

International trade in services

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in December 2025.
Planned article update: December 2026.*

Highlights

In 2024, EU exports of services to non-member countries reached € 1 568 billion, with Ireland recording the highest value (€ 334 billion). In 2024, EU imports of services from non-member countries reached € 1 374 billion, with Ireland recording the highest value (€ 356 billion). In 2024, the United States was the EU's largest trading partner for exports and imports of services, followed by United Kingdom.

This article describes the major developments of international trade in services in the [European Union \(EU\)](#), and the EU Member States. Furthermore, it provides information about the EU's main trading partners for services.

General overview

Services play an important role in all modern economies. A resilient tertiary service sector, as well as increased availability of services, may boost economic growth and enhance industrial performance. In an increasingly globalised world, services such as finance, insurance, transport, logistics and communications deliver key intermediate inputs and thereby provide crucial support to the rest of the economy.

Figure 1 presents the year-to-year development of the sum of exports and imports for the EU's transactions of goods and services with non-member countries (in other words, trade outside of the EU, also known as extra-EU trade), for the years 2001 to 2024; these data are based on quarterly balance of payments statistics. During this period, the EU's volume of services transactions with non-member countries increased each year with the exception of 2003, 2009 and 2020. 2009 is the year in which the global financial and economic crisis was at its peak and the EU's transactions in services fell by 8.3%. The significant dip in 2020 by 10.1% was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures. The EU volume of services trade increased again in 2021 by 11.1%, as well as in 2022 by 23.7% (largest increase recorded in the entire period), 4.1% in 2023 and 7.5% in 2024.

In the period 2002 to 2024, the EU net surplus of services, in other words the value of exports minus the value of imports, was always positive, with a maximum of € 209 billion in 2022. In the period from 2012 to 2017, growth for the EU's international trade in services was higher than for international trade in goods, this trend reversed in 2018 but returned in 2019. In 2020 services recorded the same drop as goods. In 2021 and 2022 goods recorded a significantly higher growth rate than services. In 2023 and 2024 services recorded a growth while goods dropped significantly.

Annual change in international trade (exports plus imports) with non-member countries (extra-EU), EU, 2001-2024

