

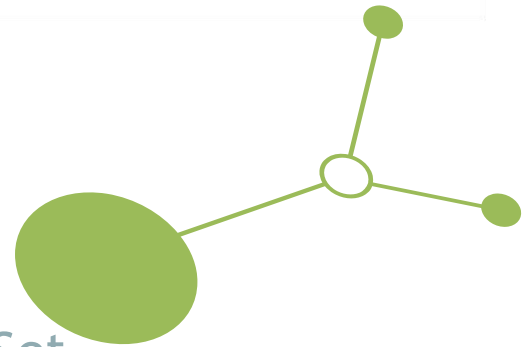
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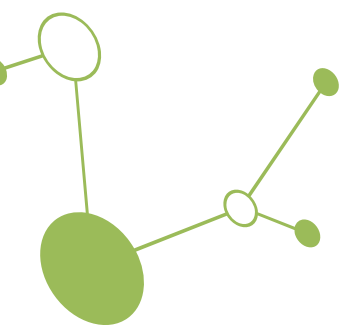
CE-PRINCE

WP 2 Activity 2.2

Del. 2.2.2 Circular Criteria Set

July 2026





DELIVERABLE D.2.2.2

CIRCULAR CRITERIA SETS

Upgrade of existing green and circular criteria and guidelines
for implementation and inclusion in public tenders

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1. Introduction and purpose

This deliverable presents the Circular Criteria Sets developed within Activity 2.2 of the CE-PRINCE project and provides guidance for their implementation and inclusion in public procurement procedures.

The work builds directly upon Deliverable D.2.2.1 - Analysis of Circular Criteria for Green Public Procurement, which assessed existing European and national Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria across the four key economic sectors addressed by the project: Agrifood, Construction, Manufacturing, and Tourism-related Goods and Services.

The analysis demonstrated that existing procurement frameworks already incorporate several circular economy principles, particularly those related to ecosystem protection, environmental certifications, resource efficiency, process optimisation and circular design. At the same time, the assessment identified a number of important gaps in the integration of more advanced circular economy approaches. While environmental protection measures are relatively well represented, circular principles related to product life extension, maintenance and repair, reverse logistics, circular business models, performance-based procurement and value-retention mechanisms remain significantly underrepresented in most existing procurement frameworks.

To address these gaps, the CE-PRINCE partnership developed a set of upgraded circular criteria aimed at strengthening the integration of circular economy principles within public procurement practices. The criteria were developed through a transnational cooperation process involving all project partners and drawing upon existing EU criteria, national GPP frameworks and good practices identified across participating countries.

The upgraded criteria are not intended to replace existing national or European procurement frameworks. Instead, they provide practical recommendations and examples that can support public procurers in progressively integrating stronger circular economy requirements into public tenders while respecting national legal frameworks, procurement practices and market conditions.

Throughout this deliverable, the term public procurers refers to public authorities and organisations responsible for planning, preparing, publishing and implementing public procurement procedures.

This deliverable therefore provides:

- an overview of the methodology used for developing the upgraded criteria;
- a description of the thematic clusters used to organise the criteria;
- guidance for selecting and implementing the criteria in public tenders.

The criteria developed under CE-PRINCE will subsequently be tested through real procurement procedures in participating countries as part of Deliverable D.2.2.3 - Report on C/GPP Solutions Testing.



2. Methodology

A shared and structured methodology was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of existing Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria across the four economic sectors addressed by the CE-PRINCE project and to identify opportunities for strengthening their circular economy dimension.

The development of the upgraded criteria builds directly upon the findings of Deliverable D.2.2.1 - Analysis of Circular Criteria for Green Public Procurement. Through the comparative assessment of European and national GPP criteria, the project partnership identified both strengths and gaps in the current integration of circular economy principles within public procurement frameworks.

The analysis revealed that existing criteria already provide a strong basis in areas such as environmental protection, resource efficiency, circular design and certification schemes. At the same time, several circular principles remain insufficiently represented, particularly those related to product life extension, maintenance and repair, reverse logistics, circular business models and performance-based procurement.

To address these gaps, the CE-PRINCE partnership developed a common framework for upgrading existing criteria through a transnational cooperation process. The objective was not to create entirely new procurement requirements, but rather to build upon existing European and national practices by integrating additional circular economy elements, transferring good practices among participating countries and promoting a more systematic application of circular principles within public procurement.

