

Joint Procurement among Municipalities

A Practical Step-by-Step Guide for Sustainable
and Efficient Purchasing



Imprint

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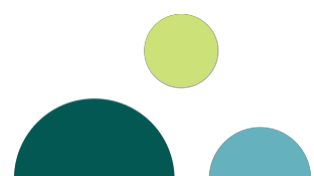
The content of this guide is based on the authors' knowledge and experience, as well as on the links provided for further information.

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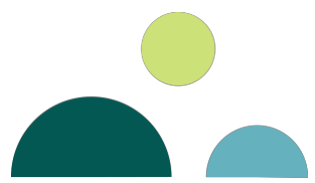


Table of content

How to Use This Guide	4
Introduction	5
What is Joint Procurement?	5
Why Joint Procurement Matters for Small Municipalities	5
When Does Joint Procurement Pay Off?	6
Deciding Whether to Use Joint Procurement: A Practical Checklist	8
Different models of joint procurement	10
Lead Municipality Model (Occasional Joint Procurement)	10
Joint Framework Agreement	11
Central Purchasing Body	12
Joint procurement in different countries	13
Austria	13
Germany	19
Italy	19
Slovenia	31
France	16
Liechtenstein	19
Switzerland	31
Step-by-Step Procedure for Joint Procurement	38
Step 1: Setting Joint Procurement on the Agenda and Identifying Funding Sources	38
Step 2 – Establishing Governance and Roles	40
Step 3 – Aligning Needs, Expectations and Specifications	41
Step 4: Exchange with Potential Suppliers	42
Step 5: System Testing in the Pre-Procurement Phase	43
Step 6: Preparing the Tender	44
Step 7: Tendering, Evaluation and Award Decision	45
Step 8: Signing the (Framework) Contract	46
Step 9: Direct Orders from Each Municipality	47
Step 10: Contract Management and Monitoring	48
Key Success Factors for Joint Procurement	49

How to Use This Guide

This document is designed as a hands-on, step-by-step guide to support municipalities that are considering or implementing joint procurement. It provides practical orientation, examples, and checklists that municipalities can adapt to their own legal, administrative, and political context.

Who Is This Guide For?

This guide is primarily intended for:

- Small and medium-sized municipalities
- Municipal staff involved in procurement, finance, or technical services
- Elected officials responsible for procurement decisions
- Municipal associations supporting inter-municipal cooperation

How to Use the Guide in Practice

Municipalities can use this document in different ways, depending on their needs:

- **As a decision support tool:** Use the checklist in Chapter 3 to assess whether joint procurement makes sense for a specific purchase.
- **As a planning roadmap:** Follow the step-by-step procedure in Chapter 6 when preparing and implementing a joint procurement.
- **As a discussion basis:** Use selected sections to structure discussions between partner municipalities, or between staff and elected officials.
- **As a reference document:** Consult individual sections when questions arise during the procurement process.

Adapting the Guide to Your Context

Legal frameworks, procurement thresholds, and administrative practices differ across countries and regions. Municipalities should:

- Verify applicable national or regional procurement rules;
- Adapt templates and procedures accordingly;
- Seek legal or procurement advice when required.

The examples and approaches presented in this guide are intended to be illustrative, not prescriptive.

Starting Small

For municipalities new to joint procurement it is strongly recommended to:

- Start with a simple, low-risk procurement;
- Limit the number of participating municipalities;
- Focus on clearly standardised goods or services.

Experience gained through small-scale cooperation can be used to gradually expand joint procurement to more complex or strategic areas.

Introduction

What is Joint Procurement?

Joint procurement refers to any arrangement in which two or more public entities cooperate to plan, launch, and manage a procurement process together, instead of purchasing goods, services, or works individually. The cooperation can take different legal and organisational forms, ranging from a simple shared tender led by one municipality on behalf of others, to a formally established joint purchasing body.

In a joint procurement, participating municipalities:

- Identify common needs.
- Agree on shared technical specifications and procurement conditions.
- Conduct a single procurement procedure (or coordinated procedures).
- Award contracts that benefit all participating entities.

Why Joint Procurement Matters for Small Municipalities

Small municipalities often face similar challenges in procurement:

- Limited staff and technical expertise.
- Limited knowledge concerning sustainability aspects of goods and services and how to integrate these into tendering processes.
- Limited availability of sustainable products and services.
- Small purchasing volumes, leading to higher unit prices.
- Repetition of similar procurement processes year after year.
- Reduced attractiveness for suppliers, especially in competitive markets.

Joint procurement can be a strategic value and a powerful catalyst for the ecological transition by transforming individual municipal needs into a significant collective market force.

Joint procurement model can help address small municipalities' challenges by:

- **Achieving economies of scale:** Larger aggregated volumes often lead to better prices and contract conditions, making a "green choice" more economically viable for all participants.
- **Reducing administrative burden:** One shared procedure replaces multiple individual ones.
- **Improving quality:** Combining technical knowledge of multiple authorities leads to better specifications and contract management, ensuring that social and environmental clauses are effectively enforced.
- **Increasing market interest:** Larger contracts are more attractive to a wider range of suppliers.
- **Increasing availability of sustainable options:** By aggregating demand, municipalities send a clear signal to the market, making it more attractive for suppliers to offer sustainable products and services.
- **Strengthening sustainability compliance:** Shared knowledge and expertise allows the development of more sophisticated technical specifications and awarding criteria, thereby reducing the risk of procedural errors or "greenwashing".

For small municipalities with limited procurement capacity, joint procurement can be a practical way to access professionalised purchasing without creating new permanent structures.

When Does Joint Procurement Pay Off?

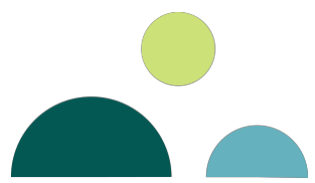
Joint procurement is a strategic tool but is not suitable for every purchase. It is most effective when certain market conditions and organisational alignment are met. Joint procurement is especially beneficial when:

- **Needs are similar or identical** across municipalities (e.g. office supplies, fuel, waste collection services);
- **Procurement is recurring** (annual or multi-annual purchases), allowing benefits to accumulate over time;
- **Goods or services are standardised**, with limited need for local customisation;
- **The market is competitive** and suppliers can realistically serve multiple municipalities;
- **Individual contract values are low** but become significant when aggregated;
- **Municipalities have limited internal capacity**, making shared processes more efficient.

Joint procurement is generally less suitable when needs are highly specific, politically sensitive, or require frequent ad-hoc adjustments at local level.

To help you navigate these factors, the following chapter provides a detailed practical checklist to determine the viability of your specific project.

As mentioned above, in the chapter “Step-by-Step Procedure for Joint Procurement” this document also provides a practical, step-by-step guide designed to lead municipalities through the practical execution of a joint procurement procedure, from the initial political decision to the final evaluation of results.



Deciding Whether to Use Joint Procurement: A Practical Checklist

Before starting a joint procurement, municipalities should jointly assess whether cooperation is appropriate. The checklist below serves as a simple practical decision tool to align expectations and ensure the effectiveness of a joint procurement process.

Joint procurement is likely to be **appropriate** if most answers are “yes”:

CRITERIA	YES	NO
Do participating municipalities have similar needs in terms of type, quality, and timing?		
Is the purchase recurring or foreseeable (e.g. annual or multi-year)?		
Are the goods or services largely standardised ?		
Would combining volumes result in a significantly higher contract value ?		
Do municipalities face capacity constraints (staff, expertise, time)?		
Can suppliers realistically serve multiple municipalities under one contract?		
Is there a shared political will to delegate part of the decision-making power to a lead authority or a joint committee?		
Will budget constraints hinder municipalities from achieving shared sustainability requirements?		



Red Flag Boxes - Joint procurement may be **less suitable** if:

Needs are highly specific or customised for each municipality

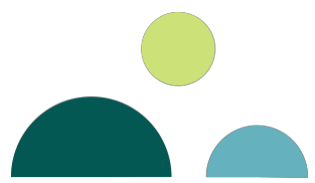
Political priorities or service models differ substantially

Timing requirements are incompatible

Only very local suppliers can deliver, limiting competition

Rapid, ad-hoc purchasing decisions are required

If uncertainty remains, municipalities may consider piloting joint procurement with a **low-risk, simple purchase** before moving to more complex areas.



Different models of joint procurement

There is no single model for joint procurement. In the context of the EU Public Procurement legislation, a technical distinction exists between decentralized joint procurement and centralized purchasing activities. Under **Directive 2014/24/EU**, these are regulated across three specific pillars: **Article 38** governs "occasional joint procurement", while **Article 37** specifically regulates "centralised purchasing activities" conducted by a permanent Central Purchasing Body. Furthermore, **Article 39** enables "cross-border joint procurement," allowing authorities from different Member States to conduct joint procedures. Despite these legal distinctions, this guide is designed to provide operational support for all forms of demand aggregation aimed at integrating social and environmental criteria.

Below are the most common forms, presented from the simplest to the most structured.

Lead Municipality Model (Occasional Joint Procurement)

Description

One municipality acts as the lead buyer and conducts the procurement procedure on behalf of others, based on a written agreement.

When to use

- Small number of municipalities.
- One-off or occasional joint purchases.
- Limited administrative capacity.
- Trust already exists between partners.

Key features

- Simple cooperation agreement.
- The lead municipality manages the procedure.
- Each municipality signs its own contract or uses a common contract.

Allocation of responsibilities

- Responsibilities are split between the lead municipality, which manages the legal procedure, and the participating municipalities, which execute their individual portions of the contract.
- Lead municipality: acts as the procedural manager and sole point of contact, drafts the tender notice and oversees the award of the contract.
- Participating municipalities: define requirements, draw up individual contracts or purchase orders with the successful tenderer, and are responsible for the direct monitoring and management of payments for their specific share of goods or services.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Easy to set up	Heavy reliance on the lead municipality
Low administrative burden	Risk of imbalance in workload
Quick implementation	Less suitable for long-term cooperation

Joint Framework Agreement

Description

Municipalities jointly award a framework agreement to one or more suppliers. Each municipality places orders (call-offs) as needed.

When to use

- Recurring needs.
- Standardised goods or services.
- Municipalities want flexibility in ordering.

Key features

- One joint procurement procedure.
- Clear rules for call-offs.
- Volumes may be estimated rather than fixed.

