

Leveraging public procurement to develop skills and create jobs



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Foreword

The global jobs gap—the estimated number of people who want to work but are unable to find employment—has surpassed 400 million. At the same time, employers across sectors report growing skills shortages, increasingly citing them as one of the most significant barriers to business transformation and economic resilience.

At UNOPS, we are committed to supporting the creation of more and better jobs. Through the management and delivery of projects on behalf of our partners, we help stimulate local economies, while the implementation of green technologies enables us to contribute to the growth of green and future-oriented jobs.

Yet we recognize that job creation is a monumental challenge—one that cannot be addressed by any single actor or policy lever alone. Skills development is a critical component of effective employment strategies, including through upskilling and reskilling initiatives that respond to evolving labour market needs. Public procurement, when used strategically, has significant untapped potential to support these efforts.

This practical report demonstrates how public procurement can be leveraged intentionally to promote skills development and help create jobs. It seeks to raise awareness among governments, procurement professionals and other stakeholders of the powerful role procurement can play in advancing employment objectives and fostering inclusive, sustainable economic transformation.



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Introduction

This publication addresses pressing global issues, particularly high unemployment rates, significant labour and skills shortages, and the increasing demand for green skills in emerging sectors. Globally, the jobs gap is close to 435 million, with the youth¹ unemployment rate being nearly 3.5 times higher than that of adults. Employers are increasingly concerned about skills gaps, with 63 per cent expecting them to be the biggest barrier to business transformation between 2025 and 2030.

In this context, public procurement emerges as a powerful tool. It can foster job creation by encouraging the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – which are a key source of new jobs – and by requiring suppliers to contribute to local recruitment and skills development. This approach helps governments make the most of their available resources by promoting learning opportunities within their projects and uplifting companies that support such initiatives, which is crucial when fiscal positions are fragile.

Purpose of the publication and target audience

This document illustrates how skills development can be incorporated into procurement to support both formal and informal learning. The types of skills targeted will depend on the specific kind of procurement, and collaboration between businesses, training providers, and the government will need to be adapted based on each country's laws, training procedures, and procurement systems. The publication's primary goal is to raise awareness among governments, procurement professionals and other relevant stakeholders about this potential, while also offering practical ideas for implementation.

This publication focuses on ways to encourage suppliers to support local recruitment and skills development, highlighting how public procurement can promote skills development and support job creation.

It serves as a starting point for public sector actors to explore ways to help close the skills gap through the procurement process.

This paper is not a step-by-step guide, but rather shows how skills development can be considered during procurement to support both formal and informal learning.

1. For statistical purposes, the United Nations—without prejudice to definitions adopted by Member States—defines youth as persons aged between 15 and 24. However, for the purposes of this publication, youth refers to individuals aged between 15 and 29. This broader definition acknowledges that some young people remain in education for longer periods and enables a more comprehensive capture of post-graduation employment experiences. See ILO's [Youth Labour Market Statistics page](#).

Unemployment trends

The global jobs gap² is close to 435 million. The recovery of labour force participation rates to pre-COVID-19 levels has not benefited all labour market groups the same way. Female workers’ participation rates have recovered faster than expected, but the gender participation gap remains large, especially in emerging and developing countries (see Table 1).

Table 1. Jobs gap rate, 2019-2023, by sex and income group.

Income group	Sex	Jobs gap rate (percentages)				
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
World	Women	14.4	16.1	15.3	14.2	13.7
	Men	10.0	11.6	10.7	9.6	9.3
	Total	11.8	13.4	12.6	11.5	11.1
Low-income countries	Women	24.1	25.5	25.1	24.4	24.3
	Men	16.6	17.8	17.8	17.5	17.4
	Total	20.0	21.4	21.1	20.6	20.5
Lower-middle-income countries	Women	16.2	17.4	16.8	16.0	15.4
	Men	10.1	11.6	10.5	9.1	8.9
	Total	12.1	13.5	12.6	11.4	11.1
Upper-middle-income countries	Women	13.2	14.8	14.0	12.6	12.0
	Men	9.6	11.1	10.2	9.4	9.0
	Total	11.2	12.8	11.9	10.8	10.4
High-income countries	Women	10.4	12.8	11.4	10.0	9.5
	Men	7.8	9.9	8.9	7.6	7.2
	Total	8.9	11.2	10.1	8.7	8.2

