

How to Run a Multi-Country Security Services Tender: Scope, Lots, Criteria and Pilots

A practical guide to multi-country security tenders: defining scope, structuring lots by country, weighting quality, piloting and avoiding common mistakes.

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Start with a scope you can actually price

A multi-country security tender fails or succeeds long before the first bid arrives. The most common root cause of disappointing outcomes is a scope that bidders cannot price consistently: different site lists, different assumptions about hours, and different readings of what "guarding" includes.

Begin with a site inventory that is the same format in every country: address, site type, opening hours, current posts and hours per week, equipment on site (alarm, CCTV, access control), incident history and any client-specific procedures. Where data is missing, say so, and ask bidders to state their assumptions rather than guess silently.

Separate what you buy into clear service lines: static guarding, mobile patrols, alarm response, remote monitoring, technical maintenance, audits and training. A bidder that is strong in one line may be weak in another, and a single blended price hides that difference.

Finally, capture the local employment context. In several European countries, a change of contractor can trigger a mandatory transfer of the guards already working on your sites. In Spain, for example, the state-wide collective agreement for security companies (2026 to 2030) applies its subrogation rules whether the client is public or private. Bidders need that information to price correctly.

Structure lots by country, then by service

Group buyers often want a single contract. That can work, but the commercial structure underneath should still be granular. Lots by country (and, where relevant, by service line within a country) let you compare like with like, see where each bidder is genuinely competitive and keep a fallback if one country does not perform.

A practical model is a master agreement that sets common terms (governance, reporting, KPIs, data protection, audit rights, ethics clauses) with country schedules that carry local pricing, local labour law obligations and local licensing evidence. This keeps the legal backbone harmonised while respecting the fact that security is delivered under national rules.

Ask for prices broken down into labour cost per hour, management overhead, equipment and margin. Without that transparency you cannot test whether a low price is sustainable or whether it relies on

underpaying staff.

Evaluation criteria that reward quality, not only price

Security is a labour-intensive service, and the lowest price is often achieved by cutting wages, training or supervision. In a joint declaration of December 2022, the European social partners for private security (CoESS for employers and UNI Europa for workers) called for best value procurement and criticised award practices driven mainly by price.

A balanced scorecard typically covers: compliance (licences, insurance, labour law), operational method (staffing plan, supervision, escalation), mobilisation and transition plan, reporting and technology, people (recruitment, training, turnover management), ethics and human rights, and price. Publish the weightings and the scoring guidance so that bidders compete on the same basis.

Define the KPIs you will hold the winner to before you award, and include them in the tender. UK public buyers are a useful benchmark: under section 52 of the Procurement Act 2023, a contracting authority must set at least three KPIs before entering a public contract estimated at more than 5 million pounds, and publish them. Private groups are not bound by this rule, but the discipline is worth copying.

Use a pilot before full roll-out

A pilot reduces the risk of committing dozens of sites to an untested model. The UK government's Sourcing Playbook includes a dedicated guidance note on testing and piloting services, alongside should-cost modelling, for exactly this reason.

Choose two or three countries that represent different conditions (for example one mature market and one where your current coverage is weak). Fix the pilot duration, the KPIs, the reporting format and the decision criteria for scaling up in advance. Treat the pilot as part of the evaluation, not a formality.

Use the pilot to test the things that are hardest to judge on paper: how quickly the provider recruits and trains guards, how supervisors handle a real incident, whether reports arrive on time and in the agreed format, and how the country teams cooperate with your local site managers. If the pilot reveals gaps, document them and ask for a corrective plan before extending the scope.

Common mistakes to avoid

The same errors appear in many multi-country tenders. Use this list as a pre-launch check.

- Issuing one global price grid that ignores local wage scales and collective agreements.
- Leaving staff transfer obligations out of the tender pack, which produces surprise costs at mobilisation.
- Scoring "experience" without asking for verifiable references in each country.
- Accepting licences and insurance certificates without checking validity and scope.

- Defining KPIs after award, when the buyer has lost leverage.
- Underestimating transition: no timeline, no named transition manager, no site-by-site handover plan.
- Allowing undeclared subcontracting, which breaks the chain of accountability.
- Skipping an exit plan, so the group cannot change provider in one country without disrupting others.

How IPN approaches this

IPN is a network of independent national security companies, built to answer multi-country tenders with one coordinated response and local delivery in each country. We are in our founding phase and encourage buyers to apply the same scrutiny to us as to any bidder: country-level references, licences and pricing transparency.

Sources

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