Allocation of responsibilities

- Collective responsibilities.
- All local authorities collectively define the 'green' specifications and award criteria, select suppliers and agree on the same fixed prices and sustainability conditions. Monitoring is also carried out jointly.
- Individual local authorities place orders independently, deciding for themselves how much and when to order, and sign their own specific purchase orders. Individual local authorities manage their own funds independently and pay the supplier directly.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexibility for individual municipalities	Requires good planning of specifications
Reduced need for repeated tenders	Call-off management still needed at local level
Predictability for suppliers	

Central Purchasing Body

Description

Municipalities create or designate a permanent entity responsible for procurement on their behalf. The Central Purchasing Body (CPB) acts as a permanent service provider, while the municipalities act as its clients or members.

When to use

- Long-term cooperation.
- High procurement volumes.
- Sufficient political commitment and capacity.

Key features

- Formal governance structure.
- Dedicated procurement staff.
- Continuous operation.

Allocation of responsibilities

- CPB manages the entire process, from market analysis to the final award and signing of the contract, and assumes primary legal responsibility for the tender procedure and compliance with EU and national regulations. CPB aggregates data from all members to monitor the overall environmental impact and cost savings.
- Participating local authorities undertake to comply with the CPB's regulations and to provide the CPB promptly with data relating to their specific requirements and volumes. Local authorities manage the on-site delivery of goods or services and remain responsible for paying the supplier for the specific quantities delivered within their territory.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Professionalised procurement	Higher setup costs
Strong economies of scale	More complex governance
Reduced risk of non-compliance	Less flexibility for individual municipalities

Joint procurement in different countries

This section provides an overview of the legal and organisational framework for joint procurement in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland. It provides background information, details of the national rules for joint procurement and descriptions of organisational solutions for purchasing cooperations, as well as examples of existing purchasing cooperations and how they function.

Austria

Legal and organisational framework conditions

Section 22 of the Austrian Federal Procurement Act 2018 (BVerG 2018), as amended by the Vergaberechtsgesetz 2026, regulates joint procurement by several public contracting authorities as follows:

- Public contracting authorities may conduct procurement procedures jointly.
- One contracting authority may carry out the procedure in its own name and on behalf of all other participating contracting authorities.

Section 11 BVerG allows public contracting authorities to enter into agreements with their counterparts in other EU or EEA Member States to conduct procurement procedures jointly.

The procurement documents for a joint procurement must specify:

- Whether the procurement is carried out jointly by several contracting authorities.
- Which contracting authorities participate in the joint procurement.
- Where applicable, which contracting authority conducts the procurement procedure alone, in its own name and on behalf of the other participating contracting authorities.

Under Section 22 BVerG 2018, contracting authorities may also conduct a joint procurement procedure for only part of a tender. In such cases, the procurement documents must clearly indicate which authority is responsible for each portion of the procedure.

Strictly speaking, central purchasing bodies do not fall under the concept of joint procurement according to the BVerG 2018, as they represent a distinct instrument. Nonetheless, from a practical, non-legal perspective, they can also be regarded as a form of aggregated or joint procurement.

Section 1, point 47 BVerG 2018 defines a central purchasing body (zentrale Beschaffungsstelle) as a contracting authority that carries out centralised procurement activities for other contracting authorities. Central purchasing bodies are legally empowered to procure goods and services (not works) and to organise procurement procedures, award contracts, and establish framework agreements or dynamic purchasing systems on behalf of multiple contracting authorities, thereby enabling aggregation of demand and administrative efficiency.

Models of joint procurement in use

In Austria, procurements are occasionally conducted by municipal associations on behalf of individual municipalities, and there are no well-documented instances of multiple municipalities carrying out joint procurements themselves. There have been isolated attempts in the past, but currently, such initiatives do not appear to exist.

What is well-established in Austria, however, are central procurement organisations, as defined in the BVerG 2018.

The **Bundesbeschaffung GmbH (BBG)** is the central procurement organisation of the Austrian federal government. Established in 2001, the company manages procurement procedures and framework agreements for a wide range of public authorities. BBG currently handles procurement volumes of several billion euros annually and provides access to hundreds of thousands of products and services through framework contracts and its e-procurement systems ([BBG, 2024](#)).

A key instrument used by BBG is the establishment of framework agreements that can be accessed by a wide range of public contracting authorities, including ministries, federal states, municipalities, and public institutions. Through these framework contracts, public authorities can procure goods and services without conducting their own tender procedures, provided they are entitled to use the agreements.

The **ÖkoBeschaffungService (ÖBS)** is a procurement service operated by the Vorarlberger Gemeindeverband. It was introduced in 2002, following earlier initiatives on ecological procurement guidelines developed in 1999 and 2000.

A key instrument of the ÖBS is the preparation of joint tender procedures and framework agreements for municipalities and other public institutions in Vorarlberg. The ÖBS conducts the tendering procedures and concludes contracts with suppliers and makes the goods and services available through the ÖBS online procurement shop. Municipalities can order directly from these framework agreements, benefiting from reduced administrative workload, standardized specifications and aggregated demand. The system currently covers more than 50 product groups, including office supplies, construction materials and cleaning products.

Leverage and Obstacles

Central procurement organisations are pivotal to the landscape of joint public procurement in Austria, primarily by offering legally compliant framework agreements. These pre-awarded contracts allow authorities to source goods and services without the burden of conducting their own independent tender procedures. By aggregating demand to ensure the best value for money, these organisations secure competitive price and quality conditions that would be difficult to achieve individually. Furthermore, they maintain extensive portfolios with multi-quality strategies, granting municipalities the flexibility to choose between sustainable options, cost-efficient solutions, or premium branded products across a wide range of categories.

However, the very convenience of these central bodies can sometimes diminish the incentive for municipalities to coordinate directly with one another. Local economic priorities often drive a preference for local sourcing to retain value within the community, which can clash with the broader scope of joint agreements. This is further influenced by recent legal shifts that have raised tendering thresholds, allowing many municipalities to

utilize simplified procedures and direct awards to local suppliers. Ultimately, the significant coordination and administrative effort required to align processes with other municipalities often creates an additional workload that makes direct inter-municipal cooperation less attractive than using established central frameworks.

Country resume and outlook

Even with these obstacles, there appears to be significant unused potential for joint procurement among municipalities and public authorities in Austria. A notable example is the [procurement of uniform service and clothing](#) for all professional fire brigades, which was coordinated jointly and tendered through the Bundesbeschaffung GmbH (BBG). Representatives from all professional fire brigades collaborated to develop common specifications, while BBG conducted the formal procurement process under the Federal Procurement Act. The resulting framework agreements consolidated dozens of items into multiple lots, enabling aggregated demand, attractive pricing, and uniform quality across all fire brigades. Beyond financial benefits, the project established a unified corporate appearance and promoted sustainability, with all textiles procured in compliance with the Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement.

France

Legal and organisational framework conditions for joint procurement

Public procurement in France is governed by the Code de la commande publique, which entered into force in 2019. This code consolidates the main legislative and regulatory provisions governing public procurement and implements the EU procurement directives of 2014. It applies to all contracting authorities, including the State, regions, departments, municipalities, and public institutions.

The French legal framework explicitly allows and encourages joint procurement between contracting authorities. The Code de la commande publique provides several mechanisms enabling public entities to cooperate in procurement procedures. These include:

- Central purchasing bodies (centrales d'achat)
- Joint procurement groups (groupements de commandes)
- Framework agreements accessible to multiple authorities

These mechanisms are designed to promote economies of scale, professionalisation of procurement practices, and improved efficiency in public spending.

Municipalities and other public entities can formalise cooperation through agreements defining the responsibilities of each participating authority, the lead contracting authority, and the governance of the procurement process. The legal framework therefore provides a well-established structure for collaborative procurement across different levels of government.

Models of joint procurement in use

Several models of joint procurement are widely used in France.

Central Purchasing Bodies (Centrales d'achat): Central purchasing bodies play an important role in the French procurement system. One of the most prominent examples is the Union des groupements d'achats publics (UGAP), the national public procurement agency. UGAP conducts procurement procedures and offers framework contracts that public entities can use directly without launching their own tender procedures.

This model allows municipalities and other public bodies to purchase goods and services quickly while benefiting from competitive conditions negotiated at national level.

Joint Procurement Groups (Groupements de commandes): A commonly used model is the groupement de commandes, where several contracting authorities join together to organise a joint procurement procedure.

In this model:

- one authority acts as the coordinator, managing the procurement process,
- all participating entities define their needs in advance,

- contracts or framework agreements are awarded on behalf of the participating authorities.

This mechanism is frequently used by municipalities, inter-municipal bodies, hospitals, and regional authorities.

Inter-Municipal Structures: France has a well-developed system of inter-municipal cooperation structures, known as *Établissements publics de coopération intercommunale (EPCI)*. These organisations frequently organise procurement procedures for their member municipalities, particularly for infrastructure, waste management, transport, or digital services.

Regional and Sectoral Procurement Platforms: Certain sectors—such as healthcare, education, or digital infrastructure—operate specialised purchasing groups or regional procurement organisations that coordinate tenders across multiple public institutions.

Leverage and Obstacles

France’s procurement landscape is defined by a robust structural framework that actively facilitates collaborative purchasing through several key pillars. The nation benefits from a strong legal foundation and established central purchasing bodies like UGAP, which are complemented by extensive inter-municipal cooperation structures known as EPCIs. These elements, paired with highly professionalized procurement services across public administrations, allow for massive purchasing volumes that generate significant economies of scale. Ultimately, this joint approach enables contracting authorities to drastically reduce costs, enhance contract management, and pool specialized expertise when navigating complex procedural requirements.

Nevertheless, even within such a well-developed system, certain operational challenges persist. The inherent administrative complexity of procurement law can be daunting, and aligning the specific needs and diverse local priorities of various authorities—particularly between municipalities of differing sizes—often leads to coordination difficulties. Furthermore, a heavy focus on legal risk management can sometimes make authorities hesitant to engage in collaborative efforts. For smaller municipalities in particular, a lack of specialized procurement expertise remains a significant barrier, occasionally hindering their ability to participate effectively in these large-scale joint initiatives.

Examples of existing purchasing cooperations

National Central Purchasing Body

The Union des groupements d’achats publics (UGAP) is the main central purchasing body in France. It provides framework contracts covering a wide range of goods and services, including vehicles, IT equipment, energy, office supplies, and facility services.

Regional Purchasing Groups

Many regions and departments have established purchasing groups that coordinate procurement for local authorities and public institutions.

Inter-Municipal Procurement

Inter-municipal organisations (EPCI) frequently organise joint procurement procedures for services such as waste management, public transport, digital infrastructure and public works and maintenance services.

Healthcare Procurement Networks

The hospital sector operates specialised procurement groups that allow hospitals to jointly purchase medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and services.

