

European Commission

Call for tenders JRC/SVQ/2023/MVP/0135

Supporting study for the development of minimum mandatory criteria for the sustainable procurement of food, catering services and vending machines

DRAFT TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

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1. Background information

A substantial part of public investment in our economy is spent through public procurement, representing 14 % of the EU GDP¹, making it a fundamental element of the investment ecosystem. The social food service market in Europe is estimated at €82 billion².

Public authorities can use this public procurement in a strategic manner, to obtain better value for public money spent and to contribute to a more innovative, sustainable, inclusive and competitive economy. This can be an inspiration for all those wanting to integrate sustainability into their procurement projects.

However, strategic procurement possibilities are not sufficiently used³. Most economically advantageous tenders, which are based on a cost-effectiveness approach and may include social, environmental, innovative, accessibility or other qualitative criteria, are still underused.

As part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission adopted the “Farm to Fork Strategy⁴ for a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system” in May 2020 to reduce the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system and facilitate the shift to healthy and sustainable diets. This responds to the fact that the environmental⁵ and social⁶ impacts of the food consumed in the EU are beyond planetary limits and compromising the welfare of citizens – with these effects taking place not only within the EU but also on third countries through supply chains.

The Farm to Fork Strategy addresses comprehensively the challenges of sustainable food systems and, among others, aims at creating an opportunity to enhance the positive role that public food procurement can play in supporting a sustainable food systems transition. In the Farm to Fork strategy, the Commission announced that in order to improve the availability and price of sustainable food and to promote healthy and sustainable diets in institutional catering, it will determine the best way of setting minimum mandatory criteria for sustainable food procurement. This will help cities, regions and public authorities to play their part by sourcing sustainable food for schools, hospitals and public institutions and it will also boost sustainable farming systems, such as organic farming.

While the Union food system has achieved high levels of food security, food safety and a wide consumer choice, there is currently no horizontal regulatory instrument which could act as a guiding framework that coordinates and drives changes across the food systems as well as an operational tool within and across its different sectors to overall improve the sustainability of the EU food system.

To address this, the European Commission has launched a legislative initiative on a Sustainable EU Food System, currently in the phase of the impact assessment, that will lay down general principles and objectives, together with requirements and responsibilities of all

¹ https://single-market-scoreboard.ec.europa.eu/policy_areas/public-procurement_en

² <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a872554-5174-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

³ Communication from the Commission on Making Public Procurement work in and for Europe (COM/2017/0572 final):

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0381>

⁵ <https://eplca.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ConsumptionFootprintPlatform.html> (see page devoted to the food systems)

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352550922003013>

actors in the EU food system⁷; it includes setting minimum criteria for sustainable public procurement of food in schools and public institutions, under one of the policy options outlined in the relevant inception impact assessment⁸.

Currently, the legal framework for public procurement is defined by the EU Procurement Directives. Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement has largely clarified the scope for permissible sustainable procurement decisions.

Commission Staff working Document SWD (2019)366 final proposes EU Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria for food, catering services and vending machines. The use of these criteria is voluntary. They provide guidance and include promotion of an increased uptake of organic food products; more environmentally responsible marine and aquaculture products; an increased offer of plant-based menus (for catering services); more environmentally responsible vegetable fats; better food and beverage waste prevention; products produced following higher animal welfare standards.

Nutritional health criteria are not included as part of the GPP. In 2017, the Joint Research Centre produced a technical report with examples of how countries have used nutritional criteria in school food policies⁹. The report gives a wide range of award criteria that can be used to encourage tenderers to deliver improved services and products in relation to health and menu diversity.

Socially responsible public procurement is facilitated by the Commission in a Commission Notice on Buying Social - a guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement. This notice helps to engage public authorities in socially responsible public procurement by buying ethical products and services, and by using public tenders to create job opportunities, decent work, social and professional inclusion and better conditions for disabled and disadvantaged people¹⁰. The Joint Action Best Remap¹¹ in its analyses of the application of existing EU and national legislation related to public food procurement for schools highlighted a number of issues hindering the uptake of sustainable public procurement: implementation of guidelines are not mandatory, legislation and regulations that define nutritional standards in school are insufficient, professionals who are responsible for food or food service procurement are not necessarily nutrition or food professionals, there is a lack of vegetables, whole grains and fish on the school menus that are too often energy-rich and nutrient-poor.

