

# **Enabling Circular Procurement: policy updates and value chain collaboration: Summary and Q&A**

9 April 2026

## **SESSION OVERVIEW**

This training explored how public procurement can support the transition to a circular economy, combining:

- **EU policy developments** (revision of Public Procurement Directives)
- **Practical insights** from the Circular Shift project
- **A real-life case study** on circular textile procurement

The session brought together perspectives from policy, project implementation, and local practice.

## **PART 1 — EU LEGISLATION AND CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT (Núria Cases i Sampere, ACR+)**

Núria opened by highlighting the scale of EU public procurement — around EUR 2.5 trillion, or roughly 15% of GDP — to underline its potential as a powerful lever for systemic change. She then walked us through the ongoing revision of the 2014 EU Public Procurement Directives, with a new legislative proposal expected by June 2026. The summary report of the open consultation on the revision of EU public procurement rules is available here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/15492-EU-public-procurement-rules-revision/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/15492-EU-public-procurement-rules-revision/public-consultation_en)

The revision aims to simplify procedures and reduce administrative burdens, strengthen economic security (including through “Made in Europe” considerations), and reinforce the strategic role of procurement. A key element is encouraging a shift away from lowest-price criteria — still used in around 60% of procedures — towards the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT), which allows for a better balance between price and quality.

Núria also highlighted the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) as an important complementary instrument. It provides the legal basis for introducing mandatory minimum procurement requirements for specific product groups — including textiles and apparel — through the upcoming 2025–2030 Working Plan.

## **PART 2 — CIRCULAR PROCUREMENT AND VALUE CHAIN COLLABORATION (Marieke Weerdesteijn, Rijkswaterstaat / Circular Shift)**

Marieke presented key findings from the needs assessment carried out within the Interreg North-West Europe Circular Shift project. The project focuses on scaling up circular procurement of ICT (such as laptops and smartphones) and workwear across five NWE countries, with a strong emphasis on Value Chain Collaboration (VCC).

The findings show that implementing circular procurement is not only a technical challenge, but also an organisational and systemic one. Common barriers include limited knowledge of supply chains, lack of internal alignment within procuring organisations, risk aversion, short-term cost thinking, and insufficient trust and transparency across actors.

One important takeaway was that internal alignment is just as critical as external collaboration. For example, purchasing a repairable product does not lead to circular outcomes if there are no systems in place to actually repair and reuse it.

The Circular Shift project aims to address these challenges by developing a Value Chain Collaboration methodology, along with training and decision-making tools. These are expected to provide more concrete guidance for organisations looking to move from ambition to implementation.

## **PART 3 — FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: THE BREMEN TEXTILE CASE (Ana Milena Robayo Brömser, Municipality of Bremerhaven)**

Ana Milena shared a very concrete account of a joint circular procurement pilot for T-shirts and polo shirts across five German municipalities (Bremen, Bremerhaven, Karlsruhe, Oldenburg, and the Berlin Police). The project ran from January 2022 to December 2023.

The process included market research to better understand what circularity means in the textile sector, followed by a market dialogue with 9–10 manufacturers in December 2022, and the publication of the tender in February 2023. The tender combined criteria on price (30%), quality (40%), circularity (20%), and supply chain aspects (10%).

A number of practical lessons emerged from the experience. Participation was limited, with only three companies submitting offers, and two out of five lots could not be awarded because requirements were not met. The team also encountered challenges related to unclear or unverified circular claims, and the limited economic viability of take-back schemes unless certain conditions (such as sufficient volume) are met.

Supply chain auditing proved valuable but resource-intensive, and therefore currently more feasible within externally funded projects. At the same time, the experience showed that joint procurement can increase leverage, but requires significant coordination and compromise between participating authorities.

Since the pilot, some elements — such as recycled content requirements — have already been integrated into regular tenders, and further work is ongoing on return schemes. The overall message was clear: pilots are not perfect, but they are essential for learning and progress.

## **Q&A — RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS RAISED DURING THE SESSION**

### ***Q: How easy is it to define and calculate Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)? Do procurement departments do this themselves or rely on Life Cycle Costing (LCC)?***

This is one of the most practical and frequently raised questions in circular procurement. TCO goes beyond the purchase price to include costs related to use, maintenance, and end-of-life. LCC takes this a step further by incorporating environmental and social externalities.

In practice, most procurement authorities do not yet systematically calculate TCO. While tools and guidance exist — for example through European Commission Green Public Procurement resources — their use is not yet standardised, and capacity remains a challenge. The current legislative framework does not mandate these approaches, but this is an area that the revision of the Directives is expected to strengthen.

### ***Q: The 'whole value chain' approach seems very complex in practice. Is there a way to centralise the process? And does it differ by sector or product type?***

Participants rightly pointed out that engaging the full value chain can be difficult, especially in global supply chains. In practice, this approach needs to be applied in a targeted and pragmatic way.

Tools such as the Circular Flanders Ambition Chart can help organisations clarify which circular strategy they want to prioritise (e.g. reuse, lifetime extension, recycling), and then identify the most relevant actors to engage for that specific objective.

For example, when focusing on lifetime extension in ICT, relevant actors might include the direct supplier (reseller), the manufacturer, internal IT services, and external organisations specialised in refurbishment or reuse.

Market dialogue plays a key role in understanding what is feasible in practice. The Circular Shift project is expected to provide further guidance through its Value Chain Collaboration methodology.

### ***Q: For organisations that are not public authorities — how can they engage with public procurement processes?***

In general, non-public actors can engage in several ways: by participating in market consultations, positioning themselves within circular value chains (e.g. as service providers or reuse actors), contributing to pilot projects, or collaborating with public authorities in developing and testing solutions. Partners in Circular Shift have indicated that market consultations are important to understand what is possible and have the dialogue on the desired outcomes of circular procurement. In Circular Shift value chain working groups will be formed by the piloting partners to identify solutions to challenges that are currently encountered in

advancing circularity. In a later stage of the project, partners can share more about the learnings of working in this manner.

***Q: Is there potential for synergies between the Circular Shift project and the Interreg Euro-MED ProcuraMED project? Could learnings also take into account non-EU countries?***

There was already some prior contact between the two projects, and we are exploring the possibility of a joint exchange call. If you are involved in ProcuraMED or similar Mediterranean procurement initiatives and would like to be connected, please do not hesitate to reach out to us directly.

## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

- Circular Shift project: <https://circularshift-nwe.eu>
- Circular and Fair ICT Pact: <https://circularandfairictpact.com>
- Flanders Fairphone feasibility study: <https://circularandfairictpact.com/flanders-feasibility-study-introduction-fairphone>