The upgraded criteria were developed through a common working file shared among project partners and organised according to thematic clusters reflecting the main circular economy objectives identified during the analysis phase.

2.1. Excel template structure

The development of the upgraded criteria was supported through a common Excel working file shared among all project partners.

The Excel file was designed as a collaborative tool for collecting, comparing and upgrading procurement criteria from different national and European frameworks. It builds directly upon the findings of Deliverable



D.2.2.1 and translates the results of the circularity assessment into practical procurement recommendations.

The structure of the file follows the four economic sectors addressed by the CE-PRINCE project:

- Agrifood;
- Construction;
- Manufacturing;
- Tourism-related Goods and Services.

For each sector and specific fields of application (product or service categories), project partners collected and reviewed existing procurement criteria currently applied at European and national level. These criteria were analysed and compared against the circular economy principles adopted by the project.

The Excel file is organised around thematic circular clusters and procurement categories. For each criterion, the file contains:

- main associated circular principle;
- thematic cluster;
- partner country;
- field of application;
- the criterion description as originally stated;
- typology of the criterion (SC, TS, AC, CC);
- a synthetized description of multiple criteria that have similar contents;
- a priority level for implementation.

Following the various national GPP legislations, criteria are organised according to four procurement categories:

- **Selection Criteria (SC):** Requirements related to the professional, technical and organisational capacity of tenderers to perform the contract, including relevant experience, qualifications and environmental management capabilities where appropriate.
- **Technical Specifications (TS):** Technical requirements defining minimum environmental and circular performance characteristics that products, services or works must fulfil.
- **Award Criteria (AC):** Evaluation criteria used to reward suppliers offering higher levels of circular performance than the minimum requirements established by the tender.
- **Contract Performance Clauses (CC):** Requirements that suppliers must fulfil during contract implementation in order to ensure the achievement of intended circular outcomes.

The common working file enabled project partners to identify opportunities for strengthening circular procurement practices within their respective national procurement systems while maintaining sufficient flexibility for adaptation across different legal and market contexts.

Rather than creating entirely new procurement frameworks, the partnership focused on upgrading existing criteria through the integration of additional circular economy elements and the transfer of good practices across countries.



2.2. Methodological approach for upgrading criteria

The development of the upgraded Circular Criteria Sets followed a common transnational methodology agreed by the CE-PRINCE partnership. The objective was not to create an entirely new set of procurement criteria, but rather to strengthen existing Green Public Procurement (GPP) criteria by systematically integrating circular economy principles and by building on good practices already implemented across participating countries.

The methodological approach was based on the findings of Deliverable D.2.2.1, which identified both strengths and gaps in the existing GPP frameworks. Particular attention was given to circular economy principles that were found to be underrepresented, including product life extension, maintenance and repair, reverse logistics, circular business models and value-retention strategies.

To address these gaps, project partners reviewed the existing procurement criteria collected from European and national sources and assessed their relevance, applicability and potential for further development. The review process was carried out collaboratively, allowing partners to compare different national approaches and identify opportunities for transferring successful practices across countries.

In this context, upgraded criteria are thus referred to as **indications to progressively integrate circular principles within each GPP legislation and depending on the national baseline**. Indications are specifically based on circular thematic clusters and priority of circular principles. As such, Criteria are considered "upgraded" in relation to the existing national GPP frameworks, by integrating additional circular economy principles and, where appropriate, by drawing inspiration from practices already implemented in other partner countries, consistently with the transnational and cross-border cooperation approach. The application of upgraded criteria in national legislations can follow three complementary approaches:

- **Strengthening existing criteria** by introducing more ambitious environmental or circular performance requirements, while maintaining consistency with existing procurement frameworks.
- **Transferring good practices** by adapting successful procurement criteria already implemented in one or more partner countries for potential application in other national contexts.
- **Introducing new circular elements** where significant gaps had been identified during the analysis phase, particularly in areas such as product durability, repairability, take-back systems, life-cycle approaches and circular business models.

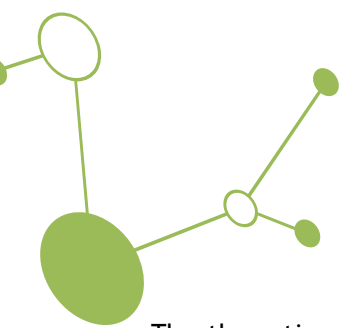
Throughout the development process, particular attention was paid to ensuring that the upgraded criteria remain practical, legally compatible with existing procurement legislation and sufficiently flexible to accommodate different market conditions and procurement systems across Central Europe.

