

# The Virtual Company Dossier

Simplified tendering across borders in Europe





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To enhance the VCD system several additional components are under development or planned in the next period.

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Promote the VCD system in call for tenders and receive accurate supplier qualifications bundled as VCD package. Integrate the VCD building blocks into your tendering system or platform.

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You are kindly requested to contact PEPPOL participants of the Virtual Company Dossier responsible for your country.



# PEPPOL and the Virtual Company Dossier

# 1

The Virtual Company Dossier (VCD) offers simplification, transparency and electronic monitoring of supplier qualifications in public procurement. It thereby addresses the demand for better interoperability in electronic tendering.

## **The PEPPOL project: eProcurement without borders in Europe**

The PEPPOL project (Pan European Public eProcurement On-Line) is an EC project facilitating EU-wide interoperability in public eProcurement aiming at setting up pan-European pilot solutions that conjointly exist with national infrastructures. The PEPPOL project envisages a future where any company in the EU, and in particular small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), can communicate electronically with any European governmental institution for the entire procurement process. The project will set up integrated pilot solutions for cross border procurement.

It consists of eight work packages and is co-funded by the European Commission within the Competitiveness Innovation Programme (CIP). The PEPPOL consortium currently comprises 17 leading public eProcurement agencies in 11 countries. Detailed information about PEPPOL can be found at [www.peppol.eu](http://www.peppol.eu).

## **The Virtual Company Dossier**

The PEPPOL work package "Virtual Company Dossier" (VCD) develops a highly helpful and accurate tool for tendering. It provides a standardized method and an electronic document solution to support Contracting Authorities and Economic Operators during the qualitative selection process in tendering procedures.

Participation in public tenders for any eligible Economic Operator means proof of fulfilment of the qualitative selection criteria requested by the Contracting Authority. The burden of proof lies at the shoulders of the Economic Operator, who has

to collect evidences from different (national) sources and provide them to the Contracting Authority, at their legally instructed forms. The VCD aims at assisting Economic Operators and Contracting Authorities in their communication by providing a standardized structure to submit evidence that can be used for both, national and transnational procurement procedures.

## **The transnational dimension of the Virtual Company Dossier**

The transnational dimension of procurement procedures causes several difficulties for the involved parties. The applied set of legal rules differs between the parties, hence qualitative selection criteria do not point at specific evidences, some evidences might not exist in a country or they exist in a different form. Moreover, competent issuing authorities are unknown across borders thus documents have to be legalized and translated by the Economic Operator.

The Virtual Company Dossier (VCD) aims at reducing some of these barriers by providing an interoperable electronic document solution that supports the exchange of evidences. Its structure is defined according to the qualitative selection criteria introduced by the European Procurement Directive 2004/18/EC (Art. 45 – 50) but it also refers to corresponding national legislation. The VCD can be used by any Economic Operator from the European Union to prove compliance with criteria when participating in public (pan-European) tenders but it can also be used by Contracting Authorities for monitoring eligibility and suitability of national and foreign candidates.



**A potentially huge market for electronic procurement: 2,288 billion Euro spent annually by EU governments account for 19.4<sup>1</sup> per cent of Europe's GDP.**

**The PEPPOL consortium comprises 17 leading public eProcurement agencies in 11 countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.**

<sup>1</sup>Deutsche Bank Research: EProcurement, February 2011

# 2

## What is the Virtual Company Dossier?

The Virtual Company Dossier (VCD), an electronic record for supplier qualifications.



The original CEN ISSS BII workshop (CEN BII) was concluded in December 2009, and its results were issued as CWA 16073:2010. In early 2010, a second Workshop – CEN BII2 – was initiated to follow up on and improve the work created in the first workshop.

