

POLICY GUIDANCE NOTE

ENABLING GENDER- RESPONSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN LEBANON:

Steps Forward

PREPARED BY

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ABOUT THIS NOTE

This policy guidance note is addressed to policy and decision makers in Lebanon, in both the public and private spheres. It is addressed as well to the executive branch of government and particularly the Public Procurement Authority (PPA) whose mission is to oversee and regulate the public procurement system and design and put into effects procurement policies as per the Public Procurement Law no. 244/2021.

The note proposes policy recommendations to practically introduce gender-responsive public procurement in Lebanon. It is intended as a guidance and advocacy tool presenting standards and good practices applied globally. It is informed by 1) the findings of a gender analysis of Law no. 244, 2) an enterprise survey and 3) consultation with decision makers and the business community.

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I. WHY IS GENDER RESPONSIVE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GLOBALLY AND IN LEBANON

1.1 GRPP is an accelerator for sustainable development (SDGs 5, 8 and 12)

The commitment to promote gender equality is at the heart of the global development agenda. Accelerating gender equality at all levels leads to a more rapid increase in progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted by United Nations Member States.

Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a key strategy for realizing gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures, and spending programs, with a view to promoting equality between women and men and fighting discrimination.

Gender-inclusive or gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) is about harnessing the purchasing power of the State as a strategic policy instrument to advance gender equality (SDG 5). It involves the introduction of gender requirements and considerations into public procurement policies and practices. GRPP aligns with international commitments of UN member states. The 2030 Agenda states that member countries are expected to mainstream gender equality

across all SDGs and targets, including the promotion of sustainable public procurement practices, in accordance with national policies and priorities (SDG 12.7).

As the state is the biggest buyer, it can influence markets, stimulate competition, and promote the development of women's entrepreneurship and women's economic empowerment (SDG 8). Public procurement accounts for 12% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP)¹ representing 10 to 15% of the GDP in developed countries and up to 30 to 40% in least developed countries². Governments can also leverage their roles as "market regulators" via procurement policies to empower women-led businesses.

Globally, states have been increasing their interest in and commitment towards integrating gender equality considerations in public procurement policies, practices and processes as entry points for furthering women's economic empowerment and building more equitable societies. At the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (2015)³, member states committed to tracking gender equality allocations and increasing the transparency of public spending. An advanced and emerging reformulation

1 World Bank (2020). How large is public procurement?, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/how-large-public-procurement>

2 Kirton, R.M. (2013). Gender, Trade and Public Procurement Policy. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

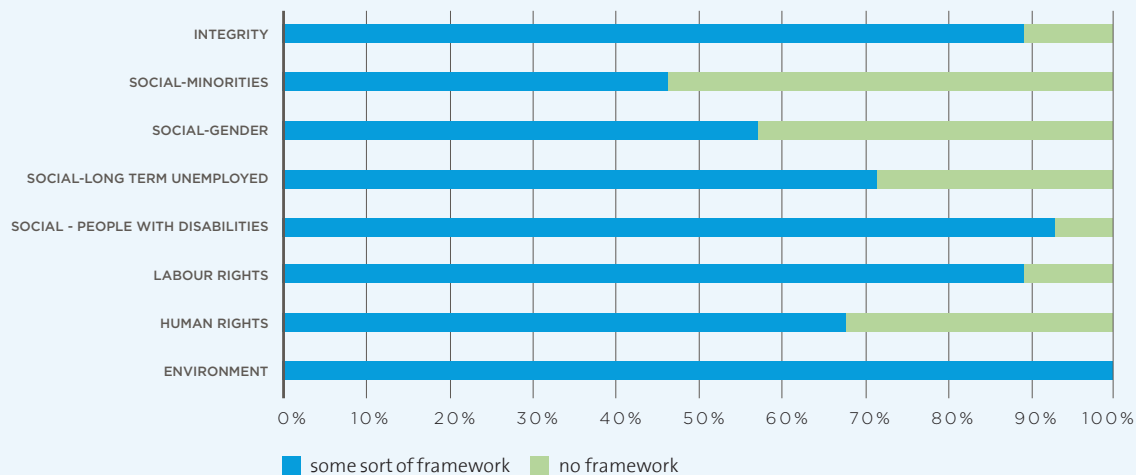
3 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/232/22/PDF/N1523222.pdf?OpenElement>

of the concept of GRPP is to source from gender-responsive enterprises, regardless of the gender identity of the owners.⁴ Around 57% of surveyed OECD countries having a framework on strategic objectives in public procurement also include gender-related considerations⁵ (Figure 1). However, strategic objectives

related to social issues (such as considerations related to long-term unemployed people, people with disabilities, and gender mainstreaming) tend to be less represented in these types of frameworks, which requires further development by governments⁶.

FIGURE 1

Share of countries with any type of framework supporting various strategic objectives in public procurement



Note: Based on data from 28 countries; either regulatory or strategic framework. Data for Austria, Chile, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States are not available.

Source: OECD (2020) Survey, Leveraging Responsible Business Conduct through Public Procurement.

Despite G20 members' commitment to reduce the gender gap in the labor market by 25% by 2025⁷, gender inequalities are perpetuated, leading to sever losses in economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) across countries at all income levels.⁸ In addition to gender inequalities, the COVID-19 pandemic has obstructed economic growth, increased unemployment and inequalities, and raised poverty, rolling back the global progress made in achieving the SDGs. More than 47 million women and girls are driven into extreme poverty in 2021.⁹ Despite this evidence, governments' responses shall address women's needs through policies. Strategic procurement is considered

one of today's policy choices for government spending as part of COVID-19 response.

Having public procurement at the heart of resources management encourages governments to adopt GRPP from a perspective aligned with gender-responsive public financial management (GRPFM). This allows better GRPP alignment with PFM and acknowledgment of different needs of men and women. Promoting gender equality is reflected in the assessment of PFM systems performance through the internationally recognized Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) framework¹⁰.

7 Islamic Development Bank (2019). Guidance Note on Social, Gender and Sustainable public procurement in Islamic Development Bank financed procurement, <https://www.isdb.org/project-procurement/sites/pproc/files/media/documents/IsDB%20-%20Guidance%20Note%20-%20Gender%20Consideration%20Social%20and%20Sustainable%20Public%20Procurement%20-%20FINAL%20%281%29.pdf>

9 UN Women (2020). From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-en.pdf>

8 Stotsky, J. 2016. Gender Budgeting: Fiscal Context and Current Outcomes. IMF Working Paper 16/149, Washington, DC.

10 PEFA has a supplementary framework for Gender-Responsive PFM. <https://www.pefa.org/resources/supplementary-framework-assessing-gender-responsive-public-financial-management-o>

BOX 1

Sustainable Public Procurement

Sustainable public procurement (SPP) is considered as a strategic tool to reinforce sustainable development and a golden opportunity for countries in crisis and governments suffering from shortages in budgetary resources to gear their procurement power towards achieving economic, societal and environmental goals (green growth, environment protection, developing SMEs, promoting women-led enterprises, innovation, responsible business conduct, etc).

Amongst the United Nations SDGs 5, 8 and 12 are particularly relevant to public procurement.

SPP shifts the value-for-money and efficiency towards more fairness and equity in the delivery of

public services, putting the life cycle costing (LCC) at the center, including the total cost of ownership and quality aspects to support more environmentally and socially sustainable outcomes.

