Circularity labels and certificates for the office furniture product group

Project 3C platform

Supported by Open Call Circular Flanders

Introduction:

Lots of systems are available to demonstrate whether a company, project or product is sustainable and/or circular. Sometimes, it's difficult to see the forest for the trees. What systems are available, what are these systems 'worth', and to what extent are they of value to purchasers or producers?

This analysis provides an overview of all the instruments available to promote sustainability and circularity within the office furniture product group. The matrix is composed of about 60 instruments. These are divided into 3 types of instruments:

A. Labels & certificates: these are systems that inform stakeholders about specific social and/or ecological aspects of a product based on objectively verifiable criteria (preferably by an independent third party). Numerous labels and certificates are available within the various product groups. These are useful instruments for defining, inspecting and communicating sustainability criteria for sustainable and circular purchasers and producers. This report mainly focuses on labels and certificates.

B. Management systems focus on overall business operations, so don't deal specifically with a product. They're based on the policy (strategy) of an organisation, and stimulate actions and results in the field of doing business sustainably. They require continuous improvement of an organisation's sustainability performance, and may relate to social, environmental or general sustainability criteria. Some management systems focus on a specific sector, such as logistics, wood, food sector, textiles, etc. A reliable management system is certified by a third party.

C. Monitoring systems take a snapshot of a company's sustainability performance. These systems are designed to verify the reliability of a supplier in terms of a set of sustainability criteria. The major advantage of these systems is that they can quickly map complex sustainability information at a relatively low cost. This allows, for example, a large number of suppliers to be screened via these monitoring systems. Examples include audits, performance charts, and monitoring platforms.

D. Standards are documents with recognised agreements, specifications or criteria about a product, service, or method. Standards can be set within a consortium of organisations, or by recognised standardisation organisations such as NBN.

Analysis framework:

This report provides a non-exhaustive overview of the instruments based on predefined parameters:

- Name of the instrument
- Brief description
- Logo
- Sustainability dimension (ecological - social - economic - circular)
- Lifecycle approach
- Link to the website of the instrument
- Availability on the market

Market availability legend

	Commonly available in the market
	Moderately available in the market
	Not yet commonly available in the market

Conclusion:

The study is based on an extensive investigation of national and international databases and criteria documents regarding sustainability, including:

- https://www.gidsvoorduurzameaankopen.be/nl
- http://www.ecolabelindex.com
- https://www.labelinfo.be
- https://www.upphandlingsmyndigheten.se/en/sustainable-public-procurement
- https://www.mvicriteria.nl/nl
- https://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/eu_gpp_criteria_en.htm

Analysing such a large number of systems has allowed some common features and tips that apply to each product group/purchasing company to be defined:

- ✓ There are a large number of systems on the market that stimulate suppliers to operate sustainability.
- ✓ The use of a specific system:
  - Depends on the product or product group.
  - Depends on the maturity of the purchasing organisation.
  - Depends on the available resources (time, expertise and money).
  - Depends on the focus area (environment, social, circular or economic).
  - Depends on the availability on the market.
  - In other words, depends on the purchase of the product or service.
- ✓ The organisation's purchasing policy must take extra account of:
  - The most prominent risks in the chain.
  - The priorities within the organisation (in function of sustainability and other strategy).
  - The financial and knowledge capacity of smaller organisations.
  - Possible combination of different systems in a purchase file.
  - CSR performance in the market.
- ✓ Finally:
  - Start simple then move step by step to higher sustainability criteria.
  - Third-party certification is the most reliable, but also the most expensive.

FURNITURE PRODUCT GROUP

A. Labels & certificates

FSC

The FSC standard for responsible forest management balances social, environmental and economic interests. Forests managed in accordance with this standard, coupled with possible wood and paper production, are protected for current and future generations. Furniture designed with FSC-certified wood or wood fibres can use this quality mark as a label on products and refer to it texts on websites or in brochures.