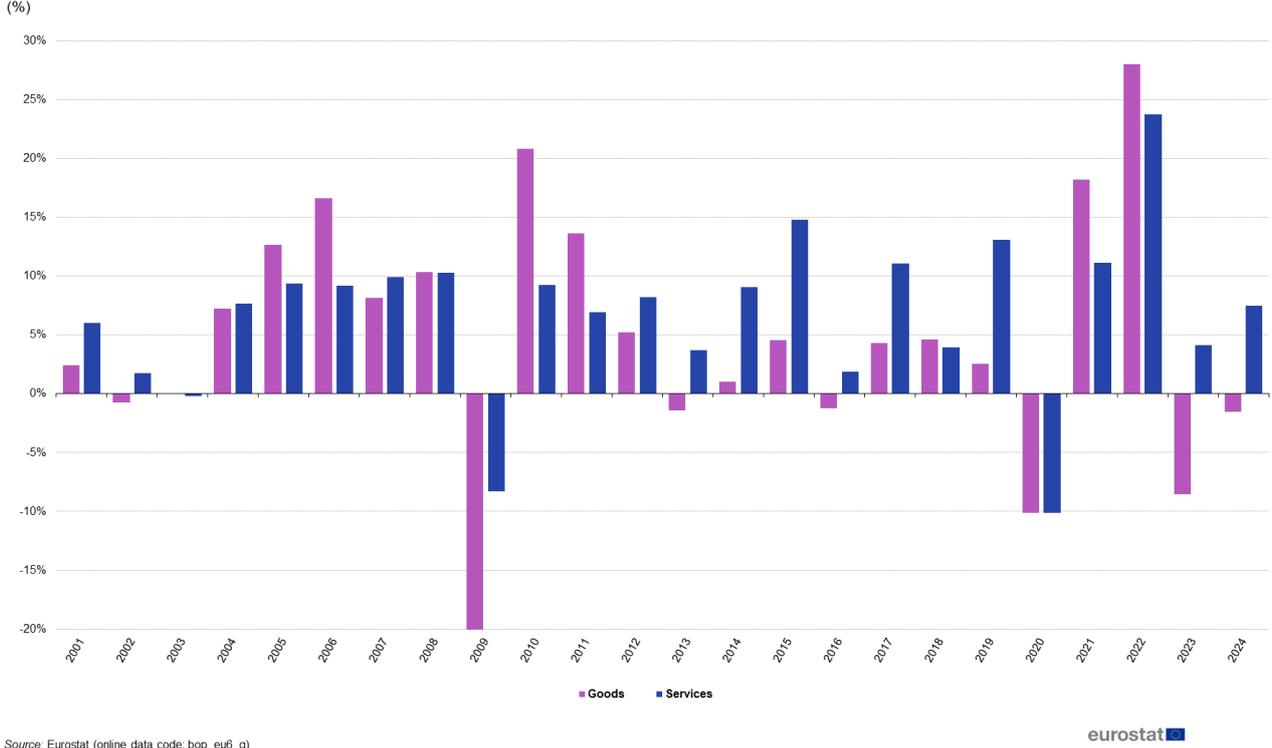
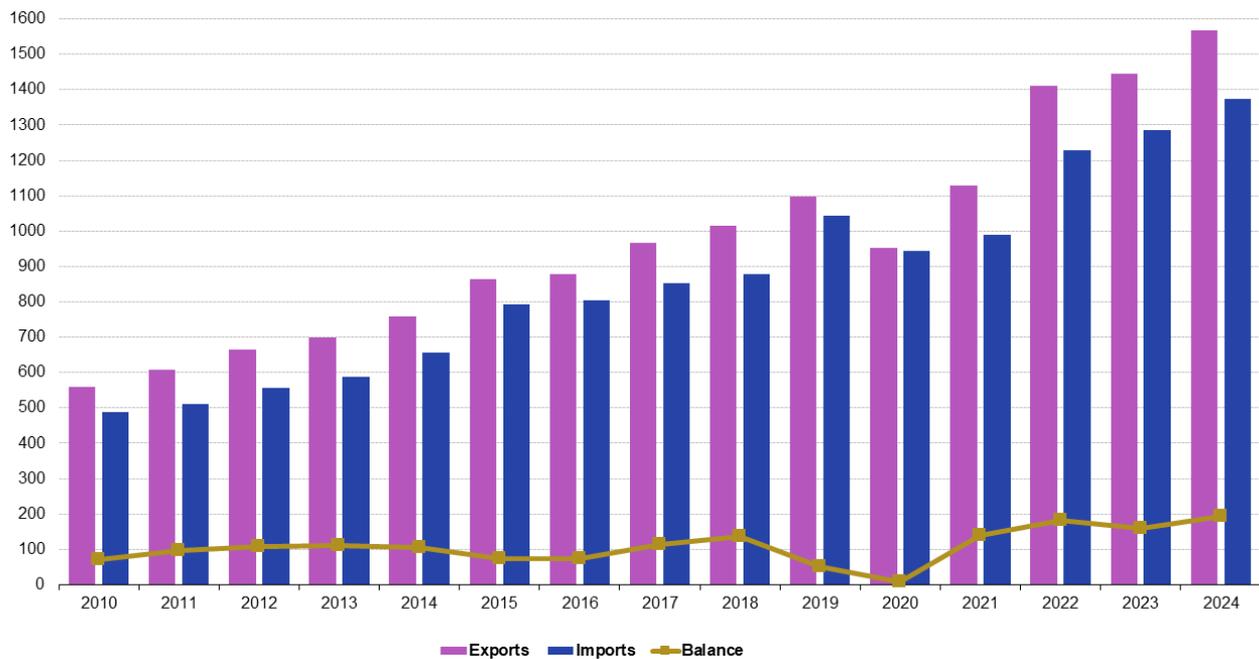


Figure 1: Annual change in international trade (exports plus imports) with non-member countries (extra-EU), EU, 2001-2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_eu6_q)

From 2010 to 2019 the EU’s exports of services to non-member countries increased every year, from € 559 billion in 2010 to € 1 097 billion in 2019. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 exports dropped to € 953 billion but in 2021 exports recovered with € 1 129 billion and reached € 1 568 billion in 2024. During the same period, EU imports of services from non-member countries progressed from € 487 billion in 2010 to € 1 045 billion in 2019, before decreasing to € 945 billion in 2020. In 2021 imports rebounded to 991 billion, reaching € 1 374 billion in 2024 (see Figure 2).

International trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), EU, 2010-2024

(billion euro)



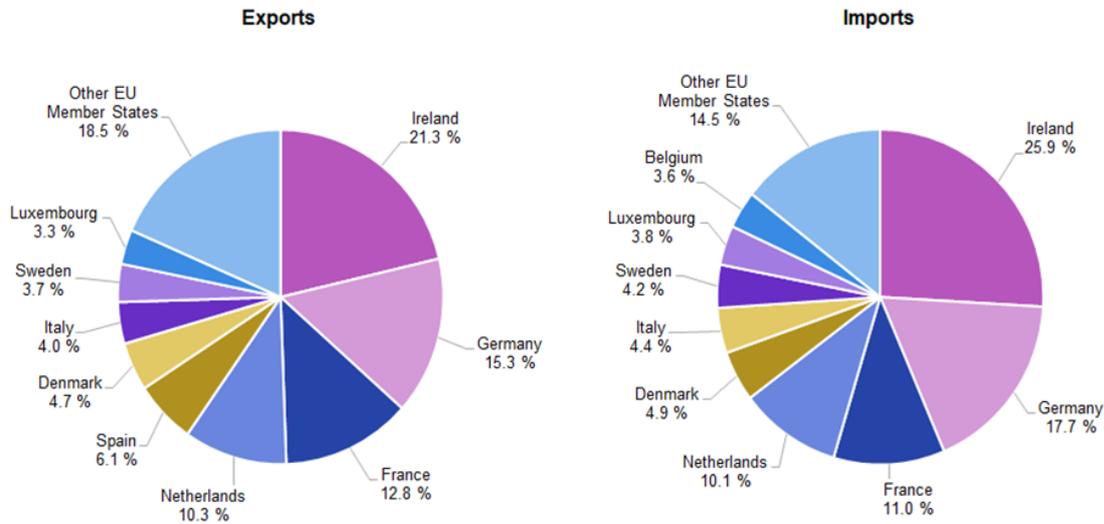
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_its6_tot)

eurostat

Figure 2: International trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), EU, 2010-2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_tot)

The 2024 data show that Ireland was the EU country with the highest value of exports of services to non-member countries, its € 334 billion of exports equivalent to 21.3% of the EU total – see Figure 3. The next highest levels of exports to non-member countries were recorded by Germany (€ 240 billion or 15.3%), France (€ 201 billion or 12.8%) and the Netherlands (€ 161 billion or 10.3%). Ireland had the highest level of services imports from non-member countries with € 356 billion or 25.9% of the EU total; Germany (€ 243 billion or 17.7%), France (€ 151 billion or 11.0%) and the Netherlands (€ 139 billion or 10.1%) followed.

Share of EU Member States in international trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), 2024
 (% of EU total)



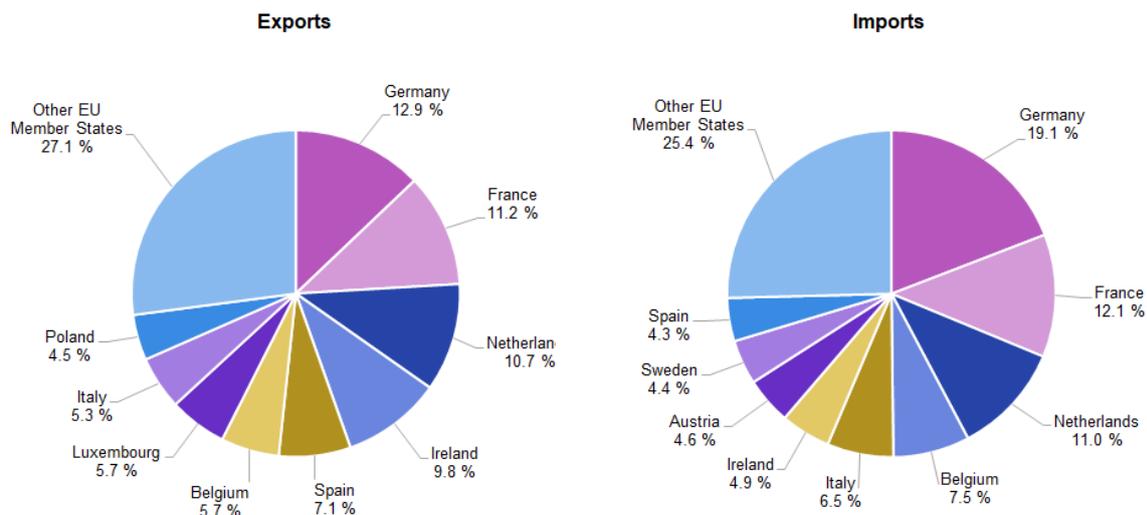
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_its6_det)



