

## Networking for a common goal: a winning strategy to spread the GPP principles and effectively contribute to Sustainable Development

Veneto Region (Italy)

### Background

The [Veneto Region](#) is the fourth most populous region of Italy, with a population of around 4.8 million living in 563 municipalities.

The region's policy work on GPP is rooted in the [National Action Plan \(NAP\) for Green Public Procurement \(GPP\)](#) (currently in action since 2013 and undergoing revision) in Italy, which served to invite all Italian public authorities to implement certain actions and comply with its objectives and principles. In order to do this, local and regional authorities can set up local policies/plans, which include specific objectives and approaches to monitoring. The Region of Veneto has been supporting GPP actions since 2015, when it approved its [first GPP Action Plan](#) (in Italian also referred to as 'PAR GPP') for 2016-2018. As well as promoting the inclusion of environmental and social criteria in the regional government's own public purchases, the action plan also included a strong focus on the wider dissemination of GPP policy and actions within the region. By developing a stronger common focus on sustainability within the region, Veneto aims to trigger the green transition, which is necessary in the face of current and future environmental challenges.



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In 2019, the regional government renewed and [updated its GPP Action Plan](#) (for the period 2019-2023), thereby strengthening the region's GPP policy. Veneto's current action plan also includes specific actions for promoting the use of renewable energy sources and reducing natural resource extraction, waste production, pollution and emissions. Its three main goals are:

1. Efficiency and savings in the use of resources, in particular energy and consequent reduction of CO2 emissions through actions aimed at spreading a 'culture' of green purchases;
2. Reducing the use of hazardous substances through actions aimed at supporting the systems certification;
3. Quantitative reduction of waste produced through actions linked to the objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

### Development of Approach

Since a long time, an approach oriented to sustainable development has been considered as the basis of regional policies. In particular, the topic of green procurement was supported by the Director of the Purchasing Department, even implementation of the (national) Minimum Environmental Criteria (MECs) were not yet mandatory in Italy. The main aim was to rationalise public spending and improve the image of the regional authority using the purchasing power of the public administration as a tool to achieve specific sustainability goals by acquiring goods, services and works with a reduced environmental impact for their entire life cycle.

In 2019, a Green Procurement Office was set up with a full-time person (environmental technician). This person is not only involved the department offices responsible for tenders, but also liaises with other regional departments and territorial stakeholders such as companies, trade associations, etc., providing the necessary support to facilitate

and spread the inclusion of MECs into purchasing procedures. In order to act more effectively, identify solutions with a higher degree of innovation, and have access to expert advice and consultation, in 2019, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) described in the next paragraph was signed.

Finally, suppliers are engaged in this whole process when a market analysis and an in-depth analysis are undertaken of the criteria to be included in tenders are required.

## Implementation of approach

As a first step to promote GPP in Veneto, a dedicated [website](#), [helpdesk service](#) and monthly [newsletter service](#) were established. The website, in particular, offers information on GPP, possibilities for ad-hoc training, collects information on relevant events and conferences, and includes a [page dedicated to advertising tender opportunities](#) on GPP.

In order to create a common focus on sustainability and innovation in procurement across the region, the regional government worked to secure a commitment to GPP from other public buyers in the region. In 2019, it signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) on GPP with local universities, the [Regional Agency for Environmental Prevention and Protection](#) and the Venetian Chamber of Commerce ([Unioncamere Veneto](#)). The MoU (still in force) aimed to set up a common platform of action for such regional institutions where good practice can be disseminated and innovative solutions can be identified and incorporated into the purchasing guidelines of each institution (as such, dissemination of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) and Life Cycle Costing (LCC) approaches are of particular interest). The goal is to encourage collaboration between public entities to identify innovative solutions for a sustainable circular economy, and promote results of research in the field of GPP. The signatories of the MoU are committed to:

- Sharing guidelines, standard clauses for notices, specifications and similar acts, necessary for the optimal implementation of the rules on the environmental sustainability of the public procurement, in order to provide assistance to contracting authorities, also ensuring addresses uniformity;
- Sharing training, awareness and information activities for the implementation of joint training initiatives for public sector employees, businesses and students;
- Collaborating in the planning, organisation and execution of events on GPP and sustainability;
- Collaborate and support the Veneto Region in the definition and/or revision of the national MECs by the Ministry of the Environment.
- Collaborating in the implementation of Veneto's Regional Action Plan and in particular in the monitoring of the objectives and progress in the implementation of GPP in the region.

A regional annual event on GPP ([Forum Compraverde – Buygreen Veneto](#)) was also started in 2017, providing an important space for procurement practitioners and other relevant stakeholders to update their skills, collaborate, and exchange with other professionals in the field. The fifth edition of the event took place in 2021.

In order to test innovative approaches and assess the best initiatives for a sustainable and circular economy, Veneto Region together with the territorial trade associations publishes two calls for proposals a year for sustainable procurement tenders, and awards prizes to the best performing contracting authorities and companies (suppliers).