Country Resume & Outlook

France can be considered one of the more advanced European countries in terms of joint procurement. The legal framework established by the Code de la commande publique provides clear mechanisms for cooperation between contracting authorities. In addition, strong institutional structures—such as the national central purchasing body UGAP and the extensive system of inter-municipal cooperation—facilitate collaborative procurement practices.

Joint procurement is already widely used in several sectors, particularly in IT, energy, healthcare, and public infrastructure. Large procurement volumes and professionalised procurement services contribute to effective implementation.

However, further improvements are still possible. In particular, smaller municipalities sometimes face challenges in navigating the administrative complexity of procurement procedures or coordinating with other authorities.

To further strengthen joint procurement in France, policy efforts could focus on:

- simplifying procurement procedures where possible
- expanding shared procurement services for small municipalities
- increasing digital procurement platforms and tools
- promoting training and capacity building for municipal procurement staff

Overall, France has a mature system of joint procurement supported by both legal and institutional frameworks. Future progress will likely focus on improving accessibility and efficiency, particularly for smaller local authorities, while continuing to expand collaborative purchasing models across sectors.

Germany

Legal and Organisational Framework Conditions

Public procurement in Germany is governed by a multi-layered legal framework. The European public procurement directives (e.g., Directive 2014/24/EU) have been transposed into German law through the Act against Restraints of Competition (Gesetz gegen Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen, GWB) and associated ordinances, primarily the Public Procurement Ordinance (Vergabeverordnung, VgV). These ordinances establish the rules for procurement above the EU threshold.

According to Article 120(4) of the GWB, contracting authorities can purchase supplies and services from central purchasing bodies, or award supply, works and service contracts through them.

Article 4 of the Public Procurement Ordinance (VgV) explicitly permits multiple public authorities to jointly award specific public contracts — including cross-border awards within the EU — with shared responsibility for compliance.

Below the EU threshold, procurement rules fall under the responsibility of the States (Länder). Many of them have adopted the sub-threshold procurement regulation (Unterschwelldvergabeordnung, UVgO). According to Article 16, which covers the occasional joint awarding of contracts and central procurement, Articles 120(4) GWB and 4 VgV apply mutatis mutandis to the use of central procurement agencies and the occasional joint awarding of contracts.

Central procurement offices exist at federal (e.g. Kaufhaus des Bundes) level to manage cross-departmental procurement and frameworks.

States (Länder) and municipalities operate their own procurement bodies and platforms, often cooperating regionally or at sector level.

Models of Joint Procurement in Use

Non-institutional cooperation: In non-institutionalised cooperation, several public contracting authorities collaborate without establishing a separate legal entity (such as a joint body or central purchasing organisation). Instead, one contracting authority carries out the procurement procedure on behalf of one or more other authorities with similar requirements.

This form of cooperation can take different practical forms:

- **Rotational model:** Participating authorities take turns conducting procurement procedures, particularly where they have comparable levels of expertise and capacity.
- **Lead authority model:** One authority assumes responsibility for conducting the procedure on behalf of others, either on a one-off basis or repeatedly. This model is common where one authority has greater procurement expertise or administrative capacity.

Beside having one municipality carrying out procurement for other municipalities, it can also be a district (Landkreis) carrying out procurement for its member municipalities.

Intermunicipal Cooperations: For municipalities that wish to organise joint procurement on a regular and long-term basis, a common approach is to establish a separate legal entity responsible for carrying out procurement on behalf of its members. This approach allows neighbouring municipalities to bundle their demand on a continuous basis, share administrative responsibilities, and professionalise procurement without each authority acting independently.

In this model, two or more municipalities formally create a joint body with its own legal personality. This entity assumes responsibility for conducting procurement procedures, concluding framework agreements, and, where applicable, managing contracts for the participating municipalities. The tasks, financing arrangements, decision-making structures, and scope of activities are defined in statutes or a formal cooperation agreement.

By setting up a dedicated legal entity, municipalities create a stable and continuous structure for procurement cooperation. This allows:

- Professionalisation of procurement through specialised staff;
- Clear allocation of roles and responsibilities;
- Reduced duplication of administrative work;
- Consistent implementation of strategic objectives, including sustainability goals;
- Legal certainty in long-term cooperation.

Such entities are commonly established in the form of a Zweckverband (special-purpose association) or within broader intermunicipal frameworks, such as an ILE (Integrierte Ländliche Entwicklung - integrated rural development).

This model is particularly suitable when procurement cooperation is intended to be permanent, covers multiple product or service categories, or involves significant procurement volumes. While the establishment of a separate legal entity requires political commitment and formal procedures, it provides municipalities with a durable structure for strategic and efficient joint procurement.

Examples of intermunicipal cooperations are the ILE Zukunftsregion Rupertiwinkel e.V. (<https://www.zukunftsregion-rupertiwinkel.bayern>) and the Zweckverband Kommunale Dienste Oberland (Municipal Services Association Oberland <https://www.zv-oberland.de>), see also “Examples of Existing Purchasing Cooperations” further down.

Municipal purchasing groups: Municipal purchasing groups (*kommunale Einkaufsgemeinschaften*) are cooperative structures in which several municipalities work together to organise procurement more efficiently by pooling demand and resources. These groups are typically established under the umbrella of municipal associations (associations of towns and municipalities) and are designed to help members achieve better prices, reduced administrative effort, and improved market leverage through volume bundling.

In practice, these purchasing groups often operate as independent legal entities such as cooperatives (eG) or limited liability companies (GmbH), set up by regional municipal associations to serve the needs of their members. Examples include KoPart (www.kopart.de) in North Rhine-Westphalia and Kommunalberatung (www.kb-rlp.de/oKa) in Rhineland-Palatinate, which provide centralised procurement services

and framework contracts for frequently used products and services. There are also numerous other players in the field of information technology, e.g. BayKIT eG (Bayerische Kommunale IT Einkaufsgenossenschaft www.baykit.de), a joint procurement initiative of Bavarian municipalities that bundles demand for IT products and services in order to conduct compliant tenders centrally and provide framework agreements for its members.

The services offered by these groups may include joint tendering of large or recurring purchases, creation and management of framework agreements, and sometimes digital procurement platforms that make ordering easier for individual municipalities. The same holds true for healthcare. Some of these regional purchasing groups are also open to municipalities of other regions if they do not have such a service.

While purchasing groups operate with member municipalities' interests in mind, they remain subject to the same public procurement rules as other contracting authorities when conducting tenders on behalf of their members.

Leverage and Obstacles

Joint procurement offers a powerful mechanism for enhancing public purchasing, primarily through the realization of cost savings and scale effects. By pooling requirements, public buyers significantly increase their purchasing volume and strengthen their bargaining position, which encourages suppliers to offer more favorable pricing, improved service conditions, and additional value-added services. Beyond financial gains, this model fosters efficiency and expertise sharing by allowing smaller authorities to bridge gaps in their in-house technical knowledge. Conducting a single coordinated procedure instead of multiple separate tenders minimizes the duplication of work and procedural costs, while the shared preparation of specifications elevates the overall professionalism and quality of the process. Furthermore, aggregated demand serves as a catalyst for strategic and sustainable procurement, providing the necessary market leverage to demand higher environmental and social standards. Through larger contracts, public authorities can incentivize suppliers to invest in innovation, transforming procurement into a strategic tool that shapes the market according to public policy goals.

Despite these advantages, the process is not without its hurdles, particularly regarding legal and administrative complexity. Coordinating across different systems and harmonizing needs can lead to longer timelines; however, the resulting financial savings generally far outweigh these procedural costs. A more subtle challenge is the potential loss of competence within local authorities. As key tasks like drafting specifications and managing evaluations are centralized within a lead body, staff in participating municipalities may find fewer opportunities to develop their own expertise. This can lead to a long-term dependency on external coordinators, making it difficult for individual municipalities to manage procurement independently if the cooperation ends.

Finally, successful joint procurement often requires a certain loss of flexibility, as participating entities must standardize their requirements and products to achieve common goals. While this limits individual choice and necessitates a "compulsion to reach an agreement," the use of "swarm intelligence" typically yields more economical results and helps avoid the high costs associated with bespoke, specialized requests.

Examples of Existing Purchasing Cooperations

Zweckverband Kommunale Dienste Oberland

The Zweckverband Kommunale Dienste Oberland (ZV KD Oberland) serves as a central procurement office for around 80 municipalities. Its goal is to pool municipal demand to achieve economic benefits through volume effects and process cost savings. The procurement model is based on an inter-municipal cooperation agreement, where the association collects requirements, conducts tenders, and establishes framework agreements that municipalities can use. The association takes responsibility for coordination, legal review, drafting technical specifications, and managing the procurement process. Commonly procured items include road salt, municipal vehicles, cold mix asphalt, fire extinguishers, emergency roofs, bollard systems, paper, and consumables. Sustainability criteria such as Blue Angel, ISO 14001/50001, FSC and PEFC certification, or EU Ecolabel compliance are predefined, allowing smooth implementation across municipalities. Key challenges include resistance to new processes and reluctance to switch suppliers. The introduction of a webshop aims to reduce process gaps, facilitate legally compliant procurement, and increase municipal engagement. The model succeeds due to the central expertise of the association, which relieves municipalities of complex procurement tasks and ensures structured collaboration. Joint working groups, centralised coordination, and clear sustainability guidelines significantly contribute to efficient, legally compliant, and economically advantageous joint procurement.

ILE Zukunftsregion Rupertiwinkel e.V.

The ILE Zukunftsregion Rupertiwinkel coordinates joint procurement for seven municipalities in the region, focusing on sustainable and fair products. Key items currently procured include copy paper and hygiene paper, with plans to expand into other office supplies and fair-trade textiles. The initiative is part of the KEpol project (Municipal Development Policy), which promotes eco-friendly and socially responsible procurement. The procurement model combines a centralised framework agreement with the flexibility of individual municipal autonomy. The ILE coordinator conducts demand surveys, prepares tenders with legal and sustainability experts, and manages contracts with suppliers. Municipalities order independently via the digital platform “Shop Rupertiwinkel”, retaining control over timing and order quantities while benefiting from aggregated purchasing power, simplified processes, and cost savings. Sustainability is a core focus: products meet environmental certifications such as Blue Angel, EU Ecolabel, and FSC, and social standards including Fairtrade criteria. Challenges have included technical development and maintenance of the platform, training municipal staff, limited availability of certified products, and overcoming initial scepticism about sustainable procurement. Success factors include central coordination by the ILE coordinator, involvement of external experts, a user-friendly digital ordering platform, and support from KEpol and the Digitales Alpendorf project. Positive impacts include administrative efficiency, financial savings through better contract terms, environmental improvements, promotion of fair trade, and strengthened regional collaboration.

