

Sustainable public procurement as a leverage for food systems sustainability

Criteria and best practices at EU level

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COREnet Advisinar – Public procurement for schools and the role of SFSCs
Online, 21 September 2026

EU Food consumption footprint
per capita

+12%
(2010-2023)



130kg

Food waste per
person in the EU
(2023)



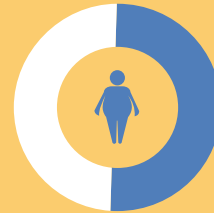
33%

of EU GHG emissions
come from **food sectors**
(2023)



Share of population **unable to afford
a healthy diet** ranges up to

52%
across the EU Member States
(2024)

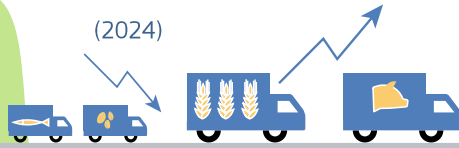


52%
of EU adults are
overweight
(2022)

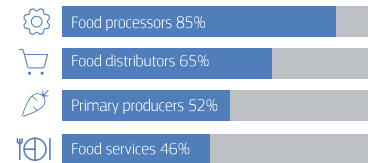


Food consumer **price
inflation** in the EU
peaked in December
2022, ranging from
11% to 50% across
Member States

The **EU trade balance** has
quadrupled since 2011 up to
EUR 43 billion
(2024)



**Salary in
food sectors**
compared to
the total
EU economy
(2022)

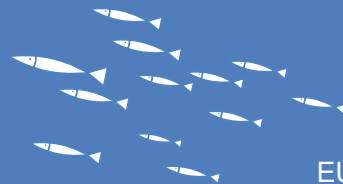


9%
of **employees** in the EU
work in the **food sectors**
(2024)



Sustainably exploited **fish stocks**
in the EU **rising to**

61%
(2022)



12%

of EU food enterprises
use AI technology
(2025)



New criteria for greener and healthier public canteen menus

The JRC has published a new report on how to achieve healthy and sustainable meals in public institutions, from schools to public workplaces and hospitals.



Criteria for Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) for Food, Food services, and Vending Machines

García-Herrero, L.; Pérez Cornago, A.; Casonato, C.; Sarasa Renedo, A.; Bakogianni, I.; Wollgast, J.; Gama Caldas, M.; Maragkoudakis, P.; Listorti, G.

2025



FOOD OFFER IN PUBLIC SETTINGS A recipe for Sustainable Food Procurement

How can sustainability become part of public food tenders? How can we balance environmental, social and economic needs?

Who is this for?

Contracting authorities, procurement officers, policymakers (EU, national and local), expert groups and researchers, food industry, NGOs and civil society.

Here is our recipe for Sustainable Public Procurement:

Then, you can add your...

The main ingredients

- Offer healthy and sustainable food and meals
- Source sustainably grown food
- Prevent food waste
- Keep 'tasting': monitoring is the best way to know that things are working

Tools

- Market dialogue: Engage with suppliers before the tender is closed up
- Active collaboration: Work with nutritional experts to promote healthy plant-based diets
- System approach: Consider impacts across the whole value chain
- Life Cycle Thinking and Assessment: Consider impacts across the whole value chain

For more detailed information, check the full report



How does it work?

The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission put together a list of criteria, best practices and other tools which can be incorporated into tenders by contracting authorities and implemented by providers throughout Europe. Our goal is to help schools, hospitals and other public institutions and settings, such as canteens, serve food that nourishes people and the planet, and ultimately contribute to a sustainable food system.

