



COMPANIES' SKILL GAP TO THE GPP:

EMERGING SKILLS IN ADMINISTRATIVE PROFILES



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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The current European Commission has presented, through the **EU Green Deal**, what will be the main objective of the mandate: to work to transform Europe by 2050 into the first zero-emission continent. Among the actions foreseen in the EU Green Deal, investments in the Circular Economy are present and it is undeniable that the contribution to this effort must come primarily from the Public Administration. Indeed, Sustainable Public



Procurement plays a fundamental role for the transformation of the Economy from a linear model to a Circular model and this has also been confirmed by the scientific community, which has highlighted the potential in support the green products market, pushing companies to adopt more ecological operating practices, thus contributing to reducing the negative impact on the environment.

The general idea of **GREENER project** is to reinforce the industrial capacities to increase successful participation in GPP processes by improving the skill of Administrative and Middle management profiles. The identification of a common skill framework and the development of a transnational training course will foster the industry engagement in the GPP and, consequently, in the Green Deal full implementation. The aim 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 allow the company to comply with the needs of the Public Authorities looking for green and circular purchases.

Despite the adoption of the National Action Plan on Green Public Procurement (PAN GPP), the main **challenges** impeding a wider spread of circular procurement in Italy, Spain, Bulgaria and Belgium include:

- Procurers main tendency is about acquiring a specific product as part of a routine process. Circular procurement should seek to fulfil a certain need, investigating the broader needs for the adoption of a functional or performance-based approach, thus allowing market operators a wider freedom to innovate and provide the most effective solution, resulting in both reduced resource use and costs;
- Administrative professionals and purchasers in SMEs still can't benefit of adequate I-VET and C-VET programs on sustainable strategic procurement; also, core skills composing ESCO profiles of purchasers and purchase planners mainly refer to management, cost-benefit analysis and negotiation, without taking into consideration
- Lack of SMEs awareness of tools working methodologies facilitating the preparation of successful offers to circular procurement tenders, such as: ecolabels, materials passports, lifecycle assessment tools.

The **challenge** is to accelerate the company's engagement and the public authorities' capacity to deal with GPP framework of competencies increasing the awareness of workers, upgrading the even more traditional procedures as the tendering processes are. The main innovative element of GREENER project is given by its main target audience, made of private sector professionals (middle management and/or staff of administrative offices) involved in procurement processes.

On the base of a need analysis on emerging skill in traditional administrative profiles **this project aims** to:

- 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;
- Improve the skills of procurers and SMEs administrative profiles 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;
- Enhance 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)
- Increase the employability of VET students facing the global challenges
- Foster the VET attractivity 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.

II. SURVEY

2.1 Introduction

The GREENER consortium has developed an online survey addressed to SMEs in Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain, with the option of an English version to address potential other participants across Europe.



The survey was launched in May 2021 and is still open. Therefore, the results that are presented in the present paragraph are referred to the period May-early October.

The participation to the survey was different in the countries object of the analysis. Considering that the indication of the country was not mandatory, the nationality of the participants is not always defined. Nevertheless, most of the SMEs have participated in their own language, therefore, the language is a proxy of the headquarters country. Regarding the English version, the SMEs that have indicate the headquarters location are from Bulgaria, Ireland, Romania, Portugal, and UK.

Language	Participants			Completed		
	Yes	No	total	Yes	No	total
English	41	29	70	11	4	15
French	15	4	19	1	2	3
Dutch	8	6	14	1	0	1
Italian	39	48	87	9	9	18
Bulgarian	0	18	18	0	14	14
Spanish	12	9	21	6	6	12
Total	115	114	229	28	35	63

Of course, the results that are presented following are coming from the completed ones. But we are willing to increase the overall participation, that could be a way, apart from obtain more responses, also to increase the awareness on GREENER. The results will be analyzed and published in a scientific paper.

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. Therefore, there were present different questions. For the purpose of this analysis, we concentrate our comparison on the differences between the first questions, in order to identify the possible reasons that push

SMEs to participate or not. Following, a sample of results are presented divided in these two sections.