Green public procurement (GPP) is part of the broader SPP agenda that uses the public sector's purchasing power to achieve environmental objectives. It requires the application of environmental criteria at each stage of the procurement process and that procurers identify the products and services that deliver the best value for money (VfM).

1.2 Can GRPP help women business thrive?

a) GRPP is good for business

Global evidence has continuously shown that a positive correlation exists between gender equality and a country's GDP per capita (Figure 2), reiterating that when women are excluded from the marketplace, the economy suffers. Statistics show that women's labour force participation globally stands at 47%¹¹, 27 percentage points below , and women continue to be paid on average 20% less than men¹² in terms of both remuneration of wage work and remuneration of capital for women entrepreneurs. Recent estimates show that with gender parity achieved, global GDP would increase by USD 28 trillion by 2025.¹³ Increasing women's labor force participation in emerging economies has led to economic gains and poverty reduction. Between 2000 and 2010, increases in women's labor force participation in Latin America and the Caribbean contributed to decreasing extreme poverty by 30%.¹⁴

11 International Labor Organization, 2020. Impact of lockdown measures on the informal economy. Geneva: ILO.

12 International Labor Organization, 2018, Global Wage Report 2018/19: What lies behind gender pay gaps. Geneva: ILO.

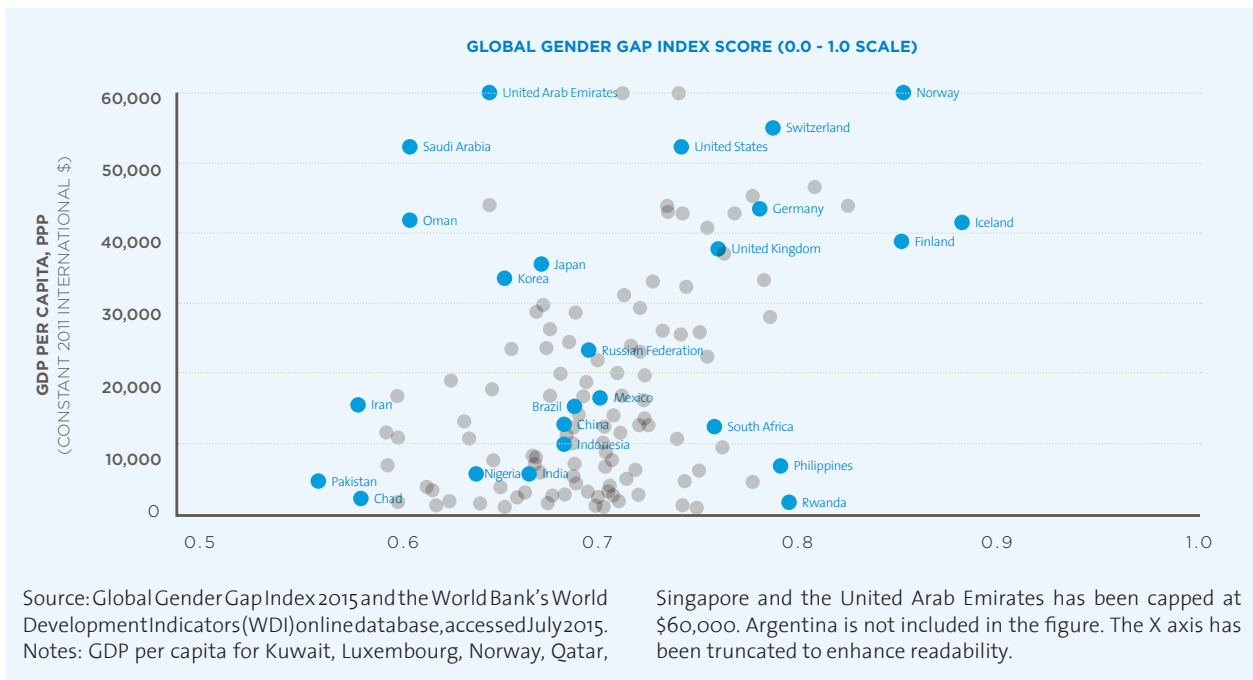
13 McKinsey Global Institute, 2015, The Power of Parity.

14 World Bank 2012, The Effects of Women's Economic Power in Latin America and the Caribbean. Washington, DC: World Bank.

15 International Trade Center, Empowering Women Through Public Procurement, <https://www.intracen.org/publication/Empowering-Women-Through-Public-Procurement/>

FIGURE 2

GDP per capita and the Global Gender Gap Index (2015)



More precisely, empowering women leads to the lowering of gender disparity which boosts productivity and economic growth¹⁵. According to the World Bank's World Development Report 2012, removing barriers

that prohibit women from entering certain sectors or occupations increases output per worker from 13 to 25%.

BOX 2

Defining women-led businesses

In a majority of studies, the “gender” of the firm is defined based on a certain threshold of ownership, ranging from having one woman owner to 51% or more.¹⁶ Ownership of a firm may not be the best way to determine the actual influence of women within a firm, and many studies and organizations look into the management structure of firms or a combination of ownership and management. In half of the multi-owner firms, where at least one owner is female, the key decision-makers are all male.

As a result, there is no standardized definition of a women-led business, which makes comparing findings across past research difficult. The Open Contracting Partnership recommends the following definition of WLBs:¹⁷

- a. 51% ownership/stake by a woman/women; or
- b. 1 woman as CEO/COO (president/vice president); or
- c. women sole-proprietors.

Source: Open Contracting Partnership (2020)

Public procurement has the power to influence market dynamics. GRPP policies offer opportunities for women-led businesses, including women SMEs, to access new markets and enter the competition. Women-owned firms, which are often smaller in size, and have less access to human, financial, and social resources often shy from entering competitive bidding. Such challenges that are unique to women led businesses need to be addressed through laws and policies that

are not gender neutral. In that sense, GRPP is a particular enabler and a creator of opportunities.

Moreover, if gender-responsive procurement is to influence equal outcomes for women and not just opportunities to participate in public markets, practices need to evolve to ensure gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and in communities so that women and men can benefit equally from both business and employment opportunities.

BOX 3

Gender-responsive public procurement initiatives in time of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to higher unemployment for women. Governments acted promptly to lower the negative effect of the pandemic on WLBs through gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) policies:

Colombia: Women-owned and women-led businesses represent 56% of the supplier base in selected procurement categories. As of October 2020, Colombia's President signed a directive with guidelines to promote GRPP. The national procurement agency 'Compra Eficiente' began publishing gender-disaggregated data about their public procurement, using the Open Contracting Data Standard. Data is used to analyze the differences in women's participation by sector, region and value of contracts. In 2020, 43% of the contracts related to COVID-19 government response were awarded to WLBs.

Also, the 2020 "Entrepreneurial Law" created a normative baseline to promote the participation of women-owned and women-led businesses in public procurement. Several pilots on

recommendations are taking place such as better outreach, fairer requirements, sensitization, and credit/prompt payment solutions in both rural and urban areas.

South Africa: South Africa has placed women's empowerment through public procurement at the heart of its COVID-19 recovery plan. In 2020, the President committed that 40% of government procurement spending would go to women-owned businesses. The 2020-22 Open Government Partnership (OGP) commitments of the Government also prioritized inclusion for women-owned businesses in procurement. Government departments have incorporated this commitment into their procurement processes, and a technical task team was established for its implementation with the support of UN Women. A series of workshops in collaboration with women's business associations were held on GRPP and its potential impact on sustaining women-owned entrepreneurs during and post COVID-19.