Specific flavours

- Buy food grown from sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming
- Choose animal products with high animal welfare standards
- Buy fishery products from well-managed stocks
- Buy food grown and harvested under fair labour conditions

For food services, in addition you might consider:

- Use water and energy efficiently in kitchens
- Ensure minimal, recyclable, and well-managed packaging
- Train your kitchen staff
- Prioritise low-emission transport

Participate in awareness raising and education activities, such as on balanced diets and food waste

Food services

- Offer healthy food and beverages – pay attention to salt and sugar content and promote plain water
- Use sustainable ingredients, such as from organic farming and fair trade
- Promote the use of reusable cups

Vending machines

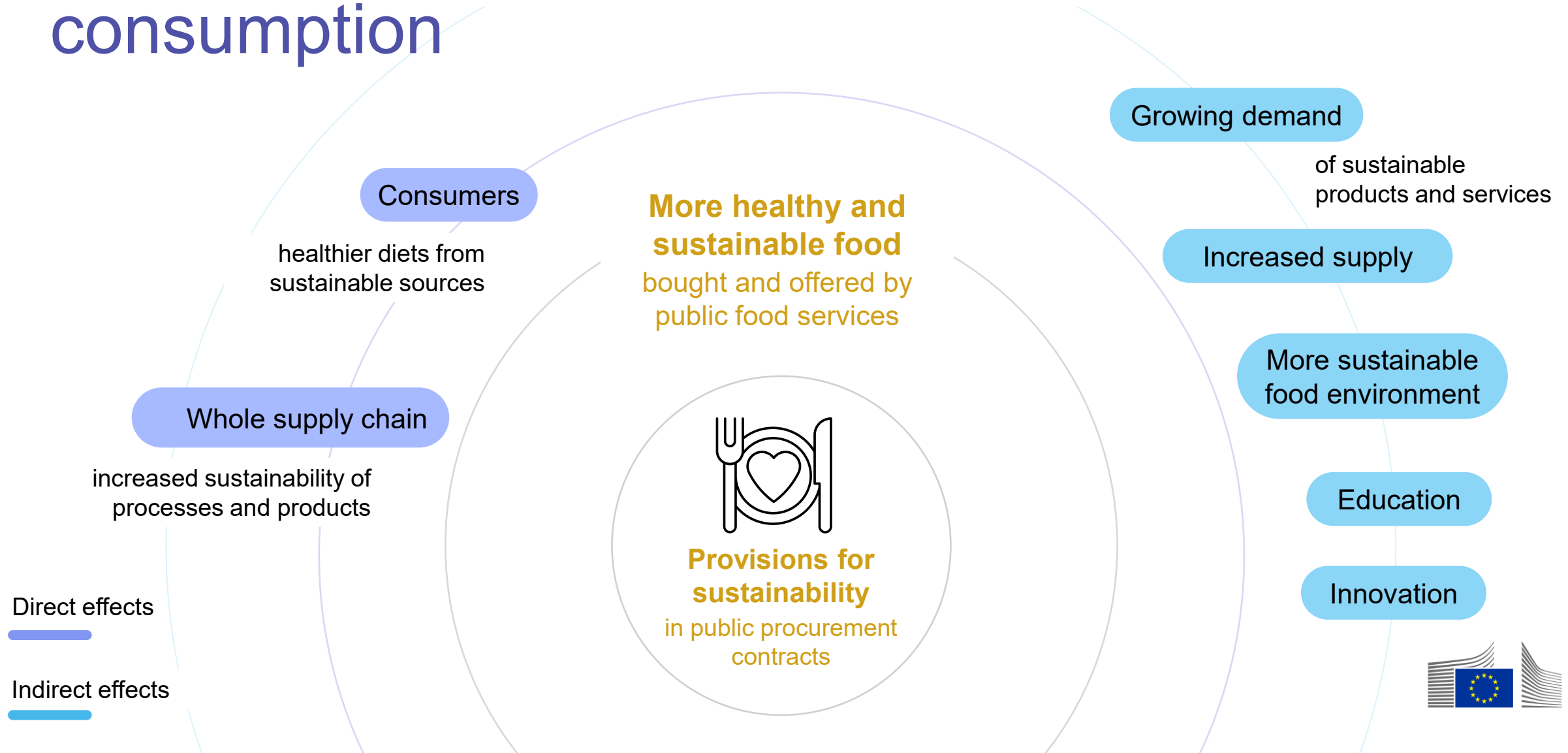
- Offer healthy food and beverages – pay attention to salt and sugar content and promote plain water
- Use sustainable ingredients, such as from organic farming and fair trade
- Promote the use of reusable cups

