

The Public Procurement Monitoring Coalition's 6th meeting - results of the second round of subgrant monitoring projects and the Public Certification system for public procurement specialists

The members of the Public Procurement Monitoring Coalition met for the sixth time on Wednesday, November 13, 2024. The five second-round sub-grantee monitors of the project "[Increasing the Integrity of Public Procurement](#)" presented the results and impact of their monitoring projects conducted during September 2023 and September 2024. Andrew Freeman, Economic Officer at the U.S. Embassy in the Republic of Moldova and Hady Fink, Project Director from [Partnership for Transparency - PTF](#) attended. The monitors discussed the recommendations they conveyed to the monitored procurement authorities formulated during the course of their monitoring projects, as well as the reactions of those authorities to the recommendations, including to what extent the public procurement process has been improved as a consequence.

In the second part of the meeting, an analytical note on the system of professionalization and certification of public procurement specialists was discussed. The document reiterates the need to develop a certification system in the Republic of Moldova in order to solve the problems of capacity and lack of qualified specialists in the field. At the same time, the note contains a survey of current policies and commitments of the government, analyzes practices in other countries, and formulates recommendations for the establishment of a certification system aligned to the needs and structure of the domestic procurement system.

Carolina Ungureanu, project manager and deputy director of IDIS "Viitorul", said at the opening of the meeting that within the Coalition, public procurement issues are discussed, which are then discussed again at the meetings of the National Platform for Public Procurement (NPPP). Where the Coalition is composed solely of civil society organizations (CSOs), the NPPP includes both CSOs and government organizations. *"Each time we prepare an analysis on the topic, we discuss it and make recommendations, which are forwarded to the relevant institutions. For us it is important that we receive responses from the authorities with reference to the recommendations. In the Coalition we have members from civil society, investigative journalists, monitors, and procurement experts. We work together to enhance the integrity of the system. Our meetings are also attended by students, because we want to increase the number of experts monitoring public procurement. It is important for the younger generation to build their capacity to monitor public money,"* said Carolina Ungureanu.

Andrew Freeman, Economic Officer of the U.S. Embassy in the Republic of Moldova, said that the integrity and transparency of the procurement system are essential for the health of the economic and social system, but also for the trust of citizens in state institutions. *"This issue is not only crucial in the Republic of Moldova, but also globally, where governments spend trillions of dollars annually, specifically on procurement, one of the most massive and relevant sectors for the development of institutions and the smooth functioning of the economy. These sums of money circulating in the field of public procurement also open the floodgates to corruption. These risks of corruption that exist in the procurement system erode people's confidence in the system, in state institutions. The more successful our efforts to root out corruption in procurement, the more successful the Moldovan government and the Moldovan economy will be,"* said Andrew Freeman.

Hady Fink, Project Director at Partnership for Transparency (PTF), said PTF has been active globally for more than 20 years. It has provided support to NGOs in more than 55 countries. In total, it has implemented close to 300 projects. *"We have been implementing projects like this for a long time and would like to implement such projects in other countries. Your experience would help us to understand the positive aspects, the challenges you have encountered, to understand what we could have done to help you better. Within the team, we have found that this project, which we have with IDIS "Viitorul", is one of the best, the most successful. The success of this project is due to a massive effort made by each and every one of you. This success is due to the results of the monitoring of public procurement, the findings and recommendations are being gathered and are already being forwarded to the National Public Procurement Platform. And most importantly, these recommendations and findings are being taken into account to improve the national public procurement system,"* said Hady Fink.

Organizations that implemented projects in the second round of sub-grants then reported on the activities carried out and drew conclusions on the findings.

Transparency International-Moldova (TI-Moldova) monitored public procurement in Chisinau City Hall and several municipal enterprises, identifying vulnerabilities and risks of corruption, as well as challenging problems. Four journalistic investigations, a monitoring report, a press club and a radio show were organized to present the findings of the report. *"The result we saw at the end was that the municipal authorities were open to receiving our recommendations. I appreciate the fact that we had the opportunity to implement such a project, one that promotes transparency in the procurement process, one that helps us and civil society, but also investigative journalists, to publicize certain irregularities and illegalities. We welcome the fact that after the recommendations and findings of civil society and investigative journalists, people are becoming more sensitive to acts of corruption or illegalities,"* said Lilia Zaharia.

The Association for Human Rights "Lex 21" from Balti municipality was a monitor in both rounds of subgrants. Valeria Ciolac, program coordinator of the association, said that the activities of the second round focused on monitoring public procurement in the social assistance sector in the Republic of Moldova. Thus, 7 investigations and 7 video reports were prepared based on the investigations. On the basis of the findings, complaints were written to the authorities concerned, a monitoring report was drafted, and recommendations were made to the contracting and regulatory authorities. *"The project aimed to monitor public procurement procedures in the social assistance sector in the Republic of Moldova, with the aim to promote transparency, efficiency and integrity in the process of awarding public contracts and to ensure the provision of quality services in the field of social assistance",* said Valeria Ciolac.

