

# International trade in goods by economic sector

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in October 2023*

*Planned article update: October 2024*

**" In the EU, in 2021, the number of importers and exporters in 'wholesale and retail trade' were more than those in 'industry', especially for imports. "**

**" In the EU, in 2021, the value of imports and exports of goods was higher in 'industry' than in 'wholesale and retail trade' especially for exports."**

International [trade in goods](#) statistics play a vital role in the assessment of an economy. Combining them with additional information from other sources, particularly business statistics, significantly enriches them; providing a closer view of traders and their characteristics such as size, sector of [economic activity](#) or level of concentration. This allows for a deeper analysis of the impact of trade on employment, production and [value added](#) , which is essential in a globalised world where economies are increasingly interconnected.

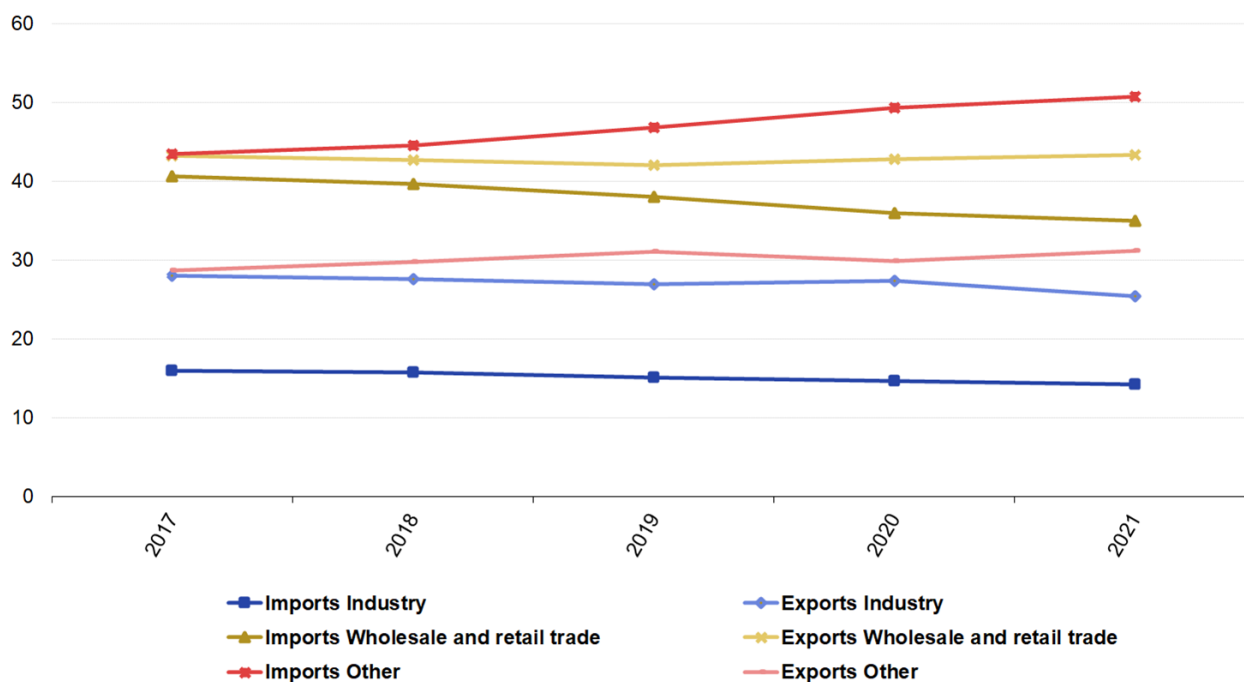
This article focusses on trade in the [EU Member States](#) , comparing 'industry' ( [NACE sections](#) B, C, D and E) with 'wholesale and retail trade' (NACE section G). Firstly, we will take a look at total trade and then, separately, at intra-EU and extra-EU trade.

## **Declining share of number of enterprises in both 'industry' and 'wholesale and retail trade'**

Figure 1 shows the share by main economic category of the number of enterprises in the EU importing and exporting goods. For importing enterprises, in both 'industry' and 'wholesale and retail trade', the share of number of enterprises declined slowly over time while the share in 'other' (agriculture, construction and service related enterprises) increased. For exporting enterprises the share for 'industry' decreased, for 'other' it increased while for 'wholesale and retail trade', after an initial decline between 2017 and 2019, bounced back in 2020 and 2021 ending at the same share as in 2017.

## Number of enterprises by main economic sectors, EU, 2017 - 2021

(% of enterprises with known economic sectors)



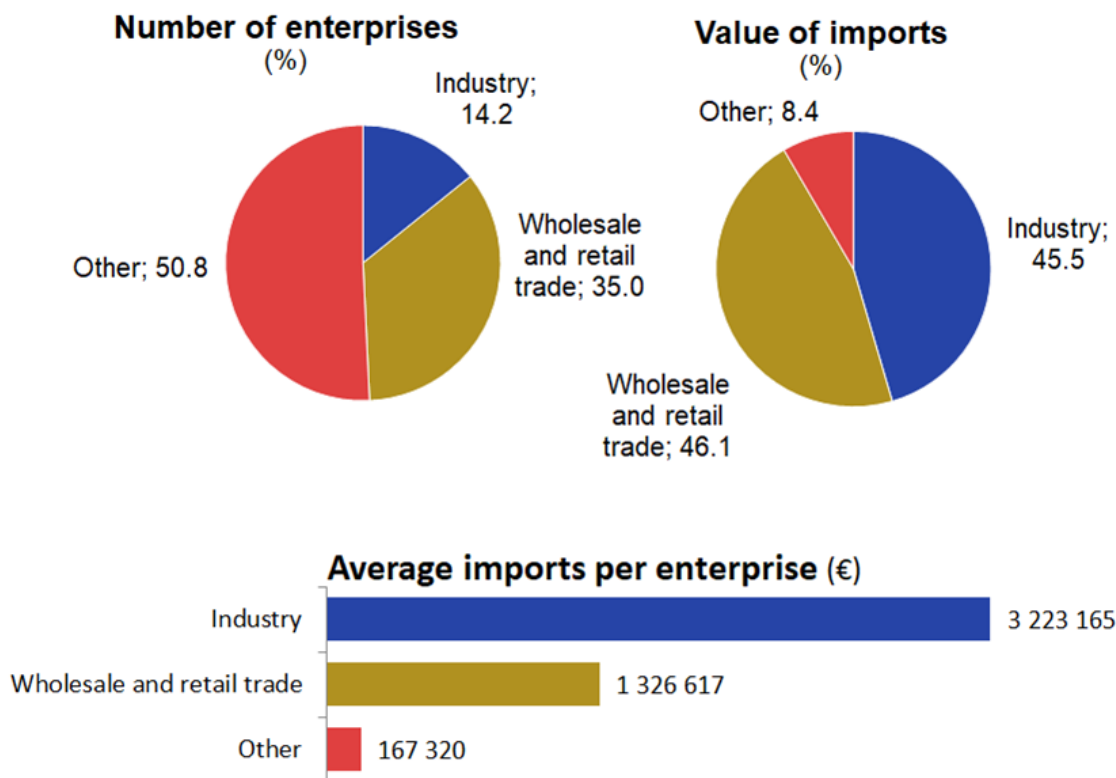
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations.