Key recommendations for other municipalities pursuing similar initiatives: start with simple product groups, involve external expertise early, invest in an intuitive digital solution, leverage available funding programs, establish clear coordination structures, and foster regular exchanges among procurement officers. Patience and gradual implementation are crucial for long-term success.

Country Resume & Outlook

In Germany, interest in joint procurement among municipalities is high, especially among smaller local authorities seeking efficiency gains and professionalised purchasing. However, in practice there are relatively few examples of non-institutionalised joint procurement and limited numbers of intermunicipal procurement bodies with their own legal personality. This reflects a combination of factors, including administrative fragmentation, limited capacity at local level, and a tendency for municipalities to continue using traditional procurement arrangements despite recognised benefits of cooperation.

Where institutionalised cooperation exists, it often takes the form of legally established bodies — such as municipal associations or special-purpose associations (Zweckverbände) — which act as central procurement offices for groups of municipalities. These entities can carry out tender procedures centrally, conclude framework agreements, and help participating municipalities benefit from economies of scale, simplified processes, and greater procurement expertise. Such formalised cooperation is still comparatively rare but represents a more mature model of joint procurement that can deliver strategic value and continuity.

At the national level, the changing legal framework for public procurement is also influencing how joint procurement is viewed. Recent and ongoing reforms to German procurement law aim to make procedures more efficient, flexible and digital for all authorities, including municipalities, and to support strategic objectives such as sustainability or innovation. This includes broader flexibility for national-level procurement and simplified procedures below EU thresholds, which could indirectly support cooperative approaches among public buyers. It also includes opening up federal structures, such as the Kaufhaus des Bundes — an electronic procurement platform that currently serves federal authorities by offering framework agreements and easy access to sub-federal authorities including municipalities in the future.

Looking ahead, the expectation is that joint procurement will gain greater legal and practical support, both through legislative reforms and through increased networking among municipal associations, central purchasing bodies, and regional cooperation initiatives. Yet meaningful progress will depend on continued capacity building, clearer incentives for cooperation, and tools that make joint procurement both accessible and attractive for small municipalities.

Italy

Legal and organisational framework conditions for joint procurement

The Italian legal framework for public procurement has recently undergone a major reform with the entry into force of Legislative Decree No. 36 of 31 March 2023 (Procurement Code). This code transposes EU Directives and places a strong emphasis on sustainability, specifically through the "National Action Plan for Environmental Sustainability of Consumption in the Public Administration Sector" (2023 Edition). Under Article 57 of the Code, contracting authorities are legally required to integrate Minimum Environmental Criteria (Criteri Ambientali Minimi - CAM), defined by the Ministry of the Environment (MASE), into 100% of the tender value for relevant categories. Non-compliance is considered a "vizio insanabile" (incurable defect) that can lead to the annulment of the entire procedure.

Joint procurement is explicitly regulated under PART III, Title I, Art. 62, paragraph 14 of the Procurement Code, which refers to the administrative cooperation rules found in Art. 15 of Law n. 241 of August 7, 1990.

It is important to underline that Articles 62 and 63 of the Public Procurement Code set out the qualification system. Indeed, in order to manage tenders independently above certain thresholds (€140,000 for services and supplies; €500,000 for works), a local authority must be 'qualified' by ANAC (the National Anti-Corruption Authority). Small, unqualified municipalities are legally prohibited from conducting tenders independently and must therefore resort to joint procurement through a Central Purchasing Body (CPB) or a qualified lead authority.

Models of joint procurement in use

Joint procurement in Italy can take many different forms. The legal framework, supported by Art. 15 of Law 241/1990 (Administrative Cooperation), allows for several operational models:

Lead Municipality Model (Occasional Joint Procurement): One qualified municipality acts as the lead buyer and conducts the procurement procedure on behalf of others based on a written agreement. The lead municipality manages the procedure, but each participating municipality is typically responsible for its own contract award and execution.

Joint Tendering: This model is used when two or more contracting authorities jointly implement a single procurement procedure for a specific shared project. This is an "intermediate" model where no new legal entity is created, but the entities act as a single unit during the tender phase. In this case, authorities are collectively liable for the parts of the procedure implemented together (e.g., drafting common specifications and evaluating bids). At the same time, each authority is solely liable for the parts it implements on its own behalf, such as the final awarding of its specific contract or selection of an operator for a specific task.

Joint Framework Agreement: This model is based on an agreement between one or more contracting authorities and one or more economic operators to establish the terms governing contracts to be awarded during a given period (usually up to 4 years),

particularly regarding price and quantity. Usually municipalities use this model for recurring needs (e.g., office supplies, IT services). The joint part ends with the signing of the framework. Afterward, each municipality places independent "call-off" orders as their specific needs arise. In this case there is a joint responsibility for the "upstream" phase—setting up the framework, defining the maximum spend/volume, and selecting the operators. For the "downstream" phase, after the "call-off" orders, each municipality is solely liable for its own call-off orders and the reopening of competition if required.

Coordinated Procurement: This model can be defined as a "light" joint procurement model. Indeed, this is the case in which municipalities work together only at the beginning to define common technical specifications or shared sustainability criteria (CAM). There is no joint tender. After the specifications are agreed upon, each municipality launches its own completely independent procurement procedure.

Central Purchasing Bodies (Centrali di Committenza): These are permanent structures, such as Unioni di Comuni (Unions of Municipalities) or Regional Aggregators (e.g., ARIA, SCR). They provide the mandatory ANAC qualification for all member municipalities, pooling technical and legal expertise.

National Aggregation with Consip: Consip S.p.A. acts as the National Central Purchasing Body. It manages the "Rationalization Programme," offering Convenzioni (Master Contracts) and the MePA (Electronic Marketplace). For small municipalities, using Consip is often the most efficient way to fulfil green public procurement (GPP) obligations, as Consip pre-integrates all CAM requirements into its contracts.

Important note: Under the current "Qualification Regime" in Italy, small municipalities that lack ANAC qualification cannot use the coordinated or joint tendering models for high-value contracts; they must use the Consip or central purchasing body models.

Structure that supports Joint Procurement

Institutional support is provided through high-level cooperation protocols. For instance, the Bank of Italy, ANAC (National Anti-Corruption Authority), AGCM (Antitrust Authority), and the National Cybersecurity Agency (ACN) have a memorandum of understanding to manage joint procurement procedures for goods and services. This protocol, signed under Art. 15 of Law No. 241/1990, defines shared strategies for joint procurement in complex sectors, providing a template for inter-municipal cooperation. Regionally, "Networks of Aggregators" provide localized support to municipalities, bridging the gap between national strategy and local needs.

Leverage and Obstacles

Collaboration allows for the sharing of best practices, significant cost and time savings, and a general reduction of administrative resources. It also allows public administrations to conclude agreements for the collaborative performance of activities of common interest.

The primary advantage for Italian municipalities lies in the professionalization of sustainability. By shifting from individual, fragmented purchases to aggregated models—

such as joining a Centrale di Committenza or using Consip's pre-negotiated contracts—small entities can "outsource" the high technical complexity of the Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM). This ensures that even the smallest administration can comply with the 100% GPP mandate without needing in-house environmental experts. Furthermore, centralization acts as a shield against administrative risks: procedures managed by qualified central bodies are statistically less prone to legal appeals and procedural errors, fostering a "culture of result" over a "culture of suspicion" and inertia. Major barriers to procure jointly include the complexity of the legal requirements, difficulties in effective implementation due to lack of communication, and insufficient information sharing between different municipalities.

A significant training and knowledge gap persists, with research indicating that a lack of specialized training is the primary obstacle for the majority of Italian public officials. Many staff members still perceive GPP not as a strategic tool, but as an additional bureaucratic burden that slows down the awarding process. The rapid succession of legislative reforms, with three different procurement codes in just fifteen years, has created legal uncertainty and a tendency for officials to avoid innovative or discretionary procurement methods in favor of more traditional, "safe" approaches.

Finally, in some regions, the limited availability of certified sustainable suppliers remains a practical bottleneck, particularly for very small or highly specialized local contracts.

Examples of existing purchasing cooperations

Unione di Comuni [Alta Marmilla - Sardegna](#)

Unione di Comuni Alta Marmilla in Sardinia represents a mature and successful case study in joint procurement, having operated a shared administrative model since its inception in 2008. By transitioning from isolated municipal management to a joint contract model, the Union specifies collective needs and manages a single procedure to sign shared contracts with suppliers. This approach is specifically designed to overcome the organizational and dimensional limits of small municipalities, making management of complex procedures and delivery of essential services both economically and operatively sustainable.

The Union adopted this collaborative model primarily to achieve significant economies of scale and increased negotiating power, which led to more advantageous economic conditions. Furthermore, the centralization of competencies within their qualified Purchasing Body allows for development of specialist know-how and standardization of administrative tools, such as "template" technical specifications and common operational models.

This structural efficiency ensures a uniform and higher level of service quality across the entire territory, particularly for collective demand services like school canteens, transport, and waste collection.

Sustainability is deeply integrated into the Union's procurement through the adoption of national Minimum Environmental Criteria (CAM) and additional social and environmental clauses. A standout example of this commitment is their approach to school canteen services, where the Union conducted extensive consultations with local institutional stakeholders, such as the comprehensive school institute, to identify specific needs and address recurring criticalities. Through this collaborative process involving the Chief Project Manager (in Italian RUP), technical offices, and school representatives, the Union

implemented high-standard sustainability criteria for canteens. These standards require the use of sustainable food supplies and materials with reduced environmental impact, such as certified detergents and a strict reduction of single-use plastics. Furthermore, social sustainability is prioritized in these contracts through specific social clauses designed to ensure employment protection and personnel continuity for those working within the service. The criteria were supported by a shared territorial vision, ensuring that even the smallest municipalities can provide high-quality, uniform services that would be unsustainable if managed individually.

Despite these successes, the Union encountered challenges such as the difficulty of gathering data from individual municipalities in a timely manner and the struggle of the local market to adapt to more stringent environmental requirements. Another significant challenge involves managing a system of effective controls during the contract execution phase to guarantee that quality standards are met consistently across all participating municipalities.

The lessons learned by Alta Marmilla suggest that success in joint procurement for small municipalities depends on fostering a culture of organizational change and investing in shared skills. They recommend that other small entities engage in preliminary market consultations to encourage wider participation and focus on improving programming and control systems. By promoting a shared territorial vision and centralizing administrative capacity, the Union has successfully demonstrated how cooperation can lead to better expenditure control and administrative optimization.

Below are other examples of best practices of this cooperation, often recognized by the national [Premio Compraverde Buygreen](#).

