

# Buy better to build better

## Driving public purchase towards green construction products

Public procurement is one of the EU's most important economic tools, amounting to a staggering 15% of the bloc's GDP. This puts governments and cities in a privileged position to create lead markets for green solutions, which often struggle to be deployed at scale. Yet, **Green Public Procurement (GPP) remains under-exploited. More than half of public contracts across the EU are awarded without the environment in mind.**

One sector in particular deserves more attention when considering the role of GPP: construction. The construction sector produces some of the most energy-intensive materials, such as cement and steel. Meanwhile, public projects account for 31% of the sector's activities. **Our new research, based on an external study commissioned by ECOS, clearly shows that introducing ambitious requirements for the highest polluting materials can save up to 19 million tonnes of emissions annually at minimal cost.**

That means lowering emissions from construction by a staggering 43% with project cost increases at no more than 3-4%.

With no way to cut down on emissions (known as "embodied carbon") after products are used to build our schools and bridges, procuring more sustainable materials represents a logical and crucial lever. **It is rather simple: we need to buy better before we can build better because the carbon embodied in our buildings is forever.**

Without conscious approach by the EU to harmonise and level-up green procurement choices, the most polluting materials will remain the go-to option for public buildings and infrastructural projects, even while low-carbon alternatives are already available and scalable. The new European Commission means renewed opportunities to direct public investments towards the EU's strategic vision – a green and competitive European Single Market.

## Making it happen

### Key recommendations

1



**Introduce common and mandatory EU-level GPP criteria for concrete and steel,** focusing on embodied carbon and circularity.

2



**Develop harmonised monitoring and reporting tools** to provide complete and comparable data on GPP uptake and its resulting environmental gains.

3



**Support public authorities in implementing GPP** by training and exchanging best practices within and across Member States.

4



**Revise the EU Public Procurement Directives** to ensure public authorities deliver the best value for public money by procuring green.

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