

# Monitoring progress towards SPP in Flanders

## Lessons learned and future plans



Image: pixabay.com

**Procura+ Participant:**

Environment, Nature & Energy Department, Flanders (renamed in April 2017 to Department of Environment & Spatial Development)

**Policy/approach:**

SPP Monitoring System  
Launched: 2013

**Targets/aims:**

Tracked progress towards goal of 100% SPP by 2020  
Identified areas for targeted improvement in SPP

### SUMMARY

- Flanders has a target to apply SPP criteria to 100% of purchases (where SPP criteria exist)
- The Environment, Nature & Energy Department developed a system for monitoring SPP, integrated in existing accounting systems.
- The process of monitoring has been evaluated and revised since first implemented in 2013, ensuring that data is easy to collect and yields useful results.
- The results for 2016 showed a fall in SPP by 24% across total spend and 32% across all procurement exercises (for which minimum SPP criteria exist) compared to 2015 figures.
- After analysing the reasons for the fall, new SPP initiatives include integration of sustainable clauses in tender templates and checks for environmental criteria in procurements above €50,000.
- In those areas where criteria do not exist, data has been used to identify key priorities for future work.

## Background

The Flanders' [Environment Nature & Energy Department](#) (ENED) is responsible for preparing, implementing and evaluating Flemish environmental policy and thus has an important role in realising the Government of Flanders target of 100% sustainable public procurement (SPP) by 2020. In April 2017, the ENED was merged with the department for spatial development to form the [Department of Environment & Spatial Development](#), which has 800 staff split between eight divisions and 10 locations, and continues to play its role in monitoring and improving SPP progress in Flanders.

In order to keep on track towards these goals, ENED created additional milestones:

- 2015 ≥ 25%
- 2018 ≥ 75%
- 2020 ≥ 100%

These targets apply to product groups for which minimum SPP criteria are available (vehicles; paper products; electricity; studies; cleaning products and services; PCs, laptops and monitors; textiles and clothing; office supplies; furniture; imaging equipment; websites; wooden products).

Prior to 2013, the ENED had no means of collecting the necessary data to measure performance and monitor progress towards the 2020 target, thus it embarked on a journey to create an effective monitoring system which would provide reliable data on achievements, as well as provide useful information which could be used to guide future activities.

## Development of the approach

The first attempt to monitor data was introduced in 2013, as part of the department's [ISO 14001](#) environmental management system, and data was collected for all types of products, services and works. The data collected showed many errors and analysing the data using this approach was labour intensive. In addition, with no criteria for assessing sustainability against, assessment was left to each procurers judgement, and a risk of 'greenwashing' was introduced. Collecting the data this way did not generate useful, comparable results.

As such, at the end of March 2014 the ENED decided to improve the data collection on SPP activity to increase the usefulness and transparency of data. The new system only introduced a limited number of product groups, measured against predefined sets of SPP criteria, with comparable data sets at the level of individual product groups.

The new monitoring system was integrated into the ENED's accounting system, and introduced a mandatory form to for orders ≥ €8,500, to be filled out for the accounting system prior to the contract/order being confirmed.

The form first establishes what type of expenditure (i.e. procurement, subsidies, and other expenses) is occurring. If it is listed as a procurement, two more fields are required: product group and SPP criteria used (when available). The form was designed to be user friendly, and the quality of data collected was improved via limits on the maximum length of description allowed (240 characters), and use of project codes (initially 35) covering all product groups with and without SPP criteria. Information about SPP criteria for each product group as well as contact details of the [SPP Helpdesk of the Government of Flanders](#) were included in the form, making it easy for procurers to find and assess the use of SPP criteria.

## Implementation of the approach

The improved SPP monitoring system was launched on January 1st 2014, and over the course of the year it was tested and continually developed. As well as monitoring the data, the ENED also tested the quality and accuracy of data being provided to assess where further support was required. This is an essential step of implementation, as it ensures that a tool is actually being used to greatest effect.

## Results

The improved monitoring scheme resulted in better, more useful data. The results for 2015 and 2016 were very different in terms of progress towards the overall targets, but both sets of results were equally important for identifying areas for improvement.