eurostat

**Figure 1: Number\_of\_enterprises\_by\_main\_economic\_sectors\_EU\_2014\_-\_2021 (%) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)**

While 'industry' in 2021 had only a 14.2 % share in the number of importing enterprises its share in value of imports (45.5 %) was much higher (Figure 2). The opposite was true for 'other', having the highest share in the number of importing enterprises (50.8 %) but the lowest share in value of imports (8.4 %). The share of 'wholesale and retail trade' in the number of importing enterprises (35.0 %) was lower than the share in value of imports (46.1 %).

# EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021



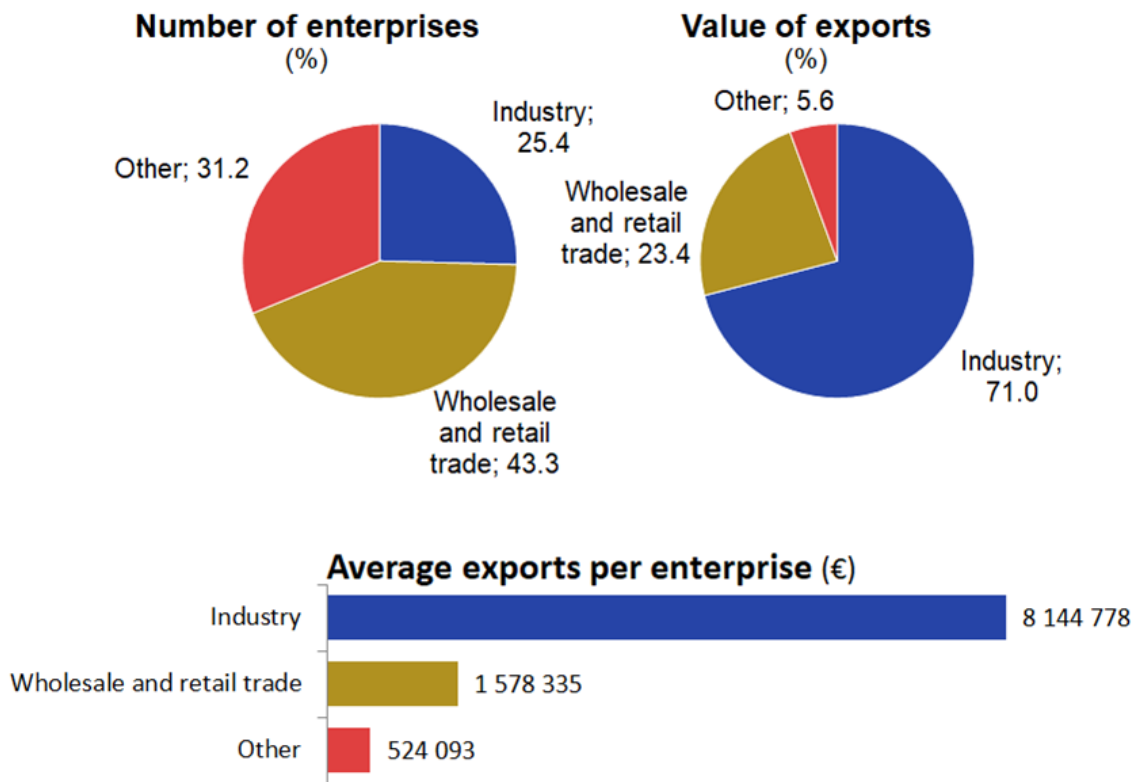
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations.



**Figure 2: EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021** Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

For exports in 2021, 'industry' had the smallest share in the number of enterprises (25.4 %) although it was almost double the share of 'industry' imports (14.2 %). 'Wholesale and retail trade' had the highest share in the number of enterprises, accounting for 43.3 % of the number of enterprises. However, when measured in value, 'industry' dominates exports with 71.0 % of all exports.

# EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations.



**Figure 3: EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021** Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

Regarding imports in 2021, among the three economic sectors shown in Table 1, 'industry' had the lowest share in the number of enterprises in all EU Member States. Whereas, measured in value of imports, in 13 EU Member States 'industry' had the highest share while 'wholesale and retail trade' had the highest share in the other 14 EU Member States.

