



The Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement (naBe)

Gerhard Weiner, Head of the [Sustainable Public Procurement Platform \(naBe Platform\)](#), has been working at [Public Procurement Agency Austria \(BBG\)](#) for four years and was initially responsible for the conceptual design of the naBe Platform. He has been heading it since September 2019. The naBe Platform is the service point of the naBe Action Plan (an initiative of the Federal Ministry for Climate Protection), it accompanies the public administration in the implementation of the naBe criteria and develops them further, ensures a strong online presence, organises numerous events and coordinates projects.

What are the objectives of the updated Austrian Action Plan for Sustainable Public Procurement (naBe) by the Federal Government? What are the main updates?

In the course of a major reform process from 2018 to 2020, the 16 naBe criteria groups underwent a general overhaul and all criteria and target quotas were further developed. In the process, the catalogue was renewed from the ground up and designed in a particularly reader-friendly manner, divided in each case into the following subchapters: Introduction, Eligibility Criteria, Technical Specifications, (Optional) Award Criteria and the corresponding Evidence. The objectives for the new generation of the naBe Action Plan were set as (1) anchoring sustainable procurement in all federal institutions, (2) harmonising criteria with regard to sustainable public procurement, and (3) securing Austria's pioneering role in sustainable public procurement in the EU.

For the first objective, the naBe action plan will be made mandatory in all ministries by directive. In addition, numerous outsourced companies in the federal sector will be required to do so by owner instruction or letter of recommendation (if the legal corporate structure does not permit instructions). Harmonisation means rolling out the naBe action plan to

the federal provinces and municipalities. We are pleased that two federal states, Lower Austria and Tyrol, have already declared their willingness to implement the naBe Action Plan. More and more cities and municipalities are also approaching us to implement the naBe Action Plan in their procurement programmes. And of course, European and international dialogue is very important to us. We are active in numerous European bodies such as the [GPP Advisory Group](#) or the network of SPP Service Centres and we are always present at international conferences.

Can you explain what are the obligations for the federal public procurers? How is it implemented and monitored? Are there any challenges?

The successful implementation of the naBe Action Plan requires clear governance that involves the relevant organisations and focuses on information and cooperation. Among them are the federal ministries, the Public Procurement Agency, outsourced companies of the federal government, and the Federal Real Estate Company (BIG). The Federal Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK), as the department responsible for the naBe Action Plan, assumes a coordinating role in this process.

To steer its implementation, an inter-ministerial steering group was set up, in which the department heads responsible for procurement in the ministries as well as the management of BBG and BIG are represented. In addition, a second body targeting the operational level was established, the 'naBe officers' group. In each ministry, selected procurement officers were appointed as naBe officers, who act as central information and contact persons internally and externally. They bring in the important reference to practice, raise awareness for sustainable procurement in their own department and actively participate in the process of data collection for naBe monitoring.

A monitoring system is currently being developed and agreed with the inter-ministerial steering group, which will provide information on the implementation of the Action Plan in the federal institutions. It is based on indicators that allow conclusions to be drawn about (1) the incorporation of the naBe Action Plan in the individual federal institutions, (2) the application of the naBe criteria in tenders and contracts and the naBe conformity of the products and services procured, and (3) the composition of the suppliers (size, existing environmental management system, etc.). The results of this will be incorporated into the evaluation of the naBe Action Plan planned for 2024, which will also focus on the economic and

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ecological impacts of the Action Plan and on user satisfaction.

