Eleventh International Research Study on Public Procurement (IRSPP11, 2026)

Public Summary

Brussels, Belgium 21-23 September 2026

Introduction

This published report outlines the cases and discussions from the eleventh International Research Study on Public Procurement (IRSPP)11. Participants examined how procurement organizations respond to economic instability or fiscal uncertainty.

The report is structured to outline the history of IRSPP, the research context for IRSPP11, the findings, the main lessons learned and introduce the IRSPP team.

History of IRSPP

IRSPP brings together procurement practitioners and researchers to develop new knowledge for the profession. Approximately every two years, senior practitioners from countries and international organizations meet to exchange experiences.

Table 1 summarizes the previous ten IRSPP studies.

YEAR	THEME
IRSPP1 (2003)	Explored what was known about public procurement and the main issues facing the field.
IRSPP2 (2005)	Examined similarities and differences across categories of public procurement spending in health, defense, education, and local government.
IRSPP3 (2007)	Examined how to build capacity and capability in public procurement.
IRSPP4 (2009)	In the wake of the financial crisis, this study explored the role of public procurement in designing and delivering economic stimulus packages.
IRSPP5 (2011)	Focused on the engagement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in public procurement contracts and how to improve their involvement.
IRSPP6 (2015)	Examined evidence of community benefits policies and implementation of community benefits clauses (social, economic, and environmental).
IRSPP7 (2017)	Investigated collaborative public procurement beyond joint purchasing and centralized procurement, examining experiences of collaboration and opportunities to improve it.
IRSPP8 (2019)	Explored procurement's role in implementing innovation policy, including its relationships with policymakers and suppliers.
IRSPP9 (2022)	Delayed by one year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the ninth study explored the role of public procurement in a crisis. The pandemic period highlighted the need to be better prepared for future crises, and the role that public procurement should play.
IRSPP10 (2024)	Examined how AI, machine learning, the Internet of Things, smart contracts, blockchain, and digitalization could help procurement address societal challenges.

Table 1: Summary of previous IRSPP studies

The IRSPP organizing team is listed in Appendix 1. Members contribute procurement research expertise from different countries, with their time supported by their respective universities.

IRSPP is not-for-profit, and conducting rigorous research relies on participation fee income and sponsorship from professional institutes.

NIGP - The Institute for Public Procurement is a long-standing sponsor of IRSPP. Previous sponsors include CIPS, NEVI, IPSERA, the Welsh Government, Cardiff University, and Politecnico di Milano.

IRSPP11 Research Context

IRSPP participation is always by invitation only. Senior public procurement practitioners, such as chief procurement officers and heads of department, were invited to participate in a three-day workshop. Participation is normally restricted to one or two representatives from each country. This provides a range of perspectives across jurisdictions.

IRSPP11 took place in Brussels, Belgium, from September 21 to 23, 2026. Representatives from fifteen countries across Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Africa shared experiences and compared responses to supply pressures, changes in funding, and new policy requirements.

During the three-day workshop, participants examined how public procurement organizations respond when **economic instability** or **fiscal uncertainty** disrupts their plans. The participants considered both the immediate procurement decision and the conditions needed to implement it.

Participants were asked to consider:

How do procurement organizations respond when economic instability and fiscal uncertainty disrupt their plans?

Day 1 focused on participant case presentations.

Day 2 groups discussed scenarios and vignettes informed by the cases.

Day 3 included the plenary discussions.

Case outcomes were shared by participants, and responses to vignettes reflected participants' judgments about hypothetical situations. Rather than establishing which responses were most effective, the discussions identified options and conditions to investigate further.

Summary of Key Takeaways from the Case Studies

Engage relevant stakeholders early and throughout delivery.

Market consultation and dialogue help buyers understand feasible solutions and cost / pricing strategies. Participants highlighted the need for local involvement in defining and implementing purchases, and that supplier engagement should continue after contract signature where delivery conditions may be subject to change.

Develop workable procedures supported by professional judgment.

The cases highlighted the need for proportionate requirements, clear responsibilities, and staff who have the skills to assess commercial options. Buyers should apply a flexible approach while working within relevant regulations, using information and approvals needed to support decision making.

Use data to inform procurement decisions.

Data integrity is critical and structured information can help predict cost changes and anomalies that will guide policy and contract management. Staff still need the expertise to interpret and act on the information made available.

Plan procurement and budgets together.

Cost estimates should reflect current market conditions and systems should be flexible enough to be updated when costs change. The cases highlighted the importance of involving those responsible for local delivery when setting budget requirements.

Prepare contracts for changing costs.

The cases illustrated the importance of building in price-adjustment arrangements by default. There needs to be clear provisions for reviewing costs and agreeing on permitted changes can help buyers and suppliers maintain delivery and avoid costly and damaging disputes.

Lessons from the Vignette Discussions

Groups discussed nine vignettes informed by the cases. The vignettes were hypothetical situations for comparing judgments across jurisdictions, rather than accounts of implemented responses.

Establish what is preventing delivery.

Participants noted that price uncertainty, insufficient production, unprepared requirements, and missing specialist advice all require different responses. The discussion on limited capacity in supply makes a more concrete distinction, i.e., receiving more offers does not necessarily guarantee that the procured equipment will arrive on time.

Engage with people who can inform or change the decision.