Step-by-step instructions

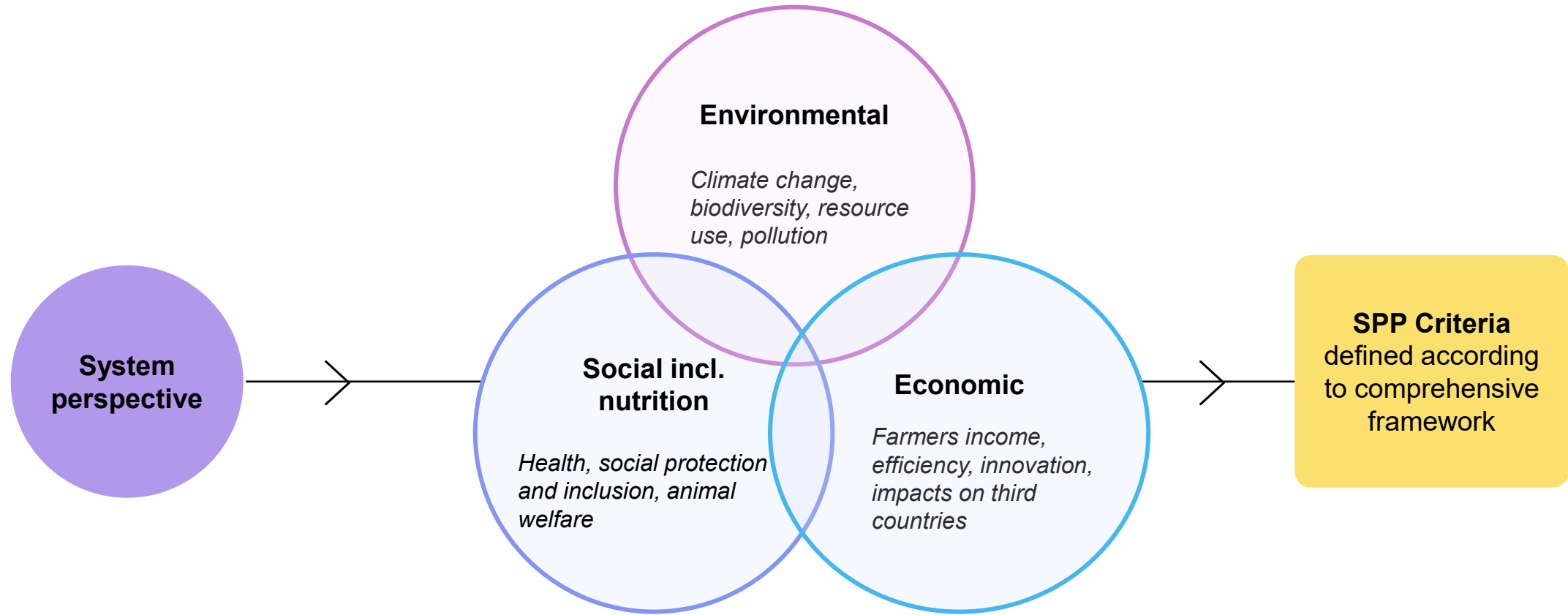
- Read the cooking book: Understand your context, target population, market availability, stakeholders, potential suppliers, and needs. Check existing best practices across the EU for inspiration
- Prepare your ingredients: Choose the criteria suitable to your target population and sustainability objectives: food, food services, or vending machines. They should cover environmental, socio-economic, and nutritional aspects
- Follow the steps: Take the appropriate 'recipe' (see on the left) and mix your ingredients to get the perfect mix
- Wait and adjust: Change takes time: monitor the uptake of the sustainability criteria and adjust them over time. You will see that synergies will emerge between environmental, economic, social benefits

