



## Full Articles

# The EU Ecolabel, the Circular Economy Package, and the Sustainable Development Goals

### **The EU Ecolabel as a driver towards meeting the European circular economy vision and global goals on sustainable consumption and production.**

#### EU Ecolabel: A Key Factor to Implement the Circular Economy Package

Since its creation in 1992, the EU Ecolabel has acted as a pioneer in promoting circular economy. From the beginning, its strict product group criteria were already based on the main principles of circular economy: water and energy efficiency, raw materials management, product's recyclability and eco-design.

Since 2009 the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies of the Joint Research Center of the European Commission based in Seville, has been technically responsible for developing a set of criteria for each product group, to which the licence holders must comply to in order to obtain the European Ecolabel certificate. Each product group criteria reflects the principles of the Circular Economy Package. The below interview with the **JRC team members including Oliver Wolf**, gives insight on the parallels between the EU Ecolabel, the Circular Economy Package, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### EU ECOLABEL AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY: THE IPTS PERSPECTIVE

### **How do EU Ecolabel criteria contribute toward meeting the Circular Economy Package and SDG 12?**

#### **How does compliance with the EU Ecolabel criteria allow manufacturers to streamline production process by using resources more efficiently?**

Businesses have the opportunity to create a win-win scenario through their engagement with the EU Ecolabel by responding to requirements such as energy efficiency, limits to the use of hazardous substances, and limits to water and air emissions. Across product groups these requirements allows them to prioritise the streamlining of their production processes for resource efficiency and guide them to the most appropriate tools. For instance, EU Ecolabel textile product group licence holders must implement EU Best Available Techniques (BAT) for energy, water, and chemicals management on production sites. By the same token, an energy management system is also specified within the criteria document, making reference to the international guidelines and certification ISO 50001.

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#### **How is sustainable management of resources of sourced materials ensured in product group criteria? Can you give an example of a product group where this is clearly seen?**

Regarding sustainable management of resources, the textile product group, focuses mainly on fibre. The criteria require a minimum recycled composition (as polyester and nylon for example) as well as both legal and sustainable sourcing of timber (mainly for the viscose). This criterion is not only specific to textile products but it is also something we require in the EU Ecolabel criteria for product groups such as furniture, wooden floor covering or paper product groups. Another example would be the computer and television product group which has also a set of requirements regarding recyclability. A minimum percentage of the plastic used should be sourced from recycled contents and the licence holders should also take measures to ensure the recyclability of the product itself.

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## **For EU Ecolabel criteria on chemical processes, what environmentally sound management techniques are foreseen to be applied to chemicals and waste throughout product life cycles?**

Chemical waste is becoming a substantial concern in response to environmental degradation and threats to human health resulting from an increasing number of and exposure to chemicals in products. Accordingly, the EU Ecolabel sets a criterion on the use of those chemicals in order to promote and encourage sound management techniques and best environmental practices.

Chemicals used in the textile product groups must be applied under a process that:

- Controls the emissions of volatile organic compound that may have a direct and indirect environmental impact further from the emission site.
- Minimises the use of hazardous volatile organic compound in printing dyes, pigments and pastes.
- Implements the Best Available Techniques (BAT) in order to minimise energy use and to limit pollutant discharges.

The manufacturer of recycled plastics (polyester and nylon) must also comply with the hazardous substance criteria with the exception of fibre manufactured from PET ([polyethylene terephthalate](#)) plastic bottles.

Additionally, products using flame retardants and/or water, stain and dirt repellents must also demonstrate that the functional finish is durable according to the stipulated testing standards.

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## **In terms of waste, how has recyclability and waste reduction been promoted within EU Ecolabel product group criteria?**

Recyclability and processing of used material in order to facilitate its reuse is one of the most efficient and direct ways to fight against an increasing volume of waste and promote sustainable consumption.

For instance, within the computers and television product groups, recyclability of product plastic casing is addressed. An applicant must demonstrate that the product is capable of being easily disassembled, which is achieved by carrying out product testing. Furthermore, paint, coatings and metal inlays that prevent the recyclability or the production of a high quality recyclate should not be used in the final product.

The EU Ecolabel has indirectly promoted waste reduction generation by requiring a minimum recycled composition for the plastics managed within various product groups such as textiles, computer, and television product groups. By inspiring manufactures to think about recyclability, reuse and repair in the designphase where about 80% of the environmental impact of the product is decided the EU Ecolabel promotes the reduction of waste and the maintainance of resources in the system – which is exactly the philosophy of the circular economy.

