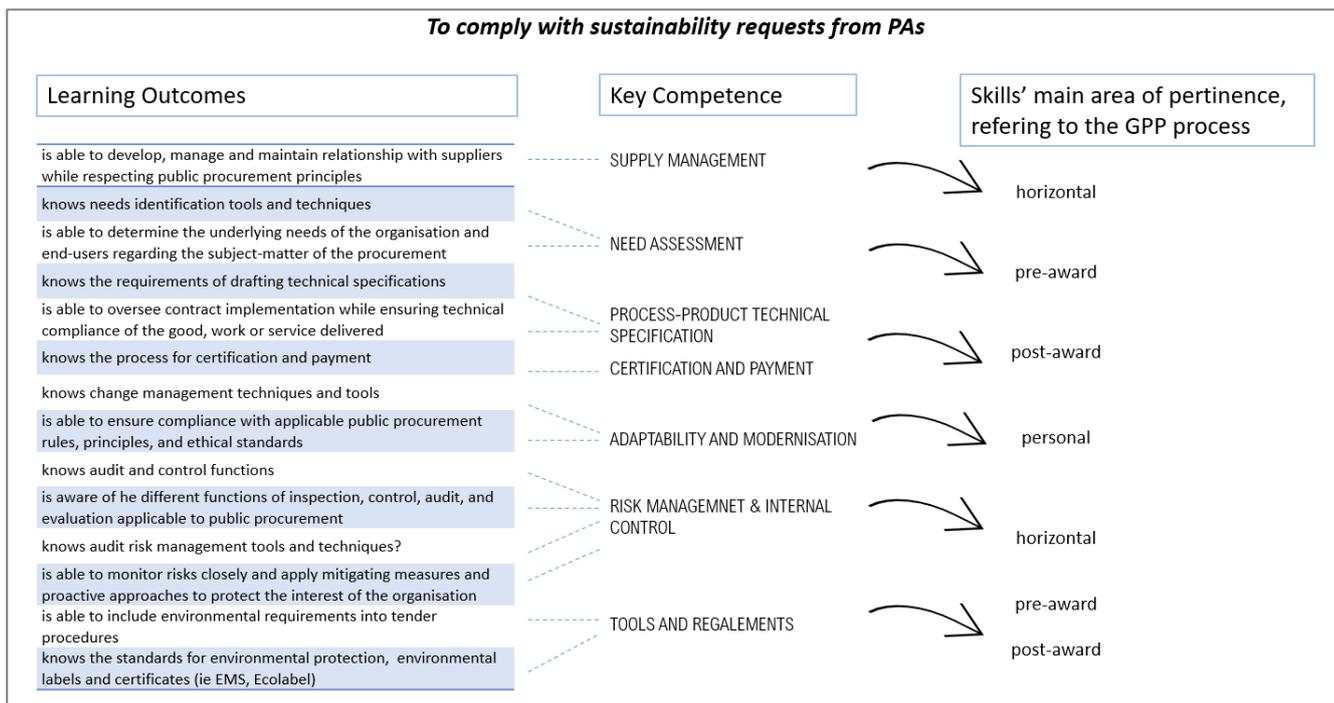


Figure 4. Sample of the Learning Outcomes definition and prioritising with the GPP process

Based on the ECVET recommendation⁴, the GREENER knowledge, skill and competencies description comply with the 5th EQF European Qualification Framework for proficiency standard identification. This EQF level corresponds to the Post-Secondary Qualification standard, and it can represent a level of C-VET Continuing Vocational Education Training for Adults.

Level 5 - learning outcomes		
Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and autonomy
Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others

Figure 5. EQF European Qualification Framework – Description of the 5th EQF level

Finally, the learning outcomes have been prioritised in 5 modules, following the modular and flexible logic the GREENER training pathway should have.

⁴ 2009 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708%2802%29> 2017 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32009H0708%2802%29>

The main target of GREENER is confirmed being the profile working in SMEs in the role of Administrative, Manager, Expert in quality assessment, Referent for tendering.

For each module, tests were developed to assess the achievement of knowledge. The tests comprise multiple-choice quizzes and are designed in such a way as to ensure that the learner can manage the tests independently and online⁵.

In the figure below, the GREENER training pathway is summarised, highlighting the module titles and the main learning objectives outlined.