Figure 3: Share of EU countries in international trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_tot)

Figure 4 presents the analysis of trade in services between EU countries (intra-EU trade) – rather than with non-member countries. In 2024, Germany recorded the largest value of services exports to other EU countries (€ 195 billion or 12.8%), followed by France (€ 171 billion or 11.2%) and the Netherlands (€ 162 billion or 10.7%). Again Germany was the largest importer of services from other EU countries, with imports valued at € 258 billion or 19.1%, ahead of France (€ 164 billion or 12.1%) and the Netherlands (€ 148 billion or 11.0%).

Share of EU Member States in international trade in services within the EU (intra-EU), 2024
(% of EU total)



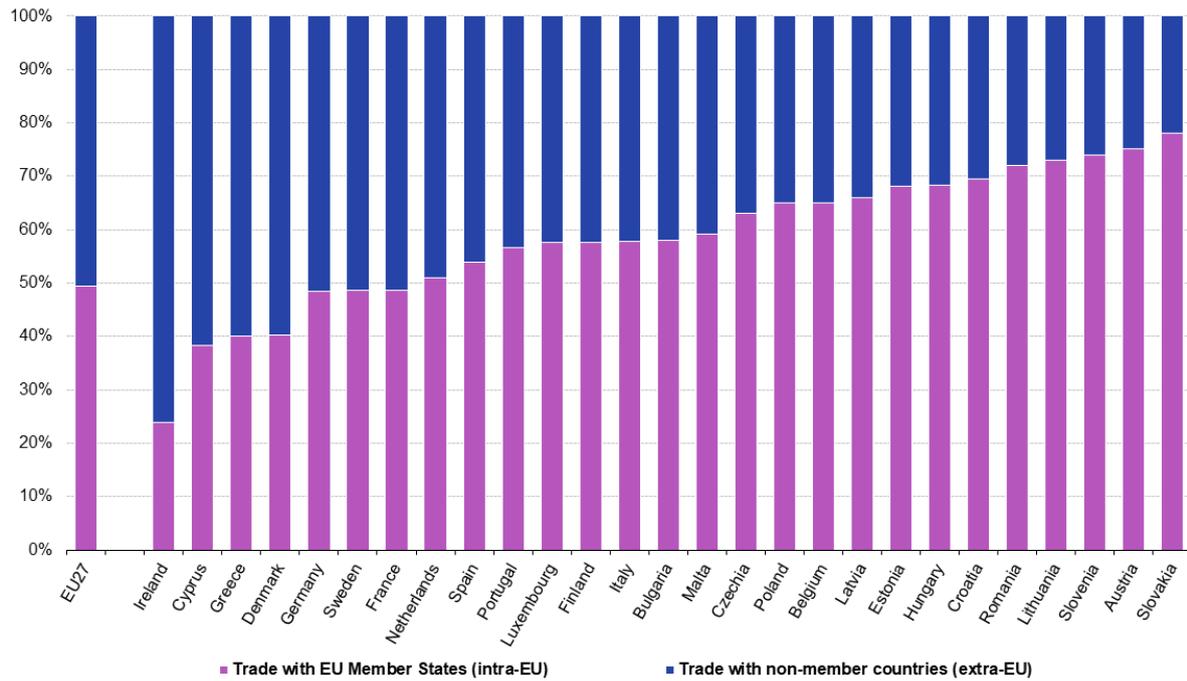
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_its6_det)



Figure 4: Share of EU countries in international trade in services within the EU (intra-EU), 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_tot)

In 2024, the division of total trade volume in services (sum of imports and exports) between trade with non-member countries on one hand and trade with other EU countries on the other hand varied significantly among the EU countries (see Figure 5). This reflected, to some extent, either the geographical proximity or historical trade associations. Hence, Ireland (76.2%) exhibited a large proportion of international trade in services transactions occurring outside the EU, as did Cyprus (61.6%) and Greece (59.9%).

