

CONSULTATION ON THE REVISION OF THE EU PUBLIC PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK

CEI-Bois contribution

Brussels, 27 January 2026

1. Introduction

The European Confederation of the Woodworking Industries (CEI-Bois) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the revision of the EU public procurement framework launched by the European Commission. This submission reflects the views of CEI-Bois' Social Affairs Working Group and therefore focuses deliberately on issues that are directly linked to social affairs, labour-related considerations and the functioning of procurement rules from an employment and social partner perspective.

The absence or limited treatment of some topics addressed in the consultation, such as broader sustainability policies, environmental requirements, industrial or trade-related considerations, should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or relevance, but rather as a deliberate choice to frame the discussion in a focused way, in line with the specific social affairs perspective of this consultation.

2. A sound framework requiring targeted improvements

The EU public procurement directives adopted in 2014 are considered a generally well-functioning framework. A radical overhaul of the existing directives is neither necessary nor desirable. Instead, the revision should focus on simplifying the rules, improving their implementation and strengthening enforcement at national and local level. Many of the challenges observed in practice stem from inconsistent or ineffective application of the existing rules rather than from shortcomings in the directives themselves.

The revision should align with the Commission's commitment to regulatory simplification, avoiding unnecessary new layers of regulation, while ensuring that existing provisions are applied consistently and credibly. Streamlined procedures, clearer guidance and better monitoring would significantly improve outcomes for contracting authorities, workers and economic operators alike.

3. Competition, market functioning and evidence-based reform

The Commission's own evaluation in 2025 noted that average bids per tender have decreased and direct cross-border procurement remains limited. This persistent lack of robust competition in many public tenders undermines value for money and can negatively affect innovation and employment conditions.



Before introducing far-reaching regulatory changes, the Commission should strengthen data collection and analysis on procurement outcomes, including the number of bids per tender, SME participation and cross-border awards, in order to better understand market dynamics and inform targeted solutions.

Any revision of the framework should be firmly grounded in evidence and clearly demonstrate how proposed changes will address identified problems, in particular weak competition. Reforming the system “at all costs” without a clear objective or solid empirical basis risks creating additional complexity without solving real market failures.

4. A procedural framework on how to buy

The EU public procurement framework must remain primarily procedural, defining fair, transparent and non-discriminatory rules on how public authorities purchase goods, services and works. Public procurement should not become a tool to impose one-size-fits-all outcomes across diverse sectors and labour systems. Procurement needs vary significantly depending on sector and context.

Any strategic or policy-related requirements introduced into procurement procedures must maintain a clear and demonstrable link to the subject matter of the contract, in line with the principles of equal treatment, transparency and proportionality. They should be proportionate and objectively verifiable, so that they can be enforced without creating legal uncertainty for authorities or companies.

Experience shows that the requirements included in procurement procedures are not always sufficiently checked in practice. A purely compliance-based approach, founded on declarations without effective verification, is insufficient. Greater attention should be paid to verification, follow-up and contract management during contract execution to ensure that commitments made by bidders are effectively respected in practice. At the same time, contracting authorities need clear and practical guidance to apply such requirements in a legally secure way.

5. Simplification and market dialogue

Simplifying procurement procedures is strongly supported, in particular where simplification can reduce administrative burdens for companies. Greater use of tools such as joint procurement, aggregation of demand and central purchasing bodies can, where appropriate, contribute to simpler and more predictable procedures, provided that competition and access for SMEs are preserved.

The revision should also place greater emphasis on structured market dialogue prior to launching tenders. Preliminary market consultations help contracting authorities define realistic, objective and verifiable requirements. Early engagement with the market helps contracting authorities better understand available solutions, supports innovation and reduces the risk of poorly designed tenders.

6. Flexibility for SMEs

Regarding SMEs, the design and implementation of public procurement should include tailored flexibilities, reflecting their more limited administrative and financial resources and enabling them to effectively participate in markets and scale up. Public procurement should avoid creating additional administrative burdens that could have counterproductive effects. Such instruments should ensure stable and reliable demand for companies of all sizes.



7. Social considerations and collective agreements

The existing public procurement framework already allows for the inclusion of social considerations and the enforcement of applicable labour law obligations. The priority should be to ensure that these existing provisions are applied effectively and consistently in practice.

Public procurement should respect the diversity of national industrial relations systems and the autonomy of social partners. While compliance with applicable labour law and working conditions must be ensured, public procurement should not be used to impose or privilege the existence of collective bargaining agreements as a condition for participation or award. Mandatory requirements related to collective agreements would interfere with national social partner autonomy and risk undermining well-functioning but diverse collective bargaining models across Member States.

8. Subcontracting

Subcontracting plays an important role in many sectors and contributes to competition, innovation and SME participation. Rigid EU-level limits on the number of subcontracting tiers are therefore not supported. Such limits could unintentionally exclude specialised companies and reduce flexibility in project organisation.

Rather than imposing blunt restrictions, the framework should focus on transparency, oversight and enforcement to ensure compliance with labour and safety standards throughout the supply chain.

9. Conclusion

The European woodworking employers support a targeted and evidence-based revision of the EU public procurement framework. The priority should be simplification, improved implementation and enforcement of existing rules, effective competition and greater legal certainty for contracting authorities and economic operators.

Public procurement should remain a fair and transparent procedural framework, focused on how public authorities buy goods, services and works, rather than on imposing one-size-fits-all outcomes. A credible shift towards quality-based evaluation requires clear, proportionate and verifiable requirements, supported by effective contract management and guidance. Any revision should build on these principles while preserving the integrity of the Single Market.