

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Where can I find information on the requirements of international organisations?

International organisations publish calls for tenders. These calls for tenders are usually posted in a dedicated section of their website. This information is freely available with no fee.

The tab is generally called: “Procurement” or “Projects”

Calls for tenders are posted publicly in line with the principles of transparency and free competition between businesses.

In addition to websites, most international organisations have mobile applications.

Other than proactively checking online platforms, it is possible to stay informed by requesting “alerts”.

The Belgian Foreign Trade Agency (ACE) has developed the “Trade4U” app for calls for tenders, though this is not exclusively dedicated to international organisations.

Private companies also offer paid-for procurement information services.

What kind of business opportunities do international organisations offer?

In order to fulfil their objectives, International Organisations develop partnerships with the private sector. This trend of collaborating with the private sector and seeking its expertise continues to grow.

Business opportunities involve (1) the operation of the organisation itself (Corporate / Institutional Procurement) and (2) work related to the projects backed by the organisation (Project Procurement).

Corporate / Institutional Procurement presents a vast range of opportunities, which can be accessed via procurement departments. These involve supply of goods and services to the international organisations themselves.

Consultancy services are a significant source of business opportunities.

International Organisations, in collaboration with the local agencies implementing projects on the ground, where relevant, seek partnerships to deliver their projects on the ground.

Are all goods and services contracts advertised?

As a rule, calls for tenders must be public. However, contracts involving smaller sums of money can be awarded without a public call for tenders.

The rules and thresholds for compulsory publication vary between international organisations.

How can I prepare to do business with an International Organisation?

The first step is to consult the website of the International Organisation in question, then register on their database (if such a tool exists). It is important to understand the modus operandi of the international organisation before making yourself known to them.

It is a good idea for companies to take steps to stay informed, by regularly checking the websites where business opportunities are posted, subscribing to newsletters and registering for notification systems to receive the latest information.

It is also advisable to familiarise yourself with specific procedures and jargon and clearly understand the meaning of technical terms such as General Procurement Notice, Bidding Documents, Request for Proposal, Request for Information, Expression of Interest, etc.

Brussels Invest & Export by hub.brussels also offers information sessions and visits to international organisations.

How can my business make itself known to international organisations?

Certain International Organisations allow companies to register online, free of charge, via a dedicated section of their website.

We advise companies to register to receive notifications of calls for tenders (refer to the registration procedure of the specific International Organisation), create a detailed profile and ensure the information provided is up to date. Companies must remember to update their profile regularly to confirm their interest in cooperating with the international organisation.

Registration enables you to hear about business opportunities in good time.

In some cases, you must register in order to submit a bid or expression of interest.

By registering, the business also makes itself visible for smaller contracts that are not necessarily advertised. For contracts of this type, the International Organisation may select businesses from those registered and contact them directly to inform them that they have been short listed.

Some International Organisations offer “Business Opportunities Seminars”, “Business Opportunities Fairs”, or “Industry Days”. These events are an opportunity to find out about the priorities and projects of the International Organisation in question, showcase your expertise and develop your network of key contacts within the organisation and/or potential partners.

As part of its annual action plan, Brussels Invest & Export by hub.brussels also organises visits to international organisations.

Is it free to access and register with the websites of International Organisations?

It is free to access and register with the websites of International Organisations. One exception is the official www.devbusiness.com site (annual subscription of 590 USD), which collates information from several International Organisations.

Who are the key people within International Organisations?

On one hand, there is the department responsible for providing information on business opportunities, and on the other there are in-house industry and regional experts.

Procurement departments publish information on business opportunities and manage the process of awarding contracts. They provide information on calls for tenders and can take the initiative by contacting potential suppliers of goods, services or consultancy expertise.

Project Team Leaders, Country Representatives and Sector Specialists are all key contacts. These individuals may be based at the International Organisation’s headquarters, or in the country/region where it operates.

Other important contacts are the key figures within the implementing agencies in the country where the project is being delivered.

Can even small companies provide goods/services to International Organisations?

International Organisations specify the eligibility criteria for calls for tenders.

Rather than a question of size, the priority is proving to the organisation that you are capable of successfully delivering the contract.

International Organisations prefer organisations with financial and structural stability, particularly in terms of staffing, as well as the necessary expertise and experience.

Small and medium enterprises may wish to consider collaborating with a larger company.

Consultancy projects are, without a doubt, open to small businesses, or even freelance consultants, provided they have the specific knowledge required.

Even relatively new companies (founded within the last three years) may be eligible in some cases (e.g. the United Nations system for smaller contracts).

Have you got any tips on how to identify opportunities?

Check the organisation websites and the available documentation regularly. This includes the sections that require registration.

Make sure to get the information in good time. Stay informed of Expressions of Interest (EOI) and Future Business Opportunities.

Identify the assessment criteria and consider how well you meet them.

Consult the documents that set out the geographic, thematic and sectorial strategies and priorities. These documents indicate the focus of projects in the medium term.

If your business does not have the necessary experience and expertise on its own, identify companies that have already delivered similar projects and develop relationships, in order to stay informed and cooperate on future projects.

Seize any opportunity for interaction with International Organisations and develop contacts with key individuals.

Which call for tenders should I respond to?

Companies should pay close attention to the exact specifications of the request made by the International Organisation. Tenders will be considered on the basis of the specifications, according to the associated assessment criteria.