Distribution of intra-EU and extra-EU trade (exports plus imports) in services, 2024 (%)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_its6_det)

eurostat

Figure 5: Distribution of intra-EU and extra-EU trade (exports plus imports) in services, 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_tot)

At the other end of the spectrum, 78.1% of Slovakia's international trade in services transactions were recorded with other EU countries, followed by Austria with 75.1% and Slovenia with 74.1%. For 2024, the EU average shows that 49.4% of all international services transactions took place within the EU, and 50.6% were with non-member countries.

Main trading partners

Figure 6 presents the EU's main trading partners for services. Between 2023 and 2024 the EU's exports of services increased for all of its main partners, except for Singapore for which they decreased. The imports increased as well for all main partners except for Canada.

Trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), main partners EU, 2023 and 2024
(billion euro)

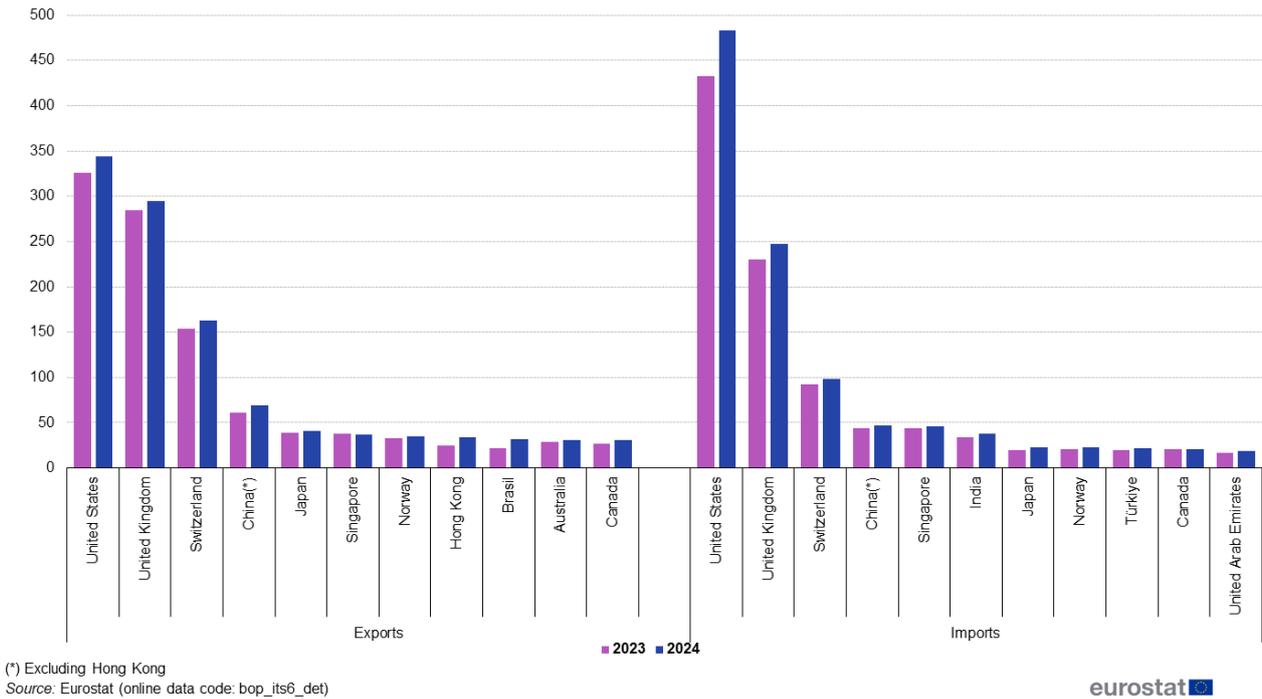
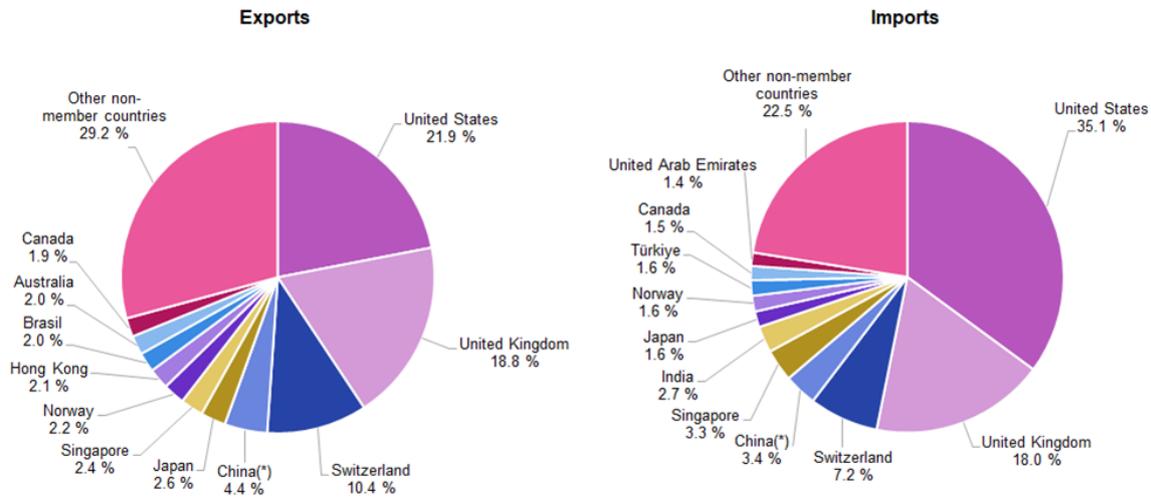