The current EU landscape governing the procurement of food is claimed to be fragmented and not fully fit to act as a transition enabler. In particular, it would offer only weak guidance for national and local public authorities on how to design a public food procurement strategy that can comprehensively contribute to a sustainable food system.

There is therefore a need to develop useful and efficient criteria that buyers should use to introduce sustainability into their procurement of food, catering services and vending machines. This concerns the environmental, social (including health- and nutrition-related) and economic dimensions of sustainability.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13174-Sustainable-EU-food-system-new-initiative_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13174-Sustainable-EU-food-system-new-initiative_en

⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1a872554-5174-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/public-procurement/tools-public-buyers/social-procurement_en

¹¹ <https://bestremap.eu/>

2. Project objectives

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission has been asked by other Commission services to support the policy making process of the Sustainable EU Food System initiative by providing scientific and technical expertise, including in the area of sustainable public procurement.

The overall objective of this contracted study is to provide the necessary data (environmental, nutritional, economic, etc.), via a technical study, that will be incorporated in the work of the JRC to support the ongoing policy-making process.

3. Description of tasks and deliverables

Task 1: Setting up of a stakeholders list

Aim: *To identify stakeholders that will be able to provide useful information throughout the process of defining minimum mandatory criteria for the sustainable procurement of food and food services.*

The contractor must identify the relevant stakeholders that either have already implemented sustainability criteria in their tendering procedures for food and food services (e.g., procuring authorities), or that have experience in supplying food and food services that meet sustainability criteria (e.g., economic operators), or that have experience in designing policies in this area (e.g., international organizations, NGOs, national and supra-national authorities, etc.) or that are experts in the field of food and food services sustainability (e.g., academia).

A tentative list (not exhaustive) of examples of stakeholders to be approached is the following:

- International organizations (OECD, WHO, ...)
- Competent Authorities of the EU Member States or non-EU countries
- Regional and/or local authorities in the EU.
- Experts from scientific associations, research projects or horizontal EU-supported initiatives relevant to the topic, e.g., coordinators of the Best ReMap Joint Action
- Concerned Commission services (SANTE, ENV, AGRI, MARE, EMPL, GROW, OIB, ...)
- Economic operators, both EU-level associations as well as, if possible, individual companies
- Non-governmental and societal organizations
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The contractor should aim at a balanced and varied list, ensuring adequate representation of institutional, economic or civic-society stakeholders, taking into account also different geographical regions of Europe. The contractor should clearly outline in their offer how they intend to construct the stakeholder list, including their search strategy, any inclusion and exclusion criteria, and provide preliminary examples of categories of stakeholders to be contacted. The preliminary list of stakeholders produced will be agreed on with the JRC and

submitted to other relevant Commission services for possible comments. A final list of stakeholders should then be produced.

Deliverables:

(D1.1) - A preliminary list of potential stakeholders that could contribute to the project via targeted consultations

(D1.2) – A final list of stakeholders that could contribute to the project via targeted consultations

Task 2: Overview and analysis of existing criteria, tools and guidelines

Aim: *To review the different criteria, tools and guidelines refereeing to the procurement of sustainable food and food services that are already in place (Task 2.1) and to analyse them to identity shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other points where improvement is needed (Task 2.2).*

Task 2.1.

The contractor should carry out research into existing criteria, tools, guidelines and good practices established by international organisations, the European Union, Member States and regional or local authorities relating to the environmental, social (with special focus on health and nutrition) and economic dimensions of procurement of food, catering services and vending machines. Desk research should also analyse the feasibility (incl. legal) and practicality for routine use by tenderers of existing criteria, as well as difficulties encountered by procurers and by food service providers.

