

Press release

European paper industry delivers on emission reduction and recycling commitments

Brussels, 9 July 2021

With the slowing down of the European economy and the sanitary restrictions, European paper and board consumption decreased by 5.3% in 2020 compared to 2019, totalling 71 million tonnes.

Cepi members produced 85.2 million tonnes of paper and board, a decrease of 4.8% compared to 2019. This downward trend was observed in many other parts of the world, namely the US, Japan, Brazil and Canada.

Covid crisis has accelerated both negative and positive existing trends

Despite the slowing down of the European economy and the sanitary restrictions, most of the mills ran without disruption in 2020; even if some operated at reduced speed because of lower levels of demand.

In 2020, the pandemic accelerated the structural decline of graphic grades but stimulated the production of packaging grades as well as sanitary and household paper. The overall output of graphic grades including newsprint fell by 19%. Demand from publishers, offices and commercial printing declined dramatically.

In contrast, the packaging paper and board as well as the sanitary and household paper production increased by 2.1% and 3.1% respectively in 2020 while speciality paper and board production remained stable.

Packaging paper and board are essential materials to transport and deliver supplies, such as medicines or food, they also benefitted from the acceleration of e-commerce related to the sanitary crisis. Demand for sanitary and household grades benefitted from higher hygiene requirements, despite the restrictions affecting the 'away-from-home' markets.

Also impacted by the economic slow-down and the decrease in paper and board production, pulp consumption decreased by 6.4%. Total pulp production decreased by 4.7% while market pulp output remained unchanged.

Net-exports remained strong despite minor decrease

Market pulp exports grew by 2.8% while paper and board exports decreased by 3.1%, a lower extent than production and imports (-4.5%). Looking at market pulp and paper and board combined, the share of our production going for export has reached a new height: 26% in 2020.

Sustainability performance on track

While providing essential products to European citizens in 2020, the European paper industry delivered on its competitiveness and sustainability agenda.

In spite of the pandemic impacting availability and quality of paper for recycling throughout 2020, the European recycling rate increased by 1.4 percentage points and reached 73.9% in 2020. Looking back at the progress made since 1998 - the base year for the first voluntary commitment set in the European Declaration on Paper Recycling ¹- recycling has increased by 40% or 16.0 million tonnes.

CO₂ direct emissions from the European paper industry also declined by 7.1% in 2020, mainly due to the reduced activity but also the continuing efforts of the industry to decarbonise. As a result, the specific CO₂ emissions (per

¹ The European Paper Recycling Council (EPRC) was set up as an industry self-initiative in November 2000 to monitor progress towards meeting higher paper recycling targets.

tonne of product) further decreased in 2020 by 3.1%. In terms of energy use, 62.2% of the fuel consumption was based renewable energy: woody biomass sourced from sustainably managed European forests.

"I am proud to announce today that our investments in reducing emissions and using more renewable energy are paying off, with a 7.1% reduction of our CO₂ direct emissions last year. We continue to lead among industries switching to renewable energy, renewables represented 62.2% of our primary energy in 2020. Our climate commitment is even more important this year, just days ahead of the European Commission's "Fit for 2030" package. It will radically revamp the regulatory framework to achieve higher emission reductions by 2030", commented Jori Ringman, Cepi Director General.

Production will pick up with economic recovery in 2022

Looking ahead, the paper and board demand will undoubtedly benefit from the economic rebound forecasted for 2021. The EU economy is estimated to grow by 4.2% in 2021 and to strengthen to around 4.4% in 2022 according to the European Commission. As of end-April 2021, the production of paper and board in Cepi countries increased by 1.0% over the same period of the previous year.

Access the full Cepi Key Statistics 2020 [here](#).

Note to editor:

For press inquiries, please contact Claire Couet, Public Affairs & Communications Director, at c.couet@cepi.org

About Cepi:

Cepi is the European association representing the paper industry. We offer a wide range of renewable and recyclable wood-based fibre solutions to EU citizens: from packaging to textile, hygiene and tissue products, printing and graphic papers as well as speciality papers, but also bio-chemicals for food and pharmaceuticals, bio-composites and bioenergy.

We are a responsible industry: 92% of our raw materials are sourced in Europe and certified as sustainable, 91% of the water we use is returned to the environment, in good condition. We are the world champion in recycling at the rate of 72%. At the forefront of the decarbonisation and industrial transformation of our economy, we embrace digitalisation and bring 20 billion value addition to the European economy and €5.5 billion investments annually.

More information about our sustainability performance [here](#).

Through its 18 national associations, Cepi gathers 500 companies operating 895 mills across Europe and directly employing more than 180,000 people.