Figure 6: Trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), main partners, EU, 2023 and 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_det)

Figure 7 shows the share of the main partners for services exports and imports. In 2024, the United States, the United Kingdom and Switzerland were the largest destination for EU exports of services, with trade valued at € 344 billion, € 294 billion and € 162 billion respectively, representing 21.9%, 18.8% and 10.4% of all exports to non-member countries (see Figure 7). All the countries shown in Figure 7 collectively received about 70.8% of all exports of services from the EU to non-member countries in 2024.

Trading partners' share of EU international trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), 2024

(%)



(*) Excluding Hong Kong

Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_its6_det)

eurostat

Figure 7: Trading partners' share of EU international trade in services with non-member countries (extra-EU), 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_its6_det)

The top 3 countries of origin for EU imports of services were the same as the destinations with the 3 largest shares of EU exports of services (see Figure 7). Again the United States account for the largest value of imported services, some € 483 billion which is equivalent to 35.1% of the total imports from non-member countries. The next largest shares are from the United Kingdom with 18.0% and Switzerland with 7.2%. All the countries shown in Figure 7 collectively account for about 77.5% of all EU services imported from non-member countries in 2024.

Source data for tables and graphs

[International trade in services data Dec2025](#)

Data sources

Statistics on international trade in services provide the monetary value of such trade, with an analysis by the type of service (for example computer services or legal services) and by partner country. These statistics are produced from the transactions recorded under a country's balance of payments, which captures all transactions that take place between an economy's residents and non-residents. Furthermore, international trade in services statistics distinguishes between transactions between EU Member States (intra-EU transactions) and transactions with non-member countries (extra-EU transactions). The total includes international transactions with all countries of the world and comprises intra-EU and extra-EU transactions.

The transmission of data on international trade in services to [Eurostat](#) is covered by [Regulation \(EC\) No 184/2005](#) of the [European Parliament](#) and of the [Council](#) .

The main methodological references used for the production of statistics on international trade in services are the following:

- the [International Monetary Fund's \(IMF's\)](#) Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (BPM6);
- the [United Nations' manual on statistics of international trade in services \(MSITS 2010\)](#) ;

- the [extended balance of payments services classification \(EBOPS 2010\)](#) .