The resulting Circular Criteria Sets therefore represent a common transnational framework that can be adapted by public procurers according to national legislation, procurement objectives and sector-specific characteristics.

2.3. Circular thematic clusters

The upgraded criteria were organised into thematic clusters to facilitate their practical application and to support public procurers in selecting the most appropriate circular requirements according to the procurement object.

The clustering approach was based on the circular economy principles analysed in Deliverable D.2.2.1 and reflects the areas where procurement can most effectively contribute to resource efficiency, value retention, waste prevention and environmental sustainability.



The thematic clusters were developed on a sector-specific basis and reflect the characteristics of the procurement categories analysed within the project.

Agrifood Sector

The Agrifood criteria focus on the following thematic areas:

- reusable tableware, packaging and elimination of single-use plastics;
- food waste prevention and redistribution of surplus food;
- waste separation, collection and management;
- sustainable sourcing and certified food products;
- organic food and environmentally responsible production methods;
- sustainable fisheries and animal products;
- local and regional supply chains;
- sustainable menu planning and promotion of plant-based options;
- environmentally friendly cleaning products;
- energy and water efficiency;
- sustainable logistics and low-emission delivery systems;
- staff training, monitoring and reporting.

Construction Sector

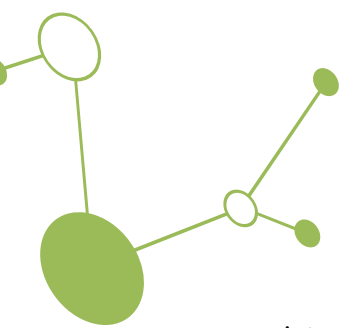
The Construction criteria focus on:

- circular and recycled construction materials;
- circular materials for road construction and maintenance;
- construction and demolition waste management;
- design for adaptability, longevity and future recovery;
- sustainable timber and bio-based construction materials;
- life-cycle assessment and life-cycle costing approaches;
- environmental product declarations;
- energy performance and renewable energy systems;
- water efficiency and stormwater management;
- construction-site environmental management;
- biodiversity protection and ecosystem integration;
- operation, maintenance and monitoring.

Manufacturing Sector

The Manufacturing criteria focus on:

- sustainable and recycled material sourcing;
- durability and product longevity;



- maintenance, repair and refurbishment;
- take-back systems and reverse logistics;
- traceability and management systems;
- chemical restrictions and hazardous substances management;
- ecolabels and environmental certifications;
- energy and water efficient production processes.

Tourism-related Goods and Services Sector

The Tourism-related criteria focus on:

- circular and sustainable materials;
- waste prevention, recycling and composting;
- circular event organisation;
- circular design of machinery, batteries and equipment;
- water efficiency and irrigation systems;
- environmental management systems;
- sustainable management of green areas;
- biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration;
- low-emission and zero-emission vehicles and machinery;
- sustainable fuels and biodegradable consumables.

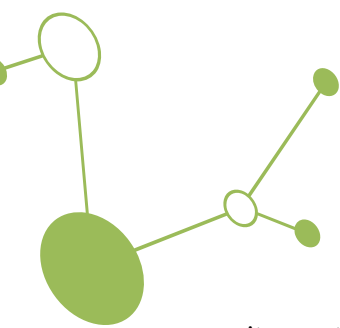
2.4. Prioritization methodology

The prioritization methodology was developed to facilitate the practical selection of criteria both for general application by public procurers and for the pilot testing activities carried out within the CE-PRINCE project.

Given the large number of criteria coming from 7 countries and collected in one single overview file, the methodology was established to support public procurers in selecting the most appropriate criteria for implementation and pilot testing.

The prioritization methodology was developed by the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies (SSSA) and applied consistently across all sectors included in the CE-PRINCE project. Each criterion was assessed considering two complementary dimensions:

- its expected contribution to circular economy objectives: criteria have been assessed according to their contribution to closing material loops and operationalizing the R-strategies hierarchy (Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Refurbish, Remanufacture, Repurpose, Recycle, Recover), drawing on the conceptual framework of Potting et al. (2017), Kirchherr et al. (2017) and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013), consistent with the EU Circular Economy Action Plan (COM(2020) 98) and Article 13 of the Taxonomy Regulation (EU 2020/852). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation defines the circular economy as a system that is "restorative and regenerative by design, aiming to keep products, components and materials at their highest utility and value at all times, distinguishing between technical and biological cycles".



