

Flanders' Framework Agreement for Office Supplies

Encouraging more sustainable choices



Image: Pixabay.com

Procura+ Participant:	Government of Flanders
Contract:	Open procedure for the delivery of (sustainable) office supplies Contract start: June 2017
Savings:	100% paper meets minimum sustainability criteria Sustainable option available for 117 products 28.5% of products in catalogue now marked as sustainable

SUMMARY

- Flanders has set a target to achieve 100% SPP by 2020.
- This is Flanders' third office supply framework to include sustainability, and it has set a target that at least 50% of products meet sustainability criteria.
- Flanders used a mix of technical specifications and award criteria to encourage the inclusion of sustainable stationery products in the inventory.
- In addition, Flanders used contract performance clauses to ensure that the contractor works with customers to encourage that the sustainable choices are made, and that other aspects of the contract (such as transport and waste) also contribute to Flanders' environmental ambitions.

Background

The Government of Flanders has been working on Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) since 2008, when it set a target of 100% SPP by 2020 for its own public procurement, and in 2015, SPP was integrated into the overall strategy on procurement of the Government of Flanders (Flemish Plan on Procurement).¹

In line with this focus, Flanders has been integrating sustainability into their stationery purchasing frameworks over many years, and in September 2016, it published a new open tender for an office supplies framework.

Procurement Approach

This was the third time that sustainability played a prominent role in the framework agreement for stationery supplies in Flanders, with the process being improved each time. In this framework, Flanders set the goal that at least 50% of products brought from the inventory list should be sustainable.

Potential suppliers were asked for:

- a fixed price on a list (inventory) of 252 different product types and;
- pricing and volume discount for a more comprehensive catalogue on office supplies, which was optional.

For the 252 different product types of the inventory, suppliers had to make an offer for at least one house brand and one 'A level' brand. For 80 of these products, it was mandatory to offer a sustainable product as an alternative to the house brand and A level brand products, and for a further 103 product types, offering a sustainable product was optional.

Market research and past experiences were used in order to decide for which product types it was mandatory to offer a sustainable product. This research indicated that there were no products currently available which met sustainability criteria for 69 product types, and as such, offering a sustainable product option was not made mandatory or optional for these products.

Criteria used in the procurement process

Subject matter of the contract

Open procedure for the delivery of (sustainable) office supplies.

Office supplies includes paper products, writing instruments, folders, filing and storage supplies, (desk) organisers, ink and toner, and tape and adhesives.

¹ More information on the SPP policy and strategy of the Government of Flanders can be found on <http://www.procuraplus.org/public-authorities/flanders> (short summary in English) or <https://overheid.vlaanderen.be/beleid-duurzame-overheidsopdrachten> (in Dutch)

Selection criteria

The contractor was required to have an environmental management system in place according to [EMAS](#), [ISO 14001](#) or equivalent (selection) for Belgian (and international) locations.

Technical specifications

The minimum sustainability criteria per product group are listed below. A supplier can only label a product as sustainable under this contract, if these criteria are met. The Government of Flanders can ask for means of verification to check if a product fulfils the minimum criteria. Amongst other things, the Government of Flanders will accept appropriate Type I Ecolabels as proof that the product fulfils the criteria.

Paper products and other products that consist mainly of paper fibres:

- Copying paper: 100% recycled fibre.
- Other paper products: at least 70% of fibres from sustainable sources (either recycled or from sustainably managed forests), rest from legal sources.

These criteria applied to both house brands and A level brands. Means of verification include: technical specifications sheet, environmental product declaration or one of the following certificates/labels:

- 100% recycled: Blaue Engel label, NAPM 100%, APUR 100%, FSC Recycled.
- 70% sustainable sources: EU Ecolabel, Österreichische Umweltzeichen, FSC Mixed, PEFC Recycled, PEFC Mixed and NF Environment for envelopes.

For 80 product types (other than paper products) on the inventory, it was mandatory to suggest a sustainable product as an alternative to house brand and A level brand.

Labels

- Paper labels: see category 'Paper products and other products that consist mainly of paper fibers'.
- Other materials (textile, plastic etc.): at least 30% recycled or renewable content.