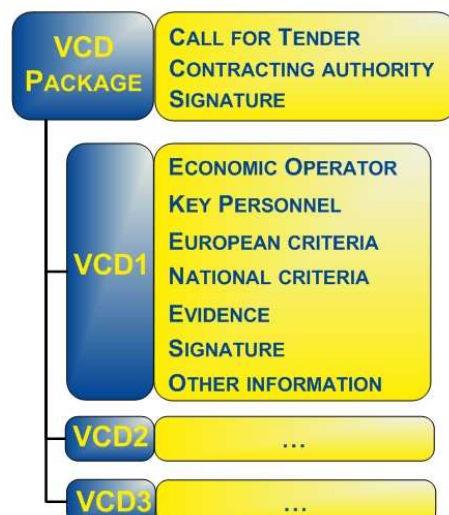
Core component of the VCD System is a document structure (VCD Package): It is an electronic record for carrying and submitting evidences in the course of a tendering procedure. Although built to support both national and international procurements, it is specifically designed to cover requirements evolving from a transnational dimension. The VCD System utilizes qualitative selection criteria requested in Call for Tenders for suggesting the most suitable kind of evidences to Economic Operators. Economic Operators are enabled to bundle relevant information together and submit it to the Contracting Authority. The figure below describes a conceptual view of the VCD data model. A VCD Package is specifically designed for a Call for Tender and Contracting Authority. In contrast, each VCD is Economic Operator specific and contains relevant information about the Economic Operator and his qualifications. Qualifications are interconnected to the criteria of qualitative selection which are requested by the Contracting Authority. In case of a bidding consortium, the VCD Package bundles several VCDs together.

Specifications and results of PEPPOL are coordinated with the CEN ISSS BII 2 (BII 2) workshop. A main purpose of the CEN BII 2 workshop is to establish a forum by:

- » Providing technical support for adopters and implementers.
- » Providing a forum for governance, life cycle management and further refinements of the CWA published by CEN WS/BII.
- » Contributing to coordination and harmonization amongst European initiatives addressing various aspects of e-procurement.

The objectives of the workshop are to provide a basic framework for technical interoperability in pan-European electronic transactions, expressed as a set of technical specifications that cross-refer to relevant activities, and in particular are compatible with UN/CEFACT - in order to ensure global interoperability. The workshop is focusing on implementation facilitations and coordinating pilots implementing the technical specifications output. The requirements and final specifications are input into UN/CEFACT.

### The VCD data model



A VCD Package provides information about the

- » Contracting Authority and the relevant Call for Tender,
- » Economic Operator or consortium responding to the Call for Tender,
- » key personnel of the Economic Operators (e.g. authorized representatives),
- » evidences and files included (e.g. Attestation, translation or legalizations),
- » references to competent issuing bodies,
- » references to qualitative selection criteria that have been requested in Call for Tenders according to European and national regulations and procurement acts.

# What are the benefits of the VCD approach?

# 3

The Virtual Company Dossier is a technical system that provides a comprehensive set of tools supporting public buyers and suppliers in the tendering phase, for both national and cross-border procurement in the EU. The VCD tools can be used by suppliers to identify and collect suitable evidences and to submit their qualifications as part of tenders to public buyers. They can in turn use the tools to receive legally accurate qualifications in a structured way and to prove the suitability of tenderers.

## Benefits for Economic Operators

- » The VCD is a compass for entering markets in different European countries being currently unattractive through complexity of legal proofs and different public procurement environments.
- » The VCD System and its software components provide a convenient way to create a qualification package, to identify and collect required evidences or suitable alternatives with respect to different national regulations.
- » Qualification information can be packaged inside a standardized data structure to electronically submit it to a Contracting Authority.
- » In a transnational case, the VCD offers the possibility to provide translations, apostille or legalization information together with the specific evidence documents.

## Benefits for Contracting Authorities

- » The VCD tools can be used to receive accurate and legally updated qualification information in a standardized way enabling the monitoring of calls for tenders and qualification responses from potential candidates.
- » The European VCD Service helps to improve the quality of qualification information as part of the tender. Contracting authorities can use it to avoid potential mistakes or ambiguities with regard to national and European legislation and to get a consistent view on the type of evidences that can be expected during the actual call.
- » At the time of award, the VCD (in particular the VCD Viewer) will enable Contracting Authorities to classify submitted evidences according to the terms defined in the call of tender, the relevant national and European laws and the specific composition of tenderers.

The VCD is guiding safely through

- » standardization,
- » harmonization,
- » easy monitoring,
- » less bureaucracy,
- » less time and
- » less paper

from the preparation phase to the qualitative selection phase of any Call for Tender. The drive has never been friendlier!