## Enterprises importing goods by economic sector, 2021

(%)

	Number of enterprises			Value of imports		
	Industry	Wholesale and retail trade	Other	Industry	Wholesale and retail trade	Other
EU	14.2	35.0	50.7	43.6	44.2	8.1
Belgium	7.9	24.9	67.3	41.7	43.9	14.4
Bulgaria	15.3	44.7	39.9	44.3	50.2	5.5
Czechia	27.5	44.2	28.3	55.5	39.3	5.2
Denmark	14.7	43.6	40.5	28.6	61.9	9.3
Germany	15.5	35.8	48.7	52.4	40.3	7.3
Estonia	15.0	37.6	47.4	10.7	55.7	33.7
Ireland	12.8	35.9	51.3	40.8	36.0	23.2
Greece	19.9	53.8	26.3	50.9	42.7	6.5
Spain	13.1	36.7	50.2	48.4	47.0	4.6
France	17.1	47.2	35.7	46.3	43.9	9.8
Croatia	25.7	38.6	35.6	39.3	53.1	7.6
Italy	17.0	35.8	47.2	50.7	45.5	3.8
Cyprus	10.0	46.6	43.0	15.2	58.7	26.0
Latvia	15.3	36.3	48.4	25.1	62.0	12.9
Lithuania	15.2	45.3	39.5	41.0	52.7	6.3
Luxembourg	6.1	38.1	54.4	28.0	55.3	16.3
Hungary	15.4	34.1	50.5	60.8	34.1	5.2
Malta	13.4	44.6	41.9	13.4	44.6	41.9
Netherlands	8.7	33.2	58.2	29.5	48.8	21.7
Austria	10.9	28.1	61.0	46.5	47.4	6.1
Poland	19.9	38.0	42.1	51.9	43.4	4.6
Portugal	12.1	37.1	50.8	48.3	46.2	5.5
Romania	14.8	36.8	48.5	47.2	42.4	10.4
Slovenia	19.6	27.3	53.0	56.2	38.6	5.3
Slovakia	16.3	27.7	56.0	58.4	27.9	13.7
Finland	13.1	26.9	59.9	44.8	48.1	7.1
Sweden	11.7	31.0	56.7	37.8	52.5	9.1
Iceland	6.2	15.8	78.0	30.8	54.2	15.0
Norway	11.1	33.6	54.9	32.5	55.2	12.2
Switzerland	19.2	27.6	52.9	53.3	30.6	16.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	27.9	45.9	26.3	40.4	55.1	4.6
Serbia	29.0	41.6	29.4	49.1	42.4	8.5
Türkiye	30.4	42.4	27.2	58.6	30.0	11.3

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat 

**Table 1: Enterprises importing goods by economic sector, 2021 (%) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)**

Regarding exports in 2021, among the three economic categories shown in Table 2, in most (20 out of 27) EU Member States, 'wholesale and retail trade' had the highest share in the number of enterprises. Measured in value of exports in most EU Member States (24 out of 27), 'industry' had the highest share.

## Enterprises exporting goods by economic sector, 2021

(%)

	Number of enterprises			Value of exports		
	Industry	Wholesale and retail trade	Other	Industry	Wholesale and retail trade	Other
EU	26.5	42.5	30.9	70.9	22.2	6.8
Belgium	15.5	44.2	40.3	54.8	35.5	9.7
Bulgaria	28.0	49.8	22.2	67.9	30.2	1.9
Czechia	42.6	38.4	19.0	82.0	14.7	3.3
Denmark	21.6	44.6	32.9	59.9	32.3	7.7
Germany	27.2	45.8	27.1	78.2	17.9	3.9
Estonia	23.4	44.2	32.4	56.1	27.0	16.9
Ireland	23.1	40.9	36.0	85.6	8.2	6.2
Greece	30.7	50.2	19.1	72.8	21.8	5.4
Spain	21.3	39.0	39.7	66.1	29.6	4.3
France	21.5	47.8	30.7	74.1	18.5	7.4
Croatia	36.9	38.6	24.6	71.8	20.4	7.8
Italy	41.9	38.9	19.2	80.9	15.9	3.2
Cyprus	14.7	44.4	40.6	26.6	21.8	51.6
Latvia	24.6	45.3	30.1	49.8	42.6	7.5
Lithuania	20.8	50.3	28.8	62.7	32.2	5.1
Luxembourg	10.1	49.9	39.0	48.2	45.6	6.1
Hungary	26.0	42.8	31.2	79.9	17.0	3.1
Malta	20.4	42.4	37.2	20.4	42.4	37.2
Netherlands	13.8	42.0	44.2	39.3	39.4	21.3
Austria	22.4	46.1	31.5	77.4	20.3	2.3
Poland	31.5	43.9	24.4	78.3	18.4	3.2
Portugal	32.4	43.0	24.6	82.5	13.4	4.1
Romania	33.2	40.0	26.8	76.3	13.7	10.0
Slovenia	24.6	31.9	43.5	78.6	18.1	3.3
Slovakia	23.7	33.0	43.3	76.1	10.9	12.9
Finland	28.9	35.6	35.5	81.3	15.9	2.8
Sweden	21.0	38.1	39.4	69.7	24.5	5.1
Iceland	21.0	32.0	47.0	62.6	26.2	11.2
Norway	22.0	38.0	39.7	86.5	6.6	6.9
Switzerland	29.2	37.2	33.5	82.2	12.1	5.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	49.9	31.5	18.6	89.4	7.6	3.0
Serbia	49.9	32.7	17.4	84.6	12.5	2.9
Türkiye	40.2	47.2	12.6	56.1	41.0	3.0