Writing instruments (pens, pencils, markers etc.)

- Barrel (& cap if applicable)
 - ▶ At least 50% recycled or renewable content (accept wooden parts – see below) or;
 - ▶ 100% wood from sustainable forestry.

Filing and storage supplies – including non paper folders, binders etc.

- At least 40% recycled or renewable content.

Ink, toner, link ribbons

- Reconditioned toner / ink without mercury, lead, cadmium or chrome or;
- Products with Blaue Engel or Nordic Swan label without mercury, lead, cadmium or chrome.

Desk accessories / Other office supplies

- At least 40% recycled or renewable content.

Other products

- At least products with a Type I Ecolabel;²
- Other sustainability criteria: possible with consultation / approval of Government of Flanders.³

Award criteria

Out of 105 points, 35 points were awarded to sustainability criteria. These were divided as follows:

- Share of sustainable products in the inventory (based on 103 product types for which a sustainable product was optional) - 10 points.
- Share of sustainable products in the comprehensive catalogue - 20 points.
- Visual aid, search engine and other stimuli helping the procurer to make sustainable choices - 5 points.

Sustainable transport was also a part of the 'Service' award criterion, where a maximum of 15 points could be earned. In order to judge the offers, every supplier had to explain how the transport for deliveries is arranged. The points were based on:

- The ecoscores⁴ or emission standard (EURO) of gasoline and petrol driven vehicles in the fleet;
- Alternative technologies such as (partly) human powered vehicles, electrical vehicles and CNG vehicles;
- Actions to reduce kilometers driven and fuel consumption.

² Labels in accordance with ISO 14024

³ Can only be discussed after closing the contract – No influence on award criteria

⁴ The Ecoscore is one number to indicate sustainability of a vehicle. The higher the number, the more sustainable the vehicle. More information on the Ecoscore can be found on <http://ecoscore.be/en/home>.

Contract performance clauses

Reporting:

The contractor has to report once a year on the products purchased (with a clear indication for those products that meet the sustainability criteria of the Government of Flanders). This reporting can be used:

- as a benchmark for departments and agencies (comparing their results on sustainability to others or to the Government of Flanders as a whole);
- to follow up on the evolution in sustainable products purchased;
- as a tool to detect trends and difficulties so action can be taken when needed;
- as information useful for devising the next contract.

