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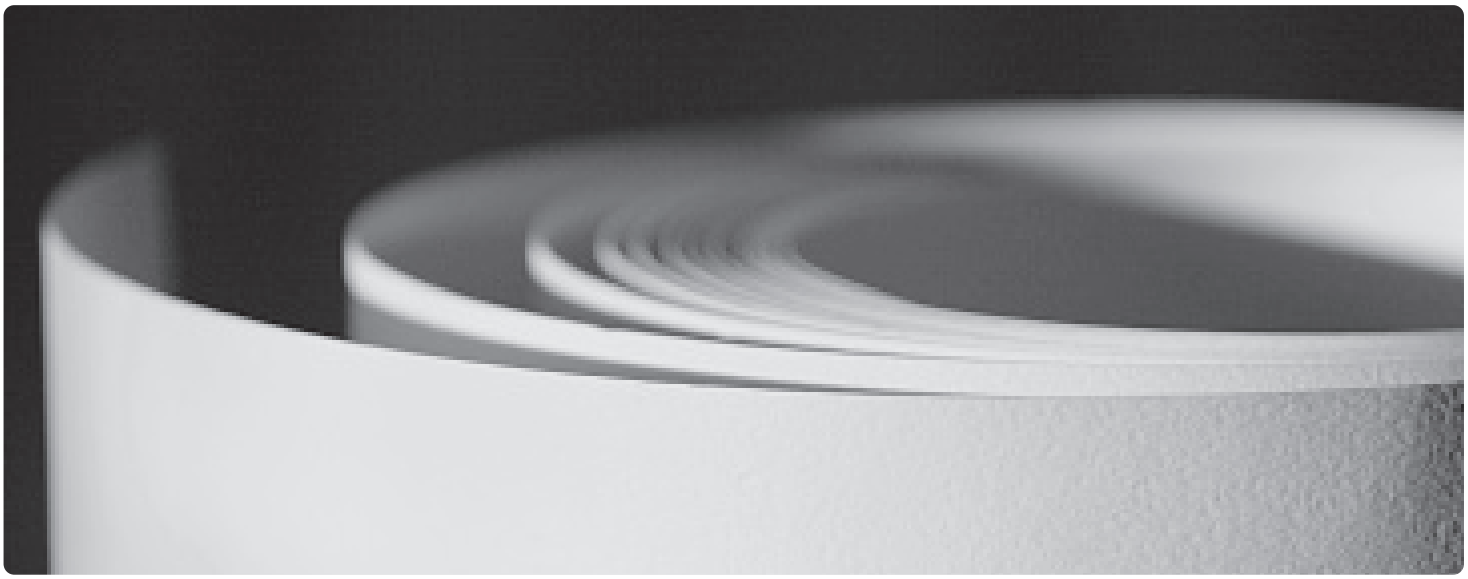


AFRY Long term outlook

Navigating the future of global paper and paperboard markets in an increasingly complex and competitive world.

World Paper Markets up to 2040

2026 EDITION

AFRY's World Paper Markets up to 2040 provides a comprehensive assessment of the long-term outlook for the global paper and paperboard industry. The study analyses the key demand, supply, competitiveness and trade factors shaping market development across regions and product segments through 2040. Drawing on more than four decades of global industry experience and market intelligence, AFRY combines deep sector expertise with independent analysis to help companies navigate an increasingly complex and evolving market environment.

The 2026 edition is published at a time when industry is facing a unique combination of structural transformation and external uncertainty. Economic growth has moderated across many regions, while geopolitical tensions, trade fragmentation and energy market volatility continue to influence industrial competitiveness, investment decisions and global trade flows. At the same time, sustainability requirements, regulatory developments and technological change are reshaping end-use markets and creating new opportunities for fiber-based products.