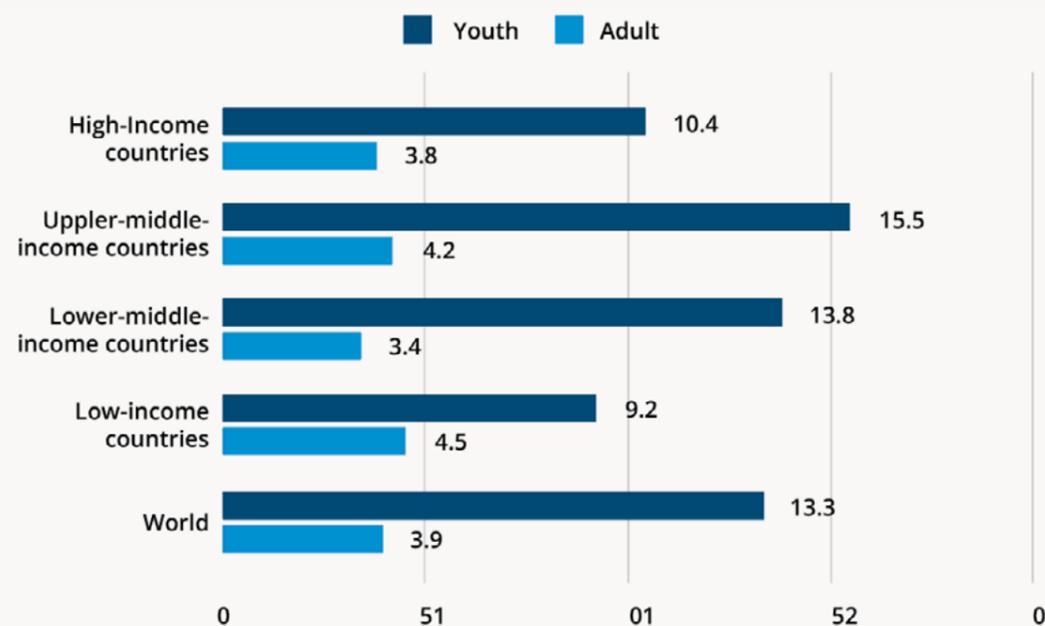
Source: International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2024.

2. International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2024.

Despite a recovery in overall labour force participation rates, concerns about labour and skills shortages remain high. According to the World Economic Forum³, 63 per cent of employers expect skills gaps to be the single biggest barrier to business transformation between 2025 and 2030. Moreover, 85 per cent of employers plan to prioritize the upskilling of their workforce, with 70 per cent expecting to hire staff with new skills, 40 per cent planning to reduce staff whose skills have become less relevant, and 50 per cent aiming to transition staff from declining roles to growing ones.

When disaggregated by age, the youth unemployment rate is nearly 3.5 times higher than that of adults. Globally, in 2023, the youth unemployment rate was 13.3 per cent. This far exceeded that of adults, which was 3.9 per cent⁴ (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Youth and adult unemployment rates (percentage)



Source: International Labour Organization, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2024.

3. World Economic Forum, *Future of Jobs Report 2025: Insight Report*, WEF, January 2025.

4. World Employment and Social Outlook.

Youth participation in the labour market has improved, but many young people who have left work are not getting any training and still face big challenges finding new jobs. In 2020, the global rate of youth who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) increased by 1.5 percentage points, reaching its highest level in at least 15 years and heightening the risk of facing greater difficulties in future jobs. By 2023, the global NEET figure reached 269.1 million, comprising 178.9 million women and 90.2 million men,⁵ which highlights a significant gender disparity. Focused skills training programmes are needed to fix this gap caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and help young people find and keep jobs.



