

# Audit of furnishings management

## Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics

### Key facts

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The Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FOBL) is tasked with accommodating the civil Federal Administration in appropriate buildings and providing it with office furniture (furnishings). Across the country as a whole, the FOBL rents 217 furnished office buildings, housing 31,000 workspaces, for the administrative units. Each year, new furniture worth around CHF 14 million is acquired.

The accommodation strategies for 2024 and 2036 make provision for localised concentration in large new buildings (campus solutions) and the implementation of new working models. For this purpose, the FOBL is furnishing thousands of new offices. The existing furniture no longer meets the requirements imposed by multispace solutions and modern working practices. The use of non-assigned workspaces will generally reduce the number of workspaces. Experience with moving into new buildings over the past two years has shown that modernising during the implementation phase results in over 20,000 pallets of obsolete furnishings per 4,000 workspaces annually. Roughly another 17,000 workspaces will be affected by the measures over the next few years.

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined whether cost efficiency, sustainability and legal requirements are appropriately taken into account throughout the product life cycle. It concluded that the FOBL takes sustainability aspects appropriately into account in its premises management. However, when procuring new furniture, there were deviations from the standard range too often.

### High degree of standardisation for clear sustainability gains

The three sustainability criteria – environmental, social and governance – have been part of the FOBL's sustainability strategy since 2019. Yet, in contrast to the developments in the procurement area, there are no sustainability requirements for dealing with existing inventory. Despite this uncertainty and the large room for interpretation, the FOBL's Logistics Division designs its strategic and operational measures around not only economic aspects, but also environmental and social requirements. Promoting the circular economy is a key pillar of the strategy.

In this context, it would be useful if the Federal Administration used the standard furnishing range as a matter of course. In actual fact, as a result of the large amount of leeway for user organisations, the share in new procurements is only around 50% in value terms. This continued variation in furnishings cannot be handled efficiently. There are also limits to sustainability when re-using items, for instance. The SFAO recommends that the FOBL draw up requirements and increase the degree of standardisation as far as possible.

### **At present, selling off non-standard furniture is a good solution**

The FOBL covers around 25% of annual furniture needs with second-hand items returned by the offices. However, owing to the inventory change mentioned above, there is still a large amount of surplus non-standard inventory that is still intact. Wherever possible, this is used to furnish offices for short-term use or passed on to other federal units such as the ETH. For the vast majority of the remainder, the FOBL has been able to find buyers in the interim, thereby making the furniture available to users outside the Federal Administration.

Besides selling, other solutions for prolonging the life of office furniture are refurbishing or repurposing. But the process of creating new furniture from old is time-consuming and the market in Switzerland is not yet developed enough to accommodate large numbers. Logically, therefore, the FOBL has not made use of this life cycle component. However, as soon as market developments allow, the Confederation should consider this option.

On average, only 10% of returned furniture ends up in recycling. This amounts to between 400 and 500 tonnes of material, with two thirds of this removed permanently from the life cycle through thermal recycling. Despite the negative environmental impact, this is sometimes unavoidable. Nonetheless, the SFAO regrets that furnishings are not included in the FOBL's sustainability report.

**Original text in German**