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Public procurement: a powerful leverage to shape sustainable production and consumption



Integrating all sustainability dimensions



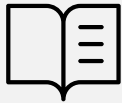
As key approach to address sustainability transitions

Accounting for synergies, trade offs

Considering all stages of the value chain (Life Cycle thinking)

From Green to Sustainable Public Procurement

2019



Green Public Procurement (GPP)

Focus on environmental impacts, limited coverage of social impacts, no inclusion of nutrition

2023-2025



JRC Analysis

Existing criteria and best practices in EU Member States collected by contracted study

Scientific analysis and mapping to sustainability framework

Stakeholders' consultation

500+ criteria already implemented in EU Member States

2026



Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP)

Environmental dimension, based on GPP

Economic and social dimension, including nutrition

Tools, best practices and monitoring

Concrete, harmonized guidance

Example: Organic Food Products

3.1.1 Organic food products

Rationale: Organic food production is often associated with a lower environmental footprint with respect to conventional production (Boschiero et al., 2023). Moreover, it can lead to social and economic benefits, specifically targeting improved animal welfare, producer remuneration and territorial cohesion/rural development (Sanders et al., 2023). ... A **market dialogue** can be a useful tool to establish relationships and to understand which organic food products to prioritize (see e.g. ...).

Objective: Propose a strategy for supporting the development of a sustainable way, enabling a

- Rationale
- Objectives
- Gaps
- Proposed actions

- Further analysis on the effect of the application of different criteria at the same time is necessary. Research has shown that increasing organic food procurement, together with a reduction of animal-based products (plant-based menus), does not lead to an increase in the cost of the meal.
- The indication of the threshold can have different effects based on the reference unit, i.e. whether this is indicated in mass or economic value. Real world data would be necessary to understand the effect of different thresholds on different product categories.

TS. 1 Organic Food products

Option A (easier to verify during contract execution)

The following food and drink products [to be inserted by the contracting authority, see also explanatory notes] shall comply with Regulation (EC) No 2018/848.

Option B (more complex to verify during contract execution)

TS.1.1 At least X% in mass/volume of the products and drink products shall comply with Regulation (EC) No 2010/2011. Products are not readily available
a part of the X% can be producers in conversion
shall submit the relevant information to the certification body.

Thresholds provide a comprehensive

Criteria (changes highlighted in grey)

AC 1. A Verification means

Option A: tenders to supply with the organic products.

Option B (more awarded to tenders): food and drink products have been organically.

In the case that some organic products are originating from farms/food production facilities, the organic production standards can also be counted towards fulfilling the technical specifications. Producers in conversion shall submit the relevant documentation confirming that the conversion is controlled by a certification body.

Verification

Option A The tenderer must provide a declaration that all food and drink products listed above, that are to be supplied during the execution of the contract, comply with Regulation (EC) No 2018/848 or its subsequent amendments. In addition, the tenderer must provide a description of how it intends to ensure that the products mentioned above can be sourced during contract execution from organic sources (e.g. by identifying suppliers for the different products). Producers in conversion shall submit evidence that they are being supervised by an accredited certification body through relevant documentation.

Option B The tenderer must provide data (name and amount) of food and drink products that are to be supplied in the execution of the contract, indicating specifically the products that comply with organic requirements. Producers in conversion shall submit evidence that they are being supervised by an accredited certification body through relevant documentation.

Best practices ar

Austria

Best practices Tools

https://www.organicseurope.bio/content/uploads/2021/06/IFOAMOE_Best-Practice-in-Organic-Public-Procurement-The-case-of-Denmark.pdf?dd

Criteria for FOOD

	Adapted from EU GPP	Proposed
	Organic food products	Primary production – Sustainable agricultural management
	Animal welfare (extended list)	
	Fisheries and aquaculture	
	Fair and ethical trade products	Working conditions and inclusion of vulnerable groups in primary production, transportation, and processing stages
		Short food supply chains

Criteria for FOOD SERVICES

Adapted from EU GPP

Training for staff, purchase of kitchen equipment, waste prevention, energy and water use efficiency,...