Source: Open Contracting Partnership and UN Women, 2021

16 C. Piras, A. Presbitero, & R. Rabellotti, (2013). "Definitions Matter: Measuring Gender Gaps in Firms"

17 OpenContractingPartnership(2020). Towards Gender Balance in Public Procurement, <https://www.open-contracting.org/resources/towards-gender-balance-in-public-procurement/>

b) Lebanese women status

The gender gap in Lebanon is pronounced in the fields of economic participation and opportunities. Female labor force participation in Lebanon is still very low (25% at the end of 2019, representing a third of the male labor force participation rate), especially among those aged 35 to 45.¹⁸ Even when women enter the workforce, they encounter barriers to advancement and retention. Only 17% of women are self-employed, compared to 43% of males, indicating a low rate of female entrepreneurship. According to the World Bank Enterprise Survey (2019), **the share of firms in Lebanon that are co-owned by women is 9.9%**¹⁹, compared to 21% in MENA region and 37.1% in upper-middle income countries.²⁰ They are concentrated in lower value sectors, and they struggle to grow, finding it hard to access finance and markets.

Since 2019, Lebanon has been facing an unprecedented multifold economic, financial, and social crisis that were compounded by the Beirut Port explosion on August 4, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of the Syrian war. Economic competitiveness (88 out of 141 countries) has been on the decline.²¹ The country's ranking on the ease of doing business is deteriorating steadily (143 out of 190 countries).²² Real GDP is estimated by the World Bank to decline by 10.5% in 2021, on the back of a 21.4 contraction in 2020. Lebanon's GDP has contracted by 58.1% ; qualified as the highest contraction among 193 countries.²³ This situation has caused the deterioration of revenues, closure of businesses and a hemorrhage of human capital, competencies and talents out of the country.

As a result, women's economic participation was worsened. During the early days of the health crisis for example revealed that more women than men reported losing their jobs (48% compared to 40% of men), and 7% of women claimed to have experienced a reduction in income compared to 3% of men²⁴.

Lebanese women's vulnerability is rooted in laws and regulations, in sectarian dynamics, in socio-cultural values, in decision-making structures, in public policies and development strategies, and in recurrent conflicts and instability. Despite progress made to date, gender inequality is endemic to all aspects of life, starting with its legal foundation.²⁵ Lebanon scores 52.5 out of 100 in the index "Women Business and the Law", slightly higher than the regional average but lower compared to the average of upper-middle-income countries.

c) Barriers to participation of women-led businesses to economy

Businesses in general, and women-led ones in particular, have been encountering multiple obstacles when it comes to actively and successfully participating in the economy and launching and growing their own businesses (Figure 3). Corruption, political stability, competition energy, low quality infrastructure like electricity and access to finance are the top 5 obstacles on a long list.

18 Idem

19 <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/brief-overview-of-recovery-support-for-women-owned-businesses-impacted-by-the-beirut-blast>

20 World Bank (2020), Enterprises Survey: Lebanon Country Profile 2019, <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/content/dam/enterprisesurveys/documents/country/Lebanon-2019.pdf>

21 World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report 2019, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

22 World Bank, Lebanon Doing Business Report 2020, <https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/l/lebanon/LBN.pdf>

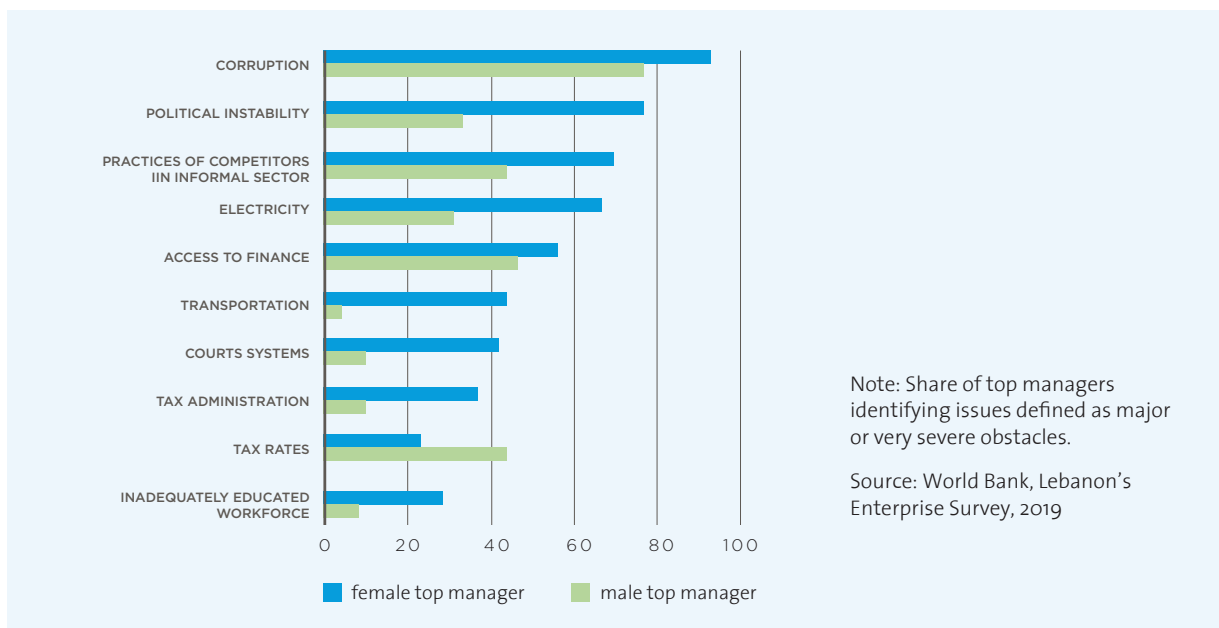
23 World Bank, Lebanon Economic Monitor, Fall 2021: The Great Denial, January 2022, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36862/LEM%20Economic%20Monitor%20Fall%202021.pdf>

24 idem

25 World Bank; UN Women. 2021. The Status of Women in Lebanon: Assessing Women's Access to Economic Opportunities, Human Capital Accumulation and Agency. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36512> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

FIGURE 3

Most constraints to firm operations in Lebanon (2019)



Access to finance is identified as a main constraint to female-led businesses.²⁶ Women have fewer opportunities to access finance for their business operations than men do. Only 31% of female-led firms have a bank loan or line of credit compared to male-led firms (40%). Furthermore, they tend to mostly operate in low-productivity, and stereotypically “feminine” industries that provide low wage and profit in return. Operating on smaller scale hinders the capacity of businesses to meet the requirements of large government contracts.

Limited access to social capital, skills, infrastructure, and high-quality business development services hampers women led businesses’ ability to grow and sometimes push them to exit markets. They mostly operate in environments that are not enabling nor gender-sensitive and suffer from non-conductive policies and legal frameworks, unsafe transportation, unsafe work environment, and unequal access to justice.

Socio-cultural challenges play a role as well, particularly due to current societal structures and preconceptions. Women, especially in areas far from centers or in rural areas may not be enough aware about women’s potential economic role, that is still heavily influenced by traditional beliefs about gender duties²⁷, which impedes women’s participation to the labor market, and increase their presence in informal sectors that are unregulated. Discriminatory working conditions often obstruct their access to adequate wages and chances of advancement into leadership and decision-making roles.

d) Barriers to women’s economic participation in public procurement

Public procurement is a big market where businesses, and particularly women-led businesses, can compete in case the procurement system in place offers the solid legal, institutional and operational grounds. However, being at the intersection of both the public and the private sphere, public procurement is

26 Idem

27 World Bank. 2019. Women’s Economic Empowerment Action Plan (WEEAP), <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/940761574447198430-0280022019/Lebanon-WEEAP-Jan-8-2019-en>

susceptible to risks of corruption and of private-sector gender biases.