Regional Aggregation and Digital Green Transition: [ARIA S.p.A. \(Lombardy\)](#)

ARIA S.p.A. (Azienda Regionale per l'Innovazione e gli Acquisti) serves as the central purchasing body for the Lombardy Region. It represents a premier example of how a large-scale hub can support small municipalities in meeting mandatory GPP goals. ARIA operates a centralized e-procurement platform (Sintel) and manages massive framework agreements (Convenzioni) for goods and services ranging from energy to healthcare.

It has been a pioneer in "transversal" green criteria, such as recycled packaging and low-emission logistics. By centralizing the technical analysis of CAM, ARIA allows hundreds of small Lombard municipalities to buy "green" without having to conduct their own complex market research. Notably, ARIA's role in promoting Renewable Energy Communities (CER) through joint tenders has enabled local territories to collaborate on sustainable energy self-consumption, a goal that would be administratively impossible for a single small town to manage alone.

Socially Responsible Joint Procurement: [ESTAR Toscana](#)

ESTAR (the Regional Healthcare Purchasing Body of Tuscany) demonstrates that joint procurement is an equally powerful tool for **Social Sustainability**.

ESTAR conducts joint tenders for all healthcare and administrative needs across the Tuscan territory, acting as a specialized Central Purchasing Body. ESTAR was awarded the 2024 Premio Compraverde in the "Social Procurement" section. The recognition was specifically for their ability to integrate strict social clauses that protect the dignity of labor and human rights throughout the supply chain.

In their tenders for services and medical supplies (such as medical gloves, where environmental standards are still evolving), ESTAR included execution requirements that

mandate decent working conditions and social inclusion programs. This ensures that every hospital and local health unit in Tuscany contributes to a fairer labor market through its purchasing power.

Strategic Hub for Small Municipalities: Metropolitan City of Turin (APE Network)

The Metropolitan City of Turin provides a unique example of a "Strategic Hub" that supports a network of 52 smaller entities (municipalities, professional orders, and local agencies) through the **APE (Acquisti Pubblici Ecologici)** project.

This is a coordinated procurement network where the Metropolitan City provides the "brains"—the shared tender templates, technical assistance, and GPP training—while the municipalities execute the purchases. The APE network won the Premio Compraverde for its systematic approach to spreading a green culture.

This cooperation has been vital for the joint procurement of collective catering (canteens) and waste management. By standardizing high-level environmental and social criteria (e.g., zero-kilometer food and ethical labor) across the metropolitan area, they have ensured that even small mountain and rural municipalities can implement high standard sustainable services.

National Joint Excellence: Intercent-ER (Emilia-Romagna)

Intercent-ER, the regional agency for Emilia-Romagna, is a multi-award-winning example of the joint framework agreement model. They were recognized by the Premio Compraverde for their use of Life Cycle Costing (LCC) in the joint procurement of low-impact vehicles. Instead of selecting vehicles based solely on the purchase price, Intercent-ER developed a joint evaluation system that considers fuel consumption and CO2 emissions over the vehicle's entire life. This centralized expertise allowed dozens of small municipalities to transition their local fleets to "green" alternatives with full legal and technical certainty.

Country Resume & Outlook

Italy is well on the way to establishing a robust joint procurement system, supported by a strong and updated legal foundation in the Legislative Decree No. 36 of 31 March 2023 (Procurement Code) and the mandatory integration of sustainability through the 2023 National Action Plan for Environmental Sustainability. High-level institutional cooperation is already a reality, as evidenced by formal agreements between major bodies like ANAC, the Bank of Italy, and the National Cybersecurity Agency to manage joint procedures.

However, what is currently missing is a more effective bridge between this high-level legal framework and practical implementation at the local level.

Small and medium-sized municipalities still face significant obstacles, specifically the difficulties in understanding the complex legal requirements and a persistent lack of communication or information sharing between different local authorities.

To further support joint procurement, Italy needs to focus on simplifying the complex legal concepts into actionable tasks for municipal staff and fostering a culture of collaboration. Support could be enhanced by providing ready-to-use templates and guidelines that connect sustainability goals with local realities, helping municipalities overcome administrative fragmentation and realize the potential for significant cost and time savings.

Liechtenstein

Legal and organisational framework conditions for joint procurement

Public procurement in Liechtenstein is governed primarily by the Public Procurement Act (ÖAWG) and the corresponding Public Procurement Ordinance (ÖAWV). These laws regulate how public authorities—including the national administration, municipalities, and entities governed by public law—procure works, supplies, and services. The framework aims to ensure transparency, competition, and equal treatment of bidders in public tenders.

Liechtenstein’s procurement legislation is strongly influenced by European standards. As a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), the country aligns its procurement rules with EU procurement directives and international commitments such as the WTO Government Procurement Agreement.

The legal framework applies to all contracting authorities, including the Principality itself, municipalities, and public-law bodies that perform public tasks.

Although the legislation does not establish a separate, highly formalised regime for joint procurement, the legal framework allows contracting authorities to cooperate in the procurement of goods, services, and works. Such cooperation can occur through delegation of procurement procedures, shared tendering processes, or coordination between municipalities and the national administration. In practice, organisational arrangements are often based on administrative cooperation agreements or inter-municipal coordination due to the small size of the country.

The national administration also maintains a specialised competence centre for procurement within the government administration, which provides guidance, templates, and support to contracting authorities in the country.

Models of joint procurement in use

Due to the small scale of the country and the limited number of municipalities (11 in total), joint procurement in Liechtenstein generally takes pragmatic and informal forms rather than large institutionalised purchasing bodies.

Procurement by the National Administration: In many cases, procurement procedures are organised centrally by the national administration. Ministries or specialised administrative units conduct tenders that cover the needs of several governmental bodies or public institutions.

Delegated Procurement Procedures: Municipalities or public-law bodies may mandate another authority—often the national administration or a larger municipality—to carry out a procurement procedure on their behalf. This is particularly common for technically complex projects or procurement requiring specialised expertise.

Framework-type Cooperation: Although not always formalised as large framework agreements, contracting authorities often coordinate procurement for recurring supplies or services (e.g., construction services, infrastructure maintenance, or IT systems). These coordinated tenders can allow multiple authorities to benefit from a single procurement procedure.

Cross-border Cooperation: Given Liechtenstein’s strong economic and administrative ties with the neighbouring Switzerland and Austria, some procurement activities—especially infrastructure, energy, or specialised services—can involve coordination or benchmarking with neighbouring jurisdictions.

Leverage and Obstacles

Liechtenstein’s administrative structure creates a unique landscape for joint procurement, where its compact scale functions simultaneously as a driver of efficiency and a structural constraint.

The country’s small administrative size fosters exceptionally close cooperation between authorities, supported by direct communication channels that link municipalities to the national administration. Because of this proximity, institutional coordination is often achieved quickly and informally, while a strict alignment with European procurement standards ensures that these processes remain governed by clear, formal procedural rules. This environment allows for high administrative efficiency, as specialized expertise can be concentrated within dedicated units to make the most of available resources.

However, these same characteristics impose certain limitations on the procurement process. The small number of contracting authorities and relatively low procurement volumes can restrict bargaining power and the potential for significant economies of scale. Furthermore, a heavy reliance on external markets means that many contracts necessarily involve suppliers from neighboring countries. This is compounded by a limited pool of specialized procurement staff, particularly at the municipal level. Consequently, the decentralized nature of local responsibilities necessitates thorough, coordinated planning before any joint procedures can be effectively implemented.

Country Resume & Outlook

Liechtenstein has a clear and well-structured legal framework for public procurement through the Public Procurement Act and its implementing ordinances. These rules ensure transparency, competition, and compliance with international procurement standards. However, joint procurement plays a relatively limited role compared to larger European countries. This is largely due to structural factors: the country’s very small size, limited number of municipalities, and relatively modest procurement volumes.

Nevertheless, Liechtenstein already benefits from strong informal coordination between the national administration and municipalities. In many cases, this close administrative cooperation compensates for the absence of large formal purchasing cooperatives.

To further strengthen joint procurement, several measures could be considered:

- expanding centralised procurement services within the national administration
- developing standardised framework agreements for commonly purchased goods and services
- increasing cooperation with neighbouring countries for specialised procurement
- strengthening procurement training and expertise within municipal administrations

Overall, Liechtenstein can be considered well positioned in terms of legal structure and administrative coordination. Future progress will likely focus less on creating new legal mechanisms and more on enhancing practical cooperation, professionalisation of procurement functions, and strategic coordination between public authorities.

Slovenia

Legal and Organisational Framework Conditions

Slovenia's joint public procurement system is grounded in a coherent legal and organisational framework designed to ensure efficiency, transparency, and standardisation in public purchasing. The primary legal basis is the Public Procurement Act (ZJN-3), which enables joint procurement by multiple contracting authorities either on a fully joint basis - where responsibility is shared - or on a partial basis, where responsibilities are divided. This ensures both flexibility and accountability in implementation.

The framework is further specified by the Government Regulation on Joint Procurement (Uredba o skupnem javnem naročanju Vlade RS), which defines the categories of goods and services subject to centralised procurement and identifies entities required or permitted to participate. The Regulation also establishes an annual government planning mechanism, aligning procurement activities with national priorities.

Institutionally, the Ministry of Public Administration (Ministrstvo za javno upravo) functions as the central purchasing body. It consolidates demand, conducts procurement procedures, and manages framework agreements on behalf of state authorities. This centralisation reduces duplication, standardises specifications, and strengthens bargaining power.

Joint procurement covers a broad range of commonly used goods and services, including ICT, telecommunications, energy, insurance, office supplies, vehicles, and medical equipment. Participation includes ministries, agencies, and certain public institutes, either on a mandatory or voluntary basis. A single tender procedure typically governs all participating entities, improving efficiency and reducing transaction costs.

The system is supported by national e-procurement platforms (<https://ejn.gov.si> and enarocanje.si), which enable electronic tendering, publication, and contract management, ensuring transparency and alignment with EU standards.

Models of joint procurement in use

Slovenia applies several models of joint procurement, differentiated by the degree of centralisation and allocation of responsibilities.

Centralised Joint Procurement: The fully centralised model is the dominant form. The Ministry of Public Administration conducts procurement procedures on behalf of multiple contracting authorities, covering planning, tendering, and contract management. Participating entities authorise the Ministry to act on their behalf and share responsibility for compliance. This model applies primarily to high-volume, recurring procurement categories such as ICT, telecommunications, office supplies, energy, insurance, and medical equipment. It is characterised by unified procedures, standardised specifications, and strong economies of scale, reflecting a high level of administrative centralisation.