⁵ <https://greener-project.eu/training-resouces/>

①	To know what GPP is and why could be an opportunity for SMEs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 What does GPP mean? 1.2 How does the Procurement process work? 1.3 What are the advantages, coming from the implementation of the GPP? 1.4 How does GPP support the transition towards CE? 1.5 What are the opportunities for SMEs, when applying for a GPP?
②	To understand and to find public tender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Entire life-cycle of Public Procurement 2.2 Introduction to the key vocabulary 2.3 Introduction to the principles and capabilities of e-procurement 2.4 Different types of Public Procurement and the specific requirements for each type of procurement 2.5 How to prepare a winning offer? 2.6 Which differences between the public and private tendering? 2.7 Award criteria & specific requirements 2.8 Searching strategies for finding a suitable public tender for your company – Public Tender Platform
③	To comply with sustainability request for PAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 introduction to the key sustainability criteria when implementing of Green Public Procurement 3.2 Introduction to the process of determination of the specific sustainability requests from the PA in a Tender 3.3 Tips on how to meet the specific sustainability requests, written in the Tender
④	To create awareness inside SME on the opportunity for GPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Preparation: Tips on how to set realistic goals and timelines 4.2 Action Plan: international communication channels as an instrument for raising awareness 4.3 Support: organizing regular campaigns to raise awareness among colleagues 4.4 Special policies related to the topic: creation of adoption of policies, relevant for the topic
⑤	To improve chances for a successful application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Introduction to the Sustainable and Sustainable development 5.2 Green Supply Chain Management 5.3 Green certifications 5.4 Life Cycle Assessment and Life Cycle 5.5 Communicating “GREEN” 5.6 Greenwashing

Figure 6. GREENER training path in a glance

3.2: Pilot testing of the training modules

Prior to starting the GREENER training test, each partner held a meeting with the national Advisory Group (AG) in which the project concept, the training course design methods and the type of training platform developed were shared, with the aim of gathering:

- Suggestions for improving the GREENER training action plan,
- Guidelines for optimising the publicity and implementation of the pilot sites,
- Any further suggestions for improvement of the realised course.

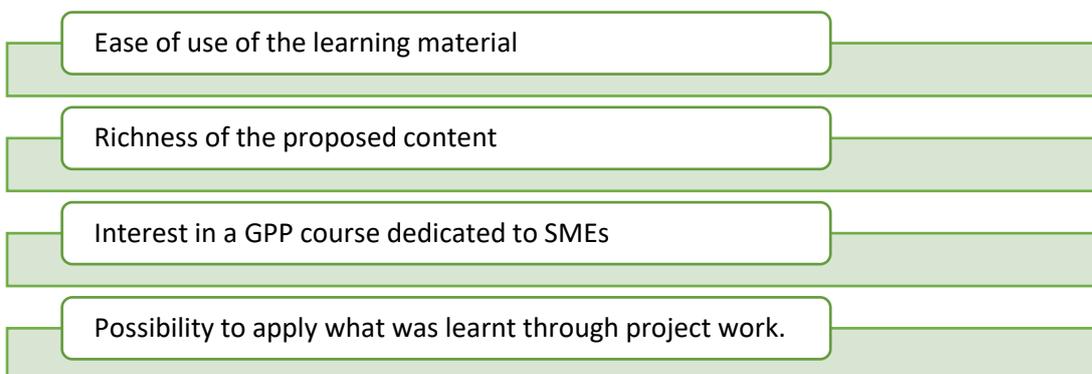
The AG is composed of GPP Experts, Referents of Public Administration Department for Finance and budget Management, SME managers and administrative, Continuing Education experts, territorial and sectorial researcher. More details on AG results are available in the IO4 Report (“National Reports”).

The first phase of target group identification was followed by the launch of piloting in the different countries involved in the project, reaching a total of 60 tester distributed as follows:

- Spain 13
- Belgium 15
- Italy 16
- Bulgaria 16

3.3: Assessment of the pilot training

In summary, the main feedback gathered during the Piloting are:



ADVISORY GROUP

OBJETIVE

Reach suggestions for training course and pilot implementation

COMPOSITION

Experts, public administration, SMEs managers, trainers, researchers

Elements that can contribute to an improvement of the training experience include:

- Greater availability of video material and graphic summaries of the GPP course.
- Possibility of certifying acquired competences.
- Enhancing the dissemination of content through the use of promotional videos.