The paper and paperboard sector remains characterized by fundamentally different demand trajectories across product groups. Graphic papers continue to face structural decline driven by digitalization, while tissue demand benefits from favorable demographic and hygiene-related trends. Packaging paper and paperboard markets continue to be supported by urbanization, consumption growth, sustainability-driven substitution and the increasing demand for fiber-based packaging solutions, although significant capacity additions in several regions may create new competitive challenges and market imbalances.

energy price volatility

regulatory pressure trade fragmentation

AI and digitalization

packaging investments

China and Indonesia capacity growth

mill viability asset quality

sustainability transition

Who benefits

The report delivers comprehensive market intelligence and strategic insights for stakeholders across the forest, paper, and packaging value chains, including:

— pulp and paper companies
— suppliers of machinery, equipment, chemicals and related inputs
— investors, financiers and institutions
— paper merchants and traders, logistics companies, and other stakeholders

Product areas

Graphics papers

Tissue paper (for converting)

Packaging paper and paperboard

Other paper and board

Selected grade sub-grades available

Specialty paper section

— Current demand for 70 grades, aggregated into 9 end uses
— Regional split: North America, Europe, Asia, Rest of the World
— Forecast 2030,2035,2040

Time span

Historic data: 2000–2025

Forecast: 2030, 2035, 2040

Geographies

Global overview and regional coverage:

— North America
— Western Europe
— Eastern Europe
— Middle East
— Japan
— China
— Asia excl. Japan & China
— Latin America
— Africa
— Oceania

Market parameters

Consumption volumes

Production volumes

Net trade

Key questions addressed

— How will paper and paperboard demand develop across regions and grades through 2040?
— How will changing demographics, economic growth and consumer behaviour affect paper and paperboard consumption?
— What impact will digitalisation continue to have on graphic paper demand?
— How will new capacity additions affect market balances and trade flows?
— How will asset quality, mill competitiveness and industry structure evolve?

2026 Edition highlights – Topical Insights

The 2026 edition introduces a dedicated Topical Insights section examining the strategic forces reshaping the global paper and paperboard industry.

Selected insights:

Europe's Competitiveness Reckoning - Can West's paper industry remain globally competitive in a high-cost world?

PPWR: Opportunity or Competitive Burden? The race to sustainable packaging is accelerating - but who will win?

China's Strategic Paper Play - Can the rest of the world keep pace with China's scale, integration and investment momentum?

AI: Hype or Structural Game Changer? How far will artificial intelligence reshape competitiveness, operations and decision-making across the paper industry?

What the study covers

The paper and paperboard industry has undergone major structural change over the past decade. Graphic paper demand has continued to decline under the pressure of digitalization, while packaging segments have attracted investment driven by fiber-based substitution, e-commerce, and sustainability-led product development. More recently, industry has also had to adapt to severe swings in energy prices, raw material costs, freight markets and policy conditions.

In Europe, cost competitiveness remains under pressure as higher energy costs, weaker growth and policy uncertainty continue to affect industrial operating conditions. The ECB and European Commission both point to subdued euro area growth and persistent inflationary effects from energy markets in 2026, underlining the importance of regional competitiveness analysis for the paper industry.

At the same time, large-scale capacity additions in Asia - particularly in packaging-related grades - are raising questions about future market balance, trade flows and the competitive response of producers in Europe and North America. The 2026 edition examines how these shifts may affect regional supply-demand balances, producer positioning and long-term market structure.

Study scope

Driving forces of the paper industry

The study analyses the fundamental drivers shaping long-term paper and paperboard demand across regions and product segments. These include:

- demographic and economic development and evolving consumer behavior
- changes in media consumption and advertising patterns
- industrial production trends and technological advances that influence the use of paper-based products

In addition, the report examines how sustainability requirements, regulatory developments, packaging substitution trends, and changing end-use markets are expected to affect future demand, competitiveness, and industry structure.

Together, these factors provide the foundation for AFRY's long-term market outlook and demand forecast until 2040.

Demand outlook

- Historical demand development
- Long-term demand forecasts 2030, 2035, 2040
- End-use analysis by grade and region
- Growth outlook by market segment

Production trends

- Regional production forecast 2030, 2035, 2040
- Capacity additions and closures

Trade flows

- Import and export trends
- Regional trade balances
- Shifting trade patterns
- Competitiveness implications