Box 1. UNOPS Possibilities programme

Developing sustainable, climate-resilient infrastructure that can withstand future shocks and stresses is essential to address the needs of communities across Yemen. Through two projects funded by the World Bank’s International Development Association, UNOPS is responding to the pressing challenges of increasingly extreme weather events caused by climate change in both rural and urban Yemen.

5. Ibid.

Components of the project aim to rehabilitate and upgrade 150 kilometres of rural access roads, construct 2 modular bridges at strategic locations, and support the maintenance of 60 kilometres of village access roads and 150 kilometres of rural access roads. The improved infrastructure will help enhance transportation connectivity, ensuring safe and reliable access to markets, social services and essential services for rural communities.

By upgrading road surfaces, improving drainage and utilizing climate-friendly materials, the project seeks to create a road network that can withstand the impacts of climate change. Additionally, slope stabilization techniques are used to prevent erosion and protect the roads from landslides, further strengthening the resilience of the rural infrastructure.

To further enhance sustainability, the works are being implemented by more than 40 local micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including four women-owned businesses. In addition, training has helped build capacity and transfer knowledge. So far, about 456,000 jobs have been created, including 39,000 jobs for women.

[Read more on the UNOPS website.](#)

The role of quality education

Skills development is among the different policies aiming to boost employment rates, including the provision of upskilling and reskilling support. Sustainable Development Goal 4, Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, establishes education as a critical enabler for sustainable development, setting the following as target 4.4: “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”.⁶

The 97th Session of the International Labour Conference, 2008, acknowledged that “Apprenticeships, cadetships, traineeships and internships are effective means of bridging school and the world of work for young people by making it possible for them to acquire work experience along with technical and professional training. This helps overcome their lack of work experience when trying to get a first job”.⁷

Vocational training programmes should include practical work experience, skills certification, financial support, training in soft skills, job placement support, and a focus on sectors with strong demand for labour. These elements have driven positive outcomes for many training programmes.⁸ The work experience component is essential, as it provides a space for enterprises to influence the design and delivery of the curriculum and training modules, considering the actual knowledge, skills and competence required in the workplace.

Work experience also offers other benefits for enterprises. For example, in the United States of America, it has been reported that apprenticeship programmes provide a stable and reliable pipeline of qualified workers, increase productivity, lower the cost of recruitment and also improve employee retention.⁹

However, in spite of the benefits, countries such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland report that there are not enough firms offering apprenticeships to meet the demand from young people,¹⁰ while in the United States of America, the primary constraint limiting apprenticeship expansion is the number of apprenticeship slots offered by employers.¹¹

Worsening financial conditions pose challenges for both labour markets and public budgets: rising unemployment further reduces revenue and undermines already fragile fiscal positions, while limited fiscal space hinders measures to support workers and provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. Governments therefore need to maximize the use of their available resources.

Sustainability in supply chains has gained prominence in the private sector. A recent review¹² of 1,000 goals from nearly 700 of the world’s largest companies found that many have targets related to climate and nature. However, only 12 per cent include at least one goal focused on people. Even more striking, just 3 per cent of companies set goals related to reskilling or upskilling workers. This is an area where public procurement can make a meaningful difference by encouraging the creation of learning opportunities within projects, uplifting companies that support such initiatives and leading by example.

6. United Nations Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, ‘*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*’, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015.

7. International Labour Office, *Resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 97th Session*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, June 2008.

8. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, ‘Vocational and skills training programs to improve labor market outcomes’, <www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/vocational-and-skills-training-programs-improve-labor-market-outcomes?deliveryName=DM162473>, accessed 24 September 2025.

9. International Labour Organization, *ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships, Volume I: Guide for Policy Makers*, ILO Skills and Employability Branch, Employment Policy Department, Geneva, October 2017.

10. McIntosh, Steven, Jin Wenchao and Anna Vignoles, *Firms’ engagement with the Apprenticeship Programme*, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Department of Education and Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions, November 2011.