The data presented in this article are based upon the BPM6 methodology which was adopted by the EU Member States from reference year 2013 onwards. On a voluntary basis, some Member States have provided data according to the BPM6 methodology back to the 2010 reference year. In order to calculate the EU aggregate for earlier years — using data provided according to the previous (BPM5) methodology — Eurostat estimated the missing values for those Member States where data prior to 2013 were not available.

EU data for the total international trade in services for years before 2010 are available from the quarterly balance of payments. It should be noted that for the years for which data are available from both sources (quarterly balance of payments and annual international trade in services), the values for these 2 sources are somewhat different. The differences may be due to revisions in quarterly data, differences in coverage and possibly also to different compilation practices.

Context

The provision of services contributes a substantial share of the EU's economic wealth and accounts for more than 50% of GDP in each of the EU Member States. Nevertheless, the value of exports and imports of goods is generally 2 to 3 times higher than that of services. Part of this imbalance may be due to the nature of some services, for example, professional services that are bound by distinct national legislation. Another difference between goods and services concerns the immediacy of the relationship between supplier and consumer: many services are non-transportable, in other words they require the physical proximity of the service provider and consumer, which implies that many services transactions involve factor mobility. For international trade in non-transportable services to take place, either the consumer must go to the service provider or the service provider must go to the consumer. Thus, an important feature of services is that they are provided via various modes of supply. Often services are tailored according to the client's needs and wishes and so tend not to be homogeneous or mass-produced. As such, services cover a heterogeneous range of products and activities that are difficult to encapsulate within a simple definition, while services may also be difficult to separate from the goods with which they may be associated or bundled. International organisations increasingly recognise that there is a need to explore means of gathering further information as to how services are provided, thus perhaps enabling, in the future, better policy-making internationally and, at the same time, offering complementary information for the purposes of bilateral or multilateral negotiations in trade in services; some first steps have already been undertaken in this direction.

In parallel, some initiatives were initiated in order to provide answers to questions such as: who are the services traders, are service traders foreign-owned, and how many people do service traders employ? As such, a first set of experimental data on services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) have been collected. These try to measure international trade in services transactions by using data from different data sources. For example, this has been done by linking enterprise based data (from business registers) and data on services traders using a common identifier, namely the business register code. Data compilers involved in this experiment created a cross-classification in order to obtain new data which characterise the set of businesses involved in trade in services.

Despite the fact that the level of international trade in services in the EU is equivalent to one-third of the equivalent level for goods, there are a number of reasons to believe that the share of services may grow in future years. Technological developments have increased the tradability of some services, for example by simplifying web-based services in services such as finance, education, health and government, among others. Furthermore, liberalisation efforts are likely to ease and therefore stimulate international trade in services. Globally, the inclusion of services in the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations led to the general agreement on trade in services (GATS) that entered into force in January 1995. The GATS aims to ensure increased transparency and predictability of relevant rules and regulations and to promote progressive liberalisation through successive rounds of negotiation.

Within the EU, the objective of [Directive 2006/123/EC](#) of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market was to eliminate obstacles to trade in services. By doing so, the development of cross-border operations will be encouraged, making it easier for service businesses to set up or sell their services elsewhere in the EU. The Directive requires EU Member States to set up 'points of single contact' to assist business through the provision of information relating to offering services abroad. The Directive is intended to improve [competitiveness](#) , not just of service enterprises but also of EU businesses as a whole, while providing greater choice and improved quality for consumers. At the end of May 2012, the [European Commission](#) confirmed that all EU Member States had officially transposed the Services Directive into national law.

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Database

- [Balance of payments - international transactions \(bop_6\)](#)
- [International trade in services, geographical breakdown \(BPM6\) \(bop_its6\)](#)

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Methodology

- [Balance of payments - international transactions \(ESMS metadata file — bop_6_esms\)](#)
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External links

- [European Commission — Trade](#)
- [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) — International Trade in Services: Recent Methodological Developments](#)
- [Newsletter of the Interagency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services](#)
- [OECD — Services trade](#)
- [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development \(UNCTAD\) — Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services 2010 \(MSITS 2010\)](#)