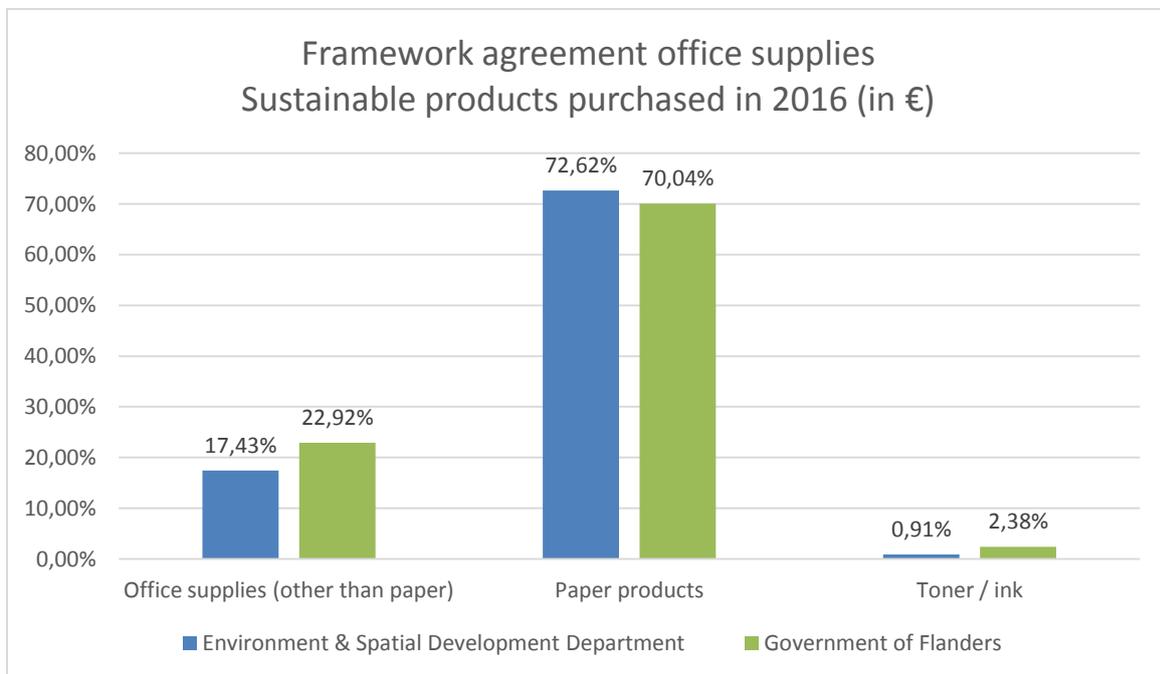


Figure 1: Example of benchmarking information (based on previous contract)

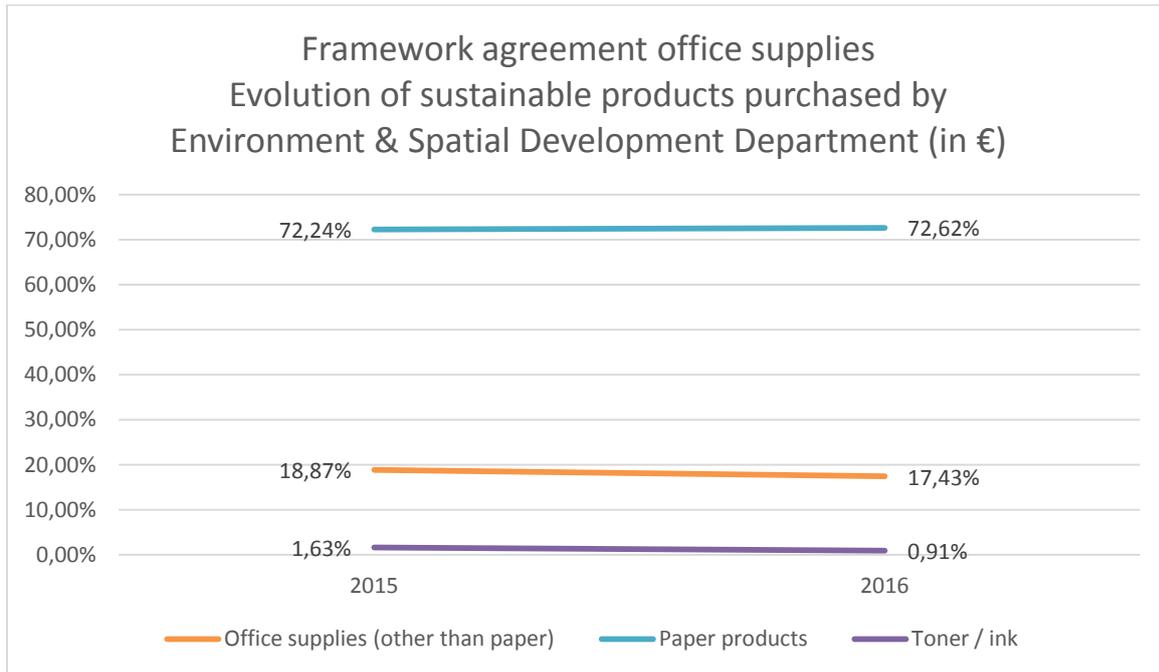


Figure 2: Example of information on evolution (based on previous contract)

In addition, the contractor has to deliver to every customer each year a list of 10 products for which the customer could have bought a more sustainable product, in order to encourage them to choose more sustainable products in future. The contractor should take into account the numbers of products bought and the difference in price between the product bought and the product proposed.

Verification:

Each year, claims on sustainability will be verified based on a list of randomly chosen products from the inventory and comprehensive catalogue. The list can contain both sustainable and non-sustainable products. For the sustainable products, the supplier will have to provide the necessary documentation / samples that allow Flanders to verify the sustainability claim. For the non-sustainable products, the contracting government will verify that no false sustainability claims are being made in the webshop. This verification will be repeated every year. For false or non verifiable claims on the sustainability of the product, there is a penalty of 10 times the product value.