11. Trutko, John, et al., *Engaging Employers to Register Apprenticeship Programs: Outcomes from the American Apprenticeship Initiative Employer Engagement Demonstration*, Report prepared for the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Abt Associates, Rockville, Maryland, 2022.

12. Said, Evana, et al., *Elephant in the Boardroom: People Are Missing in Corporate Supply Chain Goals*, Working Paper, World Resources Institute, Washington, D.C., September 2025.

Including skills development in public procurement

Labour and skills shortages are high on the agenda for policymakers, particularly in advanced and some emerging economies. Sectors employing essential workers – such as care, transportation and retail – are struggling to meet demand, as are industries like manufacturing, construction, and information and communications technology (ICT).¹³

Beyond addressing current shortages, embracing a green economy could help create 6 million jobs by 2030. Transitioning away from an extract–manufacture–use–discard model will result in job losses in extractive industries but generate new opportunities in waste management, material reprocessing, and services such as rental and repair.¹⁴ However, people will need the right skills to seize these opportunities.

As traditional sectors adopt low-carbon approaches, green skills will become essential. For example, in the construction sector, shifting to sustainable materials and adopting new building methods will require the reskilling of low-skilled workers so they can benefit from emerging opportunities in sustainable construction.¹⁵

Each country should prioritize the sectors most relevant to public procurement while taking into account its own labour and skills shortages, green and development strategies, and the existing range of training institutions and skills development programmes.

A strategy should clearly state its objectives (e.g., supporting vocational training, reskilling for green transitions, and promoting gender equality in access to skills) and the sectors being prioritized to help focus implementation efforts. Including the target sectors in the national public procurement strategy – through a national sustainable public procurement framework or another strategic instrument – provides a clear justification for procuring entities to pursue related objectives, whether it is mandatory

13. World Employment and Social Outlook.

14. International Labour Organization, *'The employment impact of the transition to a green economy'*, ch. 2 in *Greening with jobs: World Employment and Social Outlook 2018*, ILO, 2018.

15. Gupta, Niyati, and Steffi Olickal, 'India's Shift to Low-Carbon Construction Must Not Leave Workers Behind', World Resources Institute, 2 January 2024, <<https://www.wri.org/insights/india-just-transition-low-carbon-construction>>, accessed 24 September 2025.

to do so or voluntarily carried out. When prioritizing sectors, it is important to consult relevant stakeholders – such as training institutions, skills development programmes, the private sector and labour unions – to identify barriers to and opportunities for including skills development criteria in procurement processes and to build stakeholder support.

This national strategy should align with the provisions of the procurement legal framework regarding training-related clauses and, in turn, guide the procurement strategies of individual procuring entities.

Box 2. Ongoing capacity building for university-educated professionals

While this guide does not focus on professionals who are university graduates (except in the context of internships or traineeships), it acknowledges that public procurement can also support further professionalization. For example, Article 151 of the Honduras Law on Public Procurement states that consulting contracts signed by foreign firms must be executed in Honduras and should strive to involve national (local) consultants as much as possible.¹⁶ Although it does not explicitly require formal capacity development programmes, the provision – by requiring foreign companies to ensure “the greatest possible participation” of local consultants in domestic contract execution – creates an environment conducive to on-the-job learning, the transfer of skills, and professional development for Honduran consultants.

Social requirements in public procurement contracts must be sufficiently related to the specific goods or services being procured. This link can be challenging to establish in long and complex supply chains, such as those in the manufacturing sector.

In labour-intensive activities – such as services and works (e.g., construction, cleaning services, care services) – the need for skilled personnel is directly linked to the procured goods or services. In these cases, the implementation of skills

16. República de Honduras, Decreto no. 74-2001, Ley de Contratación del Estado.

development requirements can be monitored during contract management without incurring major costs (as opposed to, for example, needing to visit a factory abroad).

Once the sectors have been prioritized, the strategy should define the types of skills to be developed, which may vary by sector (e.g., vocational training, green skills, digital literacy) and target group (e.g., youth, marginalized groups, those unemployed in the long term).