- its practical feasibility within public procurement procedures: the assessment considered factors such as environmental impact, circularity potential, market availability, ease of verification, legal feasibility and expected implementation effort. This approach ensured that highly ambitious criteria were balanced with realistic implementation possibilities.

The guiding principle of the assessment is that circularity and environmental sustainability do not coincide: a criterion may be environmentally meritorious (energy efficiency, air quality, biodiversity protection) without being circular

Each criterion was assigned a priority score ranging from 1 (lowest priority) to 5 (highest priority), thus measuring the extent to which a criterion acts directly, indirectly or not at all on material cycles, and has been applied uniformly across the four sectors to ensure cross-sectoral comparability.

Score	Meaning	What it covers
5	Direct circular priority	Implements an R-strategy: mandatory recycled/reused content, design for disassembly, design for recycling, take-back systems, waste prevention, on-site reuse, substitution of virgin with secondary materials, organic recovery
4	Strong circular enabler	Durability and service-life extension, structural bio-based substitution, LCA/EPD/LCC frameworks, quality standards for secondary materials, repairability and spare-part availability
3	Adjacent or supporting contribution	Water reuse and recycling, restriction of hazardous substances that hinder end-of-life recycling, Type I ecolabels with embedded circular content, monitoring of waste flows, traceable sourcing of renewable materials
2	Addresses other sustainability dimensions	Criteria addressing environmental sustainability goals other than circular economy (climate mitigation, air quality, energy efficiency, occupational training); meritorious but not directly contributing to material loop closure
1	Outside the circular economy scope	Criteria pursuing legitimate objectives that are not part of the circular economy framework (biodiversity protection, safety compliance, social/ESG, contract enforcement); their relevance lies in other sustainability or governance dimensions

The priority score should not be interpreted as a mandatory ranking. Rather, it serves as a practical decision-support tool that helps public procurers identify criteria likely to deliver the greatest circular benefits while remaining proportionate to the procurement object and the maturity of the relevant market.

Although public procurers are encouraged to give particular consideration to criteria with priority scores of 4 and 5, the final selection should always reflect the objectives of the procurement procedure, the applicable legal framework and the characteristics of the products, services or works being procured.



3. Guidelines for implementation in public tenders

The upgraded criteria developed within CE-PRINCE are intended to support both project partners and public procurers in strengthening the circular dimension of procurement procedures.

The implementation process should follow a practical and gradual approach that takes into account national legislation, market maturity and the specific characteristics of the procurement object.

The implementation approach described below is also intended to support the pilot testing activities foreseen under Deliverable D.2.2.3.

Step 1 – Identify the Procurement Object and Circular Objectives

The first step consists of identifying the procurement object and determining the circular economy objectives that are most relevant for the planned procurement procedure.

Public procurers should consider:

- resource consumption throughout the life cycle;
- waste generation and prevention opportunities;
- product lifespan and durability;
- maintenance and repair requirements;
- opportunities for reuse, refurbishment and recycling;
- opportunities for circular business models;
- environmental and climate impacts.

The thematic clusters developed within CE-PRINCE can assist public procurers in identifying the most relevant circular priorities.

Step 2 – Select the Relevant Thematic Cluster

After defining procurement objectives, public procurers should identify the thematic cluster most closely related to the procurement object.

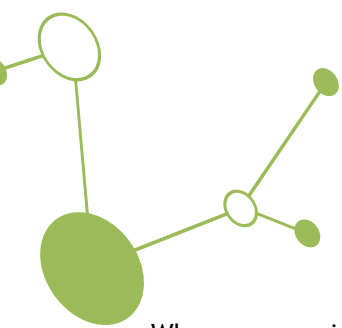
For example:

- catering services may focus on food waste prevention and reusable packaging;
- building projects may focus on circular materials and design for adaptability;
- furniture procurement may focus on durability, repairability and take-back systems;
- landscaping services may focus on biodiversity protection and sustainable resource management;
- vehicle procurement may focus on low-emission technologies and life-cycle performance.

Step 3 – Select Appropriate Upgraded Criteria

The next step consists of selecting one or more upgraded criteria from the relevant thematic cluster.

Priority levels can be used to support the selection process. Public procurers are encouraged to prioritise criteria with the highest expected circular impact (i.e. priority scores 5 and 4) while ensuring proportionality, feasibility and compliance with procurement rules.