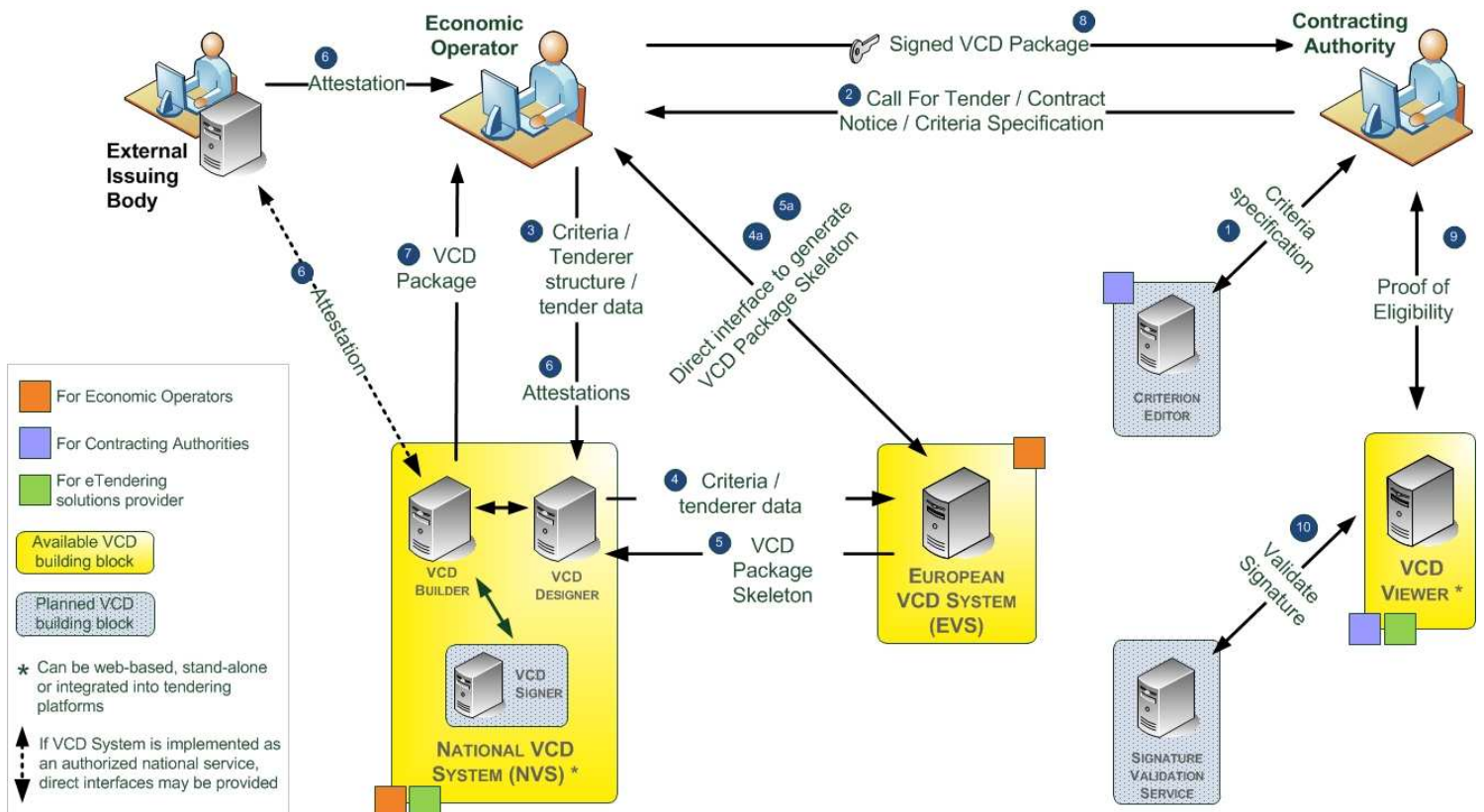
- » Reduce time effort for the preparation and submission of tenders.
- » Support the creation and submission of a tender through software tools.
- » Identify accurate and suitable evidences easily in order to prove conformance to requested criteria with respect to different national procurement legislations.
- » Handle complex situations arising from different nationalities and legal environments of the involved actors.
- » Enable legal interoperability between different national procurement legislations.
- » Increase transparency of supplier qualifications in electronic tendering.
- » Improve the quality when submitting qualifications as part of tenders.
- » Simplify the monitoring and evaluation of received qualifications.
- » Enable easy processing of qualification information through a standardized electronic data format.

Benefits  
at a glance

# 4

## How does the VCD System work?

The VCD reference implementation and building blocks in a tendering process.