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## **How have aspects of product repairability and durability been promoted within EU Ecolabel product group criteria?**

Ensuring durability and easy/unexpensive repair of products is a great way to ensure the expansion of its lifespan, which reduces its impact on the environment while at the same time delivering a added value and service to consumers.

Within the computer and television product groups, the product group criteria stipulates that the concerned products must be easy to repair or upgrade. A list of different parts and components along with detailed explanations on how to replace them (for reparability) must be detailed. For certain components such as batteries, specific requirements have also been developed for durability.

New criteria for notebooks and tablets have been developed to address durability testing requirements such as product robustness (e.g. shock, vibration, temperature) or resistance to accidents (e.g. drop, screen resilience, water spill). Durability and the lifespan of notebook

requirements for paint products aims at guaranteeing that EU Ecolabel paint products are of optimal quality, meaning that it is long lasting and requires minimal repainting.

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**Are there any specifications on packaging within the Rinse-off Cosmetics and detergents product group criteria?**

Packaging is a source of waste that can be easily addressed. Three main requirements are covered in the packaging criterion. First of all, in order to comply with the EU Ecolabel requirements and minimise the amount of packaging waste of those products, only primary packaging (i.e. in direct contact with the product) is allowed. Furthermore, the Packaging Impact Ratio, which refers to the weight of the packaging over the weight of the product shall not exceed the established values, aiming at avoiding unnecessarily heavy packaging. Eventually, in order to stimulate recovery and recyclability of product packaging, practices and compatibility of the packaging material is paramount; any combination of packaging material that impedes its recyclability is strictly forbidden.

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**How does the EU Ecolabel encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle (i.e. CSR reporting)?**

Corporate social responsibility refers to the compliance of a firm with both ethical and legal norms and values. As environmental degradation has become an increasing concern over the past decades, an increasing number of companies now disclose their sustainability practices within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports in order to enhance company transparency, transfer of knowledge and company communication on sustainability initiatives. This is their way of telling consumers that they take responsibility.

The EU Ecolabel encourages companies to adopt sustainable practices by crafting criteria that require companies from product groups such as textiles, footwear, computers and televisions to report on their labour conditions at their final product assembly sites. (With reference to the International Labour organisation – ILO – core conventions.) For computers and television, manufacturers must also participate in schemes for the ‘conflict free’ sourcing of metals like tin, tantalum, tungsten and their ores and gold.

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**How has the EU Ecolabel criteria for recent product groups fallen closer in line to or taken circularity into account? Are there plans to further cover this aspect in future product group revisions?**

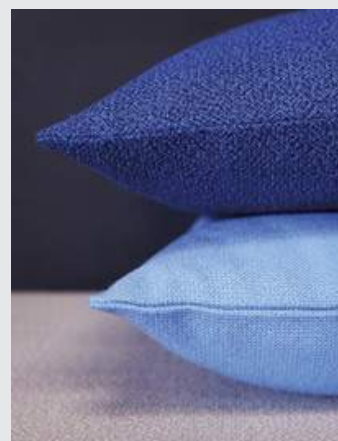
Circularity is deeply rooted into sustainability principles as it aims to close the loop on resource utilisation throughout the product life cycle. By reusing material as a sourcing for production, the extraction of resources should diminish along with the impact on the environment.

The most recent product group criteria address different aspects within the life cycle of various products by taking a circulate perspective. This is based on the principle to reduce, reuse and recycle. This has been depicted through the use of recycled content, development of designs for recycling and disassembly and the development of new models for durability (in order to increase the life span of the whole product or its key components).

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## Licence holder company profile: Gabriel

Gabriel was founded in Denmark in 1851 as an upholstery fabric manufacturer serving the Danish B2B market. Over the years, the company's reach grew to the point where it is now a key EU and global actor in textile fabrics sector. Gabriel prides itself with its uncompromising product quality, environmental management of raw materials, and sustainable production processes.



### Gabriel's long-time relationship with the EU Ecolabel



In 2002, Gabriel's became the first company in the world to obtain the EU Ecolabel on a large part of its upholstery fabric product ranges.

Gabriel originally applied for the EU Ecolabel licence to show its clients their commitment to sustainable production and management of resources via a reliable and recognisable third party external guarantee, all the while without compromising quality and affordable products. Awareness-raising measures targeted towards Gabriel's clients on the environmental and quality measures set in place via the EU Ecolabel has been paramount to its image as an environmentally-conscious company.