Where appropriate, multiple criteria from different clusters may be combined in order to achieve broader circular outcomes.

Step 4 – Adapt the Criteria to National Procurement Frameworks

Before publication of the tender, public procurers should adapt the selected criteria to the applicable national legal and procurement framework.

The upgraded criteria were intentionally designed as flexible recommendations. Public procurers should therefore adjust wording, thresholds and verification requirements according to:

- national legislation;
- market conditions;
- procurement object characteristics;
- available verification methods;
- proportionality requirements.

This approach allows the upgraded criteria to be applied across different countries while maintaining legal certainty and practical feasibility.

Step 5 – Integrate Criteria into Tender Documentation

Although upgraded criteria may be incorporated as Technical Specifications, Award Criteria or Contract Performance Clauses, their inclusion as Award Criteria is generally recommended whenever appropriate. This approach encourages suppliers to offer higher levels of circular performance while preserving competition and flexibility. The final choice depends on the procurement object and on the public procurer's assessment of the most appropriate legal and technical approach.

Technical Specifications (TS)

Technical specifications establish minimum mandatory requirements and are particularly suitable for introducing baseline circularity requirements.

Examples include:

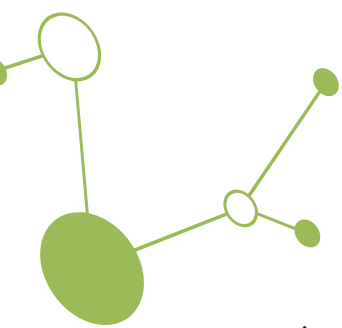
- minimum recycled content in construction materials;
- reusable packaging systems in catering services;
- availability of spare parts for manufactured products;
- durability and repairability requirements;
- minimum environmental performance levels;
- sustainable sourcing requirements.

Award Criteria (AC)

Award criteria provide an opportunity to reward suppliers offering higher levels of circular performance beyond mandatory requirements.

Examples include:

- higher recycled content than the minimum requirement;
- extended product warranties;



- repair and maintenance services;
- take-back schemes;
- product-as-a-service solutions;
- life-cycle performance indicators;
- innovative circular business models.

Award criteria play an important role in stimulating innovation and encouraging suppliers to exceed minimum environmental requirements.

Contract Performance Clauses (CC)

Contract performance clauses help ensure that circular commitments are effectively implemented during contract execution.

Examples include:

- reporting on waste prevention measures;
- implementation of maintenance programmes;
- collection and recovery of products at end-of-life;
- monitoring of circular performance indicators;
- reporting on environmental and circular targets;
- staff training and awareness activities.

Contract clauses are particularly useful when circular outcomes depend on operational practices rather than solely on product characteristics.

Step 6 – Monitor Implementation and Collect Lessons Learned

Following contract award, public procurers should monitor implementation and collect information regarding the effectiveness of the selected criteria.

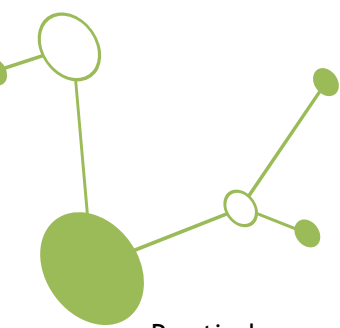
Monitoring activities may include:

- verification of compliance with contractual requirements;
- review of environmental and circular performance indicators;
- assessment of supplier performance;
- identification of implementation challenges;
- documentation of good practices and lessons learned.

Link with Pilot Testing Activities

The upgraded Circular Criteria Sets developed under Deliverable D.2.2.2 constitute the basis for the pilot testing activities implemented within Activity 2.2.

Feedback collected during the pilot testing phase will also support the future refinement of the Circular Criteria Sets and contribute to the identification of good practices that can be transferred across participating countries.



Practical examples of the application of the upgraded criteria, including their adaptation to different procurement procedures, implementation challenges and lessons learned, are presented in Deliverable D.2.2.3 - Report on C/GPP Solution Testing.

The pilot testing phase provides practical evidence regarding the applicability of the upgraded criteria across different procurement sectors and national contexts and supports their further refinement and wider uptake.

The Excel working file containing the upgraded criteria is attached to this deliverable and should be used together with the guidance presented in this document.

4. Annex

Annex 1 - CE-PRINCE Working File for the Upgraded Circular Criteria (Excel workbook attached separately).