

## Piloting sustainable school furniture procurement in Latvia

Smiltene County (Latvia)

### Background

**Smiltene County** is a small municipality in Latvia of only 15,000 inhabitants. In this respect, it represents the majority of contracting authorities in Latvia, most of which are of a similar size or smaller.

The Mayor of Smiltene first became engaged on the topic of circular procurement in September 2018, when attending a seminar on circular procurement organised by the [Latvian Environmental Investment Fund](#) (LEIF) as part of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region [Circular PP](#) project.

Following this introduction to the topic, the Mayor introduced a new ambition to buy school furniture in a sustainable and circular manner. The furniture needed to meet the school's needs, be the same price or less as new furniture, and contribute to an attractive and comfortable environment for children.

### Procurement objectives

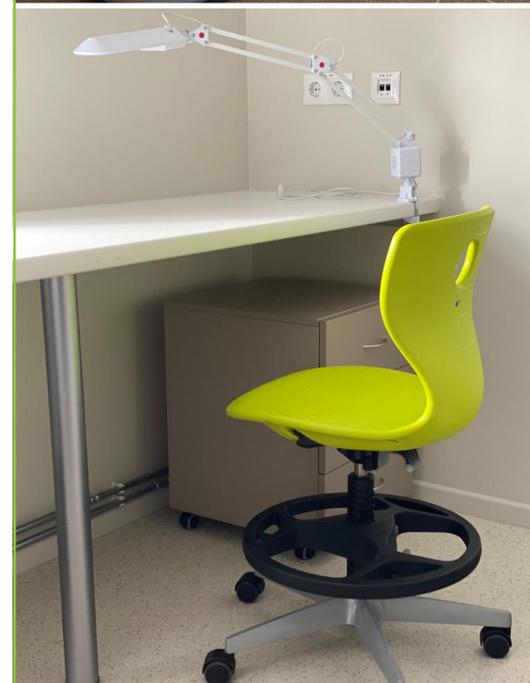
In July 2019, a meet-the-buyers event on refurbished furniture was organised by the municipality, in which the school presented its needs. Interest from suppliers was, however, low, and those who did attend were sceptical, arguing that refurbished furniture would be more expensive and would take longer to deliver. They did not express interest in providing take-back and refurbishment services, and rather than consider these as business opportunities, they perceived them as the county shifting responsibility for its own problems.

The introduction of circular criteria was also seen as risky by the procurement department, and raised questions about how the tender would impact the job of the carpenter employed directly by the school to maintain furniture. As a result of all of these factors, it was decided a different approach was needed to pilot circular criteria in the municipality.

In response, a smaller procurement for dormitory furniture was identified, which was deemed more appropriate for the municipality's first attempt at circular procurement.

The main requirements of this contract were fixed as technical specifications (chemical content, extended warranty time, collection of packaging upon delivery, and legal origin of wood sources).

The procurement was divided into three lots, with the option for bidders to submit more than one: cabinet furniture, study furniture (tables, chairs etc.), and mattresses.



## Criteria used

### Subject matter of the contract:

Purchase of sustainable furniture for Smiltene secondary boarding school.

### Selection criteria:

During the previous three years, the tenderer has successfully performed at least one equivalent contract for the manufacture, delivery and installation of furniture or mattresses (as relevant to the lot).

### Technical specifications:

#### Extraction of legally harvested timber for furniture production:

All timber used for furniture supplied under the contract must have been legally sourced in accordance with Regulation 995/2010 ("[EU Timber Regulation](#)"). Timber products not covered by the EU Timber Regulation should have obtained [Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade \(FLEGT\) licences](#) or relevant [CITES certificates](#), or information must be provided on the country of harvest, species, quantity, supplier and compliance with relevant national legislation. If a risk of the presence of illegally harvested timber is identified in the supply chain, the due diligence system should establish procedures to mitigate that risk.

#### *Verification:*

The tenderer must attach a declaration that only legally sourced timber will be used in the relevant furniture product. [PEFC](#) (Forest Management Schemes) and [FSC](#) (Forest Stewardship Council) certificates will be considered eligible.

#### Chemicals:

Products should not contain any chemicals included in the [REACH Candidate List of Substances of Very High Concern](#) (i.e. the concentration of substances on the REACH candidate list in the product or any of its components should not exceed 0.1%).

#### *Verification:*

The tenderer submits a declaration stating that the article, including its parts and components, does not contain more than 0.1% by weight of substances on the REACH Candidate List in the latest version of the Candidate List available on the date of publication of the call for proposals. Furniture products which have been awarded the [EU Ecolabel for furniture](#), or other relevant [ISO 14024](#) Type I ecolabels directly fulfilling the listed requirements, or using equivalent methods, shall also be deemed to comply.