### 2015 results

In the year 2015, Flanders calculated that 72% of spend and 67% of procurement exercises (for which minimum SPP criteria exist) used SPP. The monitoring system thus demonstrated that Flanders had met its 2015 SPP target. Perhaps more importantly however, it highlighted areas where future SPP action could be focused to improve sustainability outcomes. In particular, it highlighted that of the total procurement spend, SPP criteria only exist for 40% (meaning that only a total of 29% of the procurement budget is spent according to SPP principles). By investigating the areas not covered by SPP criteria, it is possible to identify areas where future focus should be directed, such as ICT services and software, which accounted for almost two-thirds of the budget not falling under SPP.

Around one-fifth of non-SPP spend was also listed as 'other'. By exploring this further, the ENED board was able to make informed decisions about creating extra product codes, as well as devising new minimum SPP criteria for other product groups, or installing an alternative approach to SPP in situations where criteria are unavailable or not appropriate (i.e. for very complex tenders).

Three particular areas of further action were identified as a result of monitoring:

- The tool highlighted the influence of framework agreements on the percentage of SPP carried out (i.e. electricity, furniture, imaging equipment, textiles and clothing and office supplies). Framework contracts are organised by Het Facilitair Bedrijf (HFB), which represents a large portion of the Flemish Government's buying power and is an important actor in the achievement of the 2020 100% SPP target. As such, it is important that the ENED continues to support the HFB in incorporating SPP in framework agreements.
- Some product categories used SPP 100% of the time, while others reported very low use, signaling priorities for future communication/education work on SPP criteria.
- Improvements can still be made to the design and use of the reporting system. For example, a high proportion of entries in the first year were reported under the wrong project codes, signaling that the product descriptions require better clarification and more work is necessary to inform actors about different forms of expenditure and the regulatory and SPP requirements attached to procurement.

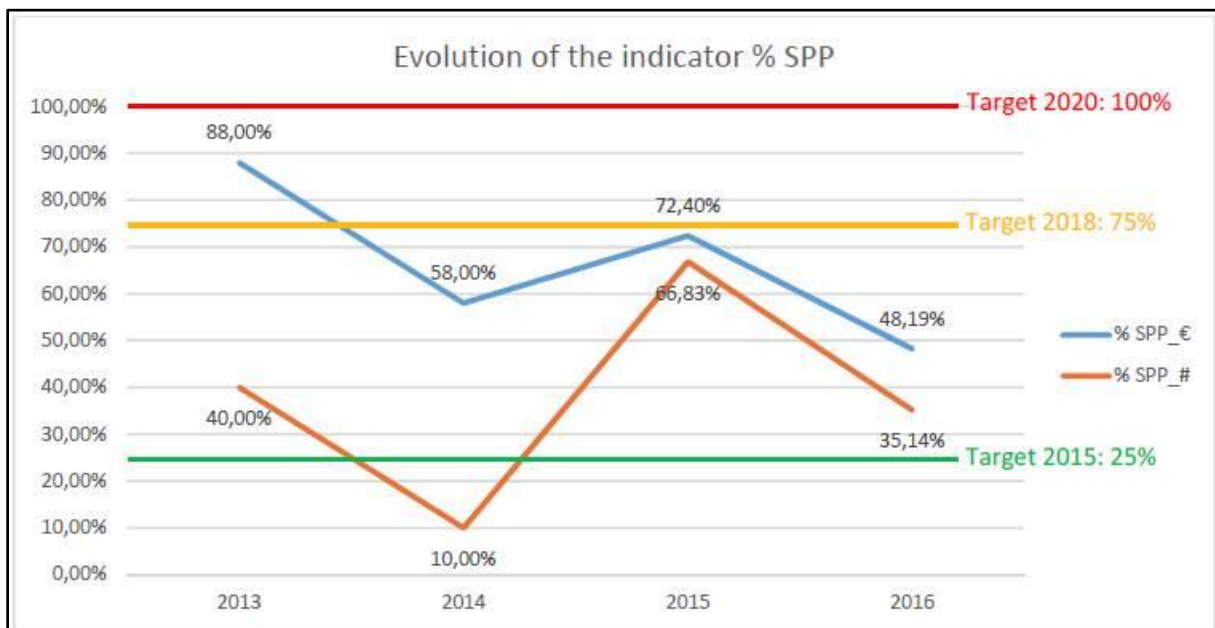
### 2016 results

In 2016 only 48% of spend and 35% of procurement exercises used SPP, a decrease from 2015 of 24% and 32%, respectively. Analysis of the data showed that several large procurements that did not use

any sustainable criteria caused this decrease in the overall SPP. This highlighted that continuous effort and communication is necessary to keep the level of SPP on target for 2020. Two initiatives were taken:

- Integration of sustainability clauses in tender templates for the studies and research category (including inspections, measurements and audits). As most of the tenders published within the ENED are for studies, this will have a large impact on SPP targets. These included clauses related to the publication of reports (i.e. preferring digital publication, or considering paper type and 'environmentally-friendly' layout when printing hard copies) and transport when relevant (i.e. using alternative modes of transport when travelling to conduct audits). Importantly, by including these clauses in the template, SPP criteria are shifted from being something which needs to be added on to contracts, to something which instead needs to be removed. It is hoped that this will facilitate the process of changing perceptions and behaviour.
- Checks for environmental criteria on procurement exercises greater than €50,000: these checks are now before final approval of tender document. Up until this point, checks only occurred when verifying data of past procurements and not beforehand. The importance of pre-procurement checks has now been highlighted.

Whilst the 2016 numbers were disappointing for the ENED, it also highlighted some important learning points and allows the department to take the necessary actions to meet its targets for the 2018 milestone of 75% SPP.



*SPP monitoring results for Flanders Environment Nature & Energy Department 2013-2016*

## Increasing the monitoring

Rolling out monitoring systems to the rest of the Flemish Government and other interested parties has begun, and the concept was implemented in the contract management system of the Government of Flanders (eDelta). From the start of 2018, use of eDelta will be mandatory for the Government of Flanders contracts worth €30,000 and above.

The Department of Environment & Spatial Development does not seek to replicate its exact approach, but rather provides advice on securing essential senior management support and integrating the monitoring system into existing procurement processes. For example, eDelta system has adopted the same concept originally developed by ENED, however, as a contract management system, it allows more possibilities. As well as tracking the use of minimum criteria, it also asks if other criteria were applied and whether use of environmental management systems was included as a selection criteria. If not all the minimum criteria were used, eDelta will also ask if these were partly met. Answering these questions will be mandatory, and will provide a great deal of useful information on SPP to the Government of Flanders.

## Lessons learned

Monitoring the use of the tool is necessary to ensure its effectiveness. Contact made with procurers as the result of identifying support needs is an invaluable opportunity for extending the use of SPP in the organisation and improving or creating new SPP criteria.

An effective monitoring system is invaluable for the prioritisation of actions regarding SPP. The 2016 results highlighted that it takes work and effort to keep SPP in the minds of all procurers. It also showed that some categories are far more significant than others, while others are greatly influenced by the design of framework agreements etc. Given limits to time and resources, using a procurement monitoring system can target SPP activities to where they will have the greatest impact.

Every method of monitoring will have its positive and negative aspects. As such, it is essential to be sure what you want to monitor and why before designing an effective system.

Knowledge of the procurement process and gathering techniques for financial data is necessary to design an effective system, including a good understanding of which tools are used in the organisation to collect financial data, how data is gathered to input to the tool, and what changes are technically and economically feasible to existing data collection systems.

Finally, keep it simple! Link monitoring to an existing data collection tool, and be clear in specifying what data should be inputted.

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Procura+ Participant page - <http://www.procuraplus.org/public-authorities/flanders/>

Weblink - <http://www.flanders.be/en>

## About Procura+

Initiated and co-ordinated by ICLEI, Procura+ is a network of European public authorities and regions that connect, exchange and act on sustainable and innovation procurement.

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We are a network of European public authorities that connect, exchange and act on sustainable and innovation procurement.

### Exchange.



Our combined knowledge and experience allows us to provide advice, support and publicity to any public authority that wants to implement sustainable and innovation procurement.

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The Procura+ Network joins forces to champion sustainable and innovation procurement at the European level.

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