1. A Contracting Authority uses the Criterion Editor to define relevant criteria in a structured and standardized way (cf. page 6).
2. A Contracting Authority publishes a contract notice (CN). An Economic Operator wants to apply for the award of that contract and requests the Call for Tender (CFT) and the criteria specification.
3. The Economic Operator submits criteria information, tenderer structure and other tender data to the VCD Designer.
4. With this input the VCD Designer invokes the European VCD System via its system-to-system interface to identify suitable evidences. Alternatively the European VCD System also provides a direct user interface to generate a VCD Package Skeleton (4a/5a).
5. The European VCD System creates a VCD Package Skeleton consisting of information about relevant criteria and suitable evidences to be provided by the Economic Operator.
6. The VCD Package Skeleton is passed over to the VCD Build-

er. The Economic Operator can now fill this skeleton structure with evidences and attestations. In countries where the VCD System is implemented as an authorized national service direct interfaces to issuing bodies may be provided.

7. Having filled the skeleton structure with all relevant data, the customized VCD Package is provided to the Economic Operator. It may be signed by the VCD Signer before (not yet implemented, see page 6).
8. The VCD Package is submitted to the Contracting Authority or relevant tendering platform.
9. The Contracting Authority can use the VCD Viewer to display the information and to prove the eligibility of candidates. The VCD Viewer offers a convenient graphical user interface for evaluating the received tenders and qualifications in a consistent manner.
10. The VCD Viewer has an interface to the Signature Validation Service which provides the capability to prove validity of foreign signature certificates.

# The VCD building blocks

# 5

Major software components (building blocks) of the PEPPOL VCD system.

## European VCD System (EVS)

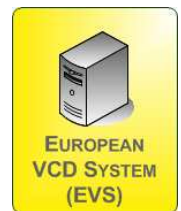
Provides decision support for deriving evidences in order to meet the required criteria defined in a Call for Tender pursuant to the underlying legal rule sets in accordance to European and national procurement legislations.

### System and user interfaces

Make functionality and decision support accessible by systems and users in order to create a data skeleton structure (VCD Package Skeleton) to the Economic Operator that can be used to include evidences accordingly. It also provides a service interface to the VCD Designer.

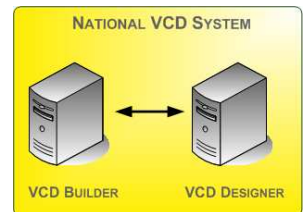
### Ontology Management System (OMS)

The rule sets of the EVS are represented as machine interpretable ontologies. The OMS provides the editing and management functionality for the different ontologies to keep the legal rule sets up to date.



## National VCD System (NVS)

As an integrated component it provides the full set of VCD features from the initial selection of criteria (via the VCD Designer) to the finalization of a validated VCD Package (via the VCD Builder). Depending on implementation architecture decisions, it can be provided as an authorized national service, integrated into existing tendering platforms or used as a stand-alone component in a desktop or web-based NVS deployment. Implementers can use all parts of the NVS reference implementation.



### VCD Designer

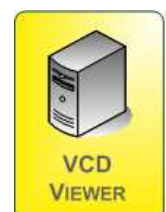
A component allowing users to create a VCD Package Skeleton (data skeleton structure) that can be used by the VCD Builder for the creation of the desired VCD Package. It uses the information about Economic Operators and their relationship among each other (tenderer structure), the criteria and other relevant information defined in a Call For Tender. It therefore provides an interface to the EVS which is used to identify appropriate evidences pursuant to the underlying legal rule sets.

### VCD Builder

A web or desktop application allowing users to enter data and to upload evidences in order to provide the information outlined in the previously created VCD Package Skeleton. The final output of the VCD Builder is a VCD Package that consists of all the information about Economic Operators, qualification and selection criteria as well as evidences to prove compliance to them.

## VCD Viewer

The VCD Viewer allows users to view the content of VCD Packages. Depending on implementation architecture decisions, it can be integrated into existing tendering platforms or used as a stand-alone component. In particular it will support Contracting Authorities in proving eligibility of Economic Operators.



# 6

## Additional VCD building blocks

Additional building blocks and features that are under development or planned in the next period.