In the grand scheme, companies like Gabriel that produce EU Ecolabel products help contribute to EU and global objectives and recommendations on sustainable consumption and production. Waste reduction, eco-design, and product end-of life optimisation are amongst several aspects outlined within the EU's Circular Economy Package and the global Sustainable Development Goals. Applying EU Ecolabel criteria throughout a product's life cycle could be an attainable tool towards creating an easy way to promote sustainable public procurement on the B2B level, as well as facilitate the B2C market to make "greener" purchases thanks to the recognisable EU Ecolabel logo.

### Circular Economy and the EU Ecolabel at Gabriel

"Closing the loop" in production of textile products via compliance with EU Ecolabl criteria is at the crux of Gabriel's mission towards promoting sustainability. In particular, Gabriel zones in on key pillars that are highlighted in both EU Ecolabel criteria and the Circular Economy Package: design (raw materials, chemicals, and dyes), environmental footprint and impact (air and water pollution), durability (end of life), along with public procurement.



Information sessions and accessible information about how the EU Ecolabel criteria is applied throughout Gabriel's production process helps ensure that its clients see the benefits of purchasing its EU Ecolabel products. As already seen with other Gabriel-hosted awareness-raising workshops, these gatherings foster discussion amongst their B2B clients on important environmental issues brought about through product fabrication. Through discussion and feedback, Gabriel demonstrates how the EU Ecolabel addresses tackles production by "closing the loop" within a product's entire life cycle. Within Gabriel's awareness-raising actions, it foresees to include workshops on the importance of responsible chemical and dye use to ensure that clients are fully educated on this environmental hotspot.



Passionate about the integrity of the EU Ecolabel, Gabriel participated in the EU Ecolabel criteria revision of textile product group as a key stakeholder with key insight. Gabriel encourages textile companies to “close the loop” in their production processes by applying for the EU Ecolabel.

### Raw materials, chemicals and dyes

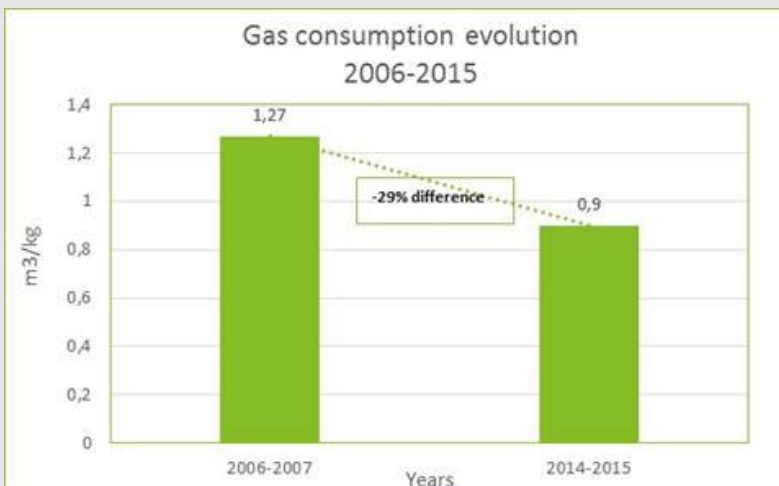
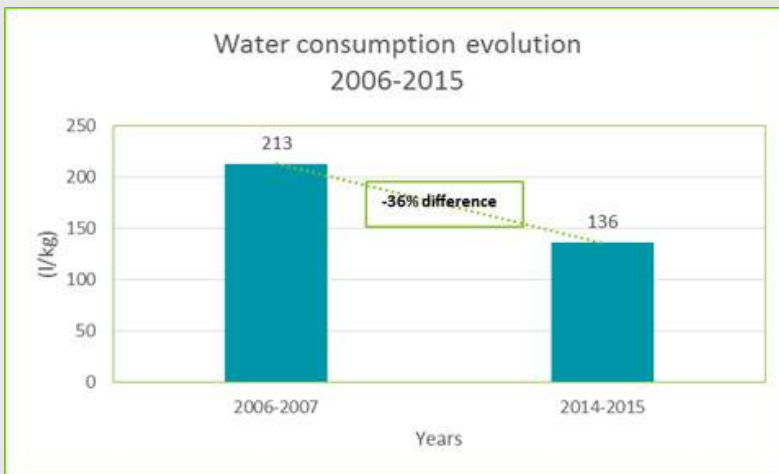
As textiles come in close contact with skin, Gabriel recognised that the **raw materials** and **chemicals** that go into their products’ fabrication were a hotspot concern that they needed to address. As a means to ensure sustainable sourcing of raw materials, Gabriel purchases its wool from Wools of New Zealand, an EU Ecolabel licence holder that guarantees high-quality wool with minimal to no chemical finishings, ethical sheep breeding conditions, and high durability.