According to the World Bank, women-owned small and medium enterprises (WSMEs) contribute 20% to the global gross domestic product. But global statistics reveal that only women-owned businesses receive an estimated 1% of large corporate and government procurement spent globally.²⁸ International reports point to two main challenges:

First, a perception that women-led businesses are not “good enough” or “experienced enough” to enter a competitive bidding process.

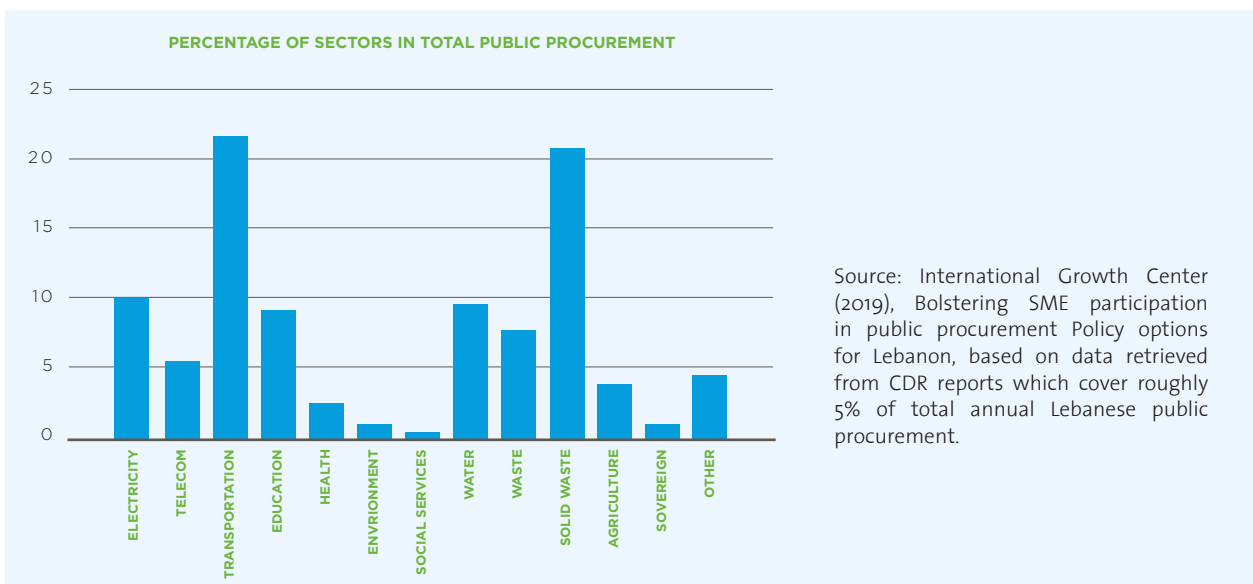
Second, that they lack knowledge about how to access the procurement market and where to find opportunities.

Disparities between men and women participation in public procurement are therefore noted across sectors, pointing to the need to target areas where women lag behind. Furthermore, governments aiming at increasing women’s participation often have difficulty to define women-led businesses. Weaknesses in data structure, disaggregation and quality is a substantial barrier to developing evidence-based policies.

In Lebanon, where SMEs constitute more than 95% of enterprises, research has shown that government contracts were awarded to a cartel of large companies, mostly dominated by politically connected male executives, leaving little space for effective competition²⁹, and leading to mismanagement and blocking market diversification. In addition, large procurement markets are concentrated in sectors where women-led businesses are not active or marginally active. These sectors include electricity, transportation, water and solid waste (Figure 4), engineering consulting, pharmaceuticals, etc.

The fact that small businesses led by women are mostly concentrated in the informal sectors put them completely out of the public procurement market being at central government or at municipal level. To many, the cost premium for shifting to formality, including being formerly registered in the tax system and in the social security fund in particular, outweigh by far the potential benefits from entering the public procurement market. Most start-ups are also averted of formality and, thus, excluded from the public procurement marketplace.

FIGURE 4
Distribution of Public Procurement by Sector, 2010-2017



Source: International Growth Center (2019), Bolstering SME participation in public procurement Policy options for Lebanon, based on data retrieved from CDR reports which cover roughly 5% of total annual Lebanese public procurement.

28 UN Women (2021). The Power of Public Procurement: How to source from women-owned businesses, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/The-power-of-procurement-How-to-source-from-women-owned-businesses-en.pdf>

29 Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (2020), Public Resource Allocation in Lebanon: How Uncompetitive is CDR’s Procurement Process?, URL: https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1595575975-cdr_article_july2020.pdf

Surveys of SMEs' barriers to participation to public procurement across the world and specifically in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region point to a number of factors including: the inadequate capacity to participate, delayed payments by procuring entity, lack of access to credit, a fragmented legal framework that is difficult to understand, the inadequate access to procurement opportunities, fraud and corruption, the lack of standardized procedures and the absence of efficient complaints mechanisms.³⁰

In Lebanon, evidence collected at the level of the business community indicated the following challenges:

- **Fragmented legal framework (before Law 244/2021):** Public procurement in Lebanon was regulated by an antiquated legal framework dating from 1959 and 1963. The framework did not meet international norms and principle. It was largely fragmented and opaque. SMEs, including WSMEs, had to abide by different regulatory texts when applying to central or local government procurement. In addition, significant capacity and technological shortages and the absence of key functions such as the complaint mechanisms led to inefficiencies and high corruption risks. The procurement system's quality ranked below average (48/100) when compared to the rest of the world and other MENA countries.³¹ Women entrepreneurs had noted that they needed to be more familiar with the new Law 244/2021 before deciding whether to venture into public procurement.
- **Limited access to procurement opportunities:** Women businesses noted that until today, they do not have timely access to information about procurement opportunities and procedures, which hinders their participation and capacity to grasp new opportunities. Absence of digitized procurement notices is a key impediment. Access is lower among smaller entrepreneurs and in sectors where majority of women SMEs operate (trade, services,

etc). A recent survey showed that 48.5% of businesses consider this impediment to be among the main ones preventing participation³².

- **Limited access to finance:** The majority of government contracts seek out businesses and enterprises with a particular level of financial depth and operational maturity. These two factors act as indicators of the bidder's ability and capacity to execute a contract. In Lebanon, recent business survey and consultation revealed that most women enterprises do not have sufficient access to finance for them to be able to compete confidently which hinders their ability to apply for procurement opportunities³³. Also, payment delays have a particularly deleterious impact on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which often have limited access to formal financial systems to bridge their working capital requirements.
- **Collusion and fraud:** Corruption and bias impair the fairness of public procurement processes. The prevalent record of public procurement contracts awarded in the last decade reveals an extreme lack of competitiveness in the tendering process at the national, governorate, and district levels, with only a few corporations receiving the majority of public procurement projects³⁴. This created barriers to private sector participation in general due to the lack of trust, but also of women-led businesses that are generally discouraged to penetrate a market controlled by cartels and closed networks.
- **Transparency and integrity:** The current public procurement system does not have the necessary levers to impose transparency and integrity when it comes to the disclosure of available public procurement opportunities as well as the fairness of tendering and bidding processes. Public procurement data is available only for around 10% of total central procurement compiled and reported by the Central Tender Board (CTB) since 2017.³⁵ Data that

30 Idem

31 <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/brief-overview-of-recovery-support-for-women-owned-businesses-impacted-by-the-beirut-blast>

32 World Bank (2020), Enterprises Survey: Lebanon Country Profile 2019, <https://www.enterprisesurveys.org/content/dam/enterprisesurveys/documents/country/Lebanon-2019.pdf>

33 World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report 2019, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

34 World Bank, Lebanon Doing Business Report 2020, <https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/l/Lebanon/LBN.pdf>

35 World Bank, Lebanon Economic Monitor, Fall 2021: The Great Denial, January 2022, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36862/LEM%20Economic%20Monitor%20Fall%202021.pdf>

are available are not standardized in a single format, and open access is not available. This hinders WSMEs' access to procurement information and decreases their trust in the system, therefore increasing barriers to participation.