Veneto's current action plan also includes links to tools, such as working groups set up on the basis of the GPP MoU. Several specific objectives and actions have been outlined in the current action plan:

*"..for the widespread implementation of GPP, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with decision makers and to invest in training, especially for avoiding greenwashing, and in consolidating the capacity building of the contract awarding commissions through increased awareness and continuous exchange of good practices."*

- Training on GPP for public officers
- Building knowledge on certification systems and ecolabels
- Sharing knowledge of implemented good practices
- Creating a database of good GPP practices implemented by the Region
- Reduction of urban waste
- Implementing GPP strategies to reduce waste, to increase waste sorting and to reduce hazardous waste
- Identifying trend of organisations that are EMAS certified
- Identifying trend of public institutions that implement environmental and/or social audits
- Identifying how many public administrations implement the MECs in their tenders, which are policy tools introduced (since 2012) through Ministerial Decrees and provide a yardstick to achieve the objectives set out in Italy's NAP for GPP, and to promote sustainable production and consumption, and circular economy models.

### Approach results/outcomes

Veneto's approach ensures that the region is contributing towards the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), in particular SDG 12: ensure sustainable patterns of production and consumption. It also contributes to a range of other policy goals, including reducing the environmental impacts of climate change by promoting the use of renewable energy sources; ensuring the proper management of waste produced via works, services and goods through the use of contract clauses; and, increasing the use of recycled materials over raw materials through procurement criteria.

As a result of the knowledge exchange enabled by the MoU, a range of guidance documents have been developed, including one for public catering services (based on the corresponding MEC), sustainable management of waste, maintenance of green areas (based on the corresponding MEC), and publication of the '[GPP and Plastic: a guide to responsible consumption and production](#)' (Agenda 2030 - Goal 12).

The actions included in Veneto's GPP action plan were included among the actions set by the regional administration in [Veneto's Sustainable Regional Strategy](#) and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Veneto Region was awarded the "[Sustainable and Resilient Public Administration Award 2021](#)" in the context of the [Forum PA](#) (a national event on the modernisation of the Italian public administration) and was also awarded for its GPP policy by the [Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development](#) (ASVIS). Veneto has also been recognised twice by the [Forum Compraverde-BuyGreen](#), which takes place annually in Rome, winning the 'Best Green Notice' award (2015) for research conducted on stationary products, and the 'Best GPP Policy' award (2017) for the region's work to promote a culture of green purchasing, both within the regional authority and the wider territory.

In terms of monitoring actions, Veneto's GPP action plan requires that monitoring be done to assess the progress in implementing objectives through the development of tools and indicators for the following:

- Measurement of the quantitative levels of GPP (number and value of "green" public contracts compared to the number and total value of public contracts)
- Number and type of green practices implemented by the Veneto Region and, possibly, by other public bodies in the area
- Amount of expenditure on goods and services with low environmental impact by product category and overall (in order to monitor the rate of green purchases out of total purchases)
- Participation of the various stakeholders in GPP training to also help identify new training needs
- Participation of the various local public bodies in GPP initiatives, in order to monitor the development of an interregional network on GPP

In practice, monitoring is not always carried out in the same way in all administrative departments. The Purchasing Regional Department (GPP Office) is able to annually monitor its green purchases in terms of numbers of green tenders and value of each contract. The monitoring is carried out by the Ministry of Ecological Transition's project "[CREIAMO PA](#)" (monitoring results from 2019 are available [here](#)). In other departments, a lack of capacity and expertise in monitoring their respective purchases has sometimes emerged.

The most relevant tenders already implemented by the Purchasing Regional Department as a result of the current Regional Action Plan include:

1. Contracting of design services and works for the new construction, renovation and maintenance of public buildings
2. Procurement of energy services for buildings, lighting and motive power, heating/cooling services
3. Acquisition of road transport vehicles: Passenger cars and light commercial vehicles.

All tenders are compliant with the national MECs in terms of technical specifications and contract management clauses. The subject matters of the contracts include references to the green nature of the tenders and award criteria includes also environmental considerations.

### Lessons learned

It is crucial that such policy approaches think about the economy, environment and society as a whole in order to overcome barriers and define new goals that continuously meet needs while ensuring responsible consumption behaviour. This requires a collaborative approach, which brings many stakeholders on board, and provides them with the information, training, and technical support they might need.

Therefore, for the widespread implementation of GPP, it is necessary to establish a dialogue with decision makers and to invest in training, especially for avoiding greenwashing, and in consolidating the capacity building of the contract awarding commissions through increased awareness and continuous exchange of good practices. This needs to be done at local, regional and international levels - showcasing the results achieved in this area by public authorities.

The direct involvement of all those responsible for the purchasing process is also crucial for the effective implementation of GPP measures. Direct involvement starts from the GPP Action Plan, which allows to make operative, through specific actions, the green procurement objectives identified to raise awareness on the topic. Subsequently, it is essential to set up working groups involving those who deal with the tenders, technical environmental contacts, and external experts for in-depth technical studies on specific themes. At the same time, in order to achieve successful results, it is essential to guarantee a constant flow of information on the current issues of GPP among all those involved.

Experience shows that it is often difficult to implement an effective approach to monitoring across all administrative departments; this is due to a lack of technical knowledge. To bridge this gap, it is essential to offer training opportunities to build the capacity of public procurers.

Although there is still a long way to go to consider GPP as a structural approach, the regional government continues to support its strategy particularly by spreading the principles of GPP through its communication tools and channels:

- Website, newsletters, helpdesk service, online courses, etc.
- Publishing annually two guidance documents on topics of interest for GPP
- Participating and/or organising events of dissemination and in-depth analysis
- Supporting local contracting authorities in drafting their green calls for tenders
- Provision of ad-hoc training courses.

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