On the one hand, the systematic collection of the necessary data for this monitoring system will be a particular challenge; the distinction between ex-ante and ex-post monitoring is relevant here. At the time of the announcement, only the tender planning is known. Just during the performance contract and when products/services are actually called off and billed does the tender realisation become obvious – plan and reality does not always have to be congruent. However, the ex-post data is even more difficult to collect, but is important to analyse the degree of target achievement in the naBe product groups. On the other hand, we generally see a paradigm shift in public procurement and public procurement law, from a voluntary to a more mandatory instrument. This is not only because of the requirements of the Action Plan at the federal level, but also because of EU directives. In the past, public procurement law essentially defined the procedure, how the processes of awarding contracts had to be designed but left the decision to the contracting authorities what they procured. Through sector-specific legislation, the EU is strengthening substantive law in public procurement law and other legislation and giving contracting authorities guidance on what to procure. For example, while the [Clean Vehicle Directive](#) does not oblige contracting authorities to purchase road vehicles, it does specify to a certain extent how road vehicles must be designed when they are procured. It remains to be seen how mandatory requirements that apply to all EU Member States will affect the level of ambition, the budgets of the contracting authorities concerned, the markets and the size of the margins left to contracting authorities to procure the most economic and environmentally friendly solutions.

What sectors do the naBe criteria for sustainable public procurement cover? What are the new factsheets? Do they facilitate the use of the criteria?

The naBe Action Plan contains criteria for the procurement of products and services from 16 procurement groups. These can be divided into three categories: 1) Consumer products and events (e.g. electricity), 2) more durable products or capital goods (e.g. IT equipment) and 3) building facilities (e.g. building construction). The naBe criteria cover, among other things, the fields of action life-cycle costs, low pollution, energy efficiency, circular economy and renewable resources, and in the procurement group food and supply services also freshness, seasonality and animal welfare. The naBe product groups also include target quotas: in the area of electricity, for example, federal institutions are required to purchase exclusively (= 100%) genuine green electricity in accordance with the [Austrian Eco-label](#) from 2022. For the procurement of food, 25% organic products are to be purchased in a staggered quota progression from 2023, and by 2030 even 55% organic quota are to be met.

The naBe factsheets are intended to make the extensive chapters on the various naBe criteria catalogues easily and quickly accessible. They provide a quick overview of the criteria, give important tips on how to apply them, provide references to other interesting sources and show comparisons of the TCO (total cost of ownership) of conventional and sustainable products. The factsheets have been very well received, which is why we have already published them in five naBe product groups. There are also factsheets on other current topics such as the application of the Clean Vehicle Directive or digital accessibility; more will follow soon. Speaking of TCO, here we naturally offer the necessary TCO tools for the most important naBe criteria groups, first and foremost for ICT. And that's not all: as a further practical tool, we will soon be publishing our own good-practice sheets in which successfully implemented procurements by public clients will be portrayed and the main implementation successes will be presented.

Talking about the naBe platform itself, has it been successful since its launch in September 2019? What services does it provide? What are the upcoming events organised by the platform?

Yes, we have been able to successively expand and improve our services since our launch in 2019. Our toolbox consisting of the factsheets, the good practice sheets and the TCO tools is just one element of this. Our website www.nabe.gv.at serves as an important information hub, where not only the tools can be found, but all criteria groups including explanations and additional information are widely presented. In addition, there are explanatory texts on sustainable procurement and current news and event information.

We provide the community with the most important events from the naBe world in a quarterly newsletter, and for those who like it more dynamic, we also have our own social media channel. Events have a special significance for us, increasingly online as a result of the pandemic, but of course physical events are also very important to us as a way of getting into conversation. Our annual naBe symposium took place on 27th September 2022 and was dedicated to the topic of circular economy, whereby we want to focus particularly on the procurement groups of construction, ICT and textiles as well as explain the connection between procurement and circular economy. In addition, on 4th October 2022, we offered a specialist day on sustainable food procurement, which addressed the climate impact in community catering. We also receive many enquiries from the federal states or public sector companies seeking support in implementing sustainable procurement in workshops.

The naBe Action Plan is particularly concerned with the further expansion of social sustainability. In a working group set up last year, we are dealing with digital accessibility and increased involvement of inclusive businesses in the procurement process. We have taken the EC's renewed [Buying Social guide](#) as an opportunity to focus even more on this pillar of sustainability.