

# Global resource consumption tops 100 bn tonnes for first time

21 January 2020, by Marlowe Hood



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The world is using up more than 100 billion tonnes of natural resources per year for the first time ever while global recycling of raw materials has fallen, according to a report released Tuesday.

The share of minerals, [fossil fuels](#), metals and biomass feeding into the global economy that is reused declined in two years from an already paltry 9.1 percent to 8.6 today, the Circularity Gap Report 2020 found.

"No country is meeting the basic needs of its citizens while also operating within the physical boundaries of our planet," said Marc de Wit, a director at the non-profit Circle Economy and lead author of the report.

The resources fuelling the [world economy](#) increased more than eight percent in just two years from 93 billion tonnes in 2015 to 100.6 billion in 2017, the last year for which data is available.

Since 1970, the human population has doubled, the [global economy](#) has grown fourfold, and trade has expanded tenfold, a trajectory that—in the absence of widespread recycling—relentlessly pushes up the demand for energy and resources.

Global use of materials is projected to balloon to 170-184 billion tonnes by mid-century, the report said.

## Exporting waste

"Our current economic and financial systems are driving unsustainable consumption, and degrading the natural environment," said Cristianne Close, head of WWF Markets Practice.



Wealthy nations, the authors note, consume 10 times more resources per person than in the developing world, and produce far more waste

To improve living standards—especially in [low-income countries](#)—while also protecting ecosystems that provide [clear water](#), air and soil, the world must vastly boost the share of recycled natural resources, the authors said.

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Rich countries must "take responsibility for the impact of their imports and exports," the report said. Much of what they consume comes from less [developed nations](#), while much of their waste is exported, it noted.

China—which recently banned most solid waste imports, forcing the United States, Britain and Japan in particular to scramble for other disposal solutions—has become a leader among middle-income nations in industrial-scale recycling.

"China, for instance, has pioneered eco-industrial parks where the waste of one business becomes the feedstock for another," the report notes.

In poorer countries, such as India, "recycling rates are high as waste can provide a valuable source of revenue for informal workers."

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APA citation: Global resource consumption tops 100 bn tonnes for first time (2020, January 21) retrieved 27 September 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-global-resource-consumption-tops-bn.html>

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