Task 2.2

Based on the research under Task 2.1, the contractor should analyse the existing criteria, tools and guidelines for shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other challenges or points of improvement:

- To what extent do the existing criteria cover the different dimensions of sustainability.
- To what extent do the existing criteria address current hotspots of the food consumption footprint regarding environmental¹² and social impacts along the supply chain.
- Existence of thresholds by criterion.
- To what extent do the existing criteria integrate general national dietary guidelines or those for specific public settings and what are commonalities and differences between guidelines/criteria in different countries.
- Identification of shortcomings and gaps related to all dimensions of sustainability (also linked to the previously mentioned hotspots).
- Need/possibility to further extend existing criteria.

¹² Hotspots analysis identify the elements of the life cycle of food products that are contributing the most to the overall environmental or social impact of food. It is important that criteria address such hotspots to tackle the most relevant sustainability aspects. Environmental impacts can be evaluated with the Consumption Footprint work. <https://eplca.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ConsumptionFootprintPlatform.html>.

- Real impact on sustainability.
- Feasibility (incl. legal) and practicality for routine use by tenderers of existing criteria.
- Difficulties encountered by procurers and by food service providers.
- How are existing criteria implemented/used?

For both Task 2.1 and 2.2 the contractor should clearly outline in their offer the proposed search strategy including topics, keywords, languages, timeframe, and search engines including those for scientific literature.

Task 2.3

The contractor is expected to reinforce and complement the desk research findings of Tasks 2.1 and 2.2 via a targeted consultation with the stakeholders identified in Task 1. The targeted consultation (Task 2.3) should take the form of an online survey (through the EU survey platform, preferably). Targeted interviews, individual or group, could be also organized in order to follow-up or clarify contributions to the online survey, or for other needs that could be agreed between the JRC and the contractor. I

Regarding the survey, the contractor is expected to design the draft questionnaire, which will then be shared with the JRC for comments and finalisation. The questionnaire should be designed in such a way as to provide the necessary information related to Tasks 2.1 and 2.2. The contractor is also expected to contact the stakeholders for availability to participate, run the survey, as well as collect and analyse the findings. In case of targeted interviews, the contractor is expected to design a draft interview template as well as the stakeholder list that will be contacted and share with the JRC for comments and finalisation; similarly, the contractor is expected to carry out the interviews and analyse the information collected.

Ultimately, under Task 2, the contractor is expected to produce a harmonised overview of existing criteria, tools and guidelines, and their analysis, based on both the findings of the desk research and the targeted survey (and interviews, if carried out).

For nutrition and health aspects, the desk research and survey should consider and build upon previous work of JRC, SANTE and the Member States on public procurement of food for health¹³. This report focused on the school setting; therefore, the relevant school food policies and procurement practices are to be updated and integrated with similar policies and practices in other public settings (e.g., public workplaces, public elderly homes, hospitals). It is important that this includes a critical assessment of how feasible and successful the health-related criteria gathered have been (e.g., alignment with national/EU public procurement legislation or limited capacity from the market to respond to the criteria).

For environmental and economic aspects, the desk research and survey should also consider and build upon previous work of JRC, SANTE and the Member States.

¹³ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC105657> and Best ReMAP deliverables

Deliverables:

(D2.1) – Draft questionnaire for survey

(D2.2) - Draft overview of existing criteria, tools and guidelines (- and a draft analysis of their shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other points where improvement is needed (delivered in the interim report)

(D2.3) - Final overview of existing criteria, tools and guidelines, and a final analysis of their shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other points where improvement is needed (delivered in the final report)

Task 3: Market analysis

Aim: *To collect robust and recent market data that enable a quantitative assessment of the economic relevance of the different food and food services categories considered.*

The analysis of criteria, tools and guidelines carried out in Task 2 must be complemented with market research. Market data is required for understanding the current role of public procurement in the overall market. Market data relating to the entire Single Market should be acquired for:

- 1) Apparent consumption¹⁴ of food in the EU (divided by the food categories of the Consumption Footprint model¹⁵), both in mass and in economic value (EURO).
- 2) Apparent consumption of food due to public procurement¹⁶ in terms of both mass (kg) and economic value (EURO). Care should be taken to consider that from the value of a food service contract, only a part will correspond to food acquisition.
- 3) The public procurement food acquisition (again, both in mass and value) should also be split into self-operations and catering contracts.
- 4) The total value of catering contracts procured by public authorities should also be stated, in order to understand the weight and relevance of the service part of the contracts.
- 5) Ideally, public procurement food acquisition should also be split into the following categories: Education, Health and Welfare, Defence and Judicial, Staff Canteens, Other. Public procurement catering contracts (*i.e.*, the total value of the catering contracts, not only the fraction relating to food acquisition) should ideally be split into the same categories.
- 6) The share of public procurement food acquisition that has been purchased (either directly or via a catering contract) taking sustainability concerns into account (e.g., EU GPP criteria). The same analysis should also be carried out for the total value of public procurement catering contracts.

¹⁴ Apparent consumption = production + imports – exports

¹⁵ The categories are: meat, dairy, eggs, fish and seafood, vegetables, fruits, tubers, legumes, oils, coffee and tea, beverages (incl. also alcoholic), nuts and seeds, legume-based products, cereal-based products, confectionary products, pre-prepared meals, and sugar. For further information of the Consumption Footprint model, please see the Consumption Footprint Platform at <https://eplca.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ConsumptionFootprintPlatform.html>.

¹⁶ The following structure can be used here: food service activities -> social food service -> public social food service. See GIRA website for details.

The contractor should clearly outline in their offer the proposed search strategy including topics, keywords, languages, timeframe, search engines including those for scientific literature.

Deliverables:

(D3.1) – Draft Market analysis (part of the interim report)

(D3.2) – Final market analysis (part the final report)

4. Timing, milestones and deliverables

The contract will be completed within the time frame of 9 months. Reports, meetings, deliverables and other milestones the contractor must comply with will be delivered in accordance with the tasks and the timeline indicated in Table 1. However, if necessary, adaptations could be discussed and agreed on case-by-case basis, as long as the overall duration of the performance of the contract is not altered.

Table 1. Tentative time schedule for deliverables, meetings and further support to JRC by the contractor

Deliverable/meeting/support	Description	Indicative Time
Kick – off meeting minutes and methodology refinement	Minutes of the kick-off meeting (to be held no more than 2 weeks after the start of the contract) - These minutes should refine the methodology proposed in the offer to be applied throughout the project and the individual tasks, and summarise other relevant points and discussions held in the kick-off meeting, including the specific deadlines for the deliverables.	T0 + 3 weeks
Deliverable 1.1	Draft list of stakeholders (Task 1).	T0 + 8 weeks
Deliverable 2.1	Draft questionnaire for the survey.	
Deliverable 1.2	Final list of stakeholders (Task 1).	T0 + 12 weeks
Deliverable 2.2	Draft overview of existing criteria, tools and guidelines and a draft analysis of their shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other points where improvement is needed (in the interim report)	T0 + 24 weeks (interim report)
Deliverable 3.1	Draft market analysis (in the interim report)	
Deliverable 2.3	Final overview of existing criteria, tools and guidelines and a draft analysis of their shortcomings, gaps, implementation difficulties and other	T0 + 36 weeks (final report)

Deliverable/meeting/support	Description	Indicative Time
	points where improvement is needed (in the final report)	
Deliverable 3.2	Final market analysis (in the final report)	
Other supporting material	(e.g., data sources, spreadsheets, PowerPoint slide deck)	

T0 corresponds to the date on which the last party signs the contract.

The deliverables will be submitted to JRC in accordance with the indicative timing in Table 1. More specific delivery dates will be agreed between the contractor and the JRC at the time of the kick-off meeting and will be reported in the kick-off meeting minute.

Stakeholder contacts developed documents and any data input with source, scientific material, models and calculations (e.g., excel spreadsheets) carried out in the course of this contract to support the revision will be made available to the Commission, for exclusive use, in written and electronic form in a way that makes it possible for the Commission to carry out further analysis, modification and editing after the contract has finished.

The contractor will have monthly meetings with the JRC to update about the contract implementation. The contractor will be in charge of taking minutes of these meetings and will send the meeting agenda at least 2 working days in advance.