2.2 Results

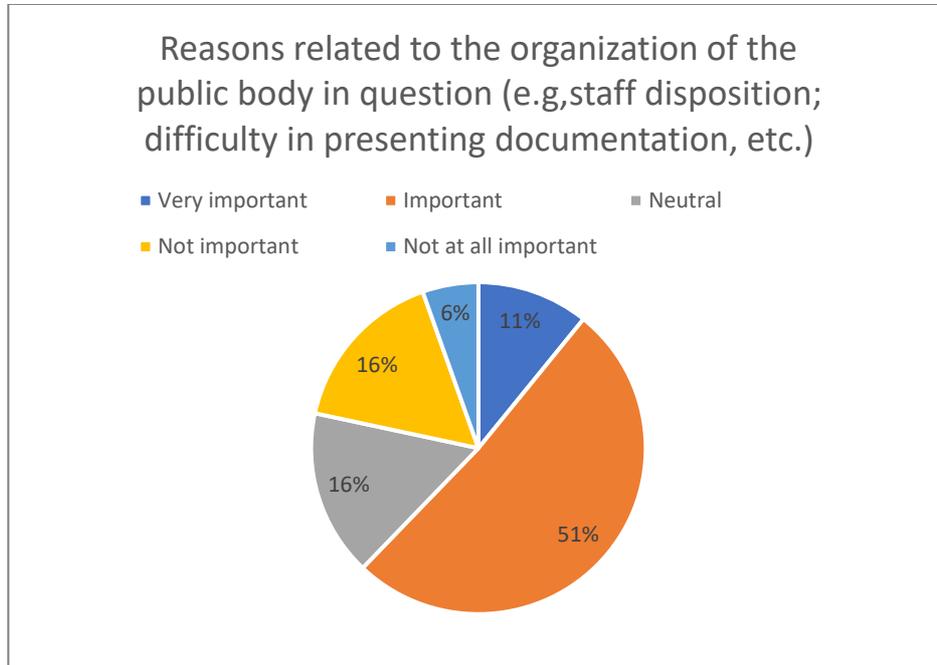
Regarding the first group of SMEs, the questions were referred to the Relations with the Public Administration-PA. The questions aimed to investigate the importance of the facts on the not-participation in public tenders. Then, SMEs were asked to respond, in order to identify a possible future participation in Green Public Tenders (GPP and CPP), on the presence of some factors in their companies and their importance.

2.2.1 Importance of PA variables on the participation in public tenders

In these questions, several options were foreseen that could help in identify the main barriers for SMEs to not participate in public tenders.

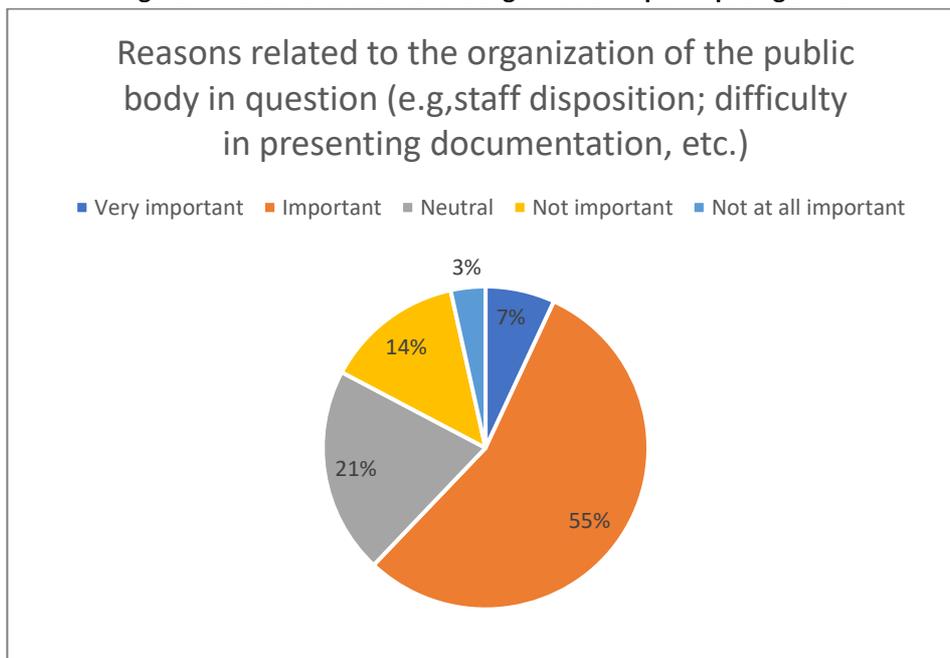
Considering, for instance, the reasons related to the organization of the public body in question (e.g, staff disposition; difficulty in presenting documentation, etc.), SMEs that do not participate seems to identify these variables as important or very important for them (>62%) (figure 1).

