

PRESS INFORMATION

RESPIRO Guidance Officially Launched – for a Fairer and more Responsible Europe!

Freiburg, 11 December 2007 – After several months of intensive preparation, the European Responsibility in Procurement (RESPIRO) Guides were officially launched on the 3 December 2007 at the RESPIRO Conference on Socially Responsible Procurement in the City of Lille, France.

Over 100 delegates from 17 countries from across Europe gathered at the Grand Palais in Lille to exchange on the latest information and experiences concerning socially responsible purchasing practices in European cities and countries. The conference brought together representatives from local governments, trade unions, procurement regulators, companies, national governments, NGOs and certification bodies. The significance of public sector purchasing – representing 15-25% of GDP in most countries in the EU - means that it can serve as a powerful instrument to promote the supply of more sustainable products, services and works.

Launch of two NEW European Guides for two of Europe's most important sectors

Officially launched in Lille by the Regional Director of ICLEI's European Secretariat, Gino Van Begin, the two practical handbooks (or guides) practically address social responsibility issues in procurement for building construction works and textiles and clothing. European purchasers are now better equipped to be courageous with their procurement actions and make a significant contribution to making our cities more socially responsible and at the same time improving their image towards the global community.

Socially responsible procurement is possible!

By practising socially responsible procurement, public authorities realise added value when carrying out necessary purchases of products, works and services. They spend their procurement budgets in such a way that, while delivering the required goods or services, the expenditure also contributes to social and sustainable development policy goals.

Many of the issues, which pioneer cities and companies practising socially responsible procurement consider fundamental were presented and discussed by delegates in Lille. Issues such as, reserving a part of a contract to companies employing staff with special needs (e.g. physical disabilities) or choosing a supplier of workwear or natural building stones that can ensure that (underage) children are not exploited for the sake of cheap labour are some of the issues which European purchasers certainly have the power to influence when spending their procurement budgets.

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For more information on the RESPIRO project, guidance and conference, visit the project website at: www.respiro-project.eu

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Background Information:

Environmental issues are increasingly being taken into account in public and private procurement, thereby being highly effective in using market power to encourage the supply of “greener” products and services. However, the inclusion of social responsibility in procurement (working conditions, employment generation, fair trade etc.) has lagged behind in both sectors.

Although facing different legal frameworks for procurement, both public and private sector purchasers have much to learn from each other, in terms of how to address social requirements, and what is practical to achieve on the market. The private sector, of course, plays a dual function in this dialogue, as both purchaser and supplier.

Through identifying good practices and committed organisations, bringing these together in discussions, providing a platform for exchange, and widely disseminating information, much can be achieved in helping to shift towards more socially responsible production and consumption. Socially responsible procurement (SRP) is using the purchasing power of public and private organisations to purchase products, works and services that have a positive social impact.

In line with current trends and increasing interest both on the business side and on the side of the public authorities, two sectors were selected for particular attention in the RESPIRO project:

- Construction – as Europe’s largest industrial employer, efforts to promote CSR principles such as healthy and safe working conditions can have a significant impact on a great many people. In addition, social criteria in sourcing supplies can have sustainability gains in the global dimension.
- Textile & Clothing – a sector under high pressure from global competition where CSR principles such as quality employment can help to profile European industry. Again, as the sector is a major employer especially in developing world countries, CSR principles are relevant along a global supply chain as well.

The RESPIRO project encouraged an exchange of experiences in including social (including ethical also) requirements in procurement actions both between public and private sector purchasers and potential suppliers. The project was co-funded by the European Commission, Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

*ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (Project Coordinator), EUROCITIES (Main Partner), FIEC – European Construction Industry Federation, EFBWW – European Federation of Building and Wood Workers, ETUF -TCL - European Trade Union Federation of Textiles, Clothing and Leather, EURATEX - European Apparel and Textile Organisation.

Attached:

Picture from Opening Plenary: (from left to right) Patrick Itschert (ETUF-TCL), Niels Van Amstel (FIEC) George Jadoun (ILO), Danielle Poliautre (City of Lille) and Gino Van Begin (ICLEI). [JPG, 351kb]

Responsibility in Procurement logo [JPG, 95kb]

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