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat 

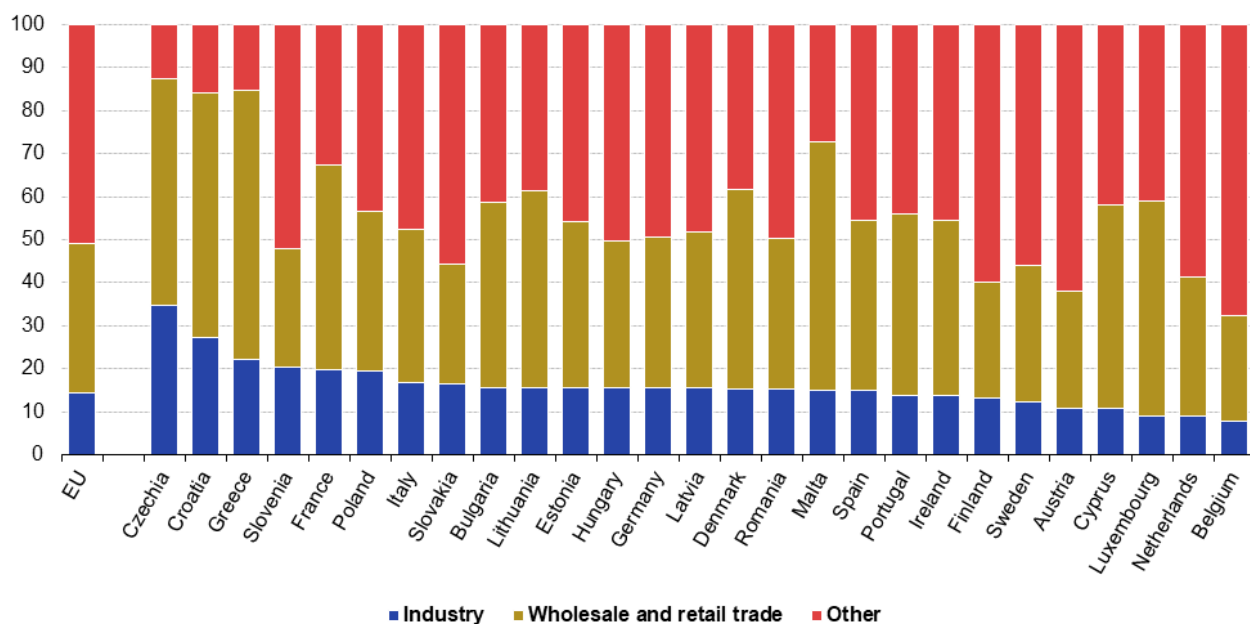
Table 2: Enterprises exporting goods by economic sector, 2021 (%) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

### Intra-EU trade by economic sector

Figures 4 to 7 show shares in the number of enterprises and trade value of enterprises trading with other EU Member States (intra-EU trade). It is interesting to compare Figure 4, showing the shares in the number of importing enterprises, with Figure 5, showing the shares in the value of imports. Regarding 'industry' in 2021, the share in the number of enterprises was highest in Czechia, Croatia and Greece. However, the share in value was considerably higher in Czechia (54 %) than in Croatia (34 %) and Greece (32 %).

Regarding 'wholesale and retail trade' in 2021, Greece had the highest share in the number of importing enterprises (63 %), and the fifth highest share in value of imports (61 %). Only Denmark (68 %), Cyprus (67 %), Latvia (66 %), Lithuania and Estonia (both 62 %) had higher shares in value of imports.

### Intra-EU imports of goods by economic sector (% of number of importing enterprises, 2021)

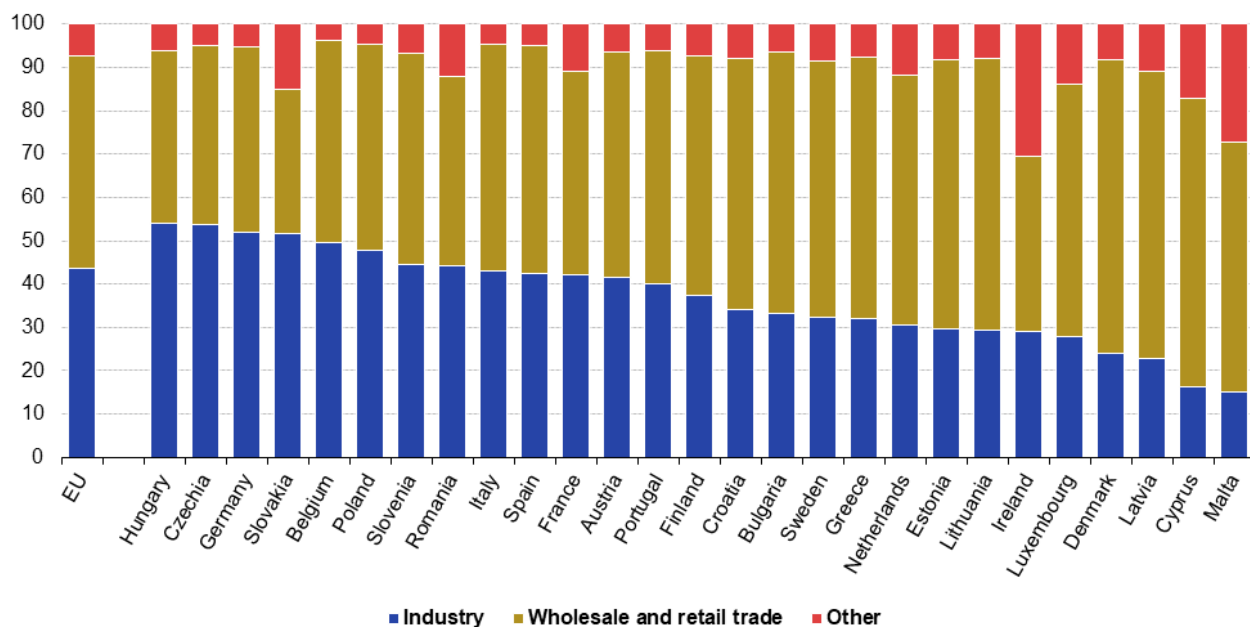


Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

**Figure 4: Intra-EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of number of importing enterprises)**  
Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

### Intra-EU imports of goods by economic sector (% of import value, 2021)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

