



ONLINE

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CONTRACTING SMEs FOR LABOUR-BASED PUBLIC WORKS

21 SEPTEMBER – 16 OCTOBER 2026

🕒 4 WEEKS, 80 HOURS

Information Note



International
Labour
Organization



International Training Centre



Contracting SMEs isn't just procurement—it's a strategy for creating jobs, boosting local economies, and delivering quality infrastructure.



INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

The construction industry has one of the highest potentials to create jobs in both developed and developing countries. Globally, the industry accounts for 7.6% of the total employment, which is equivalent to approximately 230 million jobs.

This job-rich industry consists of mainly small firms (SMEs). These SMEs in the construction sector often face challenges compiling documents and bidding for tenders, accessing bank credits, and efficiently managing labour, materials, equipment, and finance. Clients of infrastructure investments, on the other hand, which are often government entities, also face difficulties when assessing the capacity of SMEs, monitoring the implementation, and evaluating the overall quality of the works delivered.

Despite these challenges, engaging locally-based SMEs have various advantages in the context of decentralization. These advantages include the rapid and less costly mobilization of services, engagement of local labour, long-term relationships with local clients, and the knowledge and access to locally available materials that can create local multiplier effects on employment and economy at large. Locally-based SMEs are, above all, likely to be more labour-intensive.

Over the half century, the ILO through its Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP), has trained a number of locally-based SMEs on labour-based methods that are cost-efficient and capable of producing quality infrastructure assets. Experiences show that the EIIP methods of engaging local SMEs have an overall impact of creating more and better jobs that are critically needed.

This course provides an interactive e-learning opportunity to understand the environment in which SMEs operate in the construction sector, and explore how to engage them through transparent and efficient procurement procedures that can create an enabling environment for SMEs development. By undertaking a review of different approaches, case studies and tools, participants will learn how to engage SMEs as well as local communities for infrastructure works to create more and better jobs, while ensuring the quality of the assets to be constructed. The course will invite a panel of experienced practitioners to present their field experiences where the course knowledge has been already implemented. Participants will be provided with practical tools to help them demonstrate the knowledge gained throughout the learning journey in contracting SMEs for labour based public works.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE COURSE?

The course targets professionals involved in designing and implementing infrastructure works. The course specifically targets:

- Government officials operating at the local, provincial and national level on public investments;
- Social partners (e.g. engineers' associations, trade unions, etc.);
- NGOs and non-profit organizations involved in contracting SMEs for labour based public works;

- ILO, UN staff and development practitioners;
- Donor organizations, working or would like to enhance the labour inputs of investments;
- Public investment and employment policy advisors;
- Research and education institutions.

WHAT?

The course covers the following four topics:

Learning Block 1: The construction sector, SMEs, and employment-intensive investments

Learning Block 1 will provide a general overview of the context in which SMEs operate, as well as the employment-intensive approach to infrastructure works and its advantages and challenges for implementation.

- The construction sector at a glance: key statistical figures, trends, and policy frameworks
- What are the challenges SMEs in the construction sector face, and what constitutes an enabling environment for them
- ILO's Employment-Intensive Investment Strategies
- Local resource-based (LRB) approaches

Learning Block 2: Appropriate management of contracting and administrative procedures

In order to implement employment-intensive infrastructure works, it is critically important to clearly define the scope of works to be performed by SMEs, taking into consideration their characteristics, capacities, and the policy environment. Thus clearly defined scope of works will then be integrated into bidding procedures for open, competitive and targeted procurement procedures that create an enabling environment for SMEs to develop, while ensuring quality outputs and value for money. This learning block will review what constitutes key elements to be considered when targeting SMEs for infrastructure works.

- Facilitating the involvement of small contractors
- Procurement procedures including contracting system
- Community Contracting as a tool

Learning Block 3: Building capacity of small-scale contractors in local resource-based approaches

The capacity of SMEs may be assessed with the following dimensions: human resources, equipment and tools, finance, and management skills. Human resources here pertain to technical knowledge and skills to carry out required tasks, whereas access to and maintenance of appropriate light equipment for employment-intensive works shall be balanced at an optimal level in comparison to human resource development. Equally challenging for the SMEs is usually access to necessary funds to mobilize the workforce, materials and equipment on the ground. This learning block will explore local resource-based (LRB) approaches as a cost-efficient solution for the small contractors and the economy. Topics to be covered include:

- What does “capacity” mean?
- Planning for Local Resource-Based (LRB) training and involvement of small-scale contractors
- Developing an LRB training programme

Learning Block 4: International labour standards and social/environmental safeguards in labour-based contracts

A productive workforce in a safe working environment is key to quality infrastructure works. Furthermore, SMEs are becoming more and more accountable for environmental and social responsibilities. Social and environmental safeguards, guided by the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, thus play an integral role to protect the working conditions of all workers in an inclusive way, whilst protecting environment. This learning block will give an overview of key items to be considered in order to fulfil such accountability through contractual agreements between the client and SMEs.

- Decent work principles
- Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)
- Gender equality and gender-responsive procurement
- Disability inclusion
- Environmental Safeguards and Social Safeguards

HOW?

The course consists of four online Learning Blocks offered through the ITC-ILO eCampus online platform to be completed over a period of three weeks. At the beginning of each week, participant will have access to a new Learning Block.

Each Learning Block will be composed of:

1. A flexible (asynchronous) self-guided online module on eCampus
2. A live webinar that will include sessions with experts and collaborative group exercise
3. A quiz or an assignment to test participants' knowledge

WHY?

At the end of the course, participants will:

- Know challenges and opportunities that SMEs in the construction sector face;
- Know how to build the capacity of SMEs to carry out labour-based operations effectively;
- Know best practices for open, fair, efficient and sustainable contracting and procurement procedures for SMEs in the construction sector;
- Be equipped with the community contracting tool to directly engage local communities for specific tasks and nurture entrepreneurship;
- Understand the social and environmental dimensions for infrastructure works and how to integrate them into contracting and procurement procedures; and
- Build a network of practitioners working in the construction sector.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants are kindly asked to send us:

1. A completed online registration form: <https://oarf2.itcilo.org/MIF/A9718988/en>
2. If you are financed by your organization (or a donor) an official sponsorship letter is required to finalize your registration. The letter can be uploaded to the application form or sent by email to itcilo_eiip@itcilo.org
3. If you pay directly the course fees, please note that the payment is due before enrolment in the course. More details about payment methods can be found [here](#).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Language: The course will be held in English, French and Arabic.

Course Fees: Euro 1,255

Certificate: The course issues two types of certificates – Certificates of Participation, and Certificates of Achievement. Each Participant is required to submit individual assignment in order to receive the Certificate of Achievement.

Contact: itcilo_eiip@itcilo.org

WITHDRAWAL, CANCELLATION POLICY, AND REFUNDS FOR OPEN COURSES

If an enrolled participant wishes or must withdraw from a course, they may choose to apply to a different course or be substituted by another candidate. The participant must notify the Centre, in writing, of their decision at least 14 days prior to the start date of the course. Cancellation of participation in regular courses will result in the following penalties:

- 14 days or more prior to the start date of the course: No penalty, 100% refund of amount paid less applicable bank charges
- 8 to 13 days prior to the start date of the course: Penalty of 50% of course price, refund of residual amount paid (if any) less applicable bank charges
- 7 days or less prior to the start date of the course: Penalty of 100% of course price.

INFO

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

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