Decentralised (Partial) Joint Procurement: The decentralised model allows authorities to cooperate selectively. Only specific stages of the procurement process are conducted jointly, while each participant remains responsible for its own obligations. This model is

particularly relevant for local authorities or smaller-scale procurements where full centralisation is unnecessary. It provides flexibility while maintaining legal coherence.

Hybrid Model (Voluntary Participation in Framework Agreements): A hybrid model combines centralised procurement with decentralised execution. The central purchasing body establishes framework agreements, while individual authorities voluntarily participate and execute call-offs independently. This model is widely used in areas such as ICT and telecommunications, where standardisation is beneficial, but demand varies across institutions.

Digitally Integrated Model: Digital platforms underpin all procurement models by enabling standardised workflows, transparency, and coordination. Although not formally defined as a legal model, digital integration functions as a cross-cutting governance mechanism that enhances efficiency and oversight.

Leverage and Obstacles

Joint procurement generates substantial financial efficiency by aggregating demand, reducing prices, and lowering administrative costs. Centralised procedures eliminate duplication and improve resource utilisation. It also enhances transparency and procedural integrity. Centralised execution by specialised bodies reduces errors and ensures consistent application of procurement rules. Digital platforms further strengthen transparency through standardised publication and auditability.

Professionalisation is another key benefit. Procurement expertise is concentrated within the central purchasing body, strengthening institutional capacity and enabling more strategic procurement practices. Standardisation improves interoperability, simplifies maintenance, and supports long-term cost control. Administrative simplification reduces fragmentation by replacing multiple procedures with a single coordinated process.

Finally, joint procurement contributes to broader policy objectives, including competitiveness, digital transformation, and data-driven governance, by enabling coordinated planning and market engagement.

Despite these benefits, several structural challenges persist. A key issue is limited competition, as many procedures attract few bidders, reducing price pressure and innovation. Regulatory and market barriers further constrain participation. Complex procedures, limited supplier awareness, and market structure issues may discourage economic operators, particularly SMEs. Capacity disparities across contracting authorities also affect implementation. Smaller institutions may lack the expertise required to effectively participate in joint procurement.

Organisational complexity presents an additional challenge. Coordinating multiple authorities requires alignment of needs, timelines, and specifications, which can slow processes. Standardisation may reduce flexibility, particularly for specialised institutions with specific procurement needs. Finally, information gaps and timing constraints limit supplier participation, weakening competitive dynamics.

Examples of Existing Purchasing Cooperations

Centralised State-Level Cooperation

Slovenia operates a centralised joint purchasing system for electricity for state-level authorities, coordinated by the Ministry of Public Administration acting as the central purchasing body. Under this framework, ministries, government services, administrative units and affiliated public institutions participate in a single national procurement procedure for the supply of electricity.

The joint procurement covers standardised electricity supply contracts for a fixed multi-year period and aggregates demand from over 120 public authorities, significantly increasing purchasing power. The central procurement also systematically integrates green public procurement criteria, requiring a minimum share of electricity from renewable sources and verification through Guarantees of Origin.

Sectoral and Institutional Cooperation

In the healthcare sector, Slovenian public hospitals and healthcare institutions engage in sectoral and institutional purchasing cooperation through joint procurement of medicines and selected medical supplies. This cooperation is carried out by groups of public hospitals, often coordinated by a leading institution (e.g. a university medical centre) or through formally agreed joint procurement arrangements under the Public Procurement Act.

Unlike centrally managed state procurement led by the Ministry of Public Administration, this model is sector-driven: cooperation takes place within the same institutional sector (public healthcare providers), based on shared clinical needs, similar consumption profiles and common regulatory environment.

Digital Platform-Based Cooperation

A concrete and representative example of platform-based procurement cooperation in Slovenia is the use of the S-Procurement platform as a collaborative digital environment for joint public procurement. The platform operates as a shared digital system in which multiple contracting authorities and suppliers participate in the same procurement process. It enables the joint preparation and execution of procurement procedures, including framework agreements and dynamic purchasing systems, supports the formation of multi-institutional expert commissions that allow several public bodies to manage a single procurement collaboratively, facilitates consortium bidding by suppliers through joint submission of offers, and provides end-to-end digital coordination across all phases of procurement, from planning and tendering to evaluation and contract management within a unified system.

Country Resume & Outlook

Slovenia has developed a well-structured joint procurement system characterised by a strong legal framework, clearly defined central purchasing authority, and advanced digital infrastructure. Centralised procurement is effectively institutionalised across key categories of public expenditure, delivering measurable efficiency gains, standardisation, and improved governance. The system demonstrates a high degree of administrative coherence and aligns well with European procurement principles, particularly in terms of transparency, competition, and digitalisation. The integration of mandatory and voluntary participation mechanisms further enhances flexibility and inclusiveness.

However, the system is entering a second phase of development, where the primary challenge is no longer institutionalisation but optimisation. Key priorities include increasing supplier participation, reducing barriers to entry, and strengthening competition. Addressing market constraints and improving access for SMEs will be essential to fully realise the benefits of aggregated demand.

At the same time, further investment in capacity building is needed, particularly at the local level, to ensure consistent implementation and effective participation across all contracting authorities. Enhancing analytical capabilities, including the use of procurement data for strategic decision-making, represents an important opportunity.

Overall, Slovenia is well positioned to evolve its joint procurement system from an efficiency-driven administrative tool into a strategic policy instrument. By integrating competition-enhancing measures, advanced analytics, and continuous capacity development, joint procurement can play a central role in supporting innovation, sustainability, and long-term public sector performance.

Switzerland

Legal and organisational framework conditions for joint procurement

The Swiss legal framework for public procurement is defined by a combination of federal and cantonal legislation. The cornerstone at federal level is the Federal Act on Public Procurement (FAPP), which entered into force on 1 January 2021. The FAPP implements Switzerland's international obligations, in particular under the WTO Government Procurement Agreement (GPA), and harmonises procurement rules with the revised intercantonal framework.

At the cantonal level, procurement law is largely aligned through the Intercantonal Agreement on Public Procurement (IVöB). Most cantons have acceded to the revised IVöB (2019), ensuring a high degree of harmonisation across the country. Municipalities are generally subject to cantonal procurement law.

Both the FAPP and the IVöB explicitly allow contracting authorities to conduct joint procurement procedures. Contracting authorities may:

- Carry out procurement jointly,
- Delegate procurement tasks to another contracting authority,
- Establish central purchasing bodies,
- Conclude framework agreements that can be used by multiple authorities.

Due to Switzerland's strong federal structure and high degree of municipal autonomy, joint procurement is not mandatory but voluntary. Organisational arrangements are therefore typically based on public-law agreements between municipalities or between cantons and municipalities.

Models of joint procurement in use

In practice, several models of joint procurement are used in Switzerland:

Central Purchasing Bodies: At federal level, the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FOBL) acts as a central procurement body for the federal administration. It conducts tenders and concludes framework agreements that federal units can use.

At cantonal or municipal level, similar central units exist, either within cantonal administrations or as inter-municipal service centres.

Framework Agreements: Framework agreements are widely used. One contracting authority conducts the procurement procedure and awards a framework agreement that can be accessed by other participating authorities. This model is common for:

- IT hardware and software
- Office supplies
- Energy procurement
- Standardised services

Lead Municipality Model: A "lead municipality" conducts a procurement procedure on behalf of several municipalities. The participating municipalities define their needs in advance and formally mandate the lead authority.

Inter-Municipal Associations: Municipalities may establish special-purpose associations (Zweckverbände) under cantonal public law. These entities can carry out procurement centrally for their members, particularly in sectors such as waste management, water supply, public transport, or IT services.

Structures that support joint procurement

Institutional support exists at several levels:

The federal competence centre for public procurement (KBB) provides guidance and coordination.

Cantonal procurement offices provide templates, legal advice, and shared digital platforms.

The national e-procurement platform simap.ch increases transparency and facilitates coordination between contracting authorities.

In addition, professional networks and associations of municipal administrators foster exchange of best practices and model documents.

Leverage and Obstacles

Joint procurement in Switzerland presents a compelling set of advantages, primarily driven by the potential for economies of scale that lead to superior pricing and contractual conditions. By pooling expertise, public entities can professionalize their procurement activities, fostering greater administrative efficiency and a significant reduction in the duplication of procedures. Furthermore, larger-scale procedures empower authorities to implement more strategic criteria, thereby raising quality and sustainability standards across the board. For small municipalities in particular, these collaborative efforts serve as a vital safety net, substantially reducing the legal and procedural risks often associated with limited administrative capacity.

Conversely, the Swiss landscape is marked by several persistent barriers that can complicate these initiatives. The tradition of strong municipal autonomy often makes the necessary coordination politically sensitive, while the inherent heterogeneity of needs between urban and rural municipalities can hinder standardization. These challenges are frequently compounded by complex coordination processes, higher initial transaction costs, and misaligned budget cycles or decision-making procedures between partners. Additionally, the limited procurement expertise found in smaller municipalities remains a hurdle to effective participation. Finally, despite progress in legal harmonization, variations in how different cantons implement the Intercantonal Agreement on Public Procurement (IVöB) can still create a layer of uncertainty, particularly when attempting to establish cooperation across cantonal borders.

Examples of existing purchasing cooperations

Federal Level: The Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FOBL) concludes framework agreements for ICT, vehicles, and office materials for federal entities.

Cantonal IT Cooperations: Several cantons operate shared IT service centres that procure software and infrastructure jointly for cantonal administrations and municipalities.

Energy Procurement Pools: Municipal utilities in different cantons form purchasing pools for electricity or gas procurement to stabilise prices and increase bargaining power.

Inter-Municipal Associations: Numerous associations (Zweckverbände) in waste management, water treatment, and public transport carry out joint procurement for infrastructure projects and service contracts.

Country Resume & Outlook

Switzerland is well on the way toward an effective and modern joint procurement landscape. The revised Federal Act on Public Procurement (2021) and the harmonised Intercantonal Agreement (IVöB 2019) provide a solid and coherent legal foundation. The possibility to establish central purchasing bodies and to conclude framework agreements is clearly regulated and widely used.

However, joint procurement remains largely voluntary and decentralised. The country's federal structure and strong municipal autonomy, while politically important, can slow down deeper structural integration.

What is still missing is:

- Stronger strategic coordination across cantons
- More systematic support for small municipalities
- Standardised templates and digital tools for inter-municipal cooperation
- Expanded training programmes in strategic and sustainable procurement

Further support could include:

- Development of model cooperation agreements at cantonal level
- Expansion of shared digital procurement platforms
- Financial incentives for inter-municipal cooperation
- National best-practice repositories for joint procurement projects

Overall, Switzerland has a stable legal framework and functioning examples of joint procurement. The next step lies less in legal reform and more in strengthening practical cooperation, digitalisation, and capacity-building at municipal level.