#### Upholstery:

Where foam materials are used for upholstering furniture, halogenated organic compounds shall not be used in the manufacture of such upholstery materials, either as foaming agents or as additional foaming agents.

#### *Verification:*

Certificates of conformity.

#### Formaldehyde emissions:

Formaldehyde emissions from all wood-based panels supplied in the form in which they are used in a furniture product (i.e. raw, coated, glued, veneered) and in the manufacture of which formaldehyde-based resins are used shall not exceed the formaldehyde emission limit values E1 set out in standard EN 13986 in Annex B, or equivalent.

#### *Verification:*

A declaration from the supplier of the wood-based panels stating that the supplied panels comply with the E1 emission limit values, as evidenced by test reports performed in accordance with EN 717-1, EN 717-2 / EN ISO 12460-3 or EN 120 / EN ISO 12460 -5. Furniture products that have been awarded the [EU Furniture Ecolabel](#) established by European Commission Decision (EU) 2016/1332 or other relevant ISO 14024 Type I Ecolabels

that directly demonstrate compliance with the listed requirements or the use of equivalent methods to verify compliance shall be deemed to comply.

**Spare parts:**

The tenderer shall guarantee the availability of spare parts or elements having an equivalent function for at least three years warranty for spare parts.

**Verification:**

Tenderer should indicate the contact information to be used to arrange the delivery of spare parts.

**Design:**

Furniture can be disassembled and easily transformed. Products may be dismantled in separate parts, which may be replaced or refurbished. The tenderer shall provide clear maintenance instructions for the delivered goods, which can be used to keep the products in good working order and prolong their life.

**Verification:**

Attach maintenance instructions, or if relevant, indicate that “no special care is required”.

**Health and safety:**

Furniture for study purposes (Lot 2) must meet ergonomic standards.

**Verification:**

Certificates of conformity with EN 1729-1 and EN 1729-2 or equivalent standards for educational institutions provided.

**Award criteria:**

Tenders meeting the specifications were evaluated on the basis of lowest price.

**Contract performance clauses:**

**Packaging:**

The contractor will install furniture, and will collect packaging and manage this in accordance with regulatory requirements.

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## Results

The cabinet furniture lot received 12 offers, the study furniture lot received one offer, and the mattresses lot received three offers. In each lot a winning bid was identified. The total sum of all three contracts was just over €42,000 (excluding VAT).

The verification of declarations and certificates was the most difficult step in the tender evaluation process. Some companies submitted certificates that did not match the quality standards required, for example, instead of the declaration about absence of “[REACH Candidate List of Substances of Very High Concern \(SVHC\)](#)”, an environmental product declaration (as per ISO 14025 and EN 15804) was submitted that did not contain information about SVHC, and therefore could not be accepted as sufficient verification.

A range of certification schemes and ecolabels were used to prove compliance with the different criterion, and their relevance had to be checked in each case. For example, [FSC- STD-40-004 \(Version 3.0\) EN](#) and [FSC-STD-50-001 \(Version 2.0\) EN](#) for FSC® Chain of Custody Certification were both used as evidence to prove compliance with the requirement for legally harvested timber. In the end, both were accepted. In other cases, companies submitted certificates which were issued for another company without clarification e.g. without explaining that this company provides the materials being used in the product. These issues were difficult for the procurer to judge, and therefore an expert from the Latvian Environmental Investment Fund was involved for support.

## Environmental impacts

As well as ensuring wood used in the manufacture of furniture came from legal sources, this furniture was manufactured without hazardous substances, which benefits the environment, the health of users (in this case children), and avoids barriers in future to recycling. In addition, requirements on the availability of spare parts and provision of maintenance instructions aim to extend the longevity of the furniture purchased. By extending the lifetime of furniture, it is possible to slow the cycle, and reduce future material depletion and waste creation.

## Lessons learned

The total value of this contract was relatively small. This worked to Smiltene's advantage, as smaller contracts can allow greater scope for risk taking and trying out new approaches for the first time.

The biggest challenge to the county was verifying the compliance of the required declarations and certifications on hazardous substances and the proven origin of wood. LEIF helped Smiltene overcome this, by providing expert help in the evaluation process.

## Contact persons:

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For related information, please see European GPP criteria for [Furniture](#) and the [Technical Background Report](#). The tender documents are available online [here](#).