Figure 1. Reasons related to the organization – not participating SMEs



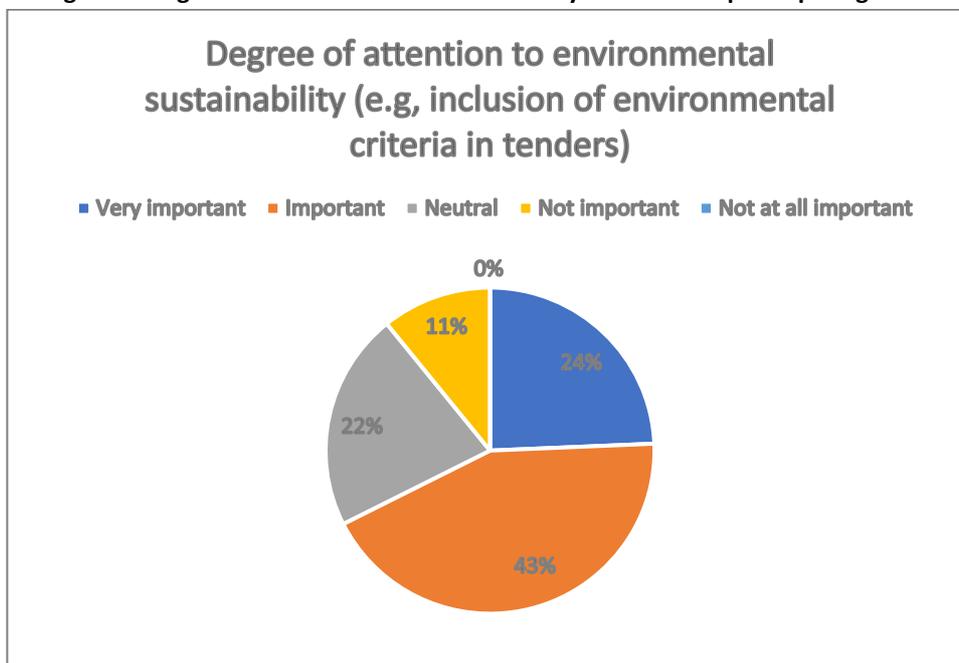
Looking to the same graph (figure 2) for SMEs that are participating in public tenders, the situation seems to be almost the same, even if with higher values. SMEs that use or used to participate in public tenders consider these variables as important or very important for them (72%). The intrinsic features of the PA could be a lever or a barrier that SMEs that participate are aware of and use with in their relationship with the PAs.

Figure 2. Reasons related to the organization – participating SMEs



Then, other factors were investigated, as, for example, the degree of environmental sustainability of PAs.

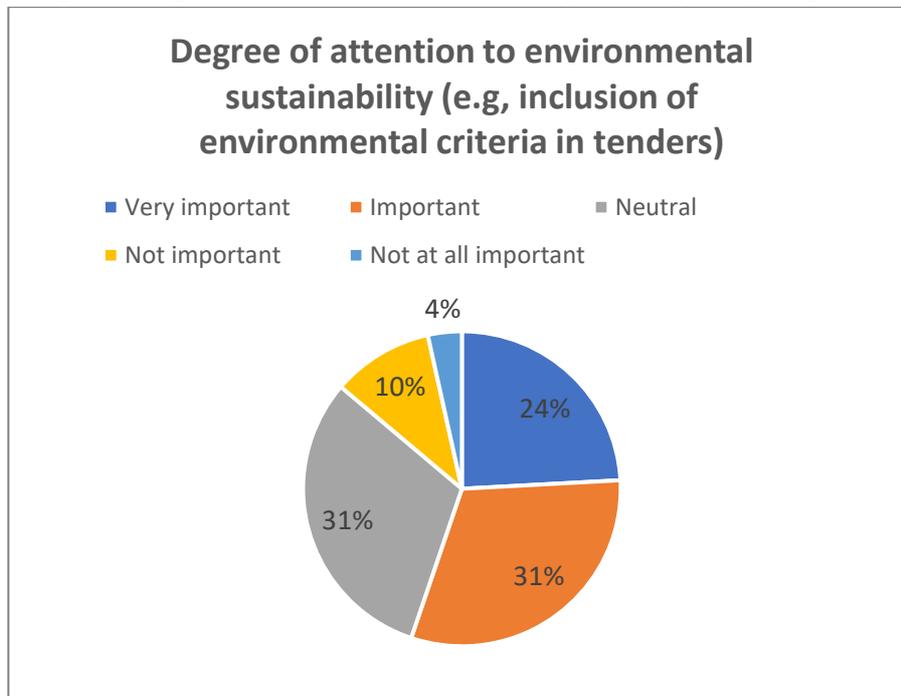
Figure 3. Degree of environmental sustainability of PAs – not participating SMEs



Companies that have not participated (figure 3) to public tenders look to the degree of attention to environmental sustainability (i.e. inclusion of environmental criteria in tenders) as a way to obstacle them from the participation. 67% for them consider the sustainability as important or very important.

Looking to the data coming from the SMEs that have participated (figure 4), the situation is a bit different. SMEs that consider important or very important the degree of sustainability are 59% of them. The percentage of neutral is the same and not important and not important at all are higher. This different (albeit slightly) could explain the different approach for the SMEs that participated, that look to the environmental transition not as a barrier but as a challenge to join.

Figure 4. Degree of environmental sustainability of PAs – participating SMEs



Another interesting factor investigated is the preparation of public officials. From the results exposed in the two figures (n.5 and 6) not-participating SMEs seems to attribute an importance lower than participating SMEs. The first group refer an importance (important and very important = 57%) lower than the second group (important and very important = 62%). This could be contrary to the logic expected.