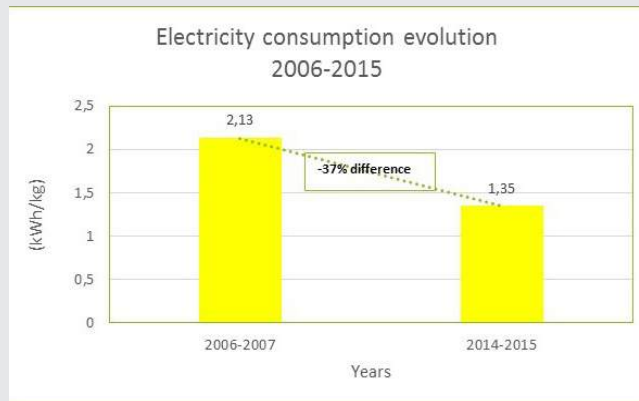
Via an electronic dyeing assessment, Gabriel measures and optimises management of **chemical** and **dye** levels within its production process. Furthermore, thanks to sustainably sourced raw materials, Gabriel is able to by-pass the use of certain customary chemical finishes that sometimes are applied to other raw materials.

***Like all EU Ecolabel awarded textiles, Gabriel’s awarded product ranges have a limited use of substances harmful to the environment and human health.***

### Air and water pollution

***The EU Ecolabel award brought upon a near one third reduction of water and electricity use within production.***





*Gabriel measures its spill percentage within its textile spinning and weaving processes in order to better identify where losses are generated. Given that Gabriel uses quality raw materials, spill management is an important method to reduce waste and avoidable costs.*

### **Durability, recyclability, and end of life**

Gabriel stands by their promise for high quality products by providing a ten-year guarantee to all products, as well as a comprehensive textile spot removal guide to encourage cleaning and reuse as opposed to disposal. Although Gabriel's main activity is selling textiles for upholstery by their B2B clients, they also have a small furniture-upholstery activity. For this latter activity, Gabriel maps out how furniture is assembled in order to ease dismantling once it has reached its end of life. Considering that the textile products are non-toxic, the textile upholstery itself could also be removed and recycled into a different product.



### **Public procurement**

As Gabriel's (and most EU Ecolabel textile licence holders') main target is the B2B market can be a driver towards green public procurement. In other words, manufacturers of B2C products, such as furniture items, bed sheets, etc. that have a market requirement for meeting green public procurement criteria can do so by purchasing EU Ecolabel textiles.

## Converted Paper products licence holder testimonial: ELEP

### **Belgian converted paper products producer Elep gives a run down on the EU Ecolabel application process and its place in a competitive market with its “circular” angle**

Elep is a Belgian SME which produces and prints about 750 million envelopes a year. Elep is an independent player composed of 75 employees in a competitive market coping with shrinking volumes, due to the substitution by electronic communication.

Yves Peiffer testifies:

“Corporate social responsibility has always been an important topic at Elep. By obtaining the EU Ecolabel, we want to outperform at an environmental level and improve the image of converted-paper products so that they are associated as being environmentally friendly.



#### **Environmental and economic benefits**

We started the application process for the EU Ecolabel with a series of 47 envelopes. We needed about a year to implement all the necessary measures to comply with all the criteria. The full production process and the used materials needed to be screened. This has given us new and valuable insights in our production process.

The most difficult step was the screening of the safety data sheets of components such as glue, ink and cleaning solvents. Some needed to be improved and a discussion with the suppliers was started. Alternative products or formulas were agreed on and implemented. Some paper grades were avoided because they did not have the EU Ecolabel certificate.

**Screening waste management, energy consumption and resources such as water, which are all key topics within the EU Circular Economy Package and Sustainable Development Goals** helped us to improve the environmental performance of our company but certainly also have been beneficial for our economic performance.

