

The Research Centre of the School of Economics and Business, in cooperation with the Bank of Slovenia, invites you to a research seminar

on **Wednesday, 11 November 2026, at 13:00 CEST in room P-119**
at the School of Economics and Business.

Manuel García-Santana

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

will present the article

How (in)efficient are governments? Evidence from import transactions data

Abstract

We use granular customs data at the transaction level from five large developing countries (Colombia, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and Vietnam) to provide direct evidence of the extent to which governments deviate from a cost-minimizing behavior as importers. We compare the price government agencies and SOEs pay vis-a-vis private sector firms for the same product. Our main finding is that government agencies and SOEs systematically pay 46%-300% more for their imports of the same products compared to private firms. Accounting for the fact that governments buy in smaller quantities reduces the premium by more than half for most countries. In our most stringent specification—which controls for product, source country, supplier, and time—we estimate a persistent “government price premium” ranging from 1% to 19%, depending on the country. Overall, most of the government premium appears driven by quantity discounts and supplier selection. The remaining premium likely reflects price discrimination on the part of suppliers. If governments were able to procure at the same prices as private firms, governments could save substantial amounts.

We anticipate your attendance at the seminar with pleasure and appreciate your participation.