In order to have the best chance of success, companies should analyse calls for tenders in detail. By doing so, they can choose the most appropriate ones. In a competitive environment, you should avoid wasting energy on calls for tenders unless you are entirely sure of your capacity to deliver.

Due to the considerable competition, companies should prioritise calls for tenders in fields where they believe they have specific expertise, solid experience and good references.

Companies should be confident of their ability to offer added value to the International Organisation; just wanting to provide goods and services is not enough.

When do International Organisations need consultants?

International Organisations, particularly Development Banks, use consultants at every stage of the project cycle, from defining country strategies alongside thematic or industry experts, to preparing, implementing, completing, and evaluating projects.

How can a company can take part in a call for tenders?

Companies may respond to a call for tenders by offering goods or services directly. They may also wish to respond as part of a consortium of businesses, or act as a “subcontractor” for a bidding company/group.

What elements should be included in a tender?

Companies must ensure they meet all of the specifications set out by the International Organisation. The tender must be clear, complete and detailed. It is important to respond fully, without giving information that is not requested, and to submit the tender within the deadline. Best practice is to provide only the information mentioned in the “Terms of Reference”.

The International Organisation will consider the tender in terms of both substance (company structure, technical specifications, etc.), and form (presentation, language, etc.).

It is essential to attach all of the documents requested (e.g. annual accounts, curriculum vitae, etc.).

Be precise in your descriptions, emphasising the competitive advantage your company offers with regard to the competition. This requires you to demonstrate your experience, and that the company is genuinely capable of delivering and not just making promises or giving a sales pitch.

Companies should consider the goals of the International Organisation when introducing themselves. When preparing a tender, imagine yourself in the shoes of its recipient. Companies should present themselves as a partner, rather than just a supplier of goods or services. It must show a clear awareness of and prioritise the interests of the recipient of the tender.

The International Organisation wants to ascertain what added value the proposed solution offers in response to a specific problem, for which it is seeking private sector input.

Considering sustainable development, including environmental and social concerns, can give your tender a competitive advantage.

If requested, you should provide separate technical and financial offers. The decision-maker may wish to choose a solution without being influenced by price offered by the lowest bidder.

You may wish to seek specialist support when drafting a tender.

Are references necessary?

International Organisations prefer companies that are able to provide references. Specific expertise and experience are necessary, especially if there is strong competition. These references relate to technical expertise, as well as experience in a given geographic location (region/sub-region/country of delivery). They are an important aspect of the tender assessment process.

It is important to demonstrate a knowledge of the country. A presence on the ground is a bonus. Contact with clients (implementing agencies) is important, as is working with local partners. Unless specified, there is no absolute requirement to work with a local partner. However, this factor may be taken into consideration during assessment. If you do not have an active and lasting presence in the country, you will naturally need to cooperate with a local partner for organisational reasons.

Do they always choose the lowest bidder?

Generally, they are looking for the “best value for money” rather than just the lowest cost.

The principle of “Best Value for Money” is, therefore, the decisive factor.

Price is just one of many aspects considered when determining who wins the contract.

For smaller contracts and for “simple/standard” goods/services, price may be the deciding factor.

Can I offer an alternative technical solution to the one requested by the International Organisation?

International Organisations expect offers to respond fully and specifically to the requirements set out in the call for tenders - no more and no less than requested.

However, some International Organisations are becoming more open to the innovative solutions that the private sector can offer. Dedicated sections of their websites give industry and technical experts the opportunity to contact International Organisations outside of any specific call for tenders, and inform them of technical innovations developed by their company. These specifications may be taken on board and appear in future calls for tenders.

International Organisations may be open to innovative solutions. According to the intended goal, and the practical feasibility of implementation in the project country, innovative solutions must be considered in terms of price and how they compare to “conventional” solutions.

What should I do if my company submits a tender and is unsuccessful?

In order to ensure transparency, International Organisations publicly announce contracts awarded, or at least those over a certain value. The name of the company (or consortium) awarded the contract is published, in addition to the contract value. This enables you to find out what kind of company won. By doing so, you can compare your tender to the successful bid, approach the company that won the contract, or use what you have learnt to improve and inform your next tender.

International Organisations have developed mechanisms for providing feedback to unsuccessful bidders. We strongly recommend taking advantage of this capacity: it allows you to gather the information you need to improve, while demonstrating that your company is still interested in working with the International Organisation.

International Organisations stress that it takes several attempts to win your first contract. Perseverance is the key.

In the case of a dispute regarding the award of a contract, you can contact a dedicated department dealing with issues of this type.

What are the benefits of responding to calls for tenders from International Organisations?

International Organisations have clearly defined needs and strict procedures governing the entire procurement process.

Their procedures are transparent. The contracting process is open. International Organisations encourage healthy competition between companies.

The risk of non-payment is very low. If the contract is delivered to specification, the company is guaranteed to receive payment. It is worth noting that Credendo- www.credendo.be - offers Belgian companies a series of solutions for projects involving International Organisations.

Provided the project is successfully delivered, an (initial) reference from an International Organisation increases the credibility of a company among other International Organisations, putting it in a good position to win subsequent contracts. International Organisations themselves tend to contact companies they have collaborated with successfully in the past.

It facilitates access to international markets. A reference from an International Organisation is seen as a mark of credibility by other International or Governmental Organisations you may wish to approach in the future.