#### **Attracting new customers**



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We are confident that the EU Ecolabel certificate will help new customers find their way towards Elep. Environmental criteria are very often part of the requirements to participate at tenders. Offering certified envelopes is a guarantee that the screening was objectively done by an independent body. Elep itself will use the existing platform such as the [EU Ecolabel product catalogue](#), and mention the certification in its own promotional material.

We also expect that the Competent Bodies will continue to promote the EU Ecolabel and show the importance of this certificate.”

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# Spotted on the Web

- Videos

[oThe Italian Ministry of the Environment illustrates the world of the EU Ecolabel](#)



[oAdria Hotel Prague covered as a success story by EuroNews Business Planet](#)

[oAFNOR & French TAs/CSs present advantages of EU Ecolabel](#)



- A fresh face for the [Finish EU Ecolabel page](#)
- The EU Ecolabel in scholarly articles

[oNudging sustainable consumption: the use of descriptive norms to promote a minority behaviour in a realist online shopping environment](#)



- Blog mentions on the EU Ecolabel

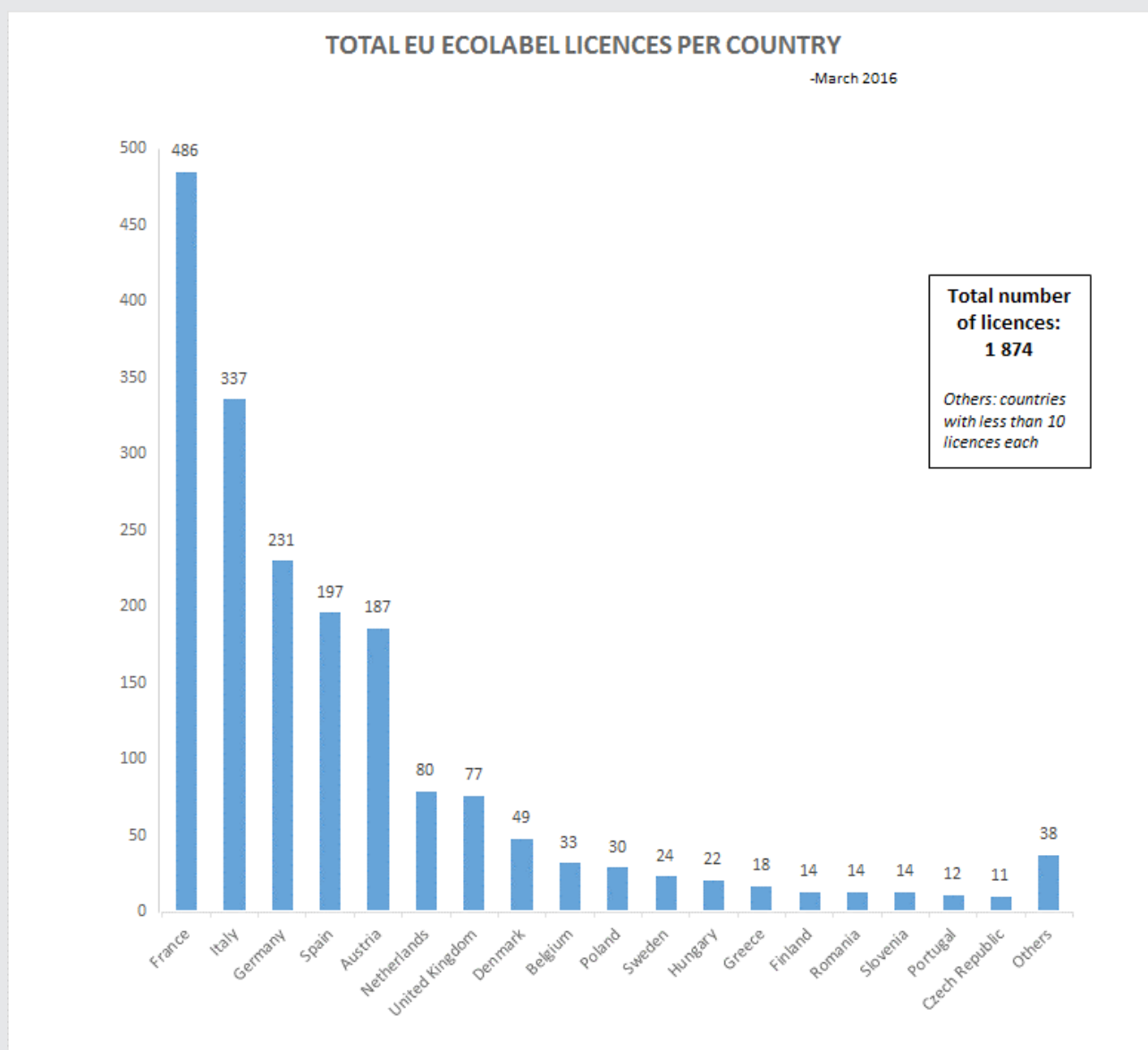
[o"Four Tips on How to Find an Eco-Friendly Hotel" by Huffington Post!](#)