Step-by-Step Procedure for Joint Procurement

This procedure provides a practical roadmap for municipalities to conduct a joint procurement (JP) effectively from the initial idea to monitoring and evaluation. It combines strategic, political, and technical steps, and integrates considerations for sustainability and efficiency.

Step 1: Setting Joint Procurement on the Agenda and Identifying Funding Sources

Goal: The overall goal of Step 1 is to transform the idea of joint procurement into a concrete administrative and political priority, while defining common objectives and ensuring that the necessary financial and institutional resources are available.

Who to involve: Key actors to involve at this stage include mayors, municipal council members, financial managers, and representatives of potential partner municipalities. Their early participation helps ensure that political expectations, financial considerations, and practical procurement needs are aligned.

Joint procurement among municipalities begins long before a tender is launched. It starts with a political and administrative decision to cooperate and to treat joint procurement as a strategic priority. Placing the topic on the agenda is therefore a crucial first step in transforming an initial idea into a concrete initiative supported by decision-makers and administrative staff.

Municipalities often face similar challenges, such as limited financial resources, increasing service demands, and complex procurement requirements. By joining forces, they can combine purchasing power, share expertise, and potentially achieve better value for public funds. However, successful cooperation requires early political support, a clear understanding of the expected benefits, and clarity regarding available financial resources.

At this stage, the aim is not yet to design a full procurement procedure but to explore the feasibility and potential advantages of cooperation. Municipalities should identify potential partners, assess available funding, and ensure that the idea receives sufficient political attention. Early alignment between political leadership and administration helps ensure that the initiative can develop further with the necessary institutional support.

To move from concept to action, municipalities can follow a series of practical steps:


Identify potential partner municipalities: Start by identifying municipalities with similar procurement needs or shared strategic priorities. Existing regional cooperation structures or informal networks can provide a useful starting point. Early discussions help determine interest and identify common challenges that could be addressed through joint procurement.


Bring the idea of joint procurement to political attention (councils, mayoral meetings): The concept should be presented to political leaders through council discussions, mayoral meetings, or relevant committees. Raising awareness at the political level is essential to ensure that administrative staff have the mandate to explore cooperation further.

Identify available budgets, pooled resources, or external funding opportunities: Joint initiatives often require coordination activities such as preparatory meetings, feasibility analysis, or administrative support. Municipalities should review available budgets and explore whether resources can be pooled. External funding opportunities, including regional or European programs, may also support early coordination efforts.

Prepare a short concept note outlining objectives, scope, expected level of commitment and benefits: A concise concept note can help structure discussions and clarify expectations among potential partners. It should briefly describe the objectives of the cooperation, the potential procurement areas, the anticipated benefits, and the expected level of commitment from participating municipalities.

Obtain political approval or mandate to explore joint procurement: Before moving forward, municipalities should seek formal or informal political endorsement. This may take the form of a council decision, mayoral agreement, or a joint statement among partners, ensuring that the initiative has sufficient legitimacy and support.

 **Tip:** Start with a limited scope to build confidence and political support. Testing cooperation in a clearly defined procurement area allows municipalities to gain experience and demonstrate early results.

 **Tip:** A clear funding plan strengthens commitment from all partners. When financial responsibilities and potential benefits are transparent, municipalities are more likely to actively support the initiative.

Step 2: Establishing Governance and Roles

Goal: The primary objective of this phase is to define the legal and organizational relationship between participating contracting authorities to ensure a clear allocation of responsibility for complying with Directive 2014/24/EU obligations. By establishing a formal framework, the group ensures that even when only parts of the procurement procedure are jointly implemented, there is a clear structure with no ambiguity regarding which authority is responsible for awarding of a contract, conclusion of a framework agreement, or long-term monitoring of sustainability commitments.

Who to involve: This step requires an active participation of the contracting authorities, but also technical experts and sustainability officers.

In the context of joint procurement, the phase of establishing a solid governance structure and defining roles is an essential step; we are moving the project from a general political intention to a functional, operative team.


To ensure transparency and legal compliance, clear rules of engagement are required, whether a municipality acts as a lead buyer for a single tender or a central purchasing body is established for long-term cooperation.

Following the Directive 2014/24/EU, a governance framework should be formalized at an early stage with a written agreement clarifying responsibilities of the participating authorities, regulating allocation of competences and specifying which national law is applicable.

What, then, should be done at this stage?

The participating entities must first select the most appropriate cooperation model, choosing between an occasional joint procurement managed by a lead authority or a more structured arrangement via a permanent central purchasing body.

Once the model is selected, the authorities must formalize cooperation through a written agreement, such as a memorandum of understanding or a formal inter-municipal convention, which explicitly agrees on roles, purposes, and legal obligations. This process involves nominating representatives to a joint working group tasked with collective planning and governing the procurement, while also deciding which entity will act as the primary developer of sustainability criteria, technical specifications, and social clauses.

 **Tip:** Put agreements in writing, even for small or informal cooperation. A high-quality agreement should include specific "conflict resolution" clauses and clear protocols for "exiting" the group if a municipality needs change. Furthermore, designate a sustainability lead within the governance structure who has the authority to veto specifications that do not meet the agreed-upon environmental or social ambitions.


Step 3: Aligning Needs, Expectations and Specifications


Goal: In this step we move from a general political will to a common technical and strategic definition. The goal is to reach alignment among participants on what is to be purchased, why, and with what characteristics. This step is a bridging step to minimize disagreements before entering the formal procurement phase.


Who to involve: Mayors, technical experts of participating municipalities, working groups, local stakeholders, legal experts and potential suppliers for preliminary

This step is the technical heart of cooperation, consolidating diverse requirements into a single, coherent set of tender documents. It moves beyond coordination to ensure the collective demand is standardized for economies of scale while remaining flexible for local needs. Following the **Directive 2014/24/EU**, this process must be transparent, ensuring technical specifications drive high environmental standards without artificially restricting market competition.

The process begins by convening all participating municipalities and relevant stakeholders, including potential suppliers, to clarify motivations, expectations, and the specific product groups to be purchased. A comprehensive joint needs assessment must be conducted to identify the quantities, quality standards (including usability), and unique local requirements of each participating entity. Once the data are gathered, the group must identify technical differences and decide which specific requirements can be harmonized into a "common technical core". After agreeing on common criteria, the team must carefully document all assumptions, constraints, and areas where flexibility is required to accommodate specific local conditions without undermining the aggregate tender's integrity.

 **Tip:** Focus on what must be common to achieve scale benefits, while allowing flexibility where local differences are essential.

 **Tip:** Early engagement of suppliers (where legally permitted) helps identify market constraints, realistic sustainability options, and innovative solutions.

 **Tool:** If support with this activity is needed, the **proCURE** tools can be used. Tool number 5 "Decision tree to support the development of goals and measures" but also proCURE Tool number 6 "Overview of key requirements of labels". You can find the tools here: <https://alpenallianz.org/en/projects/procure/procure-toolbox>

Step 4: Exchange with Potential Suppliers

Goal: The goal of this step is to ensure that joint procurement specifications are realistic, implementable, and aligned with market capabilities. Potential innovative solutions or sustainable alternatives can be identified in this step as well, and risk of procurement failure due to unrealistic requirements minimized.


Who to involve:

It is important to involve procurement officers and operational staff from the participating municipalities, but also technical experts who understand functional requirements.

This is one of the earliest steps in all (joint) procurement processes. Before finalising technical specifications with participating municipalities it is essential to understand what the market can realistically provide. Information on product or service quality, sustainability features, availability, and pricing needs to be collected. Engaging with suppliers at this stage helps to ensure that the products or services offered will meet the requirements, allowing for compliant bids and enabling municipalities to achieve best value for money or the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT). Early exchange also helps avoid overly ambitious specifications that could lead to inflated prices or unfeasible requirements.

How to engage with potential suppliers?

- Conduct market consultations or informal discussions with potential suppliers.
- Gather information on technical solutions, sustainable options, and price ranges.
- Document suppliers' responses and insights to guide the development of specifications and tender strategy.
- Ensure that information collection is non-binding and does not compromise fairness or create preferential treatment.

 **Tip:** Treat this step as an informal market check, not a mini-tender. Avoid requesting binding offers.

Step 5: System Testing in the Pre-Procurement Phase

Goal: The goal is to ensure that the joint procurement system works effectively in practice by identifying and addressing weaknesses before implementation. By simulating real-life situations, scenario play reduces the risk of coordination failures and ensures that governance, workflows, and decision-making processes are clear, realistic, and workable.

Who to involve: Scenario play should involve key stakeholders from all participating municipalities, in particular procurement representatives, operational staff, and those responsible for coordination and decision-making. Where appropriate, administrative or technical experts can support the simulation to ensure realistic and relevant scenarios.

Pre-procurement testing of the joint procurement system focuses on validating governance structures, coordination mechanisms, and operational processes before the tender is prepared. This can be done through scenario-based simulations (“scenario plays”) that replicate critical and potentially challenging situations in a controlled environment. Predefined scenarios may include:


- Non-performance/quality issues: the delivered service does not meet the contracted quality
- Supplier insolvency
- Partial withdrawal of municipalities: one or more partners leave the joint procurement
- Disputes or unclear responsibilities: governance or decision-making conflicts
- Logistical or coordination breakdowns: delays, mismatched delivery across municipalities


These scenarios are used to test how the joint procurement system responds in practice.

Structure of a scenario play (duration: 2-4 hours):

- Select a realistic and critical situation to be tested.
- Allocate roles to participants, e.g. procurers, coordination body, decision-makers.
- Step through the scenario and simulate decisions, reactions, and coordination.
- Capture challenges, bottlenecks, and unclear processes.
- Derive concrete adjustments for governance, roles, and procedures.

Start with real roles to ensure realism, and add a second scenario play with different or switched roles to gain additional insights.

 **Tip:** Scenario-based testing is a low-risk and highly effective method to build a shared understanding among municipalities, improve coordination, and increase confidence in the joint procurement model before entering the formal tendering phase.

 **Tool:** A new tool has been developed to provide support: [“Simulation Game”](#)

Step 6: Preparing the Tender

Goal: The objective of this step is to prepare a legally compliant, clear, and complete tender procedure that reflects the jointly agreed needs and enables smooth contract implementation for all participating municipalities.


Who to involve: It is fundamental to involve procurement and legal experts, but also technical staff from participating municipalities (e.g., IT or facility management). To confirm budget availability and cost structure it will be necessary to involve financial officers. Where relevant it is recommended to involve sustainability officers or advisors, and, in some cases, external legal or procurement consultants.