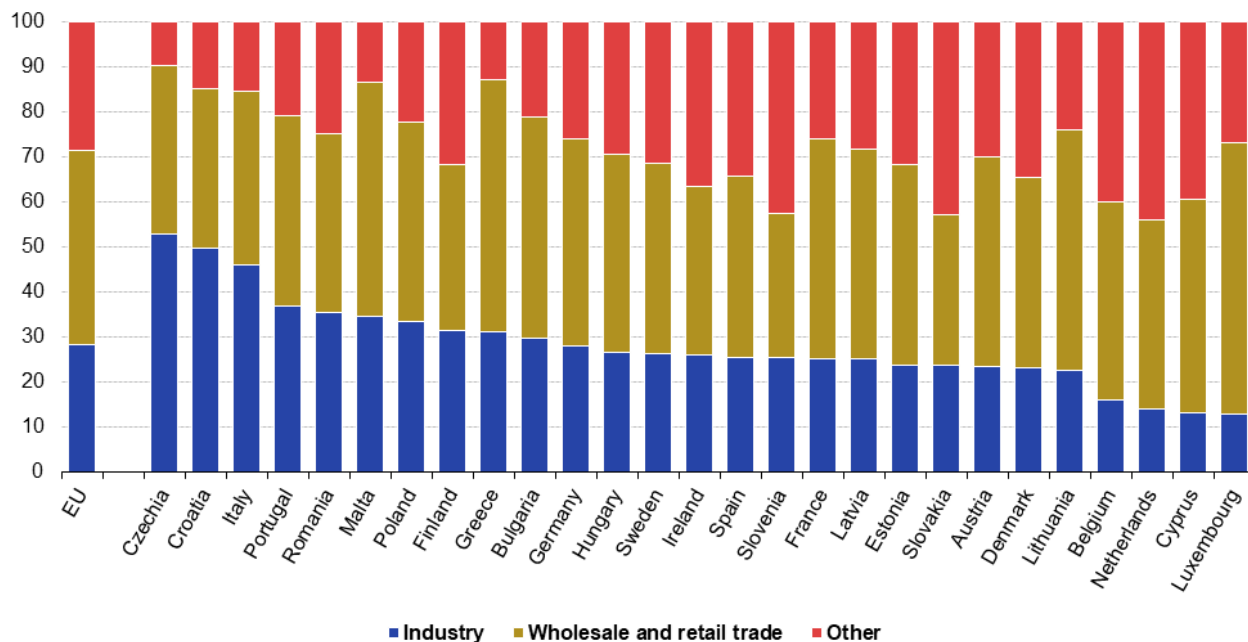
**Figure 5: Intra-EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of import value)** Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

Similar comparisons for intra-EU exports can be made by comparing Figure 6, showing the shares in the number of exporting enterprises, with Figure 7, showing the shares in the value of exports. Regarding 'industry' in 2021, the share in the number of enterprises was above 50 % only in Czechia (53 %) and Croatia (50 %) while shares in the export value of enterprises were above 50 % in 21 EU Member States.

Regarding 'wholesale and retail trade' Luxembourg (60 %) had the highest share in the number of exporting enterprises and the second highest in the value of exports (50 %) behind Malta (52 %), whose share in number of enterprises was 52 %.

### Intra-EU exports of goods by economic sector

(% of number of exporting enterprises, 2021)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

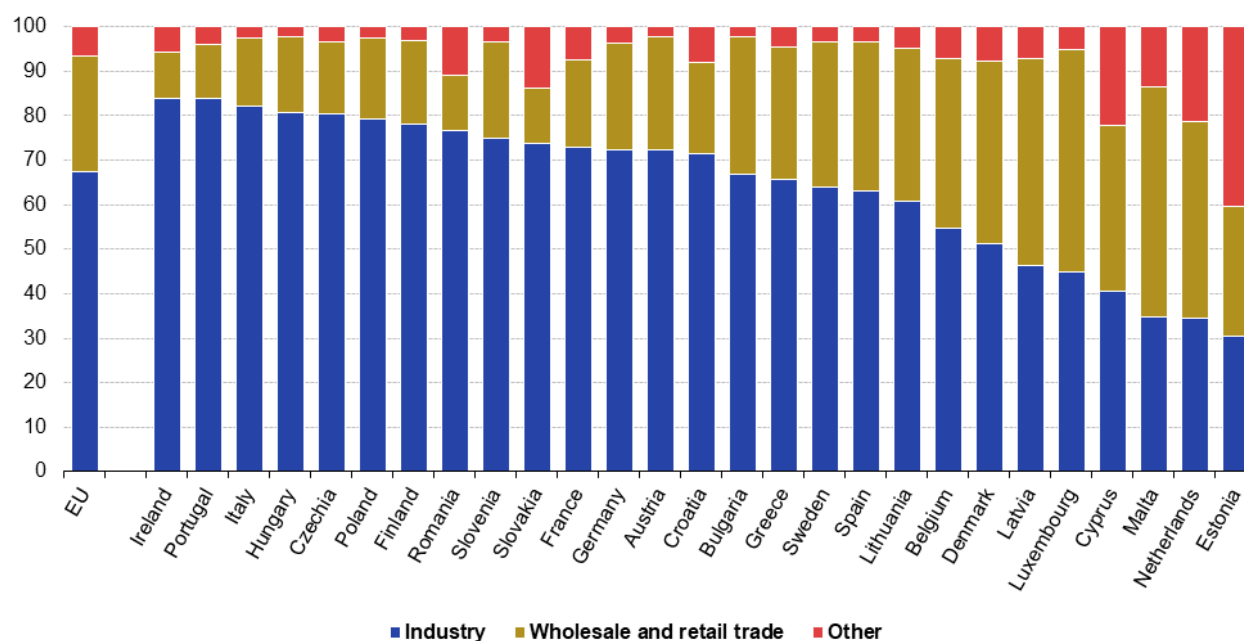
eurostat

**Figure 6: Intra-EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of number of exporting enterprises) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)**