Transport:

In the contract performance clauses it is specified that the contractor can charge an extra €7.50 to deliver orders under €25 (excluding VAT). This is a financial stimulus to urge the customers to cluster their orders, thus reducing the transport kilometers. This is an improvement from the previous contracts, which had taught that for a lot of customers, non-financial stimuli (e.g. communication) are not sufficient to urge them to cluster their orders.

For the same reason, the contractor and customers can agree to alter the standard delivery period that was set in the tender document (2 weekdays). That way it is possible to cluster more orders, by agreeing upon, for example, one weekly delivery.

Another way to limit transport are the store cupboards in which a standard set of office supplies is available. The contractor shall refill the store cupboards every two weeks, thus limiting transportation.

There will be a follow up during the contract period on the delivery service. The contractor will report every 6 months on transport and vehicles used. In cooperation with the contractor, Flanders also intends to filter some indications or information on impact on CO₂ emissions and kilometres driven.

Waste/Reuse:

The contractor is required to take back tertiary packaging.

The contractor has to collect all empty toner and ink cartridges and has to reuse (reconditioning) or recycle them as much as possible. The contractor shall provide a report each year stating the number of toner / ink cartridges taken back and the way of processing them afterwards (reconditioning / recycling / waste incineration with energy recuperation etc.).

E-catalogue:

If requested by the Government of Flanders, the contractor has to offer all of the products of (at least) the inventory through e-catalogue. E-catalogue is one module within the Belgian e-procurement tools, enabling customers to order through the module. E-catalogue could have a lot of benefits:

- Customers could limit the products their personnel could see, and thus order, e.g. to a selection of more sustainable products.
- Customers and central administration can easily ask for reports throughout the year.
- Alterations in products offered, prices etc. would be visible and could be subjected to approval before the changes are published (more control for Government of Flanders on changes in the contract).

For now, the use of e-catalogue is not requested yet. The module doesn't communicate well with the standard ordering and financial software used within the Government of Flanders. The teams behind e-procurement are working on this, and they hope to be able to activate e-catalogue in the future of this contract.

Results

The contract will run between June 2017 and June 2020, with the option to extend this for an additional year.

Sustainability impacts

Results so far include:

- All paper products meet minimum sustainability criteria.
- For 117 products, a sustainable product is offered (next to a house brand product and A level product, unless the house brand or A level product is the sustainable product).

- Catalogue: 28,48% of products in catalogue are marked as sustainable.

The first report is due after the first reporting year of the contract (i.e. January to December 2018), and is expected in April 2019.

Lessons learned

Over the course of the three stationery framework tenders ran by the Government of Flanders, many lessons have been learned and improvements made.

Verification, for example, is always important to ensure that a product meets the desired criteria across all considerations. For example, for all paper products and sustainable products in the inventory, the suppliers had to deliver documentation and/or a sample to prove the product fulfilled all requirements. This was a time consuming exercise, both for the suppliers and for the purchaser. The level of documentation every supplier had to support their sustainability claims varied. Very often, more information had to be asked for. In a few cases, the suppliers eventually offered a different product in order to meet the criteria. Common problems were:

- Label claims where no label certificate could be presented.
- Producers' Certificate of Conformity (CoC) certificates on sustainable wood without a label on the product or packaging.
- Non-documented claims on recycled content.
- Documentation unsuited to verify criteria of tender documents (e.g. documenting water-based ink of writing instruments instead of percentage of recycled content).

In addition, it is important to recognise that just because sustainable products are offered, it does not mean that sustainable products are chosen, and there is a need to steer procurers, departments and agencies of the Government of Flanders, towards the sustainable products on offer. In Flanders, the customers can have the majority of office supplies delivered to them by means of a store cupboard, which holds the most important office supplies used by the customer and which is refilled by the contractor every two weeks. The customer decides what will be in the store cupboard, but the contractor has to stimulate the customer into making sustainable choices.

Finally, collecting and analysing data provides a valuable means of following-up on contracts, for spotting difficulties and detecting where improvements can be made in current and future contracts.



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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.

Connect.



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.

Act.



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

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