Figure 5. Preparation of public officials – not participating SMEs

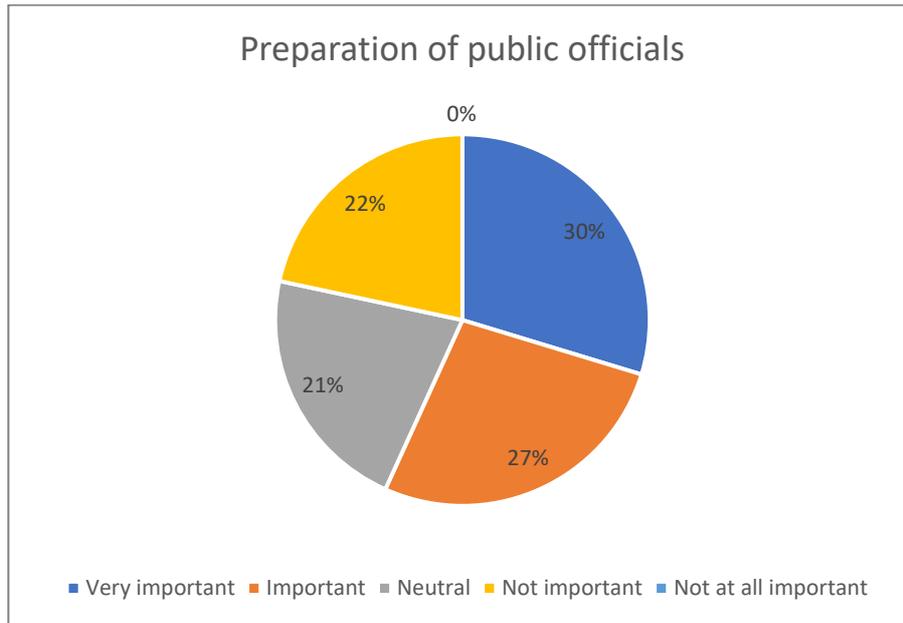
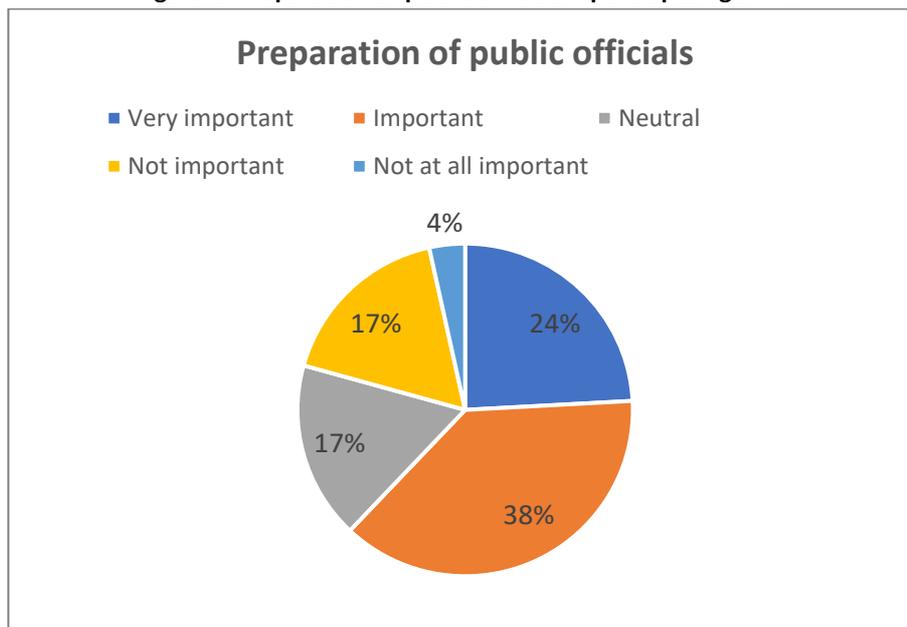


Figure 6. Preparation of public officials – participating SMEs



Indeed, there are more than one interpretation. The first is that SMEs that are not participating to public tenders feel that there are other factors that could influence their participation, instead of preparation of public officials. Indeed, if they do not participate, they could ignore the real preparation of public officials.

The second interpretation is related to the participating SMEs. On the contrary, they should know the real preparation of public officials and overrate the importance of the preparation of public officials in the participation to public tenders. Therefore, they evaluate the preparation of PA officers as a driver (in the affirmative case) or a barrier (in the negative case). In both cases, in relation to SMEs that are not participating, they could not consider this factor as a barrier or driver

(look neutral percentage in figure n.5) and this could lead them to the decision to not participate when it is a factor not under their control.