## Intra-EU exports of goods by economic sector

(% of export value, 2021)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

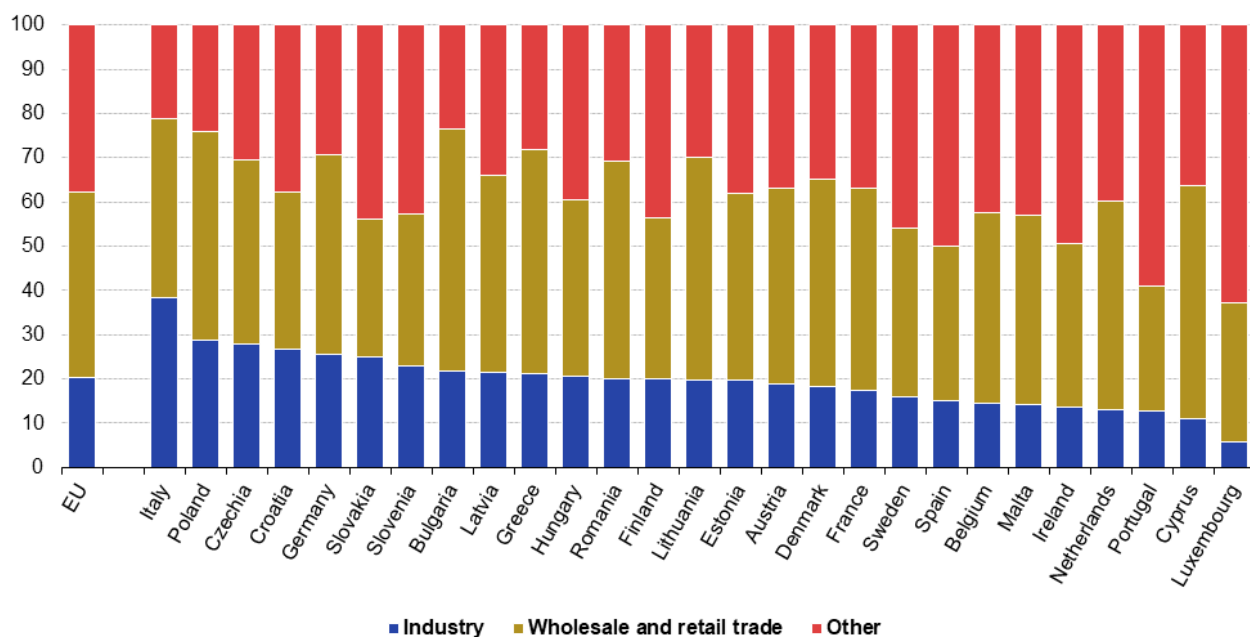
**Figure 7: Intra-EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of export value) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)**

## Extra-EU trade by economic sector

Figures 8 to 11 show shares in the number of enterprises and trade value of enterprises trading with other countries outside the EU (extra-EU trade). In extra-EU imports in 2021, comparing Figure 8 (share in number of importing enterprises) with Figure 9 (value of imports) shows Italy (38 %) had the highest share of importing enterprises in 'industry'. In value of imports in 'industry', Italy had only the ninth highest share (62 %) well below the highest share held by Slovakia (81 %).

Regarding 'wholesale and retail trade' in 2021, Bulgaria (55 %) had the highest share in number of importing enterprises but ranked only 17th for its share in value of imports (34 %). Latvia (51 %) and Denmark (50 %) were the only EU Member States where more than half of imports were in 'wholesale and retail trade'.

### Extra-EU imports of goods by economic sector (% of number of importing enterprises)

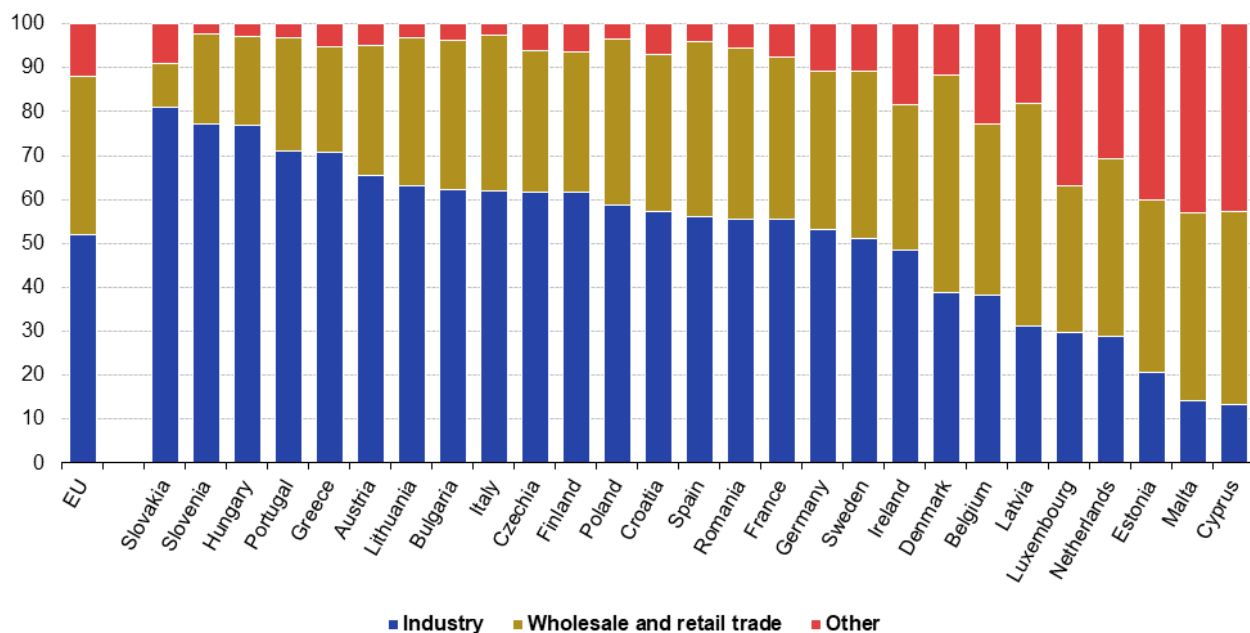


Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

Figure 8: Extra-EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of number of importing enterprises) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