4. How to engage companies. Lessons learnt

SMEs have a great role to play in the transition to a more circular economy. Indeed, SMEs are central to local economies and local employment and GPP is a central instrument for the EU to achieve its objective to become carbon neutral for 2050. However, SMEs face several barriers in accessing procurement opportunities and in winning contracts. The main barriers include: contracting authorities being unaware of SMEs potential on innovation and the types of goods and services they can potentially provide; the complexity of the tenders; SMEs not having the capacity to bid for opportunities and compete with large business; and the process of procurement often being undertaken on the basis of cost thus ruling out the ability of SMEs to demonstrate their wider value.

Moreover, contracting authorities have a key role to play to facilitate SMEs engagement. For instance, by improving the communication with SMEs to understand what is available on the market, simplification of tenders, developing channels to inform tenders in advance, providing training to SMEs, breaking opportunities down into smaller lots or reducing the levels of turnover required to participate in tendering exercise.

Only by understanding what the barriers are for SMEs can contracting authorities start to put in place measures to support SME engagement.

Using information, such as from a business survey or from a business database, as well as working with local SME and business bodies can help to identify the sectors where SMEs are active and the potential areas where they could engage in public procurement. Such sources of information can also assist in the identification of barriers to SME engagement in public procurement. Reviewing the procurement process, identifying any barriers to SME engagement, and then putting in place measures to address such issues can have a positive impact on SME involvement. Creating a conducive procurement environment also includes supporting public procurement staff themselves. This is not only about capability, that is ensuring procurement staff receive the training required, but also about the adequate resourcing of procurement.

BARRIERS FOR SMEs

- contracting authorities being unaware of SMEs potential
- complexity of the tenders
- lack of capacity to compete with large business
- process of procurement often being undertaken on the basis of cost

5. Conclusion and take-aways

Nowadays, we are facing the consequences of the global economic recession caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This leads to a lack of important resources in production and stagnation in the development of the European economy, which make the topic of green public procurement even more important.

Although the benefits from including green criteria to public procurement are identified, GPP is still not widespread at EU level- stakeholders face considerable uncertainty when talking about green public procurement due to the legal complexities arising from EU directives on public procurement and the low level of awareness of GPP and the main specificity of its implementation.

GREENER project aims to identify the necessary skills of middle management in SMEs to build a new professional who will deal with public procurement. To achieve this, the project consortium followed a systematic approach to identify the required skills. Through this process, GREENER experts had the opportunity to observe the current situation when it comes to GPP and build a solid foundation for developing the common skills framework for professional profiles. Containing specific knowledge and skills, the framework is considered GREENER's main innovation and contribution to existing frameworks and lays the foundation for the development of the GREENER modular training program.

A quick review of the feedback, collected from the pilot of the GREENER course, clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of the training materials and supports the thesis that such an educational course is needed by professionals dealing with public procurement. The ease of use of the materials and the richness of the course materials contribute to the process of achieving the main goal of the GREENER project – to support companies' participation in GPP with systemic effectiveness on the conditions of sustainability and business competitiveness.

Considering the low level of awareness of green public procurement and the main specificity of its implementation, the GREENER training course could be identified as a dedicated tool for introducing green public procurement in companies, which presents specific knowledge tailored to the skill level of the participant and supports him/her in the learning process by offering him/her a self-assessment section where each participant can evaluate the level of skills and the knowledge acquired during the training program.

It is important to note that GPP is currently a voluntary instrument in some EU countries. This means that each contracting authority decides for itself whether and how to apply environmental criteria for a given order, as well as what the criteria should be. However, this is expected to change as public

procurement is one of the areas whose legislation will be updated to meet the Sustainable Development Goals of the European Union in future.

In this context, it is important to pay attention to the existing legislative framework and the need for its future updating to meet the needs of the contracting authorities. This means that the application of the GREENER Toolbox could be considered the first step in the process of including green criteria in public procurement. Key actions must be taken at national and EU level to achieve the set goals and to claim green criteria in any public procurement procedure.

What?

Support companies' participation in GPP with systemic effectiveness on the conditions of sustainability and

How?

1. Systematic approach to identify the required skills

2. Developing the common skills framework for professional profiles

3. Training materials creation and pilot test implementation

Results

- GREENER training course --> a dedicated tool for introducing green public procurement in companies.
- GREENER Toolbox --> first step in the process of including green criteria in public procurement.

GREENER



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