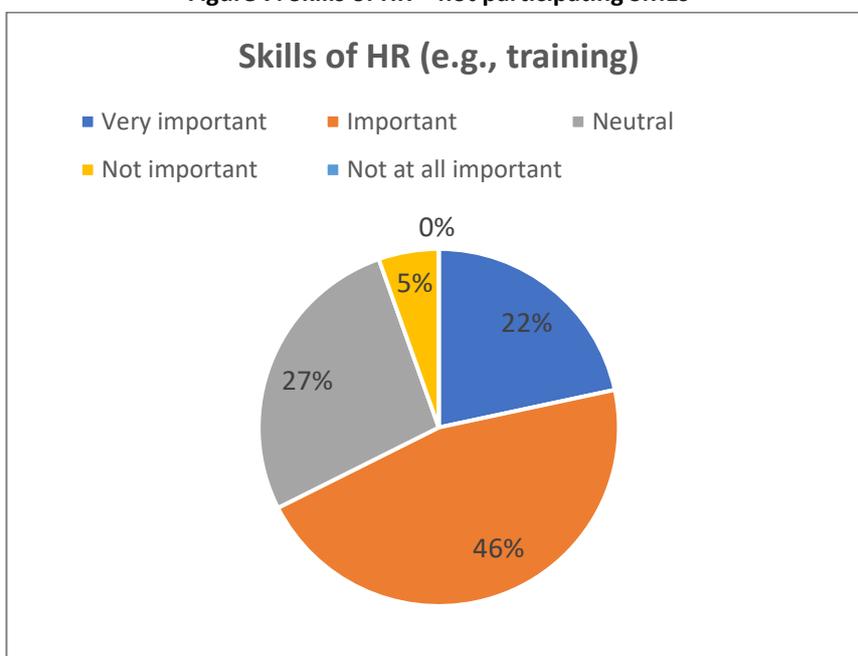
Basically, preparation of public officials is an important factor for both groups of SMEs.

2.2.2 Importance of SMEs variables on the not-participation in public tenders

The second group of items investigated is referred to the internal variables of SMEs. In this paragraph, just an anticipation of the overall results is given.

The first anticipation is connected to the scope of GREENER. The two following figures (n.7 and n.8) show that not-participating SMEs seems to attribute an importance lower than participating SMEs to the skills of human resources. The first group refer an importance (important and very important = 68%) lower than the second group (important and very important = 76%).

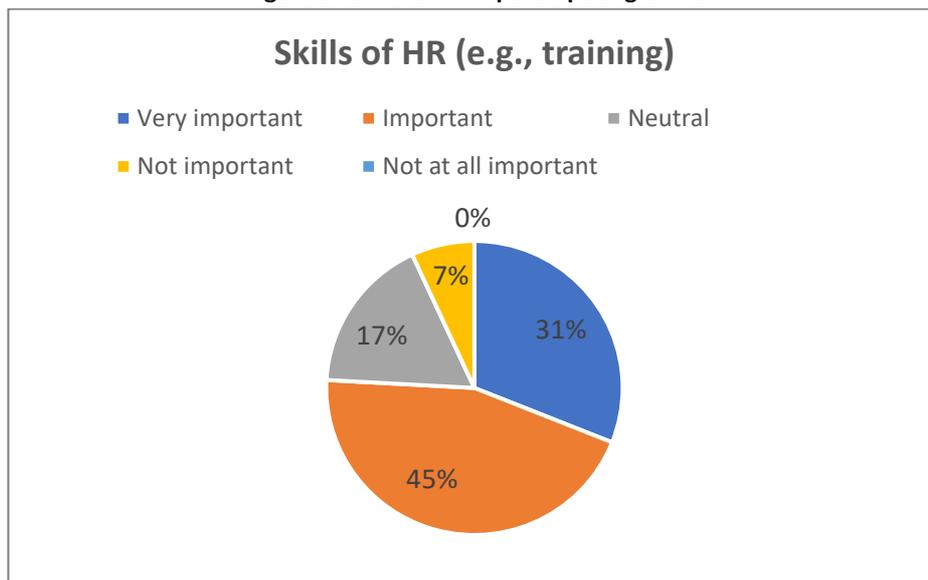
Figure 7. Skills of HR – not participating SMEs



In addition, SMEs that are participating, attribute a higher value to “very important”. Probably, this group is confident that invest in Human Resources skills is a possible driver for participating to public tender procedures. This thesis is confirmed by looking also to the “neutral” value, lower compared

to the SMEs that are not participating. This seems to be aligned with GREENER main goal, that is to train SMEs for the participation to green and public tenders.

Figure 8. Skills of HR – participating SMEs



Then, SMEs were asked on the presence of some environmental tools. Regarding SMEs that have not participated, the questions were addressed to the possible future participation in Green Public Tenders (GPP and CPP) and how this presence was important for that pursuit.

In the following table 1, percentage are resumed.

Table 1. Importance of some internal sustainability tools for SMEs in order to participate to Green Public Tenders.