Industry structure

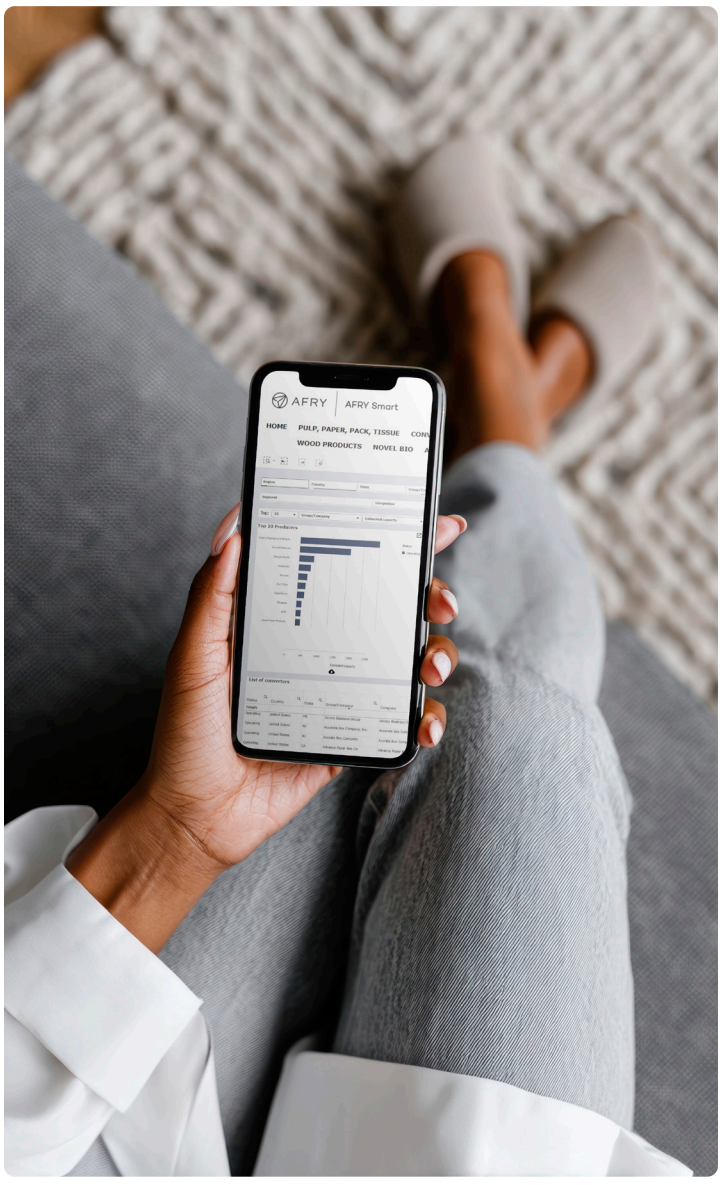
- Leading producers
- Asset quality assessment
- Regional production positioning

Deliverables

Executive report - A comprehensive report covering all major grades, regions and market drivers, including:

- Strategic market overview
- Key messages and conclusions
- Detailed charts and graphical analysis
- Grade-specific outlooks
- Regional market reviews
- Industry structure assessment

Available in PDF format.



AFRY Smart digital platform

All data is available through AFRY Smart, providing:

- Interactive visualizations
- Drill-down capabilities
- Country and regional comparisons
- Flexible data aggregation
- Chart downloads
- Access to statistical annexes
- Future forecast updates for subscribers

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Illustration of the content

Asset quality

Cartonboards | Asset quality

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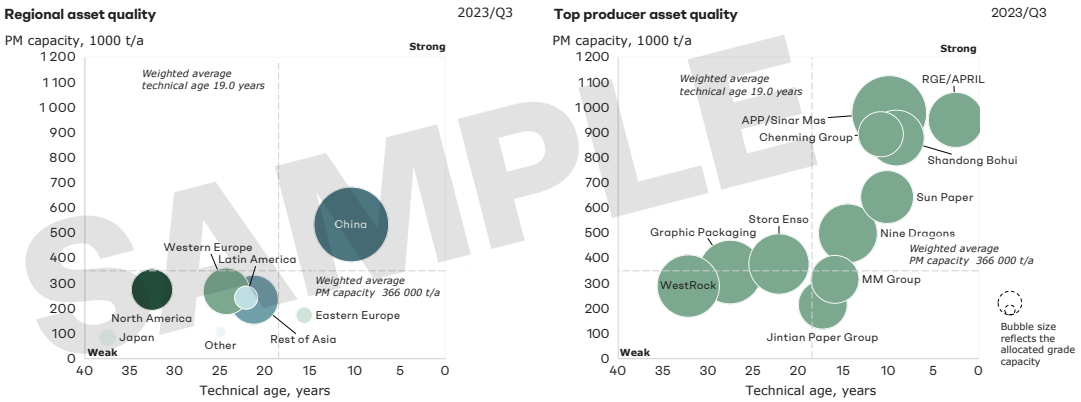
Chinese companies have invested heavily in large-scale cartonboard machines; North American assets are older