Limited access to procurement opportunities (48.5%), limited access to finance so that businesses can adequately resources and guarantees to bid and compete in procurement market (39.4%), as well as opaque and overlapping regulations are identified as main impediments to participation of WLB.

Changing the rules of the game and reforming public procurement holds large potential for women-led businesses. Law 244/2021 is a door opened for women economic empowerment by breaking previous barriers to equal participation opportunities³⁶. This is perceived to lead to increased participation of WSMEs in public procurement and thus the promotion of decent job opportunities for women, and fostering innovation and market competitiveness.

BOX 4

Gender disaggregated data and transparency in public procurement

Gender-disaggregated data has been instrumental in identifying gender gaps and informing gender-responsive procurement reforms. Initiatives to increase transparency in public procurement, such as open data processes, can complement affirmative actions toward building a gender-responsive procurement system. Open data and the timely sharing of procurement information can enable greater transparency and accountability between governments and citizens. In turn, this transparency can help reduce women's perceptions of unfairness, bias, and corruption in public procurement processes.

For example, the procurement agencies of the Dominican Republic and Chile have both created public online procurement portals based on open contracting principles, Mercado Público in the case of Chile and Compras Dominicana in the Dominican Republic. These portals have made it easier for new suppliers and women-led SMEs to access tender information. Interviewees from both governments said the platforms have contributed to increasing fairness, transparency and combating corruption.

36 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

II. HOW CAN LAW 244 PAVE THE WAY FOR GRPP IN LEBANON

Public procurement reform in Lebanon presents a perfect moment for introducing GRPP. Lessons learnt from various countries' contexts also show that public procurement reform is a perfect momentum for governments to gear policies towards serving secondary policy objectives (economic development, social inclusion environment protection), and for women-led businesses to actively learn about the dynamics of this market and be proactive and innovative. However, even with such success, the integration and effective application of gender-responsive public procurement is hindered by many challenges faced by governments and government reformers across the world. These challenges include:

- the lack of gender disaggregated data about bidders and suppliers;
- the legal difficulty in identifying women-led businesses;
- the preconceived beliefs and stereotypes that women can only lead microenterprises in certain sectors which impacts bids³⁷.

In Lebanon, the Public Procurement Law (PPL) no. 244/2021 succeeded in breaking barriers to equal participation opportunities and has included provisions that allow for the integration of gender-responsive policies. By doing so it has guaranteed equal and fair opportunities to all potential suppliers to participate in procurement on competitive basis. It thus represents the first and most essential step towards GRPP in Lebanon.

PPL no. 244/2021 is deeply rooted in the international norms set out by UNCITRAL Model law on Public Procurement (2011)³⁸ and the OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement (2016)³⁹. It is founded on eight guiding principles that emphasize competitive practices and sustainability considerations for better economic and social outcomes from government contracts (Figure 5). It also puts digitization and open data at the core interest of the new system. This comes in line with international standards and practices that have proved to bring large value in terms of cost reduction, value for money, economic gains and most importantly for GRPP; social inclusion. GRPP cannot be achieved without such solid legal foundations. This is the case in many countries such as Chile, Tunisia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and others, where GRPP was introduced in the framework of comprehensive and whole-of-government procurement reform⁴⁰.

37 Open Contracting Partnership (2020). How to empower women-led businesses and make public procurement more inclusive, <https://www.open-contracting.org/resources/empower-women-led-business-procurement/>

38 UNCITRAL Model Law on Public Procurement (2011), <https://uncitral.un.org/sites/uncitral.un.org/files/media-documents/uncitral/en/2011-model-law-on-public-procurement-e.pdf>

39 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Procurement (2016), <https://www.oecd.org/gov/public-procurement/OECD-Recommendation-on-Public-Procurement.pdf>

40 Institut des Finances Basil Fuleihan, 2020. Public Procurement: A key lever for sound governance and economic recovery

FIGURES

Guiding principles of the Public Procurement Law no. 244/2021



Based on a detailed gender analysis of PPL no. 244/2021 underlying opportunities for women and women-led businesses were pinpointed. The below is a summary:

a) The Law adopts an enhanced framework for competition, which:

- Ensures that **competitive measures are the general rule and the standard procurement method**, as a means to enhancing efficiency and fighting corruption (Article 42). With single bidding as a proxy for corruption risks in public procurement, improvements in gender-related variables are associated with lower levels of single bidding in public procurement. Evidence from research show that if a company is run by women, the probability of winning a contract with a single bid is lower by 2.3%⁴¹;
- Adopts strict controls to **limit the recourse to mutual agreements** (Article 46);
- Provides equal opportunities for all bidders wishing to participate in the **pre-qualification proceedings according to a clear and detailed process**, (Article 7, Article 19) allowing to determine the bidder's eligibility and capacity to implement the contract. This replaces an old and archaic "classification" process that was ill governed and acted as a barrier for entry of newcomers into the public markets⁴².
- Operates within **coherent, stable, clear and simple institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks** which ensures that potential competitors of all sizes have

access to procurement opportunities, including foreign suppliers, and promote fair, equitable and transparent treatment of all;

b) The Law adopts sustainability as a key guiding principle, which:

- Provides a **leverage for economic development**, by ensuring SMEs the right to fair and transparent participation in government contracts, and including sustainability criteria related to environment, balanced economic development (support of women's economic participation, rural development, etc.), and social responsibility (Article 15);
- Directs the Lebanese government's procurement capacity, when possible, towards **sustainable goods and services**, while ensuring a balance between potential benefits and achieving the best value for money (Article 15);
- Provides **incentives to SMEs, local production and national expertise** (Article 15);
- Allowing for procurement to be **divided into lots**, when possible, to guarantee social & economic benefits;
- Provides **preference regulations with regard to domestic products, consulting services and expertise**, and guarantees that such products, services and expertise shall not be excluded if they are available and their quality thereof meet technical requirements (Article 16);

⁴¹ EBRD (2020), Gender in European public procurement: Extent, distribution, and impacts, http://www.govtransparency.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Fazekas-et-al_Gender-in-European-public-procurement_published_2020.pdf

⁴² Lamia Moubayed Bissat, Gender Analysis of Public Procurement Law 244/2021, January 2022

- Uses **clear, integrated and standardized bidding documents**, binding for all parties (Article 52, Article 76);
- Provides an **appropriate range of procurement methods** that include competitive procedures, to ensure best value for money and only eligible bidders are involved (Articles 41 to 48).

c) The Law creates the Public Procurement Authority (PPA) as the regulatory body responsible for designing policies.