Comments produced by the JRC or other Commission services in respect to the interim report and other interim output must be taken into account when producing the final report and other final output. For major comments, the Commission might ask for a resubmission of any of the interim output before proceeding with the rest of the work.

5. Coordination and meetings

The Contractor must carry out the service in close co-ordination with the relevant Commission staff from the JRC. Videoconferences between the contractor and the Commission will be scheduled in the kick-off meeting of the contract and after every deliverable. Additional calls and email exchanges are also foreseen on an ad-hoc basis and subject to the availability of the relevant parties.

Kick-off meeting

The contractor must organise a kick-off meeting by videoconference (using either the Teams or WebEx platforms) to present the detailed work plan, including the proposed approach to carrying out the required tasks. The meeting will aim at refining the scope of the work, agreeing on the research questions, and discussing the overall approach and work plan, including the timing of the deliverables.

The kick-off meeting shall take place within 2 weeks of the official start date of the contract.

Interim coordination meeting

Interim coordination meetings must be organised by videoconference (using either the Teams or WebEx platforms) to present the project's progress and agree on the fine timing of next steps. These meetings shall take place monthly, unless deemed necessary by the Commission to have a shorter periodicity.

Final meeting

A final meeting must be organised by videoconference (using either the Teams or WebEx platforms) to present the draft final report (which will have been circulated at least 7 calendar days beforehand). A PowerPoint presentation should be prepared by the contractor and delivered to the Commission accompanying the final report, summarising the scope, methodology and key findings.

In addition, the contractor may be requested to participate in one broader meeting, e.g., between the JRC and other Commission services, in order to present their work.

6. Language

The language of all deliverables, meetings, presentations, and exchanges will be English (United Kingdom).

It is expected that the written text in the deliverables is of high standard scientific language, ideas are expressed in a clear and logically structured way. The text of all deliverables will be strictly assessed according to these criteria in the review process. If necessary, the contractor should employ a proofreader to ensure high standards of delivery.

7. Duration

The performance of the tasks cannot start before the date on which the last party signs the contract and should be finalised in a maximum of **9 months (36 weeks)**, including the time for the Commission to comment the interim deliverables and the contractor to implement the suggested amendments. The time needed for possible comments and amendments to the final report would be added to the total duration of the contract.

8. Quality assurance

The contractor must establish robust means to ensure the reliability, validity and comparability of the information collected as well as the quality of its analysis and of its reporting, including full and standard referencing of the sources used.

The work delivered by the contractor must be of such quality that it can be used to support policy making and that it is directly publishable by the European Commission as a part of its official publications.

The contractor should briefly outline in their offer any identified risks concerning their work and propose appropriate mitigation measures.

Before final acceptance, all reports will be completed, adapted and corrected by the contractor who will fully take into account the comments, suggestions and additional written comments provided by the Commission.

9. Content, structure and graphic requirements of the final deliverable

All studies produced for the European Commission and Executive Agencies shall conform to the corporate visual identity of the European Commission by applying the graphic rules set out in the European Commission's Visual Identity Manual, including its logo.

The Commission is committed to making online information as accessible as possible to the largest possible number of users including those with visual, auditory, cognitive or physical disabilities, and those not having the latest technologies. The Commission supports the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0](#) of the W3C.

For full details on Commission policy on accessibility for information providers, see: http://ec.europa.eu/ipg/standards/accessibility/index_en.htm.

Pdf versions of studies destined for online publication should respect W3C guidelines for accessible pdf documents. See: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>.

9.1 Content

Final report

The final report shall include:

1. an abstract of no more than 200 words and an executive summary of maximum 3 pages, in English (United Kingdom);
2. the following standard disclaimer:

“The information and views set out in this [report/study/article/publication...] are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. The Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this study. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission’s behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.”

9.2 Structure

The final report must follow the structure agreed at the kick-off meeting.

9.3 Graphic requirements

For graphic requirements, the Contractor will have to refer to the template provided by the Commission. The cover pages shall be filled in accordance with the instructions provided in the template.