### Extra-EU imports of goods by economic sector (% of import value, 2021)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

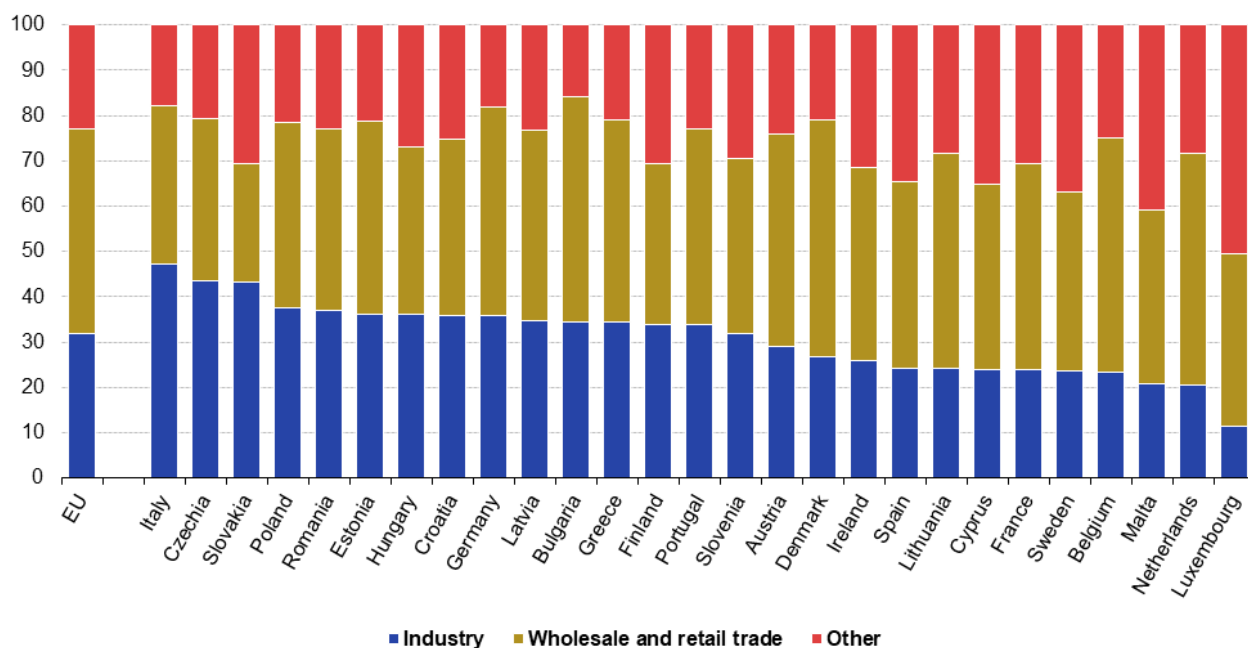
Figure 9: Extra-EU imports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of import value) Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

Regarding extra-EU exports (Figures 10 and 11) in 'industry' in 2021, Italy had the highest share in the number of exporting enterprises (47 %) but only the ninth largest share in value of exports (79 %). By contrast, Austria had the highest share in value of exports (89 %) but only the 16th largest share in number of enterprises (29 %). Czechia had the second largest share in number of enterprises (44 %) as well as in value of imports (89 %).

Regarding 'wholesale and retail trade' in 2021, the Denmark and Belgium had the highest share in the number of exporting enterprises (both 52 %). Belgium was ranked third for share in value of exports (31 %) and Denmark ninth (22 %) . Malta had the highest share in value of exports (38 %) but was ranked only 21st for the share in number of enterprises (38 %).

### Extra-EU exports of goods by economic sector

(% of number of exporting enterprises, 2021)

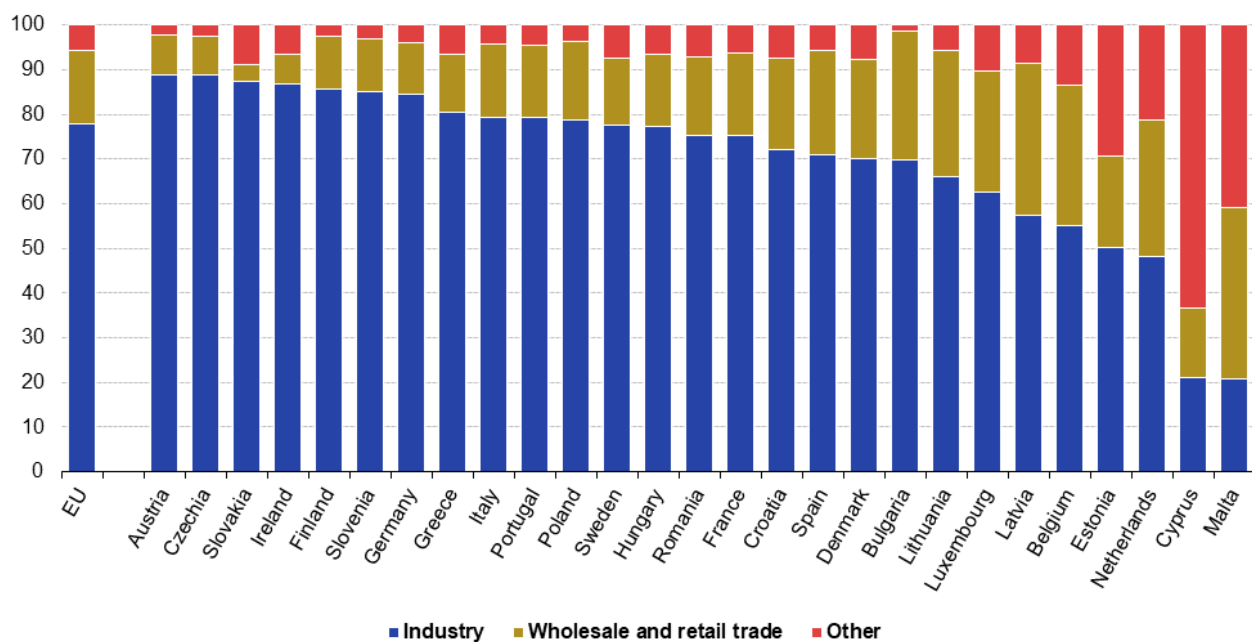


Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations



**Figure 10: Extra-EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of number of exporting enterprises)**  
 Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