There are three versions of this label:

- FSC 100%: This label indicates that the product comes entirely from FSC certified forests
- FSC Mix: This label indicates that the product comes from a production process in which FSC material is mixed with recycled material and/or controlled material. A product with an FSC Mix label contains at least 70% FSC-standard input (from FSC-certified forest or recycling).
- FSC Recycled: This label indicates that a product is made from 100% recycled wood or recycled fibres.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X		

More information: http://www.fsc.be/nl-be

PEFC



PEFC is an international label for sustainable forestry, created in 1999. The label, which applies to wood, wood fibres and paper, guarantees that the fibres come from sustainably managed forests. The fibres used for the production of furniture must come from sustainably managed forests or recycled fibres.
There are two versions of this label: PEFC and PEFC Recycled.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X		

More information: https://www.pefc.be/nl/

EU ECOLABEL



The EU Ecolabel is the official European environmental label. The label aims to reduce the negative effects of production and consumption on the environment, human health, climate, and natural resources. All the products and services available with the EU Ecolabel are also listed in a catalogue. There is an ecolabel for furniture which assesses criteria such as toxicity, sustainable forest management, heavy metals, recycled content, etc.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.ecolabel.be/nl

NORDIC SWAN

Nordic Swan is a Scandinavian ecolabel that develops criteria for various product groups. Nordic Swan sets extensive criteria in terms of chairs, tables, armchairs, desks, beds and kitchen and bathroom furniture. Nordic Swan guarantees that the materials are environmentally friendly, and that production and delivery are carried out sustainably.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.nordic-ecolabel.org

GLOBAL RECYCLE STANDARD (GRS)

The GRS is an international voluntary product standard that sets requirements for third-party certification of recycled content in finished or semi-finished products. The label also takes into account the social, environmental and chemical aspects of production. Furniture that partially or completely consists of recycled content can use this label as proof.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X		

More information: https://certifications.controlunion.com/nl/certification-programs/certification-programs/grs-global-recycle-standard

LEVEL (by BIFMA)

Level is a European sustainability certification for the office furniture industry, based on European legislation and the prevailing principles of sustainable procurement. Level certification pays attention to aspects such as the use of materials, the health of the user, energy implications, and the social impact of furniture production and sales.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.levelcertified.org

CertiPUR

CertiPUR is a voluntary test, analysis and certification programme for the environmental, health and safety properties of polyurethane foam used in the manufacture of bed linen and upholstered furniture. It sets criteria that avoid the use of harmful substances in the manufacture of polyurethane foams, and imposes strict upper limits for certain components.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X	X	

More information: https://certipur.us

SCS INDOOR ADVANTAGE and INDOOR ADVANTAGE GOLD

SCS Indoor Advantage and Indoor Advantage Gold certify interior products in terms of VOC emissions. They classify products based on an IAQ (indoor air quality) standard. This quality mark can be used for both furniture and building materials that determine the air quality in an interior. The label is eligible for a range of building assessment systems, including LEED v4, BREEAM, GOED Building and Living Building Challenge.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★ Economic ★
Social ★★★ Circular ★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	

More information: https://www.scsglobalservices.com/services/indoor-air-quality-certification

RCS 100 - RECYCLED CLAIM STANDARD

The RCS (Recycled Claim Standard) monitors the chain of custody of recycled raw materials throughout the supply chain. The RCS checks the presence and quantity of recycled material in a finished product based on input and chain of custody inspections by third parties. This approach allows the claims regarding the content of recycled material in a product to be evaluated and inspected transparently, consistently and completely independently.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★ Circular ★★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X			

More information: https://certifications.controlunion.com/nl/certification-programs/certification-programs/rcs-100-recycled-claim-standard

RECYCLED CONTENT CERTIFICATION

Recycled Content Certification is issued by SCS Global Services, and certifies the recycled content of a product. The certificate is suitable for manufacturers of various products, such as furniture, carpet, textiles, construction products, wood products, paper products, insulation, clothing, jewellery, etc.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★ Circular ★★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X			

More information: https://www.scsglobalservices.com/services/recycled-content-certification

DER BLAUE ANGEL

the Blue Angel (Der Blauer Engel) is a German ecolabel, created in 1978 by the German Ministry of the Interior. The label can be found on an extensive range of products, and specifically for furniture (CO2-friendly furniture, chairs, furniture such as chairs and stools with textile upholstery, etc.) and outdoor furniture (synthetic outdoor furniture). This German ecolabel aims to reduce the ecological footprint of a product throughout its lifecycle.

