

PRESS RELEASE
19/09/2023

European print and paper industry unite against the 'digital only' approach in legislation

[Brussels, Belgium] The European social partners representing companies and workers in the printing and paper sectors, Intergraf, Cepi, UNI Europa Graphical, FEPE, and IndustriAll Europe, have issued a joint statement, expressing their concerns about the increasing promotion of digital documents and communications as the default option in European legislation.

In recent years, the European Commission's emphasis on the digital transition in various EU legislations has led to references to the elimination of printed paper products. For instance, in the context of industrial products, medical products, and other consumer information. The authors of the joint statement emphasise that while they recognise the importance of digital transition, it is essential to remember that 'digital by default' or 'digital only' approaches are not neutral. Print is indispensable for an inclusive digital transition which respects the fundamental rights of access to information for everyone. Print also positively contributes to inclusion and education.

Inclusion and Educational Benefits of Print

The promotion of digital technologies over printed paper can lead to social exclusion, particularly affecting older people, persons with disabilities, those with limited incomes, and people without basic digital skills, more than one third of EU citizens. Several studies have shown that reading in print has educational advantages and leads to better comprehension compared to digital reading. Policymakers should consider that indiscriminately promoting digital over print is not neutral and may even be damaging in some cases as it can create wide-ranging social and economic risks.

Sustainability of Paper and Print

The partners underline the sustainability and circularity of paper and print, emphasising their role in the European circular economy. Paper is based on renewable raw materials, manufactured using primarily renewable energy, and has a recycling rate of 71.4%.

Meanwhile the environmental footprint of digital solutions is rarely acknowledged. Digital has a high direct energy consumption, through the use of data centres, servers, and more, and contributes to the growing issue of electronic waste in the EU. Despite offering efficient access to information for the media literate people with access to the internet, digital is not environmentally neutral. These credentials should not be overlooked in policymaking – doing so perpetuates misleading stereotypes against paper that are harmful to printed media and their industries, and are not based on science.

Economic Importance of the Print Sector

The 'digital first' approach negatively impacts the print industry, which plays a crucial role in generating growth, employment, democracy, education, and inclusion. The progressive deterioration of the paper and print market promoted or facilitated by policymakers puts at risk an industry that produces many essential products and is vital for the dissemination of knowledge and the free exchange of ideas.

It empowers large, digital companies, often headquartered outside the EU, at the expense of local, small, and medium-sized businesses.

The social partners collectively call upon EU policymakers to consider the following:

- EU policymakers should refrain from implementing a 'digital by default' or 'digital only' approach in European legislation.
- Print should always be considered at the same time as digital communications.
- EU legislation should take into account the ecological and recyclable value of paper products in the context of the current climate change crisis.
- EU legislation should take everything relevant into account, including (in particular) circularity, inclusion, and freedom of choice.

The joint statement with relevant references is available [here](#).

About Intergraf, CEPI, UNI Europa Graphical, FEPE, and IndustriAll Europe:



UNI Europa graphical & packaging represent the workers in the graphic and packaging industry.

Intergraf is the European federation representing the printing industry.

industriAll represents European industrial workers.

Cepi is the Confederation of European Paper Industries.

FEPE is the federation for envelopes and for light and ecommerce packaging.