

Office furniture: why and how to buy circular

ProCirc is an Interreg North Sea Region project set up to experiment to learn how circular economy and procurement can benefit the region. The project takes a transnational approach to support circular procurement in the key sectors of construction, IT, textiles and furniture. This factsheet draws upon the key learnings from a [Future of Furniture webinar](#) which was hosted by ProCirc.

Opportunities to reduce material use in furniture

First, look to reduce the need for buying more furniture. Carry out furniture audits to understand what you already have; better asset management through reallocating your existing furniture supplies may negate the need to procure new furniture. Good maintenance can also double the lifetime of your furniture.

Next, consider a variety of opportunities to reuse and adapt existing furniture. These include:



Refurbishment: Aesthetic improvement of a product to make it look like new, with limited functionality improvements

Remanufacture: Return a used product to at least its original performance with a warranty equivalent or better than the newly manufactured product – furniture remanufacturing was the focus of the webinar and the rest of this factsheet will focus on this often poorly understood option

Repurposing: Transform or redeploy a product as an alternative product-type. An example of this might be taking an old box crate and repurposing the materials into a coffee table. This would involve time, energy and finishing materials but would also be likely to increase the value of the resources.

If it is not possible to meet your furniture needs using these approaches you can specify circular principles in newly manufactured furniture. For example, that it is made from recycled materials, is designed to be easily repairable, or is supplied through a service-based business model.

Key benefits

Cost

City of Malmo Municipality have found that it was at least 30% cheaper to buy remanufactured furniture rather than new.

Climate

Typically 20-50% carbon savings for remanufactured furniture. City of Malmo achieved carbon savings of 170,000+ Kg CO₂.

Social benefits

Creates new training and employment opportunities. Potential for 160,000+ additional jobs in Europe through circular furniture.

Waste

Potential for 10 million tonnes of waste savings on a European level by taking more circular approaches to furniture.

Myth-busting

Getting remanufactured furniture will take much longer than buying new furniture

Wrong! Typically, there is a two to three-month lead time from ordering large batches of new corporate furniture to having it installed, by contrast some remanufacturing suppliers can do bespoke projects within two weeks.

Remanufactured furniture is simply second-hand furniture

Wrong! From a customer's perspective remanufactured furniture is indistinguishable from new furniture and comes with a warranty.

Remanufactured furniture is ugly

Wrong! Remanufactured comes in a wide range of styles, some remanufacturing organisations will be able to make bespoke design changes to the original furniture to the customers specification.

My existing furniture is not good enough to be remanufactured

It depends. If your existing furniture is low quality, it may be difficult to remanufacture but alternative uses for the materials in the furniture may be found. You can still procure remanufactured furniture which has been sourced from other clearance projects.

I can not get a large quantity of the same model of a piece of remanufactured furniture

Wrong! Remanufacturers can take on large projects and often have large stores of items from previous clearance projects that can be remanufactured to fit your needs.

How can I find the right supplier?

The growing number of circular furniture suppliers are highly motivated to showcase their solutions and are willing to be approached for advice. You can also contact [ProCirc partners in your country](#) if you would like further advise on local remanufacturers to approach.

How to develop your specifications?

It is very important that you select a supplier at an early stage as they will be able to assist you in applying the hierarchy for furniture procurement and use their experience to identify the best approaches for your organisation.

You should set your circular ambition at a high level in terms of the objectives which you wish to achieve, for example the circular furniture tender for the Dutch Government had an ambition to extend the lifetime of their current furniture and, where it was needed, that new furniture would meet circularity requirements. Avoid being too prescriptive about your furniture specifications and sustainability criteria as this constrains your opportunities. An example presented on the [ProCirc Future of Furniture webinar](#) was a supplier that was scored down on a question about packaging despite them not using packaging!

You should also evaluate furniture procurements based on lifecycle costing rather than upfront pricing. Traditional furniture suppliers will expect you to bear the additional cost of disposal of the items at end-of-life but suppliers operating circular business models will often plan to take the furniture back from you, and this will be built into their costing.