Early engagement was a common message in the case discussions. However, the purpose of engagement differs by situation. Suppliers clarify commercial feasibility; technical colleagues may assess alternatives; users identify essential services; finance and security bodies make judgments within their responsibilities. Continuing stakeholder involvement during delivery matters where costs, other threats or operating needs change. Engagement should have a clear purpose and there needs to be clear approval and authority for it.

Make flexibility credible for the supplier and for the buyer.

Phased, lower value orders can help the buyer manage uncertainty but may leave suppliers unable to plan production or recover high initial overhead costs. Any adjustments require information, resources, and monitoring.

Involve procurement in decisions about budgets and services.

Procurement should be invited to contribute early on when service priorities and spending plans are being developed. The discussions on categories of spend including water and catering illustrate why: decisions about affordability require early consideration to changes in scope, service level agreements, and future cost implications. Contingency, end of year or additional-funding scenarios raised a different set of questions about what the organization was ready to buy and support. Procurement can inform these decisions if it has sufficient understanding of the supply market, and can foresee commercial options, and delivery risks. The final approval of spending priorities remains with the contracting authority responsible for procurement.

Invest in procurement expertise and supplier capability.

A strategic role requires adequate staffing, commercial and contract-management skills, and access to technical specialists. One case emphasized sustained investment and political support in rebuilding procurement. An additional-funding scenario exposed the constraints of having more money without additional staff or technical support. A security scenario required expertise beyond procurement. Professionalizing the workforce should therefore include developing skills, strategies for retaining experienced staff, and ensuring access to specialist advice.

The final plenary also emphasized supplier and subcontractor competence, including the additional guidance and support that smaller firms may need to understand the requirements and to deliver on time and to budget.

Follow the decision through implementation.

Security clauses need regular checks, equipment needs maintenance, and digital systems need adequate infrastructure for sustained use. The intended result should therefore be expressed through services and delivery, with procedural completion treated as an intermediate step. It should be made clear whether additional costs and are transferred to future budgets, and whether risks become the responsibility of suppliers, staff, or service users.

Main Takeaways from IRSPP11

On Day 3, the plenary reviewed the responses and unresolved questions across three themes:

- Supply market pressure,
- Financial capacity constraints, and,
- Policy and regulatory changes.

Participants were asked what they would take away from IRSPP 11 and which similarities they had observed across the cases.

Their reflections focused on shared challenges, professional development, knowledge sharing, and the **value of the network**.

Common challenges - participants were surprised to find similar problems across countries with funding pressures and supply market fluctuations. Comparing experiences helped them consider possible responses, while acknowledging that these would need to fit local legal and organizational conditions.

Professional development - participants believed that procurement professionals should have a stronger role in organizational decision making, but it needs to be supported by ongoing professional development. They also called for closer connections between research and practice so that practitioners could employ new findings and methods.

Knowledge sharing - participants asked for anonymized cases, research, and training materials to support learning from one another. They valued feedback during case presentations, which helped them compare experiences across procurement systems.

Benefits of the IRSPP network - participants valued working with researchers and practitioners from other countries. Hearing about similar difficulties elsewhere provided reassurance and opportunities for continued exchange.

The session concluded with an invitation to suggest future activities and remain involved in the network.

Please send all inquiries to the organizing team at e.peters@utwente.nl

Appendix 1 - IRSPP11 Research Team

IRSPP Chair: Andrea Patrucco, PhD

Associate Professor of Supply Chain Management at Copenhagen Business School. Andrea is the Chair of IRSPP. Andrea's passion is public procurement, but his research expertise includes the management of buyer-supplier relationships in both the private and public sectors. LinkedIn profile

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Tünde Tátrai, PhD Professor of Economics at Corvinus University of Budapest in Budapest, Hungary. Tünde's research interests focus on public procurement, public procurement law, sustainable procurement, and the role of SMEs in public procurement. LinkedIn profile	**Jane Lynch**, PhD Professor in Procurement for Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University and leads the Centre of Public Value Procurement. Jane's research areas include public procurement, joint bidding, collaboration, innovation and social value. LinkedIn profile	**Esmee Peters**, PhD Assistant Professor at the University of Twente, in the Netherlands. Her research interests include public procurement, supply chain resilience, crisis management, and governance and policy. LinkedIn profile
CORVINUS UNIVERSITY of BUDAPEST	Cardiff University Prifysgol Caerdydd — Cardiff Business School Ysgol Busnes Caerdydd	UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.
Petra Ferk, PhD Associate Professor for Public Administration at the New University, Slovenia, a founder and director at the Institute for Public-Private Partnership, in Slovenia. Petra's research focuses on public-private partnerships and public procurement. She is the national correspondent for the European Procurement and Public Private Partnership Law Review. LinkedIn profile	**Louise Knight**, PhD Professor in Public Sector and Healthcare Procurement at University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands. Louise leads the EI-IPS Research group. Her research includes healthcare procurement, developing procurement capability and driving innovation in public procurement. LinkedIn profile	**Ana-Maria Dimand**, LLB, PhD Assistant Professor at the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University. Ana-Maria's doctorate focused on public affairs, and her current research focuses on public management and policy, government contracting, collaborative governance, environmental policy, innovation and sustainability. LinkedIn profile
NOVA UNIVERZA FAKULTETA ZA DRŽAVNE IN EVROPSKE ŠTUDIJE	UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.	FSU REUBIN O'D. ASKEW SCHOOL