The Law establishes a clear and modern institutional framework that is conducive to broad participation of the private sector, including SMEs and more particularly WSMEs, in a way that ensures alignment to international standards and good practices.

The duties of the PPA, listed in Article 76 of the PPL, that particularly impact gender equality and women-led businesses participation are the following:

- **Formulating public policies** that ensure the progressiveness and innovativeness of the system. This mandate, totally inexistent in the current legal framework, will allow procurement to be governed by tailored policies that enable continuous evolution of the system, including the consideration for inclusive procurement and gender responsive procurement. PPA will be directly responsible of designing procurement policies and overseeing their implementation;
- **Prioritizing the adoption of policies that promote the support of WSMEs by setting aside a certain percentage of annual public procurement contracts** to women-led businesses or enterprises that employ a large number of women, or by choosing to create incentives that encourage their participation, without breaching the principle of competition. This role could benefit women exceptionally. Setting-aside processes shall also be cautious of the availability of women-led businesses that can supply the set percentage in terms of goods and services to be procured, otherwise setting quotas might create a shortage of viable suppliers;

- **Allowing systematic and free of charge access to procurement information** through the central electronic platform, and **publishing and analyzing gender-disaggregated data** to inform procurement policies;

- **Assisting and advising WSMEs** on how to seize procurement opportunities, and making available tools and guidance;

- **Designing strategies & recommendations to increase or improve the participation of SMEs**, with room for gender inclusiveness through particular consideration to women-led businesses: continuous dialogue, regular analysis of barriers to entry, etc.

d) The Law also creates the Complaints Authority (CA) that provides fair, specialized and timely responses to grievances.

This function which was inexistent in the previous regulations guarantees the right of businesses to file their complaints at any stage of the pre-contractual phase should they note breaches of the principles that the PPL promulgates or an abuse of any sort. With a three-stage complaint mechanism in line with modern practices, private sector in general, and SMEs including WSMEs in particular, have the right to file complaints about unfair decisions taken by procuring entities or carry specific biases. When filing a complaint, the procurement procedures are frozen and no signature of contract is allowed. It further guarantees that the system efficiently addresses grievances in a swift, timely, independent, unbiased and competent manner. The new system is a new innovation brought by the PPL that has proven its success and efficiency in many countries such as Croatia, Denmark, Georgia, Kosovo, Norway, Romania, Poland. It is key for the business environment in Lebanon to re-establish trust in the procurement market and encourage small businesses, including WSMEs, to participate and be able to challenge the procedures or decisions issued by or against the procuring entity or any of the stakeholders in the procurement process.

III. POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS TO

MAKE GRPP IN LEBANON

REAL

To advance the agenda of gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP), governments should principally make the regulatory framework for public procurement more adequate in relation to the needs and characteristics of MSMEs, including women-led businesses, and to ensure the efficiency and transparency of the procurement system.

However, regulatory reform alone is not enough. There is a wide array of policy options available for governments that facilitate women-led enterprises' participation in public procurement. Such policies, among others, include targeted capacity development, set-asides, preferences, and sub-contracting plans. Increased participation by women-owned or led businesses in these markets would not only facilitate achieving gender equality as a goal in itself, but also improve procurement outcomes by increasing the pool of potential suppliers, therefore, enhancing fair and effective competition. Lessons learnt from various countries' contexts show that public procurement reform is a perfect momentum for the government to gear policies towards serving secondary policy objectives (economic development, social inclusion environment protection), and for women led businesses to actively learn about the dynamics of this market and be proactive and innovative.

Globally, many countries including Albania, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, South Africa, and others have taken important steps towards setting more gender inclusive procurement systems. This has proven effective in establishing a supportive environment for women businesses and entrepreneurs interested in participating in the public procurement market⁴³. Preferential treatment for women-owned businesses in public procurement is one of the policy options at the disposal of policy makers. It is a relatively new concept in Europe. Notwithstanding this fact, many countries have already established minimum quotas for the participation of women in procurement. Many countries have integrated the “buy from women-owned/operated” approach into their national laws and policies. These have recorded tangible results.

43 UN Women (2021). Empowering Women Through Procurement and Enabling Inclusive Growth, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/11/empowering-women-through-public-procurement-and-enabling-inclusive-growth>

BOX 5

Chile leading by example for gender-responsive public procurement

In 2014, the Government of Chile pioneered a new public policy to increase the participation of women-owned and women-led businesses in public procurement. In a country where only 36% businesses participating in the public market are women-owned, ChileCompra (the procurement agency working under the Ministry of Finance) included gender-responsive policies in their public procurement system, through:

- a. sensitization and capacity-building among public procurement officers
- b. consolidation of the Sello Empresa Mujer (Women's Supplier Certification) to identify women-owned and women-led businesses
- c. actions to increase the capacity of suppliers to engage in public procurement processes

- d. the creation of business networks

The above actions were complemented by a baseline analysis of the market to identify share of women and size of their companies and in which industries they were active, and the establishment of an E-marketplace where 90% of the companies that sell their products and services are micro or small enterprises. Chile Compra also facilitated access to public markets through user-friendly platforms and guiding potential suppliers.

'Directive 20' was also launched as an initiative that encourages public buyers to procure from WLBs.

Source: Open Contracting Partnership and UN Women, 2021

For Lebanon, the PPL and the reform in general is a door wide opened for women economic empowerment. To inform the process towards GRPP in Lebanon, the gender analysis of the PPL no. 244/2021 was complemented by countries' benchmarks and an enterprise survey to better understand the perception of businesses in Lebanon. This was followed by consultations with policy makers, private sector entities and gender experts that revealed key elements pertaining to the understanding of the new law, the expression/identification of practical barriers to entry to the procurement market, and the familiarity with the GRPP concept and application.

This approach helped shaping practical policy recommendations for GRPP to be considered by the Public Procurement Authority (PPA), in consultation with key stakeholders of the public procurement system, when Law 244/2021 enters into force:

3.1 Identify and track women-led businesses

There is absence of clear definition of women-led businesses in Lebanon. The indicative survey results show that 66% of respondents defined women-led businesses (WLB) to be 51%+ controlled by women, and only 6% opted for the definition of "full ownership". Having women at the decision-making level of

businesses is then the main factor to be considered 'women-led'.