Lastly, keep in mind that any requirements should be proportionate to the size and duration of the contract. If typical contracts are not suitable, it may be more appropriate to incorporate skills development criteria into pooled procurement methods, such as framework agreements. In these cases, the strategy could specify which sectors should be addressed at the entity level (decentralized procurement) and which would be better tackled centrally (e.g., through framework agreements).

Implementing entities should establish their own objectives, indicators and targets based on national ones. However, regional and local priorities may require adaptations. Clear criteria should define how such adaptations can deviate from national objectives. For example, while traineeships in the construction sector may be prioritized at the national level, a municipality located far from technical and vocational education and training centres may find it impractical to include them in its projects. Nevertheless, the municipality may face a social challenge, such as a high unemployment rate in the community, which it may aim to address through procurement, potentially via informal training initiatives. Guidance for implementation can be developed at the national level while allowing procuring entities the flexibility to adapt it to local circumstances.

The national strategy's implementation should be regularly monitored. The results and lessons learned should inform any improvements to the strategy or to the tools used for its implementation.

Box 3. Example of a scoring system to measure social impact in public procurement

A 2025 publication by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA) proposes a set of indicators to measure social impact in public procurement. The sub-indicator Skills development falls under the broader

category of Promoting employment opportunities and social inclusion. It assesses the extent to which procurement specifications promote employee growth and upskilling. Procurement procedures with vague or generic requirements score lower, while those that include industry-leading training programmes and detailed mechanisms to monitor and report on the impacts of training and upskilling initiatives achieve the highest scores.

Score	Description of each score on the scale	Rationale
0	No specified requirements for training or upskilling.	No effort to improve employee skills.
1	Vaguely formulated requirements for training (e.g., general statements like “provide training if necessary”).	Limited clarity and commitment to upskilling.
2	Moderately specific requirements for training (e.g., some indication of training programmes but lacking detailed criteria).	Some effort to promote upskilling but not extensive.
3	Detailed requirements for training (e.g., specific training programmes and regular skill assessments).	Clear commitment to employee development with specific programmes.
4	Comprehensive requirements for training (e.g., tailored individual development plans, partnerships with educational institutions and detailed training schedules).	High level of commitment to employee development and upskilling.
5	Transformative requirements for training (e.g., industry-leading training programmes and requirements to monitor and report on training impacts).	Transformative impact on employee skills with detailed monitoring mechanisms.

The analysis highlights areas for improvement and underscores the importance of adopting standardized metrics to guide procurement professionals in delivering transformative societal benefits across the European Union.

More information [here](#).

Skills development requirements in public procurement processes

A simplified public procurement process is composed of three stages:

- **Pre-tender:** identification of needs, planning and budgeting, project preparation, including definition of requirements, and the choice of procedure type.
- **Tender:** preparation of tender documents, specification of selection/award criteria, publication of tender/invitation to tender, opening, assessment and evaluation of tenders, signature of contract, and notification of contract award.
- **Post-tender:** contract management in accordance with the outcome of the procurement procedure.

In the following sections, we will provide recommendations for the inclusion of skills development criteria in the procurement process. [Annex 1](#) contains definitions and concepts related to skills development for your reference.

Pre-tender

During the pre-tender stage, the following considerations may guide the inclusion of skills development in the procurement process:

- Do the goods or services being procured relate to a sector that has labour and skills shortages, either identified in the corresponding national strategy or through other sources, such as consultations with local authorities?
- Are there training institutions implementing programmes aiming to address these labour and skills needs?
- How can companies (i.e., potential suppliers) support these programmes – for example, by offering traineeships or internships? Is it realistic to expect suppliers to do this, especially without overburdening small businesses?
- Are there established apprenticeship programmes aiming to address these labour and skills needs?
- Can informal training related to the goods or services being procured be included in the tender? If personnel with certain skills are required in relation to the goods or services being procured, the tender could require the supplier's personnel to be trained by including a provision in the contract. This would allow people without

vocational or technical skills to be employed and receive training through the implementation of a public contract.