Proposed



Participation in education and awareness raising



Food environments



Traceability of sustainability information



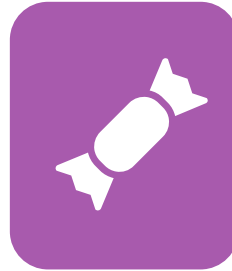
Working conditions and inclusion of vulnerable groups in food services

Criteria for VENDING MACHINES

From EU GPP

Offering organic and fair-trade products, purchase of new vending machines, use of disposable cups

Proposed



Guidance on providing healthy and nutritious snacks, together with recommendations on placing

HORIZONTAL Criteria



Healthy and sustainable meals

Based on nutritional criteria in food public procurement in EU countries & latest dietary recommendations from international bodies

Nutrients

Food groups

Specific criteria for infants and children

Specific criteria for packaged and ready-to-eat foods



Food waste prevention

To foster action towards food waste reduction



Monitoring

Key to assess effectiveness

Proposed nutritional criteria

Nutritional criteria in public
procurement in multiple EU countries

AND

Latest dietary recommendations
from international bodies

Healthy and sustainable meals:
Criteria for nutrients and food groups



Promotion of fruit,
vegetables, legumes,
whole grains, nuts, and
seeds

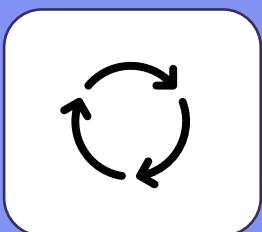


Limiting salt, free sugars,
saturated fats, alcohol,
and red & processed
meats

Further supporting tools



Market
dialogue



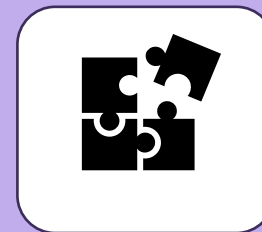
Life Cycle
Assessment



Nutritional
criteria



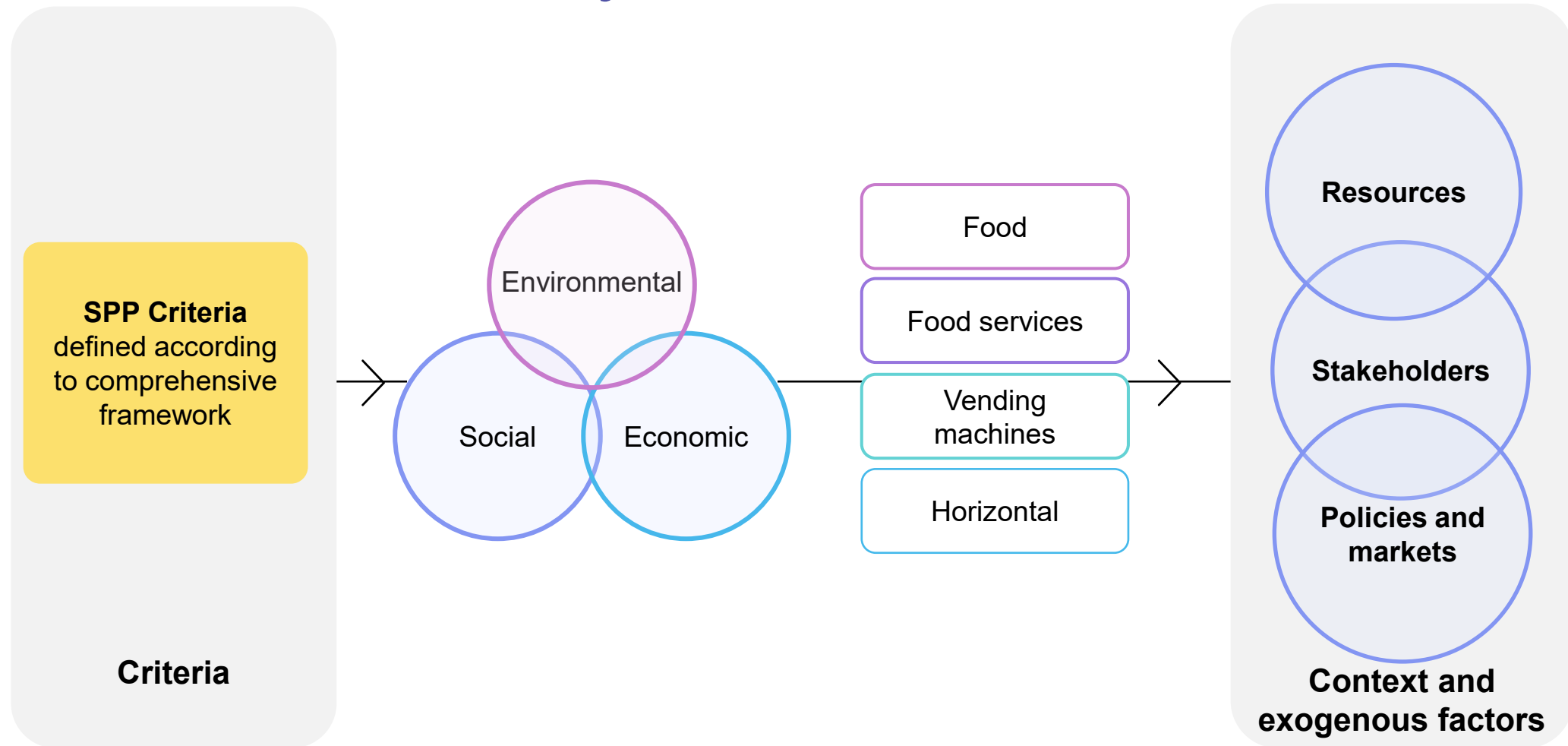
Monitoring and
evaluation



Integrated food
system policies

Capacity building and training of contracting authorities and stakeholders

A broader perspective: public procurement for sustainable food systems



Possibilities for implementation



Source of inspiration

for national, regional or local authorities to promote sustainability of the food system through public procurement

Support to public authorities

who want to use public procurement of food in a strategic manner, in order to address environmental, social and economic considerations throughout the food chain

Further progress

in implementation, e.g. via relevant networks

Proposal for a new Regulation