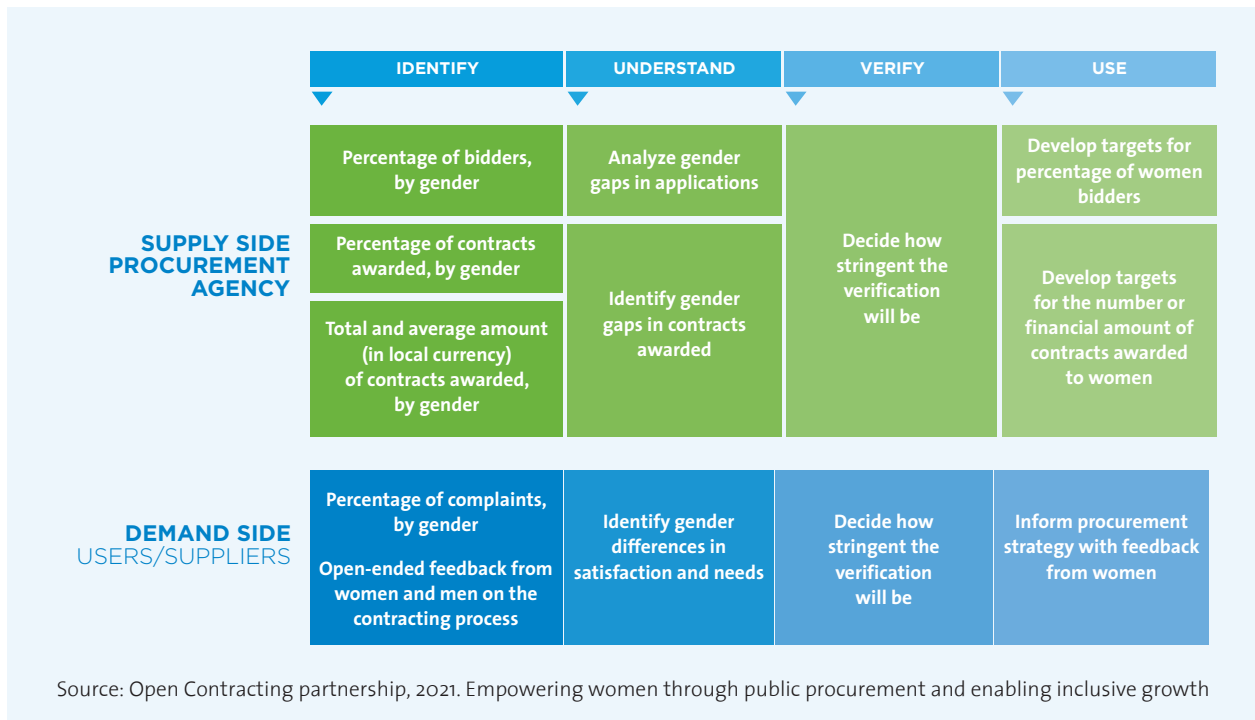
A first policy action would be to formulate an officially recognized definition of WLB that helps the Government and the business sector identify businesses to be targeted by gender-inclusive policies, programs and incentives to access the public procurement market.

Defining WLB should be practical and take into account the availability, or lack thereof, of gender-disaggregated data. **There is an opportunity to create a field for the gender of the CEO or beneficial owner or general manager of the supplier on the central electronic platform that will be managed by the PPA.** This identification shall also align with the identification at the level of commercial registry to be able to capture the relevant data and serve the purpose of gender-responsive procurement policies. An indicative table of gender-disaggregated data from the demand and supply sides is shown in Figure 6.

Such practice was successfully applied in Chile where an electronic registry that certifies WLBs and is linked to the civil registry was introduced. In Argentina for instance, the City of Buenos Aires launched the Women's Seal "Sello Mujer" which is a mechanism for voluntary identification of women-led suppliers registered in the Single and Permanent Computerized Register of Suppliers (RIUPP).

FIGURE 6

Indicative set of gender-disaggregated indicators, related analysis and use



As the application of GRPP matures at the country level, **a next step would be to define gender-responsive enterprises and design indicators to track them.** This is a newer concept whereby government procures from gender-responsive enterprises, regardless of ownership, leading to equal outcomes for women more broadly at the national level.

Therefore, an analysis and understanding of gender is required to understand the differential impact of the procurement process on women at all stages, not only at the level of contracting, but also making sure that women may access and benefit from public services (such as education, health, and social care that constitute large shares of public investment) in different ways than men. In this case, public procurement would be used as a transformative lever that gives preference to gender-responsive enterprises, which leads to creating decent jobs and better economic outcomes for women.

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3.2 Design informed GRPP policies

- Ensuring a government commitment to gender equality by **developing a strategy for gender-responsive procurement upon the suggestion of the Public Procurement Authority (PPA).** The Dominican Republic’s public procurement strategy led to an increase of 16 percentage points in contracts awarded to smaller businesses owned and led by women, from

10% of contracts in 2012 (with a spending value of US\$ 41 million), to 26 per cent in 2019 (a spending value of US\$ 125 million).

- Undertaking an **in-depth survey and perform a sectoral analysis to understand the characteristics of women-led and owned businesses, and the dynamics with the public procurement market** (knowledge of and participation to public bids, constraints faced and needs for support, etc) to better inform future procurement policies in favor of women-led businesses participation.

- Designing **tailored GRPP policies with special attention to women-led businesses in Lebanon in a way that reduce barriers to participation and bring incentive measures**, such as:

- ✓ certifying women-led businesses to identify both women-led businesses as well as those with more than 50% of women workforce. Such policy measure was applied in Chile and led to an increase in the number of women-owned businesses in PP (approx. 45% of transactions), many of them are from rural areas and 64% are from the family's main wage earner. It also pushed the government to advise that gender criteria be included in all government purchases.

- ✓ setting aside a certain percentage of public contracts for women-led businesses. Kenya applied this policy; 30% of government tenders were allocated to enterprises led by women, youth, older persons and people with disabilities, through the 'Access to Government Procurement Opportunities - AGPO' program. The value of tenders reserved and given to women has doubled between 2016 and 2019⁴⁴.

- ✓ including gender criteria in the standard bidding documents (SBDs) or reducing legal and procedural requirements for WLB while ensuring that those included are essential for the delivery of the needed service or work. In Albania for example, SBDs were amended under a World Bank financed project to ask bidders to submit Gender Diversity Action Plans to increase the representation of women in the construction sector that has always been male dominated.

- ✓ establishing percentage points in the evaluation for non-financial criteria (for businesses having gender sensitivity, businesses being women-led, and those having an active CSR policy, etc).

- ✓ leveling the playing field for WSMEs by opening procurement opportunities for targeted sectors where the concentration of women-led and owned businesses is higher.

- ✓ setting subsidies such as tax exemption for WSMEs winning public contracts, whether applied to indirect taxes on inputs used or on the outputs (profits) generated by a public contract.

- Accompanying the policy design process by the provision of adequate technical and legal assistance to the PPA in view of issuing targeted and well-designed GRPP policies.

3.3. Sourcing techniques and practices

- **Dividing the procurement into independent portions** where the nature of works, goods or services requires such division, and in line with the application of a set development policy that has at its core the gender dimension.

- **Encouraging the application of group bidding / joint venture based on the provisions of Law 244** that allow such mechanism, in order to encourage women-led businesses to enter the competition with adequate pre-qualification criteria.

- **Reserving contracts for certain types of procurement below a certain value threshold for pre-qualified WSMEs** (positive discrimination without breaching the principle and rule of open competition) reducing concerns that contracts may be allocated on the basis of patronage and networks. Based on the international experience, the use of quotas remains controversial, as it may reinforce bias in some cases. As such, additional research is required to understand how such quota and preferential treatment programs work in practice and to evaluate effective complementary measures.

- **Issuing specific guidance and provide hands-on training for public buyers (procuring entities) on procurement planning from a gender lens**, including

44 UN women (2021). Empowering Women Through Procurement and Enabling Inclusive Growth, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/11/empowering-women-through-public-procurement-and-enabling-inclusive-growth>

42 Lamia Moubayed Bissat, Gender Analysis of Public Procurement Law 244/2021, January 2022

needs analysis, market research, choice of approaches and procedures, preparation and publication of procurement plans, so that procurement projects meet the societal needs. Countries that established GRPP policies have given capacity building crucial importance to contribute to change management.

