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Information Communication Technology (ICT) has become a fundamental part of modern daily lives. Our smartphones and computers connect us, provide access to a vast world of information and create countless opportunities for business. Digitalization and smart tools can also be instrumental in creating a more sustainable world and help towards a post-Covid, green recovery. At the same time, the ICT sector is itself a significant source of carbon emissions worldwide, currently responsible for 2 to 4% of global CO₂ emissions and this percentage is growing. In addition, the ICT sector is dependent on a wide range of rare minerals, whose mining, production and waste phases have a high negative impact on the environment, on human rights and labor rights. Only a small proportion of these materials is effectively reused or recycled.

On June 14th 2021, several governmental and important procuring organizations signed the [Fair and circular ICT Pact](#). It brings together public and private ICT procurers and governments in a collective movement to accelerate the transition towards circular and fair ICT-products. This Pact lays the foundation for international collaboration.

Through the power of procurement, the ambition is to have sustainable ICT widely available on the market by 2030 in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2021, the Belgian federal Minister for Sustainable Development, Zakia Khattabi, wanted to deliver an active contribution in the execution of the Pact by setting up: (1) an 80-member Belgian ICT Buyer group; and (2) an International Working Group on Ethics. The last group concentrated itself on the topic of human and labor rights in IT procurement. It brought together leading public buyers of IT as a means for exchange, stocktaking, discussion and identification of actions towards a next-generation ethical procurement of IT. Key objectives of this group included:

- to bring together frontrunners (policymakers and procurers) regularly;
- to gather the latest insights on practices and challenges from public authorities as preparatory research that could enable learning, development of new criteria or engagement with market actors;
- to identify concrete actions to be taken for ethical procurement practice;
- to enable exchange between procurement and policy perspective; and
- to connect key outputs to other relevant European and international work.

At its core, the group consisted of 18 committed members from Belgium, Norway, Spain, Sweden, UK, Denmark, Italy, Finland, Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland. They were recruited by the Belgian Federal Institute for Sustainable



Development (FISD) and ICLEI based on clear criteria at the start of the work program, with emphasis on frontrunners from different levels of government. To understand their expectations, expertise and ambitions in more detail, a needs and status assessment process was carried out at the beginning of the project. The assessment clearly showed that the level of experience with ethical IT within the group varies, but the commitment is generally high. The results of the assessment showed the group's main interest in the topics of labels, joint market dialogues, the follow-up process and exchanging and learning from good practice examples. As a result, the core work of the group was built around four workshops:

1. Exploring the use and credibility of labels;
2. Prioritizing issues to jointly push the industry further;
3. Discussing the follow-up process; and
4. Capturing good practice.

The FISD and ICLEI organized and moderated the workshops in an interactive online format. Beyond the workshops, the group had the opportunity to exchange information via a Slack channel, which was set up and maintained by the secretariat.

A report on the discussions and outcomes, together with procurement-profiles from 10 leading European cities and countries, provides inspiration on future fair IT buying. The report will be available soon.

As was the case in 2021, the FISD will provide further support for this working group in 2022.

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