## What is new on the EU Ecolabel Website?

- The [Facts and Figure Page](#)
- The [Factsheet for soil improvers, growing media and mulch](#)

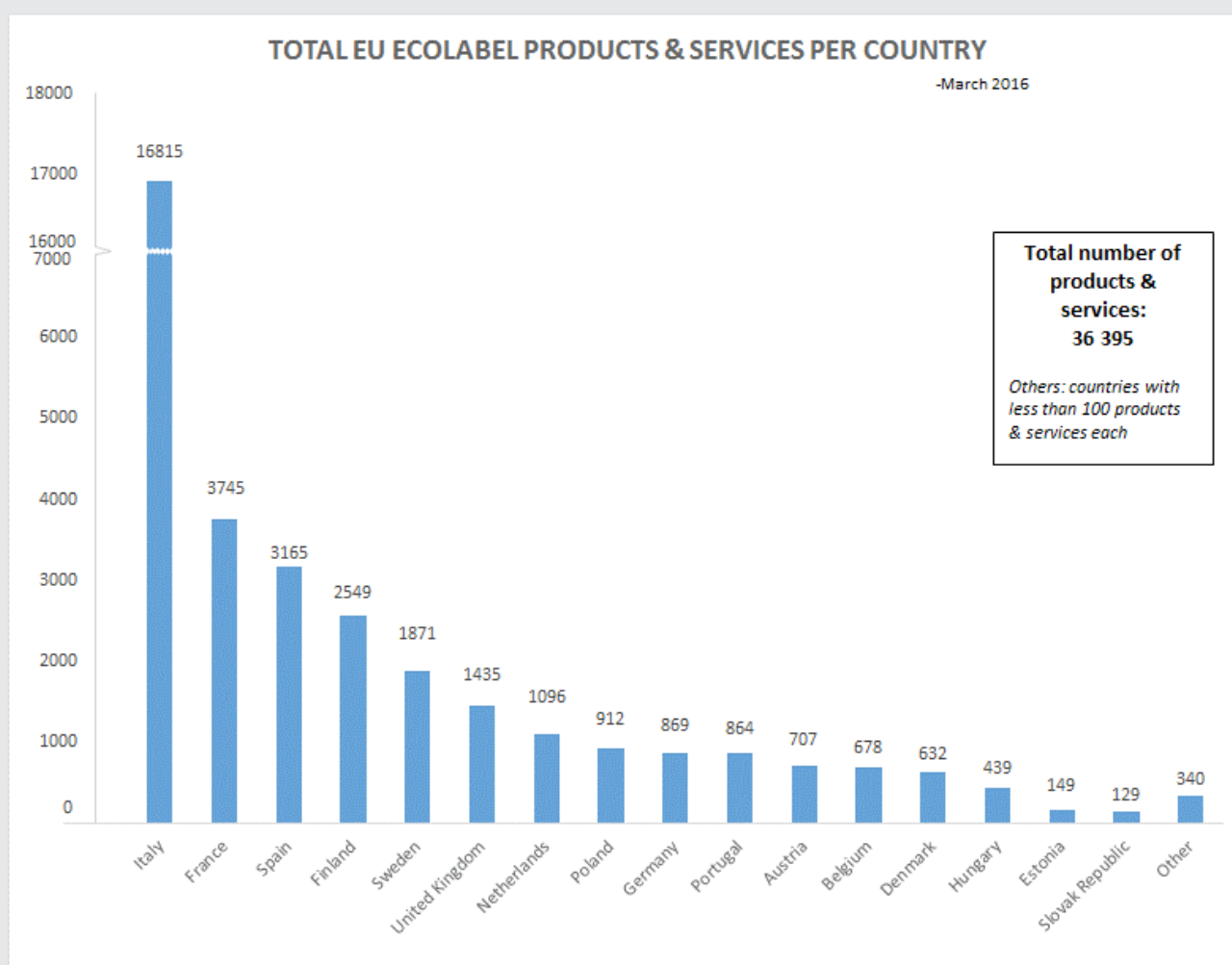
# Facts and figures

These statistics represent the current number of total valid licences and products and services. Readers can now compare the licence and product/service trends from the last four reporting periods, in September 2014, March 2015, September 2015, and March 2016, giving a clearer picture of the advancement of the EU Ecolabel. Updates on statistical trends will be made twice per year, coinciding with the publication of EU Ecolabel News Alert Special Editions. These figures are based off of Competent Bodies' internal data, with licences under application or renewal process not taken into account. Access the [Facts and Figures](#) page for statistics on the evolution of licences and products/services since September 2014.



*Specificities on the reporting period: Iceland and Croatia have not awarded any EU Ecolabel licences.*

These statistics represent the current number of total valid products. These figures are based off of Competent Bodies' internal data.



*Specificities on the reporting period:  
Iceland and Croatia have not awarded any EU Ecolabel products or services.*

## Product/service group calendar

### First semester 2016 - First semester 2018

The following tables outline planned adoptions for new and revised product/service group criteria for 2016-2018. Information in the below tables are subject to modification at any given time.

New Product/Service Groups	Scheduled Adoption	Comments
<b>Growing media, soil improvers and mulch</b>	18 November 2015 (find criteria <a href="#">here</a> )	The two former PGs, "growing media" and "soil improvers" have merged and the scope has been broadened to include mulch.

<b>New Product/Service Groups</b>	<b>Scheduled Adoption</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Cleaning Services</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Product/Service Group Revision</b>	<b>Scheduled Adoption</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Television</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Portable Computers / Notebook Computers</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2016	Laptops will be merged with PCs
<b>Wooden Furniture</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2016	The scope has been enlarged to Furniture
<b>Footwear</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2016	Already voted, the adoption is expected by the end of 2016
<b>Wooden Floor Coverings</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 2016	Already voted, the adoption is expected by the end of 2016
<b>Tourist Accommodation Services and Campsite Services</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester 2016	Criteria for CS and TAS have been merged, the adoption is expected by the end of 2016