	Environmental sustainability manager	Environmental sustainability policy	Internal regulation on saving resources	Certified Environmental Management System - EMS	Product certifications (eg Ecolabel)	Training dedicated to environmental sust.	Life Cycle Assessment-LCA
Very important	27,03%	29,73%	18,92%	21,62%	29,73%	40,54%	27,03%
Important	32,43%	37,84%	48,65%	48,65%	35,14%	32,43%	43,24%
Neutral	24,32%	24,32%	24,32%	27,03%	27,03%	13,51%	16,22%
Not important	13,51%	5,41%	8,11%	2,70%	8,11%	13,51%	13,51%
Not at all important	2,70%	2,70%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%

As it is possible to infer from the table, some factors are judged more or less significant for the participation to green public tenders. Considering the values of “important” and “very important”, training (72%) seems to be crucial for SMEs and this is in line with the results coming from figure n.7. Second place goes to LCA-assessment (70%), that, indeed, is a tool that PAs are more and more considering in their evaluations. Then, third place is shared between classical tools to demonstrate the environmental commitment of companies to the market and to the PA, as Environmental Management Systems (as EMAS or ISO 14001- 69%) and Environmental Labelling (as EcoLabel-64%). In public tenders these certifications are often means of proof for green public tenders. Finally, it seems those internal procedures, as internal regulations or environmental sustainability policies, or

dedicated positions as the environmental sustainability manager, are not so relevant for SMEs. This could also be related to the dimension of SMEs that, maybe, infer on their willingness or possibilities to dedicate resources to those documents or positions.

Considering the same question addressed to SMEs that have participated in public tenders (table 2), the results are quite similar, even with different values and a different order. Training is still a leading factor (68%), but the environmental sustainability policy (75%) and the internal regulation on saving resources (72%) are considered more important. Then, other tool follow, as product certifications (65%), LCA (61%), and EMS (58%). The environmental sustainability manager (48%) is the less important. This different ranking could be influenced on a different perception from SMEs that have already participated. While training is still important, a more comprehensive knowledge of green public tenders, could lead companies to think that a further investment (in policies and in procedures, for example) could create more benefit in order to keep high standard on sustainability. Considering that these tools are often part of EMSs, a logic connection between them could be assumed. Another interpretation could be that SMEs that participate in green public tenders have already obtained EMSs and Ecolabel and, therefore, they want to enhance their sustainability.

Table 2. Importance of some internal sustainability tools for SMEs in order to participate to Green Public Tenders.

	Environmental sustainability manager	Environmental sustainability policy	Internal regulation on saving resources	Certified Environmental Management System - EMS	Product certifications (eg Ecolabel)	Training dedicated to environmental sustainability issues	Life Cycle Assessment-LCA analysis on some products
Very important	17,24%	13,79%	20,69%	27,59%	17,24%	27,59%	27,59%
Important	31,03%	51,72%	51,72%	31,03%	48,28%	41,38%	34,48%
Neutral	24,14%	17,24%	10,34%	17,24%	6,90%	10,34%	13,79%
Not important	20,69%	13,79%	13,79%	20,69%	20,69%	17,24%	17,24%
Not at all important	6,90%	3,45%	3,45%	3,45%	6,90%	3,45%	6,90%

2.3 Main conclusions

Before pointing out some conclusions, we had to state a premise. As anticipated, the survey is still on going and the number of participants is still low. Therefore, we must assume that the results presented have to be treated with caution.

Nevertheless, from the graphs and the tables presented, we can infer some useful insights for the creation of a draft of curriculum for companies that want to approach to green public tenders:

- SMEs that participate into public tenders consider the reasons related to the organization (e.g., staff) to be more important than SMEs that do not participate. This could be related to a more comprehensive **knowledge of the process of tendering**;

- considering the degree of environmental sustainability of PAs, SMEs that have not participated to public tenders look to it as a way to obstacle them from the participation. SMEs that have participated showed a different approach and this could be explained as the **environmental transition may be considered not as a barrier but as a challenge to join**;
- regarding the preparation of public officials, not-participating SMEs seems to attribute an importance lower than participating SMEs. This could be related to an imperfect perception of the importance of the preparation itself (for not-participating SMEs) or an overrating perception of this factor (participating SMEs). In both case, **preparation of public officials is considered as an important factor**;
- when asked about the importance of skills of SMEs HR, SMEs that are participating, attributed a higher value to “important” and “very important”. Probably, this group is confident that **invest in Human Resources skills is a possible driver for participating to public tender procedures**;
- **regarding the tools for pursuing environmental sustainability, there are differences between the two groups of SMEs.** Not-participating SMEs attributed the highest importance to training and then to LCA, EMSs and Ecolabel, typical tools for showing the environmental commitment to the market and then, participating to public tenders. Looking to the group of participating SMEs, in these other tools have prevailed, as Environmental sustainability policies and internal regulations. This could be related to a higher degree of maturity of sustainability commitment.

