

German plastics industry faces challenges

New study reveals significant declines in plastic production and processing, highlighting challenges from rising costs and increasing competition.

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Amid the ongoing stagnation in German industry, the country's plastics sector experienced a significant downturn between 2021 and 2023. During this period, plastic production in Germany dropped by 17%, while plastic processing decreased by 8.5%.

These findings are outlined in the biennial Stoffstrombild Kunststoffe report, prepared by Conversio Market & Strategy on behalf of BKV and supported by industry organizations, including PlasticsEurope Deutschland.

The sector faces numerous pressures, including rising energy and raw material costs, frequent shifts in political objectives, and increasing bureaucracy. These challenges have deterred investments necessary for modernizing and expanding facilities, which are crucial for the transition to a circular economy.

From 2021 to 2023, the automotive industry increased its use of plastics by 15%, while the packaging sector saw a sharp decline of 12.3%, signaling either a reduction in overall volumes or a shift toward alternative materials.

The construction sector also reported a significant decrease, with plastic consumption falling by 17.3%.

The study highlights an increase in the share of plastics produced from non-fossil sources (including recycled materials), which rose to 18.9% in 2023, up from 16.3% in 2021.

In 2023, Germany used approximately 1.93 million tons of post-consumer and post-industrial recycled plastics, alongside 0.5 million tons of by-products, accounting for 15% of total production. However, nearly 3.6 million tons of plastic were still disposed of through energy

recovery.

The use of recycled plastics in processing grew by 8.2% annually from 2021 to 2023, peaking in 2022 due to high oil prices. However, economic contraction in 2023 slowed this growth trend.

The post-consumer plastic waste recycling rate increased from 9.1% in 2021 to 12% in 2023. In total, 2.24 million tons of plastic waste were recycled in Germany in 2023, representing a 14.3% increase compared to the previous two years.

During the same period, plastic waste collection reached 5.9 million tons.

The full Stoffstrombild Kunststoffe report (in German) is available for purchase on the [BKV website](#)

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