Once the needs have been aligned and the cooperation model agreed, the next step is to prepare tender documentation. This is a crucial phase in the joint procurement process, as it translates the political and technical agreements into legally binding procurement documents.

The process for this step begins with **selecting the procurement procedure according to the contract value and your legal framework**, where the appropriate method, such as an open, restricted, or negotiated procedure, is determined by the estimated value and applicable national or EU thresholds. This choice must strictly comply with relevant procurement law and reflect the complexity of the specific procurement. Simultaneously, it is essential to ensure each participating municipality formally signs or confirms its participation in the framework. This participation should be formally documented through a cooperation agreement, mandate, or written confirmation to ensure legal certainty and prevent later disputes regarding commitment or responsibilities.

The strategy then moves toward **deciding on the contract structure**, whether it be a single contract, multiple lots, or a framework agreement. The chosen structure should reflect the nature of the procurement; for instance, a framework agreement is often suitable for recurring needs and provides municipalities with flexibility in placing orders, while utilizing multiple lots may enable the participation of smaller or local suppliers and increase overall competition.

Finally, authorities should **develop tender documents collaboratively, including sustainability criteria depending on the type of procedure selected**. Technical specifications, award criteria, and contract conditions should be drafted jointly to ensure they reflect harmonized needs, with environmental and social criteria included in a proportionate and legally compliant manner. Throughout this stage, it is vital to indicate all participating municipalities and their respective delivery addresses in cases where goods are to be delivered to each location.

 **Tip:** Clarity at this stage prevents legal challenges, supplier misunderstandings, and implementation problems later. Investing time in careful preparation reduces risks and strengthens trust among participating municipalities.

 **Tool:** If support with drafting the sustainability criteria is needed, the [proCURE tool](#) number 6 “Overview of Key Requirements of Labels” can be used.

Step 7: Tendering, Evaluation and Award Decision

Goal: The objective of this step is to conduct a transparent, legally compliant, and well-documented procurement procedure that results in selection of the most economically advantageous tender in line with the predefined criteria and jointly agreed objectives.


Who to involve: In this step it is necessary to involve a joint evaluation committee, composed of representatives from the different municipalities. It is important to also involve procurement and legal experts and sustainability experts.


After the tender documents have been prepared and approved, the procedure enters its operational phase. This step covers publication of tender, communication with bidders, evaluation of offers, and formal award decision. In joint procurement, coordination and transparency are particularly important to ensure equal treatment of bidders and alignment among participating municipalities.

The process begins by **launching the tender via appropriate electronic platforms** in accordance with national and EU rules, ensuring that all mandatory documents and deadlines are accessible to uphold transparency. Once the tender is live, any **supplier clarifications must be managed** centrally and shared with all bidders simultaneously to maintain fairness, requiring diligent internal coordination among participating municipalities before formal replies are issued.

As the procedure progresses, **authorities collect and analyze offers** within the **planned timeframe**, handling any late or non-compliant submissions strictly according to legal provisions. The next pivotal step involves **evaluating offers jointly based on predefined criteria**, such as price, sustainability, and lifecycle costs, through a transparent scoring process. If required by the tender documents, product testing is conducted to verify performance requirements, with all results documented to support an evidence-based award decision.

Finally, the process concludes with a **focus on accountability and clear communication**. Comprehensive documentation of the evaluation and scoring is essential to ensure traceability and protect against legal challenges. Once finalized, the **lead authority communicates the results to all partners and issues formal notifications to bidders**, including details on standstill periods and available legal remedies as required by law.

 **Tip:** In joint procurement, disagreements during evaluation can delay the process. Clear evaluation rules, early agreement on methodology, and a well-structured evaluation committee help prevent conflicts and ensure a defensible award decision.

 **Tool:** If support with evaluation is needed, the [proCURE tool](#) number 8 “How to evaluate an offer” can be used.

Step 8: Signing the (Framework) Contract

Goal: Formalising the agreement with the supplier and defining the management of the contract, turning the award decision into a binding legal commitment that enables the operational start of supplies or services.

Who to involve: Contracting supplier/s and legal representatives of municipalities.

Once the award decision has been completed and all legal standstill periods have expired, the procurement process moves into the contractual phase. In joint procurement, signing the (framework) contract is not merely a formal act — it marks the transition from procedure to implementation and requires clear allocation of responsibilities among participating municipalities.

Following the formal award decision and any required standstill period, the contract or framework agreement is signed. Depending on the chosen cooperation model, this may involve:


- One central entity signing on behalf of all participating municipalities.
- Each municipality signs an individual contract based on a joint framework.
- A single joint contract signed by all parties.

The contractual structure agreed in earlier steps must now be implemented consistently and in line with the procurement law.

Clear responsibilities must be defined for the contract phase. This includes:

- Who serves as the main contact point for the supplier.
- Who places orders under a framework agreement.
- Who monitors performance and compliance.
- How complaints, changes, or contract modifications are handled.
- How information is shared among participating municipalities.

In joint procurement, unclear contract governance can undermine the efficiency gains achieved during the tendering phase. A written internal agreement on contract management responsibilities is strongly recommended.

 **Tip:** Joint procurement does not end with contract signature. Successful cooperation depends on structured contract management, regular communication between municipalities, and early coordination if performance issues arise.

Step 9: Direct Orders from Each Municipality


Goal:

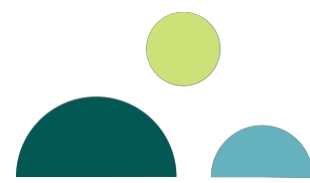
The primary objective is to activate specific supplies or services through individual contracts or purchase orders while preserving the joint agreement's sustainability criteria. Decentralizing execution allows each authority to manage its own budget and timeline while benefiting from superior technical specifications and aggregate demand pricing. This step ensures a seamless transition from award to delivery, confirming that the operator provides the exact "green" or social features specified in the joint tender.

Who to involve: The lead municipality or central purchasing body remains a key point of contact for resolving any systemic issues or discrepancies between the joint contract and individual orders, but local procurement officers and technical managers of each participating municipality are the key figures to be involved at this stage. It is important to involve the accounting and financial departments as well.

After the joint award is finalized, the project shifts to individual execution, where centralized agreements translate into specific local actions. At this stage, the responsibility for specific "call-offs" typically rests with the individual authorities acting as direct beneficiaries. It is important that in this step the legal and sustainable standards secured by the group are strictly maintained during the direct operational relationship between each municipality and the supplier.

Each participating contracting authority must issue its own formal orders or sign individual contracts based on terms established in the joint procedure. If a framework agreement was used, authorities must follow the specific rules for "call-offs" which may involve a simple direct order or a mini-competition if the framework was awarded to multiple suppliers. It is essential to verify that individual purchase orders strictly adhere to the mandatory sustainability requirements defined in the earlier phases. Additionally, each entity should establish its own internal record-keeping to track the quantities and types of sustainable goods or services received, which will be vital for the final monitoring and evaluation phase.

 **Tip:** It is highly recommended to develop a standardized "Sustainable Purchase Order" template for all participating members to use when placing individual orders. By using a unified ordering format, the group ensures that the aggregate data collected for future reporting remains consistent and accurate across the entire partnership.





Step 10: Contract Management and Monitoring

Goals: The main objective of this step is to ensure contracts are executed according to agreed terms and deliver expected outcomes, as well as to track delivery reliability, quality, costs and user satisfaction throughout the contract period. This is the step in which it is significant to identify issues early and enable joint decisions on amendments or improvements of the contract. The step also serves to gather lessons learnt and thus guide future joint procurement projects.

Who to involve: In addition to procurement officers and operational staff from all participating local authorities, this stage involves technical experts with in-depth knowledge of the products or services. To provide meaningful feedback on usability and performance, it is advisable to involve end-users of goods and services covered by the contract, as well as representatives of suppliers, particularly where changes or adjustments are required.

After joint procurement contracts are signed, contract management and monitoring have to be implemented. **Contract management** ensures that the agreements are properly administered, strategic objectives met, and any issues addressed collaboratively. **Contract monitoring** tracks key performance indicators (KPIs) such as delivery reliability, quality, costs, user satisfaction, providing data needed to make informed management decisions.

 **Tip:** Treat monitoring as a continuous, operational activity, feeding information into contract management decisions.

 **Tool:** A new tool has been developed to provide support at this step: [“Periodic Contract Review Report”](#).

Key Success Factors for Joint Procurement

Early Political Buy-In

Early involvement and support from mayors and municipal councils is essential. Political buy-in ensures that staff have a clear mandate to cooperate, allocate time and resources, and make compromises where needed. Without early political support, joint procurement risks delays, withdrawals, or lack of commitment at critical stages.

In practice, this means:

- Informing elected officials early about objectives and expected benefits.
- Securing a formal or informal political mandate.
- Keeping political leadership informed of progress and results.

Clear and Realistic Scope

Joint procurement works best when the scope is well defined and achievable. Trying to include too many products, services, or municipalities at once can make coordination complex and slow.

In practice, this means:

- Clearly defining what is included and excluded.
- Limiting the number of participating municipalities in early stages.
- Choosing product or service groups that are suitable for harmonisation.

Written Agreements

Even in small or informal cooperation, written agreements help clarify expectations and reduce misunderstandings. They provide a common reference point if questions or disagreements arise.

In practice, this means:

- Documenting roles and responsibilities.
- Agreeing on decision-making rules.
- Clarifying cost sharing and workload distribution.
- Defining how municipalities can join or leave the cooperation.

Transparent Communication

Regular and open communication builds confidence among partners and helps prevent small issues from becoming major problems. Transparency is particularly important when municipalities have different sizes, capacities, or political priorities.

In practice, this means:

- Sharing information on timelines, decisions, and changes.
- Explaining reasons for key choices (e.g., specifications, award criteria).
- Ensuring all partners have access to the same documents and information.

Trust and Willingness to Compromise

Joint procurement requires municipalities to align their needs and accept that not every local preference can be fully reflected. Trust between partners and a willingness to compromise are therefore essential.

In practice, this means:

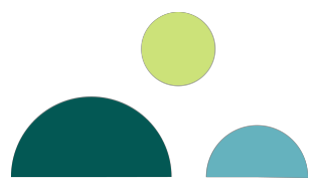
- Accepting common standards where possible.
- Being open about constraints and priorities.
- Focusing on shared benefits rather than individual optimisations.


Starting Small and Scaling Up

Beginning with a simple, low-risk joint procurement helps build experience, confidence, and trust. Successful small projects create a positive basis for expanding cooperation to more complex or strategic areas.

In practice, this means:

- Piloting joint procurement with standardised goods or services.
- Evaluating results and learning from experience.
- Gradually increasing scope, value, or number of partners.





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