III. INTERVIEWS

3.1 Introduction

The GREENER consortium has developed a questionnaire for interviewing the main target groups in Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria and Spain. Interviews are one of the most used form of data collection in qualitative research. The consortium developed questionnaire for structured interview and created a protocol template to be followed from all partners.



The interviews started in May 2021 and were finished within the next four months. The summary presented in this report comes to enrich and enhance the value of the results from the survey, described in the previous chapter.

The number of participants in the interviews were pre-defined in the project proposal - 14 interviews (3 per each partner country + 1 additional from Italy and Bulgaria) to Middle management and administrative profiles of companies, and 12 interviews (3 per each partner country) addressing public authorities (when applicable, staff involved in procurement processes).

3.2 Results

The estimated duration of each interview is 58 minutes, and the questions were distributed within 6 main sections related to knowledge and interest of participating in GPP, skills, green practices implemented, relation with the PA.

3.3 Public Authorities

3.3.1 Organization functioning and GPP&CPP

All the interviewed public authorities in Spain, at regional and local level, have the necessary rights and staff to launch public tenders but they don't have specialize staff on green and circular procurement.

"We do not have experts in this matter or at a technical level. It would be nice to have experts in different fields to provide us with technical advice." – Spain

“The CAM (minimum environmental criteria) have been stated and must be applied. Now the problem is not in their application, you can choose whether to put them as a basic criterion or reward criterion. Generally, we put them as a basic criterion, even to be faster.” – Italy

In Belgium are identified difficulties for integrating environmental criteria: the lack of time to develop the criteria, the lack of understanding of circular economy (not only in the lower part of the organisation but also in higher management levels). Other factors highlighted were the lack of good practices, the language barrier, and the lack of awareness about sustainability.

3.3.2 Training and skills

No one in Spain has received tailored training on GPP or CPP.

“The lack of vocation and the high temporality makes it extremely difficult for us to establish work teams, with different levels of specialization.” – Spain

Training is a strong need for Italian Public Officers-POs. There is undoubtedly a lack of training, considering that the field is sometimes very technical.

“We do not solve doubts with a formalized procedure but in the most different ways. Starting from the web consultation, then we ask colleagues that are technical consultants, architects, engineers, etc. We have followed several courses on tenders, I would say general, but nothing specific about individual CAM”. - Italy

Some Public authorities in Italy are organizing training on Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) several times a year but there is no module yet about GPP or CPP.

In Belgium there is the need to facilitate via trainings the understanding of the law. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness about the possibility to put enough weight on other criteria different than price. Big organisations are more ready to take the risk of including CPP criteria in tenders.

3.3.3 GPP/ CPP policy context

“The use of environmental criteria is not necessarily linked to the price, so it is not possible to translate it into an increase or decrease in the final price.” – Spain

All interviewed recognize that the legislation is unclear about the inclusion of green criteria and the process to include them. Legislation is more voluntarism, and at national/regional level there is a lack of green criteria examples to be implemented by the different organizations.

“Legislation is more voluntarism. Currently, either you are a green activist, or you only include basic points such as ISO 14.001” – Spain

Sometimes, in Italy the knowledge of environmental certifications is lacking or there is a difficulty in understanding new certifications presented by companies. This could generate delaying in the tender procedures.

“We also have, incidentally, a little difficulty in verifying the exact correspondence of certain quality certifications, which were presented by the supplier, for example, to the purpose of reducing the cautionary deposit. There have been certifications of foreign countries for which it was not easy to refer to ours.” - Italy

The legislation in Belgium is not well-known and there is a need to exchange knowledge among the different departments. The use of labels generates a lot of questioning, and the criterion of price is still predominant among the rest. In some cases, when the amount to be invested is significant, it is hard to see the long-term benefits.

3.3.4 GPP/CPP and private market

The Spanish industry is highly fragmented in SMEs, with a lack of knowledge and resources to be innovative and disruptive companies. General unknowledge, from companies and public authorities, on the different green certificates or labels that could be use as green requirements.

“Most companies are not prepared. Lack of training” – Spain

“There is a lack of awareness so that SMEs see this as an opportunity and not as a new administrative barrier.” – Spain

“In my opinion, the big companies are adapting. We need to adapt small and craft businesses and this can only be done by involving their trade associations” - Italy

“There must be greater awareness. The professionals are very good and very prepared in their field. What must be clear is that if you (enterprise) work with the public administration you have to adapt to the rules of public administration.” – Italy

There is a lack of demand to influence the market and the use of green criteria has been more generalised than the circular criteria. The market fails to mobilize SMEs.

Some companies in Belgium are not aware of the use of certain tools (e.g., e-tendering), do not have internal capacity to respond to this type of tenders and some do not know where to find the publication of tenders.

