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MANUFACTURING, CONSTRUCTION AND RETAIL

3D printing's post-pandemic potential; the complete report

The growth of 3D printing plunged in 2020 due to the Covid-19 recession. But the experienced vulnerability of supply chains and the economic recovery could be catalysts for a rebound. We expect growth to recover to 25-30%, slightly higher than in the years before Covid-19. We don't expect 3D printing to be applicable for mass production any time soon



The potential of 3D printing was recently shown in Amsterdam with this 3D-printed bridge, opened by Queen Maxima in July 2021

Executive summary

3D printing is back in the spotlight

3D printing caught quite some attention half a decade ago. In our 2017 report, we discussed the possibilities of the technology and its consequences for world trade. Now that 3D printing has come to the rescue in some markets where Covid-19 has caused supply shortages, the technology is attracting attention once again. This report is a follow-up to our 2017 study look at the development of 3D printing in recent years. As for its future, specific attention is given to the short and longer-term effects of the pandemic on the outlook for the 3D printing business.

The outlook

3D printing is the dominant production technique in some niche markets, but to become a widely used method in manufacturing, further technological breakthroughs are needed to drive down costs. There is no sign of that happening soon. But other drivers of growth make us believe that 3D printing could make up 5% of all manufactured products around 2040.

The effect on global trade

3D printing is a threat to world trade but its impact is still limited. The share of 3D printed goods in global manufacturing could rise to 5% over the next two decades. That is a significant increase from the current share of 0.1%, but much lower than in the two scenarios in our 2017 report. The effect on world trade is more subdued as well, at -4.5%. This implies, on average, 0.2 percentage points less trade growth per year towards 2040.

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