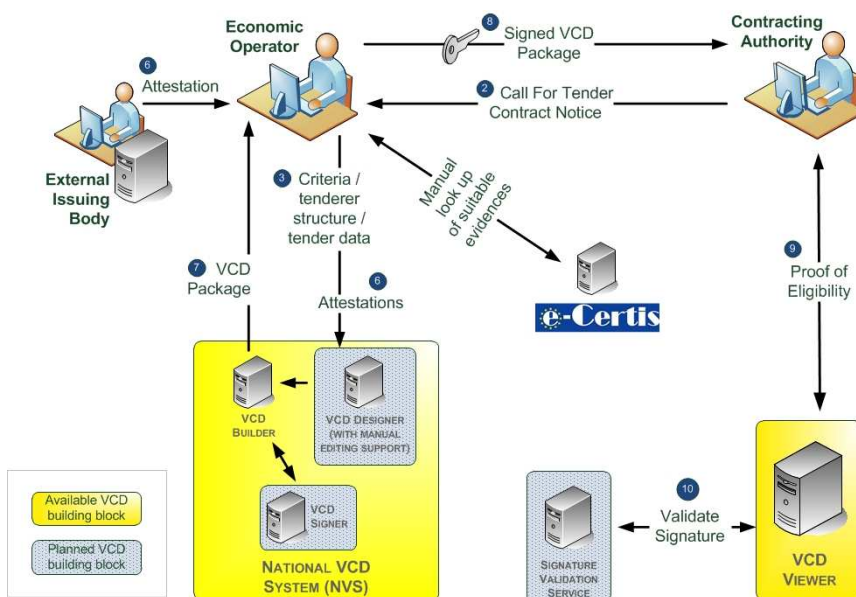
### eCertis and Manual Editing of a VCD Package Skeleton

**eCertis** ([www.ec.europa.eu/markt/ecertis](http://www.ec.europa.eu/markt/ecertis)) is a guide to the different documents and certificates frequently requested in procurement procedures across the 27 Member States, two candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia) and the three EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). Economic operators that wish to submit a proposal in response to a foreign Call for Tender as well as Contracting Authorities that have

to evaluate a foreign tender are supported by eCertis to understand what information is being requested or provided.

#### VCD Designer with manual editing support

The VCD Designer shall also support Economic Operators in creating a VCD Package whose national procurement legislations are not yet part of the European VCD System. In this case Economic Operators have to manually create the VCD Package with the suitable national evidences. The manual editing feature is specifically aligned with eCertis. This feature is built as an add-on for the VCD Designer and will be automatically available as part of the VCD Designer distribution.



### Software Components under development or planned in the next period

#### VCD Signer

Will provide technical means to digitally sign VCD Packages and the included XML meta-data files according to the XAdES (XML Advanced Electronic Signatures) format. It will provide interfaces so that other components can directly access its functionality.

#### Criteria Editor

Will support Contracting Authorities in define relevant criteria of qualitative selection in a structured and standardised way that can be automatically computed via the VCD solution (criteria specification). It will simplify the compilation of a VCD Package through automatic support via the VCD solution.

#### VCD BusDox Connector (PEPPOL work package 8)

Implements a client application to send/receive VCD Packages over the PEPPOL BusDox infrastructure developed by PEPPOL work package 8 (process step 8).

#### Signature Validation Service

Provides means to validate and verify the digital signature of a VCD Package. The VCD Viewer will integrate this service to provide the capability to Contracting Authorities to prove validity of foreign signature certificates (process step 10).



# VCD pilot participation

# 7

Governments, Economic Operators and software companies are invited to participate now. The project also invites all other initiatives related to public eProcurement.

In May 2010, PEPPOL entered its testing phase. Contracting Authorities and their suppliers simulate eProcurement processes to the common processes and tools developed by the PEPPOL Working Groups.

From November 2010, the PEPPOL project started to be in its production pilot phase. It includes full operational use of PEPPOL including submissions of VCDs as part of real tenders.

There are “win-win situations” for both Contracting Authorities and tenderers: Contracting Authorities can easily evaluate tender qualifications and can assess eligibility of tenderers. Suppliers are assisted to create legitimate offers. Participation in a PEPPOL pilot gives Contracting Authorities an early lead by gaining familiarity with and contributing to more efficient cross-border eProcurement services.

Results of the PEPPOL project are made available to all stakeholders to ensure awareness and acceptance on all levels across Europe. As a general policy, specifications, best practices documentation, open source reference implementations of components and building blocks for interoperability are made public.