Big companies know quite well how to participate in public procurement, so the issue with them is more on the understanding of circularity/sustainability. Ecolabels can also be a limitation for smaller companies to apply for tenders due to their price.

3.4 SMEs

Spain



“We have a very few members that have a specialized department on public purchases. Usually, SMEs need to ask for external support to us, as business association, or consultancies, on these matters. SMEs don't have technicians with the necessary knowledge on legal aspects” – Spain

The interviewed companies, most of SMEs are reluctant to participate in public tenders due to the unknowledge on the administrative process and the fear on bureaucracy.

It is highly desirable to have good cooperation with public authorities and take the opportunity of participating in preliminary market consultations.

Companies and the association consider critical to have further training on GPP and CPP, as public tenders are moving to get more sustainable and social tenders. For interviewed companies there is a necessity on known the possible different green criteria, beyond ISO 14.001, that could be included in future tenders. Moreover, there is a consensus to get a fluent dialogue between companies' technicians and bidders.

“We are always looking to be updated to the trends topics to be able to anticipate public administration movements. Currently, it is obvious that sustainable characteristics have more importance, and we need to be ready for upcoming green and circular criteria.” - Spain

Italy



Among the factors hindering the participation of SMEs in tenders with the PA, there is a high lack of confidence in the expertise of public officials.

It is the administrative process of the public administration that blocks the innovation of the offer by the company, which pursues cost efficiency objectives. CAM - minimum environmental criteria - can help make companies respond more effectively and quickly.

In addition to the elements that could increase a company's participation in GPP, process and product certifications are the most rewarding in terms of market visibility. Training dedicated to environmental sustainability issues (including GPP) is however a strategic priority for the most of SMEs interviewed.

“in the context of public tenders, the most innovative technologies have still not been fully recognised precisely because there is a lack of in-depth knowledge of them and a lack of planning to integrate them into internal PA procedures” - Italy

The companies consider it important for a possible future participation in GPP to train administrative and technical staff on all the proposed items of Supply Contracts, Service Contracts, Works Contracts.

Belgium



The first demand for green and circular criteria should come from PA, and this will lead to innovation and a change in the market.

Some of the difficulties they face in participating in CPP/GPP is the access to people working at PA, the lack of time, the price and the validation of knowledge related to the product.

The costs of certification limit the possibilities to participate in certain markets.

Knowledge exchange is important, and it helps companies to learn how to become more circular.

Tenders should also be well described to facilitate the company's participation. SMEs needs to be considered when developing green and circular criteria in tenders through consultative processes.

Sometimes the procedures are very complicated and bureaucratic. It would be helpful for SMEs specially to receive support and guidance.

The legislation is falling short and doesn't cover fully the concept 'product as a service'. Instead of focusing on the description of the product tenders should focus on the solution they are looking for.

Bulgaria



There are no clear and justified criteria for products and services, no clarity on the EU Ecolabel as a criterion.

The experience in Bulgaria shows that the orders with eco-element are in a limited number of areas (construction, office equipment and IT).

The administrative capacity is insufficient and there is no incentive to implement the GPP.

Contracting authorities often do not report when an order has an eco-element and do not mark it as "green".

There is difficulty of applying green criteria because it is considered as discrimination.

3.5 Main conclusions

Down are listed the main conclusions that can be drawn in relation to the topic of the report and will be used as base for the further development of 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.).

IV. COMPANIES' SKILL GAP TO THE GPP

To identify Companies' skill gap to the GPP, was developed an instrument that includes online survey and interviews with public authorities and SMEs. Based on the summary of the research made by GREENER consortium within four partner countries - Italy, Spain, Belgium and Bulgaria, the gaps detected are as follows:



1. Lack of **knowledge of the tendering process**. The focus of the training oriented to SMEs nonparticipating in GPP should be put on acquaintance with the basics of the procurement, terminology, procedures documents etc. Acquaintance with the PAs – responsible authorities, main requirements when participating in procurement procedures – administrative, financial etc.
2. **Environmental sustainability** – for the SMEs it is essential to receive a training in this area, regarding tools and requirements needed to provide it. The summary of the survey gives a clear view that this “obstacle” is the basis of non participating in GPP. Here comes the main aim of GREENER project to enrich the existing trainings with new knowledge according to the “green” requirements and to personalise it according to the companies’ needs.
3. **Investment in Human resources** – subsequent of the above mentioned gaps, and a must for each SME or PA (no matter that in this case it is not considered as such an important factor) is the continuous training of the staff. Upskilling and reskilling provides higher quality and effectiveness of the working process, cost effectiveness etc.

Based on both products developed in IO1 of GREENER project: 1) “Companies’ skill gaps to the GPP” identified through surveys and interviews and 2) “GPP Skills Framework for Middle management and administrative profiles” will be developed a modular training course, subject of the next IO3.

GREENER



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