

Professionalisation of public procurement

Public procurement is becoming increasingly complex as more demands are placed on procurement professionals. These range from delivering goods, services and public works that underpin public services, to ensuring the resilience and productivity of processes, and implementing strategic policy goals. For some time, governments have used procurement as a strategic tool to deliver on several policy fronts, such as supporting the green transition, implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and, more broadly, inclusive growth. In recent years, policy makers have increasingly sought to tap its potential to advance public objectives. Expectations have evolved from achieving value for money to providing tangible benefits to citizens. The purchase of essential goods at the height of the COVID-19 crisis has illustrated the complexities and pressures faced by public buyers, and has demonstrated how procurement is vital to the functioning of fundamental public services, such as health and infrastructure. Public procurement will also be critical in the post-COVID era to support targeted public investment in infrastructure and include environmental and climate change considerations into recovery plans.

Emphasising capacity and professionalisation is one of the principles of the OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement, and the quality of outcomes is closely linked to the level of professionalisation of procurement practitioners. At a minimum, public buyers need legal, economic and market knowledge to fulfil their tasks but, increasingly, they need commercial, soft and other job-related skills to perform effectively. Countries are already strengthening their public procurement workforces. For instance, New Zealand developed several initiatives to empower procurement practitioners, starting with assessing organisational capacity through the Procurement Capability Index. Nevertheless, capacity gaps remain among public procurement staff across OECD countries (OECD, 2019a).

OECD countries are using several targeted measures to professionalise their public procurement. For instance, 14 out of 33 OECD countries surveyed in 2020 (42%) had introduced competency models, which define the critical skills necessary to accomplish a given procurement function, compared to 30% in 2018 (Table 8.10). ProcurCompEU, newly developed by the EU, is a procurement competency framework consisting of a suite of scalable tools available for countries to use. Other OECD countries define entry requirements to meet contracting authorities' needs. For instance, staff in Colombia require previous experience, or basic or specialised training, depending on the job profile. Mandatory training, as used in Korea, is another approach to ensuring suitable skills. Finally, certification frameworks to enhance procurement professionalisation are gaining traction in OECD countries: 6 out of 29 countries (21%) used them in 2018, compared to 12 out of 33 (36%) in 2020 (Table 8.10). For example, Chile requires a certification process for procurement officials with four competency levels to encourage skills development.

OECD countries also increasingly recognise public procurement as a standalone profession: 13 out of 33 (39%) did so in 2020, compared to 33% in 2018 (OECD, 2019b and Figure 8.11). This allows countries to attract and retain qualified personnel on a dedicated career track, allowing them to grow professionally or be rewarded based on performance. For example, France has formally added the public procurement job family to its Inter-ministerial Directory of State Professions (*Répertoire Interministériel des Métiers de l'Etat*). Importantly, 27 out of 33 OECD countries (82%) rely on collaboration to improve the capacity of procurement entities (Figure 8.12) through specialised training institutions, joint research programmes and co-operation with universities, among others. Austria has developed a European Training Programme for central purchasing bodies in collaboration with Vienna University of Economics and Business.

Methodology and definitions

Data were collected through the 2018 OECD Survey on the Implementation of the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement and the 2020 OECD Survey on Professionalisation. The 2020 survey was carried out to update the status of professionalisation as of the end of 2020, and focuses on measures to support capacity, the recognition of procurement as a profession as well as collaborative approaches in capacity building. Thirty-one OECD countries and Costa Rica responded to the 2018 survey and 33 OECD countries and Costa Rica responded to the 2020 survey. Respondents were country delegates responsible for procurement policies at the central government level and senior officials in central purchasing bodies.

Further reading

OECD (2019a), *Reforming Public Procurement: Progress in Implementing the 2015 OECD Recommendation*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1de41738-en>.

OECD (2019b), *Government at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/8ccf5c38-en>.

Figure notes

8.10. Data for Colombia, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States are not available for 2018. Data for Canada, Iceland, Luxembourg and the United States are not available for 2020.

8.11 and 8.12. Data for Canada, Iceland, Luxembourg and the United States are not available.

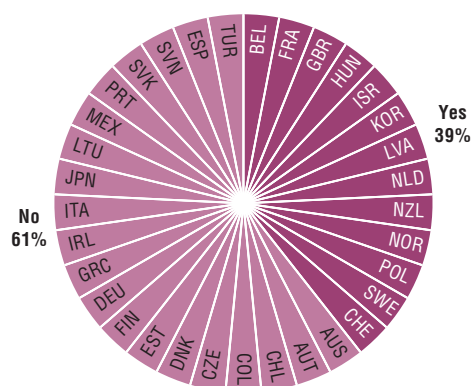
8.10. Measures to support public procurement capacity, 2018 and 2020

	Competency model		Entry requirement according to contracting authorities' needs		Obligatory training		Certification framework	
	2018	2020	2018	2020	2018	2020	2018	2020
Australia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Austria	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
Belgium	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Canada	●	..	●	..	●	..	●	..
Chile	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●
Colombia	..	●	..	●	..	●	..	○
Czech Republic	..	○	..	○	..	○	..	●
Denmark	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Estonia	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Finland	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
France	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●
Germany	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
Greece	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○
Hungary	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
Iceland	●	..	○	..	○	..	○	..
Ireland	..	○	..	○	..	○	..	●
Israel	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Italy	..	○	..	○	..	○	..	○
Japan	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Korea	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○
Latvia	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○
Lithuania	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Mexico	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Netherlands	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
New Zealand	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Norway	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
Poland	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○
Portugal	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	●
Slovak Republic	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Slovenia	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
Spain	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sweden	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Switzerland	..	●	..	●	..	●	..	●
Turkey	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
United Kingdom	..	●	..	●	..	●	..	●
OECD Total								
● Yes	9	14	13	17	9	12	6	12
○ Not	20	19	16	16	20	21	23	21
.. No information	6	2	6	2	6	2	6	2
Costa Rica	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Indonesia	..	●	..	●	..	●	..	●

Source: OECD (2018), Survey on the Implementation of the 2015 OECD Recommendations on Public Procurement; OECD (2020), Survey on the Professionalisation on Public Procurement.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258534>

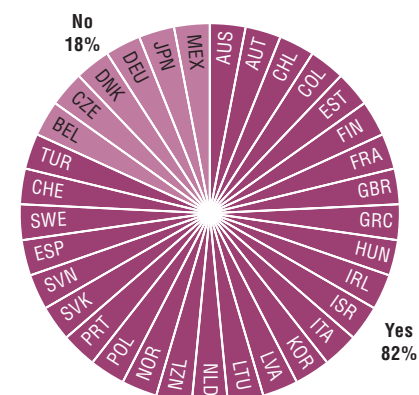
8.11. Public procurement recognised as a profession, 2020



Source: OECD (2020), Survey on the Professionalisation on Public Procurement.

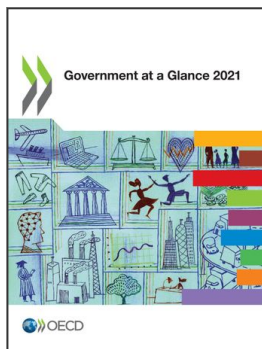
StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258553>

8.12. Collaborative approaches with knowledge centres to improve the capacity of public procurement entities, 2020



Source: OECD (2020), Survey on the Professionalisation on Public Procurement.

StatLink  <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934258572>



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