## Extra-EU exports of goods by economic sector (% of export value, 2021)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_tec01) and Eurostat estimations

eurostat

**Figure 11: Extra-EU exports of goods by economic sector, 2021 (% of export value)** Source: Eurostat (ext\_tec01)

### Source data for tables and graphs

- [Graphs and tables](#)

### Data sources

The reporting of international trade in goods statistics by enterprise characteristics consists of data collection independent of the monthly trade in goods statistics. This data collection has been included in the revised [Intrastat](#) (respectively Extrastat) Regulations published in 2009 that came into force for the reference year 2009 (respectively 2010) onwards.

The compilation of trade flows (exports and imports) by enterprise characteristics is based on linking micro-data on intra- and extra-EU trade with structural information from business registers. The trade value of each trader, by product code and partner country, is combined with the main enterprise characteristics (economic activity and number of employees) retrieved from the business registers. Only aggregated results (i.e. no micro-data) are provided to [Eurostat](#). Confidentiality is applied in the statistics disseminated to ensure that it is not possible to identify an enterprise or a trader.

### Definitions

#### Trade value

The value of traded goods is calculated at the national border, on a **FOB** basis (free on board) for exports and a **CIF** (cost, insurance, freight) basis for imports. Hence, only incidental expenses (freight, insurance) are included and they are incurred for:

- exports in the part of the journey located on the territory of the EU Member State where the goods are exported from;
- imports in the part of the journey located outside the territory of the EU Member State where the goods are imported to.

### Number of enterprises

The number of enterprises consists of a count of the number of enterprises involved in trade during at least a part of the reference period. For intra-EU trade, VAT data are used to estimate the number of traders and the trade value of the smallest traders exempt from Intrastat reporting. These traders account for a limited share of the trade value but in terms of number of enterprises represent the majority.

### Number of employees

The number of employees refers to the number of those persons who work for an employer and who have a contract of employment and receive compensation in the form of wages, salaries, fees, gratuities, piecework pay or remuneration in kind. A worker is considered a wage or salary earner of a particular unit if he/she receives a wage or salary from the unit regardless of where the work is done (in or outside the production unit).

To determine the enterprise size classes, the number of employees is used. The intention is to use the situation at the end of year (including seasonally active units). As the end date approach is not harmonised, the annual average can also be used as reference calculated for a certain period.

### Statistical unit

The statistical unit is the enterprise. However, the enterprise concept has not yet been implemented by all the reporting countries. When the enterprise concept has not yet been implemented, reporting countries use the legal unit as an approximation of the statistical unit. More information is available in the [metadata file](#) (points 3.5 and 15.1).

**Legal unit** and **enterprise** are defined as follows:

- The **legal unit** is a part of the legal and administrative world. Only a legal unit may enter into contracts, be an owner of a property, rights or goods (i.e. production factors). However, a legal unit does not always reflect an economic activity. This is because a legal unit is a construct of law and administration.
- The **enterprise** is the smallest combination of legal units that is an organisational unit producing goods or services, which benefits from a certain degree of autonomy in decision making, especially for the allocation of its current resources. An enterprise carries out one or more activities at one or more locations. It may also be a sole legal unit.

The Business Register Regulation establishes a link between the business registers and the registers of intra- and extra-EU trade operators through a common unit of reference, namely the legal unit. The same regulation also defines the link between the legal unit and the enterprise. Via the legal unit, trade in goods data can then be linked to enterprise characteristics available in the Business Register such as the economic activity or the number of employees.

## Context

International trade in goods statistics play a vital role in the assessment of every economy. By combining these statistics with additional information on characteristics of enterprises involved in international trade, such as the size and the sector of economic activity, trade data are significantly enhanced. Generally speaking, trade statistics show movements of goods between countries by goods categories. However, they do not provide explicit information on the businesses that are behind these trade flows. In a globalised world where economies are increasingly interconnected, it is more and more important to know traders and their characteristics. This requires linking trade statistics with other sources, particularly with business statistics, which describe the structure and evaluation of the activities of businesses.

International trade in goods by enterprise characteristics is a statistical domain, which, unlike traditional trade statistics, aims at describing the structure of trade by characteristics of the trading enterprises, for instance, by their

economic activities, their size or concentration of trade. It is based on linking trade micro-data with business register information, allowing a deeper analysis of the impact of trade on employment, production and value added.

## Other articles

- [International trade in goods](#)

## Dedicated section

[International trade in goods - dedicated section](#)

## Database

[International trade in goods - database](#)

## Methodology

[International trade in goods - methodology](#)

## Data visualisations

- [Top 5 partners in trade in goods](#)

## Legislation

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 222/2009](#) of 11 March 2009 amending [Regulation \(EC\) No 638/2004](#) on Community statistics relating to the trading of goods between EU Member States
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 471/2009](#) of 6 May 2009 on Community statistics relating to international trade with non-member countries and repealing [Regulation \(EC\) No 1172/95](#)
- [Summaries of EU Legislation: Extrastat: statistics relating to trade with non-EU countries](#)
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 177/2008](#) of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 February 2008, establishing a common framework for Statistical Business Registers is the legal basis for business registers.
- [Summaries for EU Legislation: Business registers for statistical purposes](#)

## External links

- [European Commission - Globalisation](#)

*View this article online at*

*[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Article\\_name](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Article_name)*