- Is the duration of the contract adequate for the inclusion of such criteria (see the example in Box 5)?
- What costs should be budgeted? Suppliers will incur costs such as trainee allowances, workplace injury insurance and personal protective equipment (PPE). These costs vary from country to country, depending on whether there are requirements regarding trainee allowances and whether such allowances are considered a salary or a wage.
- Are capacity building components necessary to fully benefit from the procurement process, for example when purchasing technology that is new to users?

Box 4. Fostering resilience and economic diversification in Angola's Lobito Corridor

UNOPS is working with the government of Angola, with funding from Japan, to support a transition from subsistence to commercial farming with high-value export by developing last-mile infrastructure that directly connects rural communities to the broader opportunities of the Lobito Corridor. This corridor is a rail and infrastructure project stretching 1,300 kilometres from Angola's Port of Lobito to mining regions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. It is designed to foster trade, industrialization and regional integration across southern Africa.

As part of the three-year project, UNOPS will implement climate-resilient infrastructure, building 15 underground rainwater storage dams and rehabilitating 3 traditional irrigation canals to provide year-round access to water for more than 170 hectares of land. This will help farmers increase their annual cropping cycles from 1.5 to 2.5, strengthening their resilience against erratic rainfall and droughts.

UNOPS will also construct 25 eco-cooling storage warehouses, helping farmers reduce post-harvest losses by 20 per cent, extend the shelf life of their products and access bigger commercial markets.

The project also includes a comprehensive capacity building programme to train 250 farmers and 50 technicians, ensuring that local communities and Angolan technicians can independently manage and maintain the new infrastructure in the long term.

Read more on the [UNOPS website](#).



Traineeships, apprenticeships and informal on-the-job training are among the types of skills development mechanisms entities could consider including in their contracts.

Table 2. Examples of skills development mechanisms in procurement.

Skills	Examples of inclusion in procurement
Technical: masonry, carpentry, welding, electrical work, plumbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require contractors to offer apprenticeships (e.g., x per cent of workforce trained). Require on-the-job training in brick laying Require contractors to designate trainers and task them with cooperating closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices and to ensure mutual and regular feedback. Require contractors to conclude a written agreement before the start of the apprenticeship to define the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the vocational education and training institution, related to learning and working conditions.
Safety: health and safety at work, working at heights, use of PPE	Include clauses for certified safety training.
Sustainability in cleaning services: eco-friendly cleaning methods, waste segregation	Require all staff to be trained in safe chemical handling and environmental cleaning practices.

Criteria related to skills development – or any social criteria, for that matter – must be linked to the contract’s subject matter and be proportionate to the size and duration of the contract. To ensure this, early market engagement¹⁷ should be considered to assess what the market can offer. Based on market knowledge, the criteria can either be

17. United Nations Office for Project Services, *Early Market Engagement for Innovation, Efficiency and Sustainability*, UNOPS, Copenhagen, 2025.

included in the contract as a requirement (i.e., included in the technical specifications) or as part of the evaluation criteria if there appears to be a limited number of suppliers who are able to comply. The latter would allow a broader range of competitors to bid.

The tender documents should clearly link the skills development clauses to the contract. For example: *"The Contractor shall contribute to workforce skills development by delivering training and capacity building activities for personnel engaged in the execution of this contract, with the aim of improving technical competencies, ensuring safe and high-quality service delivery, and enhancing employability within the sector."*

Box 5. Asian Development Bank's Build4Skills approach

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has developed the Build4Skills approach to promote traineeships and skills development as part of ADB-supported infrastructure projects in the energy, transport, water, urban and social sectors.

The following criteria help identify civil work contract packages in the procurement plan that are suitable to include traineeships:

- The construction duration is longer than 12 months
- The contract price of the individual civil work contract package is greater than \$500,000
- The construction site is located no more than 30 miles from relevant technical and vocational education training (TVET) institutes (if unknown, this criterion can be skipped)

More information [here](#).

