

## **More than 30 representatives of civil society, media, and business had their public procurement capacities strengthened**

**Thirty-five journalists, representatives of civil society organizations and economic operators, have strengthened their capacities in monitoring public procurement by participating in a complex training program organized by the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) "Viitorul", in partnership with the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF). The training program is part of the project "Increasing Integrity in Public Procurement".** The aim of the project is to support the reforms of public procurement in Moldova, which will increase the transparency and integrity of public procurement by empowering civil society to hold public authorities accountable.

The training program took place between October 7 and December 17, 2021, and included 12 training modules, of two training sessions each. The topics examined in the capacity building program addressed the issues of the legal and institutional framework of public procurement, sectoral procurement, the process of electronic public procurement, access to information and open data analysis, the appeal procedure, as well as the tools for identifying and analyzing corruption risks. Several case studies on public procurement issues and risks were also presented to participants within the program.

*"The watchdog role of the representatives of the civil society and of the investigative journalists can induce the contracting authorities, the economic operators but also the decision-makers to be more responsible, efficient, more honest, and more transparent. For efficient monitoring of public procurement, civil society and the investigative journalists must have in-depth knowledge on topics such as the functioning of the public procurement system, the legal and institutional framework, data collection and analysis tools, the application of monitoring tools, and the identification of irregularities and actions to hold public authorities accountable. In this context, we considered it appropriate to strengthen capacities and provide a comprehensive training program through which civil society monitoring could subsequently have a positive impact on the efficient spending of public money and on the strengthening of good governance",* stated Carolina Ungureanu, deputy director, and project manager at IDIS "Viitorul"

*„The training program is a core element in a broader program that will support CSOs and investigative journalist organizations as they put the knowledge, skills and tools they learned into practice and engage in monitoring of actual procurement through all phases of the procurement cycle, from specifications through to awarding of and implementation of contracts. This support will include funding for competitively selected organizations, as well as mentoring and advice to ensure complaints are well-founded before being submitted to relevant public authorities to address”,* stated Karin Millett, Project Director and Member of the Board of PTF.

*"The training program on public procurement has once again demonstrated the need for ongoing training for civil society and journalists who monitor and investigate public*

*procurement. In the process of monitoring procurement, it is equally important to know the regulatory framework, the monitoring tools, the electronic procurement process, and the procedures for awarding procurement contracts. Although the participants had a different level of training and experience, the program was a good opportunity for networking and for exchanging best practices. We would very much like all the knowledge and tools acquired in the training program to be applied in practice so that public procurement in all regions is under the scrutiny of civil society and public authorities are becoming responsible" stated Diana Enachi, public procurement monitoring coordinator.*

*"Training is not an end-it is the beginning. The end we envisage is that the monitoring some of you will do will identify inefficient and corrupt practices. Only when these practices have been corrected through actions taken by the contracting agencies or control bodies will we have approached the end. And not even then because there may be a need for changes in legislation, regulations and the system of control and sanctions. Only when such changes are made by the appropriate state bodies and the parliament, and those laws and regulations are adhered to can we say we have reached our goal. This is a long process which this project will not complete. The procurement monitoring work that some of you are about to embark on will, I am convinced, accelerate this process", stated Lars Jeurling PTF senior adviser to the project.*

*"The stages of launching a procurement procedure, of opening and evaluation of tenders is governed by some pre-established rules. Likewise, there is a multitude of aspects related to the human factor. Their knowledge is essential in the objective monitoring of public procurement by civil society, but also for journalistic investigations, the representatives of these segments being the beneficiaries of the current training", stated Ecaterina Meaun, one of the moderators of the training program.*

The legal expert Viorel Pîrvan explained to the participants in the training program all the legal aspects of a public procurement, the conflict of interests, and the stages of the appeals procedure: *"An important topic addressed in the program is that of conflicts of interest and corruption in public procurement. Participants were acquainted with the prohibited practices in procurement procedures, the responsibilities of the actors involved in the procurement process, and on the ways to notify the competent bodies regarding illegal practices, but also on the consequences for public procurement procedures in case of proven acts of corruption and conflicts of interest. Also, the beneficiaries of the training program understood better the role of different public institutions in everything related to public procurement as well as the way in which they can notify these institutions to report a certain problem".*

*„Participants showed a good insight of procurement issues and risks in the procurement process from needs identification all the way to contract implementation and management. They identified vulnerability points in the process such as contract implementation and stressed the importance of monitoring at that stage. They also highlighted the need to go beyond the legal and institutional framework and ensure enforcement of existing rules and sanctions for non-compliance. In that respect, one of the participants brought up the fact that despite the existence of a Contravention Code in Moldova, non-compliance in the area of public procurement often goes unpunished. The participants also understood that strength is in numbers and that increased communication and cooperation among key stakeholders in*

*procurement can help prevent and/or expose Prohibited Practices in procurement leading to better practices and ultimately a more transparent and efficient public procurement system delivering Value for Money*, stated Sabine Engelhard, Legal and Regulatory Specialist, Partnership for Transparency Fund.

Each of the beneficiaries of the program had the opportunity to comment on the usefulness of the training course and to come up with recommendations and suggestions for the public procurement monitoring process.

*"Although I was mostly familiar with certain terms and procedures, I learned new things in today's sessions. For example, I did not know that the authorities have such leverage as the offer guarantee and still do not use it. The presented and analyzed case studies were relevant and useful to understand the way in which certain provisions work in practice. Also, the presentation of the method of calculating the most economically advantageous offer was important and useful"*, underlined Marcela Zamosteanu, RISE Moldova journalist.

For her part, Olesea Harti, a member of the "Zubrea" Natives Association from Zubrești village, considers that: *"The course is very welcome. As I have virtually no experience in the field of procurement, it is a significant contribution towards improving my knowledge and skills in this area. It was very useful to combine the theoretical aspect with the practical one and it is much easier to assimilate the information in this way"*.

*"The training was very well organized. The presentations of the moderators, combined with the rounds of sessions of questions and answers allowed the information to be assimilated more easily. The agenda of each session was well thought out for the convenience of the participants, including from the point of view of the time"*, stated Tatiana Djamanov, a journalist at Radio Orhei.

*"I decided to participate in this program because the company I work for never took part in any public procurement procedure, the reason for this being the lack of knowledge in the field. This training helped me understand all the stages of a public procurement procedure, the legal framework, and all the information necessary to launch such procedures"*, mentioned Nălea Demian, the administrator of the LLC "Bioenergy Company".

*"This is very useful and important information for us journalists. I received answers to questions that will help me a lot in my work. Thank you very much!"* stated Vera Bulgaru, the director of TV Drochia.

Also, at the end of the program, the participants received certificates from the organizers and exchanged impressions and useful information.

The participants in the training program will subsequently have the opportunity to apply for a grant program through which eligible organizations that will be selected on the basis of an open competition will receive support and expertise in the procurement monitoring process. Recommendations made by civil society representatives after the procurement monitoring process will be forwarded to decision-makers for review and action necessary to improve

the situation, thus holding the involved authorities accountable. The expected result would be to achieve efficiency in the use of public money, minimize the risks for public authorities, and finally, ensure quality public goods, works, and services for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.