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Production and consumption

Containerboards | Production and consumption

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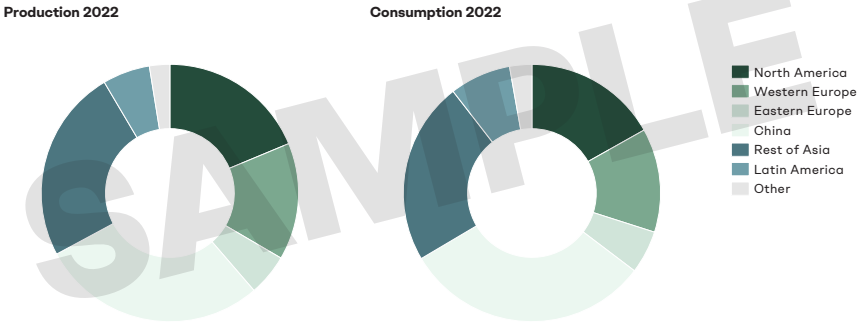
Typically, containerboard is produced and consumed locally – but virgin fibre-based or special grades can be shipped longer distances



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Demand

Total paper and board | Demand

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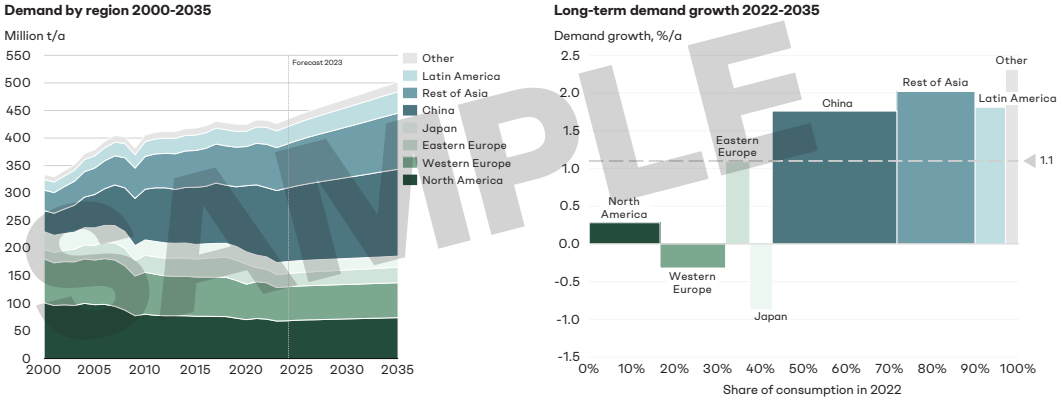
Emerging economies are driving the additional paper consumption; mature economies are still heavily exposed to the secular graphics paper decline



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Orderform

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2026 EDITION

Subscription alternatives

☐ **Executive report** (pdf) + **Digital data tool** in AFRY Smart[1)] available in late 2026	16 000 EUR (excl. VAT)
☐ **Executive report** (pdf) + **Digital data tool** in AFRY Smart + **data updates** 2027 & 2028[2)]	30 000 EUR (excl. VAT)

1) PDF report issued in Dec 2026 + digital data tool access for up to 10 users for one year, larger number of users can be agreed on a case basis + payable upon ordering
2) PDF report issued in Dec 2026 + digital data tool access for up to 10 users until the end of Dec 2027, larger number of users can be agreed on a case basis, + updates of data and forecast available in Dec 2027 and Dec 2028 + payments split in three instalments (50%/25%/25%), payable upon ordering and in Dec 2027 and Dec 2028

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Related products

AFRY Smart is an advanced cloud-based analytics portal

Offering high-quality, up-to-date data within the bioindustry sector. It provides instant access to the latest industry and market analyses, empowering strategic decision-making, investment planning, and competitor or customer monitoring.

The data available through AFRY Smart is sourced from official statistics, publicly available information (including industry publications, press releases, and annual reports), industry conferences, technical seminars, and expert insights. No confidential information is included.