

European Heart Network Feedback on the EU consultation on public procurement

Public money must be used for public good

Unhealthy diets are a major driver of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Europe, causing over 1.5 million deaths annually and contributing to 37% of all CVD fatalities, with high salt, trans fats, sugar, and low fruit/veg intake being key issues, linked to obesity and other NCDs.¹

Food is not a commodity like any other. The [EU Safe Hearts Plan](#) adopted on 16 December 2025 states that “Local governments could be supported and motivated to ensure that healthy foods are served in public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government facilities.” The document hereby refers to the JRC report on criteria for sustainable public procurement for food, catering services and vending machines which can be used by local governments to ensure that healthy foods are served in public institutions.

Strategic public spending on nutritious, healthy, sustainably grown, and regionally sourced food generates multiplier benefits across multiple domains: improved public health (reducing healthcare expenditures), environmental resilience (improving soil health and climate adaptation), and economic prosperity (creating quality jobs and strengthened regional economies). The revision of the public procurement rules should take this into consideration.

Food must be recognised as a strategic sector within public procurement

The [INI Report 2024/2103](#) (§61) recognises food as a strategic sector for EU security and prosperity, and President Ursula von der Leyen affirmed in her [State of the Union speech](#) that food and farming are the backbone of the European Union. Therefore, EHN calls for the revised Public Procurement Directive to grant special attention to the food and agriculture sector, acknowledging its strategic importance.

Furthermore, reforms on food public procurement allow to improve food environments as food public procurement can play a particularly strategic role for public health and contribute to healthy local economies while supporting small & medium enterprises (including farmers). Therefore we stress the need for rules to be better adapted to the food sector (for example to be able to better source local food).

The Commission recognises this need in [The EU Vision for agriculture and food](#) where it says: “Additionally, the Commission will come forward with a legal proposal to strengthen the role of public procurement. Public procurement should pursue a “best value” approach to reward quality and sustainability efforts made by European farmers, food industry and services, and should provide opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to participate in such activities. This can provide the right incentives to promote the consumption of local, seasonal products, and food produced with high environmental and social standards, including organic products and food originating from shorter supply chains.

¹ Figures from Global Burden of Disease 20219

Linked to this, the development of short food supply chains remains of strategic importance to ensure fairer prices for farmers, fishers and improved access to fresh and seasonal products for consumers.”

Prioritise quality over prize

The introduction of the MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) criteria in Directive 2014/24/EU created opportunities for strategic procurement through non-price award criteria. However, legal uncertainty persists, and risk-averse contracting authorities continue to default to lowest-price awarding, disregarding therefore the impact these choices may have on people’s health.

EHN calls for redefining MEAT as the Most Advantageous Tender (MAT), establishing the Best Price-Quality and Sustainability Ratio (BPQ&S) as the default award criterion for public contracts (Articles 67 and 72.6). The MAT criterion would provide greater flexibility by allowing social and environmental considerations to be assessed independently of purely economic factors. Anchoring the award process in the BPQ&S ratio, alongside a 'comply or explain' mechanism, would effectively limit lowest-price awarding and ensure a more balanced, sustainability-oriented procurement approach that can benefit people’s health.