PRESS RELEASE | Sep 9, 2026 | Brussels | 4 min read

Commission proposes simpler and more strategic Public Procurement rules

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Today, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a [new Regulation](#) to modernise and simplify the EU's public procurement framework to support effective investments in public services and infrastructure in line with the Union's policy objectives.

Drawing on extensive consultations with public buyers, businesses, trade unions, and civil society, the Commission is proposing an ambitious reform to make public procurement simpler, more flexible, and more effective. It will help complete the Single Market for public procurement, which accounts for around 15% of the EU's GDP.

Public procurement is central to both the European economy and citizens' daily lives, covering everything from transport, infrastructure, and energy systems, to schools and health care services. The proposal is expected to deliver significant administrative annual savings of €650 million, resulting from a burden reduction of €80 million for public buyers and of €570 million for economic operators.

Article 53

Food procurement

1. For the purposes of pursuing objectives set in Articles 50(2) and Article 55(2), public buyers may also take considerations related to the quality and sustainability of food into account when procuring food, as appropriate, in specifications, award criteria or conditions for the performance of contracts, to the extent that they are related to the subject-matter of the contract.
2. The food-specific considerations referred to in paragraph 1 may relate, in particular, to the following:
 - (a) fairness and transparency in food supply chains requirements and conditions, in particular a fair remuneration of the farmers involved in the production of procured food;
 - (b) the organisation of the food supply chain;
 - (c) requirements or conditions on organic production methods, quality schemes such as geographical indications, and other production methods;
 - (d) nutritional value and health effects, freshness and seasonality of food criteria;
 - (e) animal welfare requirements.



Thank you

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