

From the tap: replacing single-use water containers with glass in the Basque Country, Spain

Mutualia (Basque Country, Spain)

Background

Mutualia is a provider of social services and medical care, which is subject to EU public procurement laws. It collaborates with the Spanish social security system and operates 17 social and medical service centres in the Basque country, Spain. The organisation aims to reduce its environmental impact by reducing plastic waste, while also spending public funds in the most economical way.

Mutualia is a participant of the [Basque GPP Programme](#) and is committed to green their procurement practices. So far, 70% of Mutualia's tenders include environmental criteria and the organisation aims to increase this number and introduce environmental criteria in future tenders.

Until recently, drinking water was provided in all facilities by water fountains which dispensed water from large plastic bottles (11 litres) into single-use plastic cups. In addition, patients also received bottled water with their meals and Mutualia provided bottled water during meetings. This led to high expenditures on mineral water on the one hand, and a high amount of plastic waste on the other: approximately 147,000 glasses, 4,000 large cooler bottles for the fountains, and 7,000 small water bottles were used and thrown out each year.

Procurement objectives

To address issues of plastic waste and reduce spending on bottled water, Mutualia decided to install water fountains connected to the public water network, offering tap water instead of buying bottled water. The goal was to offer high quality drinking water at varying temperatures.

To reduce the use of plastic cups and bottles Mutualia also aimed to:

- Replace plastic cups at the water fountains with recyclable cardboard cups.
- Use glass jars and washable and reusable cups to serve the water to patients and during meetings.
- Distribute 0.5l glass bottles to Mutualia staff to refill with water from the new water fountains.
- Remove plastic water bottles from existing vending machines.

Criteria used

Subject matter of the contract:

The contract is divided into two lots. The first concerns the supply of purified water sources connected to the public water network for 17 Mutualia centres. This includes the installation and commissioning of the water fountains,



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maintenance and repair, or replacement in case of breakdown, as well as the supply of spare parts and consumables. The contract is awarded for 48 months with the option of extension. The second lot covers the delivery of refillable glass jars and bottles.

Technical specifications:

For lot 1, a minimum of 40 water fountains needed to be supplied, offering water at varying temperatures, including cooled water. The new water fountains must be connected to the public water network. Suppliers were required to introduce a filtration system to assure high quality drinking water. Each water fountain must be able to operate without the need for external drainage, and instead must be able to collect up to 2 litres of spilled water. The winning contractor is also in charge of repair, maintenance, and replacement of water fountains if needed.

For lot 2 technical specifications included the delivery of a minimum 600 bottles, preferably with a printed environmental commitment on them or on their packaging. The bottles have to be made of glass, for its low environmental impact, machine and hand-washable, and include a screw cap for easy refill. In addition, a minimum of 100 glass jars had to be delivered, also washable by hand or machine.

During the procurement process for both lots, bidders were required to submit a demonstration of the product that they planned to supply.

Award criteria:

The contract was awarded to the most economically advantageous offer, weighted according to price (50%) and quality (50%).

To assess the quality of submissions for lot 1, bidders were asked to provide technical data sheets detailing:

- The quality, design, aesthetics, filtration systems and performance of the water fountains (15 points)
- The maintenance plan (10 points)
- The installation plan (10 points)
- Anti-leakage safety system (2 points)
- Height of installation and ease of use for people with reduced mobility (3 points)
- Response time to technical failures (3 points)
- Availability of spare parts or replacement of water fountains in case of breakdown (2 points)
- The possibility to add Mutualia's logo on the water fountains (5 points)

For the assessment of submissions for lot 2, bidders were asked to submit a report detailing:

- The design of the jars and bottles (15 points)
- The packaging and presentation of the jars and bottles (10 points)
- Delivery and replacement time (15 points)
- The printing and design quality of Mutualia's name and logo (10 points)

Contract performance clauses:

For lot 1, the maintenance and repair plan that the successful bid proposed is included in the supplier contract.

"Investing in reduced resource consumption and plastic waste generation has proven to also be economically advantageous. The tender initiated a process in the organisation to consider other areas where reductions could be achieved."

**Lorena Aguirregabiria
Castresana, Purchasing,
Contracting and Building
Management Director,
Mutualia**

Results

The call for tender was published in November 2018 and five bids were received in the process, three out of which were accepted, and two made it to the evaluation phase. The contract was awarded to the company Aguapura Aguaviva SL and has a contract value of €79,500. Prior to publishing the tender, Mutualia consulted several water fountain producers regarding the possibility to provide fountains that connect to the public water network.

In January 2019 Mutualia introduced 40 new water fountains in its 17 service centres, provided its staff and rooms with the new glass bottles and jars, and purchased recyclable paper cups (in a separate procurement). As a result of the procurement, Mutualia is saving an estimated €17,000 annually on water for its patients, employees, and visitors.

Mutualia observed that the market consultation helped to raise awareness among suppliers that demand for plastic free water solution exists. Due to the market's lack of combined solutions for both water fountains and recyclable paper cups, Mutualia opted to manage the purchase of single-use paper cups for visitors separately. Mutualia's choice to procure paper cups separately was a signal to the market that combined, plastic-free solutions are in demand.

Environmental impacts

Single-use plastic and associated resource consumption and waste are a major concern in the EU due to adverse environmental and health impacts. [The EU's plastics strategy](#) therefore includes the goal to reduce plastic waste overall and recycle all remaining plastic by 2030.

In line with these ambitions, the procurement has reduced both Mutualia's spending on water and its plastic waste. Per year, Mutualia admits about 5,000 patients and has about 600 employees. Based on these numbers, an estimated 147,000 plastic cups, 4,000 big plastic water cooler bottles, and 7,000 small plastic bottles will be saved annually through the use of reusable bottles, jars and cups.

Mutualia also has plans to remove plastic water bottles from the beverage vending machines installed in the different centres.

Lessons learned

Mutualia concluded that investing in reduced resource consumption and plastic waste generation has proven to also be economically advantageous. The tender initiated a process in the organisation to consider other areas where reductions could be achieved and has led to the establishment of a working group that aims to reduce plastic and plastic waste throughout Mutualia's operations.

Contact person:

Lorena Aguirregabiria Castresana, Purchasing, Contracting and Building Management Director,
laguirre@mutualia.es

For related information, please see [European GPP criteria for Food and Catering](#) and the [Technical Background Report](#).