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Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.blauer-engel.de/en

CRADLE-TO-CRADLE

Cradle To Cradle is a label for reusable products, created in 2010. The label can be found on a very wide range of products and materials, including textiles and building materials. The label focuses specifically on material use, energy, water, and social working conditions. This label has now found its way into the furniture industry, where a wide range of chairs and workplace furnishings bearing it are sold.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★★ Circular ★★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.c2ccertified.org

QA-CER

QA-CER, the result of a project by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, is a certificate that guarantees the quality of a recycling process. This applies to the use of recyclate, the recyclate content, and the quality of the finished product. The QA-CER certification system applies to:

- Sorters and recycling companies of post-industrial waste and post-consumer plastic, textile or composite waste;
- Plastic and textile processors and composite producers, who use post-industrial waste and post-consumer plastic waste;
- Assembly companies that make composite products using recycled plastic parts or textiles.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★
Social ★ Circular ★★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X			

More information: https://www.qa-cer.be/nl

B. Management systems

SA8000 (Social Accountability):

SA8000 (Social Accountability) is an internationally certifiable standard for good working conditions. This standard checks the social working conditions in terms of the 8 basic conventions of the ILO (International Labour Organisation) at the furniture production site.

Dimension:

Ecological ★ Economic ★
Social ★★★ Circular ★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X		

More information: http://www.sa-intl.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=1689

BSCI

The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) is an initiative by AMFORI, a large business network for open and sustainable trade. The BSCI specifically focuses on the social dimension in product supply chains. The BSCI offers a complete management system, with audits, improvement plans and certifications at different levels. BSCI refers to the production site.

Dimension:

Ecological ★ Economic ★
Social ★★★ Circular ★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X		

More information: https://www.amfori.org/content/amfori-bsci

B CORPORATION

B Corp stands for Benefit Corporation. B Corps are certified by the non-profit organisation B Lab. Companies with this certification voluntarily pursue the highest standards of social and environmental performance, responsibility and transparency. In this way, the companies jointly drive the economy towards inclusion and sustainability.

Dimension:

Ecological	★★★	Economic	★
Social	★★★	Circular	★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://bcorporation.net

AA 1000

AA 1000 stands for AccountAbility 1000, and aims to improve the social responsibility and performance of organisations through stakeholder management. The focus is on increasing stakeholder involvement.

Dimension:

Ecological	★	Economic	★
Social	★★★	Circular	★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X		

More information: https://www.accountability.org

C. Monitoring systems

SEDEX (3rd-party audit)

The Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (SEDEX) is a platform which publishes audit results on, among other things, labour practices and environmental performance in the supply chain. The advantage for members is that it allows them to provide transparency about the risks in their chain to customers and interested stakeholders.

Dimension:

Ecological	★★	Economic	★
Social	★★★	Circular	★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.sedexglobal.com

ECOVADIS

EcoVadis is a third-party evaluation platform that aims to score and evaluate a company's sustainability performance, and propose improvement actions. EcoVadis takes into account the specific risks of the sector and the region in which the company operates.

Dimension:

Ecological	★★★	Economic	★
Social	★★★	Circular	★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
		X		

More information: http://www.ecovadis.com/nl/

D. Standards

ISO 20400

ISO 20400 sets out guidelines for taking into account environmental aspects and social themes throughout procurement. It provides insights into the strategic, operational and process dimension in making the products and services that the organisation purchases more sustainable. This standard is not certifiable.

Dimension:

Ecological ★★★ Economic ★

Social ★★★ Circular ★★

Lifecycle approach:

Design	Materials	Production	Use	End of use
X	X	X	X	X

More information: https://www.iso20400.org

ISO - ISO/TC 136 FURNITURE

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is an international standard-setting body composed of representatives from various national standards organisations in 163 countries. There is a specific ISO focusing on standardisation in the areas of design, performance, safety, production, and testing methods for furniture.

- ISO/TC 136 Furniture

More information: https://www.iso.org/home.html