If, during the preparatory phase, it is deemed inadvisable (or not possible) to include skills development clauses in contracts, procurement entities may implement related initiatives in parallel, in collaboration with contractors.

Box 6. Advancing workforce equity: On-the-job training for female workers under the UNOPS Nepal Security and Justice Programme

In a small corner of Biratnagar, the clinking sound of bricks and trowels signals more than just construction; it marks a step towards empowerment. At the Police Training Center construction site under the Security and Justice Programme (SJP), implemented by UNOPS Nepal with funding support from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), eight determined women participated in on-the-job training (OJT) in brick laying, turning uncertainty into skill and potential into confidence. Soon after, the initiative extended to Gadhawa, where seven more women received site-based training in plastering and brick laying, further reinforcing the programme's commitment to inclusive skills development across sites.

These site-based training sessions are designed not only to build technical competence, but to shift the perceptions of the participants and the traditionally male-dominated construction industry. In Biratnagar, trainees learned to prepare and mix mortar using the correct ratios, align and level bricks using plumb lines and spirit levels, and apply proper bonding techniques, specifically the English bond, as per design specifications. In Gadhawa, the women were additionally introduced to plastering techniques, focusing on finishing quality, surface preparation and tool handling.

"I didn't know I could be more than a labourer," said Soni, one of the participants. "But now I know I can build walls, and maybe even help build a house someday."



Beyond honing skills, the OJT is focused on visibility, voice and value. This initiative offered more than instruction. It offered recognition. Each participant received safety gear, a daily stipend and incentives tied to their performance. For many, the training marked the beginning of a new identity as a skilled worker.

And this is just the beginning. With successful pilots in Biratnagar and Gadhawa, this initiative will now be scaled across all SJP construction sites in Nepal.

The OJT for female workers was not originally embedded as a contractual clause in the tenders. It was initiated and implemented by UNOPS in parallel with the construction works, in coordination with the contractors. While the contractors facilitated access to the site and supported logistics, UNOPS led the design and delivery of the training.

Alongside building infrastructure, the SJP project is fostering dignity, inclusion and opportunity. Each wall, each brick, each lesson adds to a bigger structure, one that has equity built into the foundation. Because when a woman lays her first bricks, she doesn't just build a wall; she reclaims her power, reshapes her future and redefines what is possible for those who follow.

Tender

As with any other criteria, the bidding documents should define the type of evidence or information to be requested from bidders, and whether providing it is a part of selection criteria or award criteria.

Box 7. Example of selection and award criteria

Selection criteria: Bidders must provide evidence of their ability to recruit, train and retain workers from one or more of the defined disadvantaged groups. This experience may relate to previous contracts carried out in any sector. It must be shown that the bidder and/or its subcontractors have the capacity to recruit, train and retain such workers over a period similar to that covered by this contract.

Award criteria: Up to 15 per cent of the available marks will be awarded to tenders based on the number and quality of employment opportunities to be made available to disadvantaged workers. These marks will be awarded based on the specific plans submitted to recruit, train and retain such workers.

Source: European Commission, *Buying Social – A Guide to taking Account of Social Considerations in Public Procurement, 2nd ed.*, European Union, Brussels, May 2021.

As previously mentioned, it is important to consider market capacity when deciding how to incorporate skills development criteria into the bidding documents. Evaluation approaches vary from country to country, but generally, certain elements are assessed on a pass/fail basis while others are weighted.

Post-tender

Contract managers should have guidance on the main obligations and authorities of the parties involved in enforcing skills development-related requirements. Even if trainees are not considered workers, remember that conditions of decent work apply to them as well, including the stipulation that the delivery of training should be at no cost to the participants. The bidding documents should also state the minimum number of people to be trained, topics and duration if applicable. The supplier should maintain records of all training activities, including attendance, topics covered, duration, trainer credentials, and outcomes, and they should issue certificates or other recognized proof of completion to all participants.