<b>All-Purpose Cleaners and Sanitary Cleaners</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Detergents for Dishwashers</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Industrial and Institutional Automatic Dishwasher Detergents</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Hand Dishwashing Detergents</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Laundry Detergents</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Industrial and Institutional Laundry Detergents</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	Ongoing revision, the vote is expected in November 2016
<b>Copying and graphic paper</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2017	
<b>Newsprint paper</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2018	
<b>Tissue paper</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Semester 2018	

# Agenda

29 September: [Promoting a Circular Economy on Waste Material: The Way Forward](#) – Brussels, Belgium

Promoting The Circular Economy Concept can be a practical solution to the planet's emerging resource problems. The ambitious scheme of this concept contemplates to minimise the generation of waste and maintain the value of products, materials and resources in the economy for as long as possible. The transition to a more circular economy, however, is going to be demanding. This events will look into the benefits and challenges of implementing the Circular Economy Package.

27-28 September: [Global Green Destination Day](#) – Ljubljana, Slovenia

Celebrate World Tourism Day in Ljubljana, European Green Capital 2016, by joining the most prestigious event for green and responsible tourism. The EC will give a presentation and a stand on recently voted criteria on Tourist accommodation services.

27-30 September: [ITC Trade for Sustainable Development](#) – Geneva, Switzerland

The third annual Trade for Sustainable Development Forum is focused on the leading events focused on how voluntary sustainability standards can support sustainable value chains – from farmers and producers, to big businesses, polycymakers and consumers.

18-20 October: [GEN Annual General Meeting](#) – Kyiv, Ukraine

The Ukrainian Centre for Environmental Certification and Labelling will be hosting the 2016 GEN Annual General Meeting this. This meeting and related events will be held in Kiev in the Ukraine, and are scheduled in conjunction with the opening of the International Forum GREEN MIND. Within the framework of the event EC will give a presentation on EU Ecolabel and the EU Circular Economy Strategy.

26-28 October: [Local Renewables Conference 2016](#) – Freiburg, Germany and Basel, Switzerland

In the face of rapidly growing global energy needs, the EU Energy Union recognises the importance of cities and regions in making energy more secure, affordable and sustainable. At a time when European cities are searching for innovative ways of meeting energy demands while responding to citizens' needs, the conference will address key opportunities and challenges.

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