## Why become a VCD Pilot participant?

- » The VCD solution offers standardization, simplification, transparency and electronic monitoring of supplier qualifications in public procurements.
- » The VCD System reduces the administrative burden of evaluating tenders and suppliers.
- » VCD components assist suppliers to create a legitimate package of supplier qualification.
- » The VCD concept opens new markets to local small businesses (SMEs).
- » You can increase competition in tenders.
- » You can contribute to innovative procurement and influence the on-going evolution through direct feedback.
- » You can save up to 5 per cent of expenditure and lower transaction costs through more effective tendering.
- » You can validate different digital signature certificates used across Europe.

## What is provided by PEPPOL VCD?

- » Results of the PEPPOL project such as policies, specifications, best practice documentation, open source reference implementations of components and building blocks for interoperability are made available to all stakeholders to ensure awareness and acceptance on all levels across Europe.
- » General guidance on how to use and integrate the pilot components.
- » Advice from a local PEPPOL beneficiary .
- » A localized starter kit for enabling participants to connect and use PEPPOL services.

## Who can take part in the PEPPOL VCD?

Participation in PEPPOL is open to any Contracting Authority issuing a call for tender or already having contracts, especially with cross border suppliers.

Questions  
and  
answers



# How to become a VCD pilot participant?



At present, Economic Operators are fully responsible for identifying the evidences that shall be submitted to the Contracting Authority in order to meet the criteria defined in a Call for Tender. The VCD solution envisages that the European VCD System, which conducts the mapping from criteria to suitable evidences in the pan-European context, will assist Economic Operators in identifying the required evidences. For the European VCD System to be successful and considered useful, it is vital to ensure confidence in using the tool.

The use of the VCD System should be promoted by Contracting Authorities ensuring at the same time trust and confidence in the European VCD System. The Economic Operator is assured that applications or tenders will not be rejected because of irregularities resulting from submitted evidences in accordance to the recommendations of the European VCD System.

Contracting authorities should clearly state in the Call for Tender:

- » That the Contracting Authority promotes the use of the European VCD System.
- » That the Economic Operators may not fully understand the recommendations made by the European VCD System having the opinion that some evidences are not necessary according to

their own legal advice. If this is the case, they should ask the Contracting Authority for clarification.

- » That the Contracting Authority usually will not reject an application or a tender on the basis of irregularities resulting from evidences provided in accordance with the recommendations of the European VCD System, but will usually give the Economic Operator a possibility to submit correct evidence.

## What do interested Contracting Authorities need to do next?

- » Engage personnel with relevant technical, legal, and administrative skills.
- » For tendering – have a forthcoming tender being issued.
- » Assist in raising awareness of PEPPOL among local and cross-border suppliers.
- » Nominate at least one representative in your organization as a contact person.
- » Contact your local PEPPOL Head of Beneficiary and ask for advice (cf. page 9).

# Contact us & participate

# 9

Are you interested in using the PEPPOL VCD solution? Are you planning to publish a Call for Tender in the near future where you would like to encourage Economic Operators to make use of the VCD? We would appreciate to assist you in this process and we would like to collect your feedback and user experience in order to further improve our solutions.

The PEPPOL project currently seeks for cross border cases where the VCD solution could be used. If you have a Call for Tender for which you expect foreign suppliers to submit their offer, this will be of particular interest for us as we want to run our solutions in cross border scenarios. In any case the PEPPOL VCD solution is generic, thus also national suppliers can benefit from it.

We would appreciate to receive a short notice of your interest including the following information:

- » Do you wish to receive further information about the VCD? Is there any information you are specifically interested in (e.g. demonstration of tools)?
- » Are you interested in offering the VCD solution to your suppliers and promote its usage in Calls for Tenders? Do you need further information on how to do this?
- » Are you planning a Call for Tender where the VCD could be promoted or used? Do you expect foreign suppliers to reply on this Call for Tender? In which status is the Call for Tender?
- » Do you have concerns in using the VCD solution or to promote its usage in a Call for Tender? Which particular concerns do you have?

Contracting Authorities are kindly requested to contact regional nodes in their country and to register at the PEPPOL website.

For more information, see [www.peppol.eu/contacts](http://www.peppol.eu/contacts)

## Contact points: Regional nodes

### PEPPOL VCD coordinator

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