The Independent Press Association (API) monitored the procurement procedures of the national program "European Village" and "European Village Express" from 2023-2024. Ion Mazur, head of the Advocacy, Campaigns and Publications Department of the API, said that eight journalistic investigations were carried out, and six best practice articles and a monitoring report on public procurement were created. *"We monitored 65 procurement procedures carried out by 65 contracting authorities in 32 districts. The value of the monitored procurement amounted to over 125 million lei (~26 million USD). This is the first project of its kind that API has implemented. The project gave us the opportunity to explore this area. We intend to capitalize on the experiences gained. The project allowed us to set up the beginning of a network of experts/journalists who could specialize in the field of public procurement",* said Ion Mazur.

The NGO "Parents in Solidarity" was also a monitor in both rounds of subgrants. This time, it monitored the low-value public purchases (AVMs) carried out by 5 education directorates in Chisinau, one year after the entry into force of a new regulation. Four articles were written and a monitoring report was drafted, which showed that non-competitive procedures for MVAs predominated. According to Alei Revenco, as a result of the monitoring of the six education directorates, the directorate of the Buiucani sector was sanctioned by the Public Procurement Agency for the splitting of public procurement, based on a complaint that was sent by the A.O. "Parents in Solidarity". Ala Revenco expressed hope that similar sanctions will follow the other education directorates, as they all admitted to abuses in the use of public money and for a year they concluded direct contracts, mostly with favorite companies. *"About 96 percent of the money used through AVMs during the monitored period, or 76.91 million lei (~16 million USD), was discretionary spending by the education directorates through purchases based on tax invoices and direct contracts. About 4 percent of the money used through AVMs in the monitored period, or 2.85 million lei, was spent through the low-value procurement procedure through MTender, which has no published contract,"* said Ala Revenco, executive director of the association.

The Association for Efficient and Accountable Governance (AGER), likewise, was awarded grants in both subgrant rounds to monitor sectoral public procurement. The first round monitored amendments to the Law on Sectoral Public Procurement. And to see the impact of these amendments, AGER applied for the second round. Olga Diaconu, project coordinator within AGER, said that seven investigative articles were written, two more than promised in AGER's project proposal. A monitoring report with findings and recommendations for contracting authorities and entities was also prepared, as well as a round table to present the monitoring report was organized. *"We aimed, through the implementation of the two projects, to contribute to the transparency of sectoral procurement, increase the level of knowledge and understanding of the provisions of the law, identify legislative gaps in sectoral procurement, and develop proposals to remedy them. I think we have succeeded"*, said Olga Diaconu.

During the meeting, Diana Enachi, project coordinator at IDIS "Viitorul", presented an analytical note on the system of professionalization and certification in public procurement, which analyzes current policies, certification systems functional in other countries (e.g. Croatia, Austria, Malta) and formulates solutions for the Republic of Moldova. The authors emphasize that in the Law on Public Procurement No. 131/2015, by the 2018 amendments, the notions of "certified specialist" and "procurement service provider" were introduced and the contracting authorities obtained the right to delegate the tasks of the working group to the certified procurement specialist. However, in spite of these provisions, and after two unsuccessful attempts to draft a Regulation on certification, to date there is still a lack of a mechanism for professionalization and certification in procurement.

Enachi argues that the lack of specialists and the lack of professional skills, at the level of contracting authorities, in particular local public authorities, undermines the quality and efficiency of the public procurement process. Referring to the research "Active and Passive Waste in Government Spending: Evidence from a Policy Experiment", the lack of professional skills in procurement is considered to be a more important problem than corruption, thus 83% of wasted resources in public procurement are due to lack of professionalization and only 17% - to corruption.

Valeriu Ciorba, an expert of "Parents in Solidarity" A.O., conducted research on the procurement data analysis system - BI, which processes data from MTender, a system that was stopped because its external funding was stopped. Valeriu Ciorba argues that there would not be good data quality in BI, the system

is outdated. In his opinion, "we still need a system to make a big leap from selective monitoring of a few procedures to systemic monitoring of all procedures".

[The Public Procurement Monitoring Coalition](#) was created at the initiative of the [Institute for Development and Social Initiatives \(IDIS\) "Viitorul"](#), within the project [Increasing the Integrity of Public Procurement](#), implemented in collaboration with the American organization [Partnership for Transparency](#). The Coalition aims to support public procurement reforms in the Republic of Moldova. Over 20 civil society organizations, investigative journalists, experts and independent monitors from the Republic of Moldova are members of the Coalition. So far, six meetings of the Coalition have been held, where several topical issues in the field of public procurement have been discussed.

The project [Increasing the Integrity of Public Procurement](#) is implemented by the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) Viitorul, in partnership with the American organization Partnership for Transparency. The project aims to support public procurement reforms in Moldova that will increase transparency and fairness in public procurement by empowering citizens to hold relevant institutions accountable.

[IDIS "Viitorul"](#) is an independent think tank established in 1993 that combines social, political and economic research with strong advocacy components. The institution conducts applied monitoring research in several areas: economics, social policy, EU policies, regional development, and security and foreign policy risks.

[Partnership for Transparency](#) (PTF) is based in Washington, DC and its mission is to promote innovative civil society-led approaches to improving governance, increasing transparency, promoting the rule of law, and reducing corruption in developing and emerging countries. Since 2000, PTF has supported over 250 projects aimed at promoting NGO involvement in decisions, processes, and laws that enforce transparency and accountability in public procurement.