- **Training public buyers (procuring entities) on how to include clauses with a gender perspective and how they are weighted and controlled to benefit WLBs.** In Colombia, guidelines for public procurement officials were issued to incorporate gender-responsive procurement and supporting WOBs and WLBs. Improving payment terms for women-led businesses by setting and/or enforcing rules regarding prompt payment since MSMEs including WLBs have limited financial resources and thus are less able than larger firms to absorb the impact of delayed payments. In Paraguay for instance, measures were undertaken to reduce delayed payments to suppliers that costed the economy \$143.2 million between 2011 and 2017 (equivalent of 0.48% of 2017 GDP).

- **Providing timely and adequate feedback** to bidders.

3.4. Supplier development

- **Providing financial assistance to women-led businesses** to enable them to have the needed means to apply to bids by incentivizing the banking sector and financial institutions to facilitating bid securities, guarantees, advanced payments facilities, specific credit lines for business development, etc.

- **Setting incentive structures to sustain the risk of innovation for SMEs**, including WSMEs, to reduce the risk failure and increase chances of success by providing them with the means to acquire required external resources.

- **Informing and training women to help them get on the registration process as suppliers and to get them familiar with the new Law 244/2021** and the functioning of the procurement process. Training is pivotal; the experiences of Chile and the Dominican Republic are inspiring where procuring entities launched specific initiatives to reach rural areas to inform WLBs about reforms. In-person training, at central level and in the regions, is key to transfer knowledge and skills on how to successfully prepare bids, and e-learning is important to help increase the outreach to WLBs in remote areas.

- **Issuing specific guidance to economic operators, including WLBs**, on the application of incentives for domestic businesses or locally produced supplies, goods or services.

3.5. Promoting transparency and harnessing the use of data

- Ensuring a high level of transparency in public procurement through **the effective operationalization of the central electronic platform using adequate digital information means and technologies that ease access to procurement information to SMEs including WSMEs.** This allows the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated-data with specific indicators to inform gender-responsive policies, monitor and draw analysis. Both the Dominican Republic and Chile created public online procurement portals based on open contracting principles which eased access to procurement opportunities and contributed to increasing fairness, transparency and combating corruption.

- **Establishing tracking reporting and goal-setting mechanisms to follow on implementation of procurement practices in favor of women-led businesses' participation.** Using standardized data that can be compared and analyzed easily. It has proved that by using the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS), data could be collected and analyzed to monitor the competition and gaps (number of WLBs submitting bids / winning contracts) and the performance (WLBs performing the same, better or worse than other businesses). In Colombia, the government started to publish gender-disaggregated data using OCDS to analyze the difference in women's participation by sector, region and value of contracts, and to gear public policies in that respect.

- **Setting clear guiding principles for the generation of gender-disaggregated data on women-owned and led businesses.** Communicating the results of gender-disaggregated data analysis to concerned stakeholders to ensure needed support and buy-in for better policies and targeted programs. The City of Buenos Aires, Chile, and the Dominican Republic ensured that all tenders and programs related to WLBs are easily accessible online and linked with different government entities that are working on other specific programs to support women entrepreneurs.

3.6. Requirements for encouraging an inclusive public procurement ecosystem

- **Identifying stakeholders concerned with the gender-responsive public procurement ecosystem** to facilitate networking and partnership building with business associations and civil society organizations to advance the GRPP policy agenda.
- **Reinforcing the alignment between GRPP and other public policies and initiatives** intended to promote sustainable development and improve gender equality at the national level.
- **Issuing a PPA circular encouraging procuring entities to undertake robust and structured procurement planning exercise to mainstream gender considerations** in procurement projects at the level of sourcing, beneficiaries and long-term impact on society.
- **Setting a quota for women in the secondary legislations** pertaining to the nominations of the two authorities (PPA and CA) and in the PPA decisions for the formation of the tender and acceptance committees, to ensure fair and gender-balanced representation and start shaping the public opinion on this topic.
- **Considering gender balance in the secondary legislations establishing the procurement profession**, and in internal circulars/decisions/administrative arrangements of the new procurement units (at the level of procuring entities) and their respective staffing.
- **Sustaining the peer-to-peer exchange and transfer of international good practices** in collaboration with international partners such as UN women, World Bank, European Union, Open Contracting Partnership, among others.
- **Considering the implementation of the universal framework to assessing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in public procurement**, in collaboration with Open Contracting Partnership, to assess the inclusivity of procurement practices, policies, regulations and laws at the national level.

IV. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The table below summarizes **key policy recommendations proposed for the Public Procurement Authority to undertake in order to advance the**

gender-responsive public procurement policy agenda in Lebanon, featuring key actors to engage with, and the respective timeframe.

| Policy recommendation for PPA | Actors that can be engaged | Timeframe |
|---|---|----------------------|
| Set a quota for women in the secondary legislations pertaining to the nominations of the PPA and Complaints Authority. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform coordinator) • International organizations providing assistance and support to public procurement reform | Short term |
| Ensure the effective and timely operationalization of the central electronic platform, using adequate digital information means and technologies that ease access to procurement information to SMEs including WSMs, and that allows the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data for analysis and monitoring of competition and gaps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform coordinator) • Procuring entities • International organizations providing assistance and support to public procurement reform | Short term |
| Identify stakeholders concerned with the gender-responsive public procurement ecosystem to engage them in the process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform lead) • International organizations working on public procurement reform | Short term |
| Raising awareness on the importance and features of GRPP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National training providers (Institut des Finances, others according to specialization) • Private sector (associations, syndicates, economic operators including SMEs, WLBs, startups, etc) • Civil society and think tanks | Short term |
| Issue guidance to public procurers on applying procurement practices that are in favor of WLBs participation while applying PPL provisions (division into lots, group bidding, etc) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National training provider (Institut des Finances) • Private sector (associations, syndicates, economic operators including SMEs, WLBs, startups, etc) | Short term |
| Issue specific guidance to economic operators, including WLBs, on the application of incentives for domestic businesses or locally produced supplies, goods or services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National training provider (Institut des Finances) • Private sector (associations, syndicates, economic operators including SMEs, WLBs, startups, etc) | Short to medium term |
| Issue decisions for the formation of the tender and acceptance committees while ensuring fair and gender-balanced representation and start shaping the public opinion on this topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform coordinator) • Procuring entities • Central Inspection Board | Short to medium term |

| Policy recommendation for PPA | Actors that can be engaged | Timeframe |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| Propose a strategy for gender-responsive procurement to be approved by the Government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform coordinator) • Procuring entities • Private sector (associations, syndicates, economic operators including SMEs, WLBs, startups, etc) • Civil society and think tanks • International organizations working on public procurement reform and gender quality | Medium to long term |
| Design a range of tailored GRPP policies with special attention to women-led businesses in Lebanon in a way that reduce barriers to participation and bring incentive measures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business associations • Economic operators bidding to the State • Women-led businesses • Financial sector • Civil society organizations advocating for gender quality and economic empowerment | Medium to long term |
| Issue specific guidance, circulars and provide hands-on training on GRPP and related procurement practices addressed to public buyers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National training provider (Institut des Finances) • Procuring entities | Medium to long term |
| Implement the universal framework to assessing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in public procurement to assess the inclusivity of procurement practices, policies, regulations and laws at the national level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institut des Finances (as reform coordinator) • Procuring entities • Private sector (associations, syndicates, economic operators including SMEs, WLBs, startups, etc) • Civil society and think tanks • International organizations working on public procurement reform and gender quality | Long term |

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MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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