The bidding documents should specify the type of reports the supplier must submit to the contracting entity, as well as the required reporting frequency, to track the delivery of traineeships or other learning activities. Any feedback that the contracting entity asks from the trainees should also be submitted. In addition, indicate any coordination required with the training institution involved, if applicable.

The reports should enable the entity to track progress towards its targets and to report back on any relevant national targets (e.g., number of trainees disaggregated by sex, age, and disability, discussed topics).

The contract must clearly outline the measures to be taken in cases of non-compliance. For example, it should provide for the issuance of Improvement Notices (or Notices to Correct, where applicable), setting out the supplier's responsibilities along with firm deadlines for corrective action. These measures, as detailed in the procurement documents, will be the supplier's obligation to bear. They may include, where necessary, UNOPS authority to suspend all or part of the contract until the supplier resolves the breach.

Conclusion

Skills development is essential to reduce unemployment, foster economic growth, and address skills gaps in both traditional and emerging sectors, including green jobs. Efforts should particularly focus on youth and marginalized groups.

Policies on skills development should draw on all available implementation tools. Public procurement can play a key role by promoting the creation of learning opportunities within projects and uplifting companies that support such initiatives. This approach not only highlights the importance of skills development policies to the market but also generates concrete opportunities for people to acquire new skills.

To fully realize this potential, public procurement must adopt a strategy that aligns with national skills development objectives and reflects what is feasible within current procurement practices and market conditions.

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7. National Apprenticeship Service. [Achieving the benefits of apprenticeships: A guide for employers](#), National Apprenticeship Service, October 2018.

Annex 1. Definitions and relevant concepts

- **Apprenticeship:** defined in the Vocational Training Recommendation, 1962 (No. 117) as “Systematic long-term training for a recognised occupation taking place substantially within an undertaking or under an independent craftsman [and] should be governed by a written contract of apprenticeship and be subject to established standards.”¹⁸ Over the years, since its adoption, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has promoted the concept of a quality apprenticeship system to emphasize the quality and relevance of training to the labour market. Such a system has the following key features: quality apprenticeships are a unique form of technical vocational education and training, combining on-the-job training and off-the-job learning, which enable learners from all walks of life to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies required to carry out a specific occupation. They are regulated and financed by laws and collective agreements and policy decisions arising from social dialogue, and require a written contract that details the respective roles and responsibilities of the apprentice and the employer; they also provide the apprentice with remuneration and standard social protection coverage. Following a clearly defined and structured period of training and the successful completion of a formal assessment, apprentices obtain a recognized qualification.¹⁹
- **Formal education:** is institutionalized, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies. It leads to nationally recognized qualifications.²⁰
- **Informal apprenticeships:** are to be found in the informal economy and provide for the transmission of appropriate skills from an experienced craftsperson to a young person, usually covering all skills of a trade. These do not follow a curriculum, do not lead to qualifications and are regulated by social norms and traditions rather than laws and regulations.²¹
- **Internships and traineeships:** provide young people who have finished their studies or are still studying with an opportunity to learn in a workplace – usually covering specific aspects of a job or an occupation, but not all skills needed for it – in a particular sector of the economy or in a specific occupation. Typically, these programmes don’t follow a curriculum or lead to qualifications based on an assessment of skills. Differences between the two depend significantly on how the stakeholders in a particular country define them.²²
- **Non-formal education and training:** is institutionalized, intentional and planned. It is often organized outside the formal education system, and may take place both within and outside educational institutions and cater to people of all ages. It is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning and does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway structure. Non-formal education and training usually result in no official credentials, or in qualifications that are not recognized by the relevant national or subnational education authorities as formal or equivalent to formal qualifications.

18. International Labour Organization, R117 – Vocational Training Recommendation (No. 117), ILO, 1962.

19. ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships.

20. International Labour Organization, Room document 25: National practices in measuring work-based learning: A critical review ILO Department of Statistics, ILO, September 2023.

21. ILO Toolkit for Quality Apprenticeships.

22. Ibid.

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