

Data from March 2022.

Planned update: April 2023.

" EU exports grew less than imports and consequently the trade balance decreased from € 216 billion in 2020 to € 68 billion in 2021. "

" The main destination for EU exports in 2021 were other European countries accounting for 35 % of the total, followed by Asia (30 %) and North America (20 %). "

International trade - especially the size and evolution of [imports](#) and [exports](#) - is an important indicator of the performance of the [European Union \(EU\)](#) economy, showing how it interacts with other countries and its position.

This article takes a close look at recent trends in imports and exports, focusing on [extra-EU](#) trade, the main trading partners, and the most traded products.

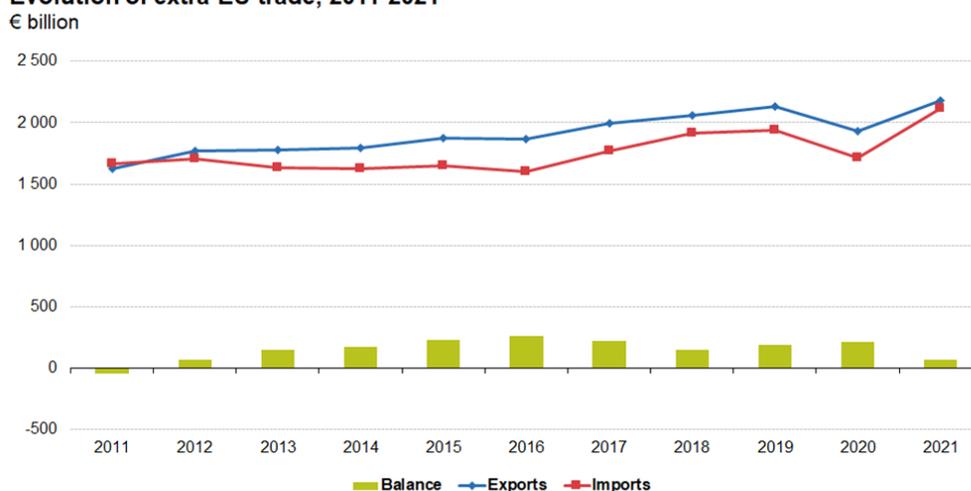
This article is part of an [online publication](#) providing recent statistics on international trade in goods, covering information on the EU's main partners, main products traded, specific characteristics of trade as well as background information.

Evolution of extra-EU trade

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic extra-EU trade fell considerably between 2019 and 2020 (see Figure 1). Exports dropped by € 199 billion while imports fell by € 224 billion. However, in 2021 both more than recovered with exports growing by € 247 billion and imports by € 395 billion. Over a longer period, between 2011 and 2021 both imports and exports increased. The average annual growth rate of extra-EU trade was (2.7 %) with exports (3.0 %)

growing faster than imports (2.4

Evolution of extra EU trade, 2011-2021



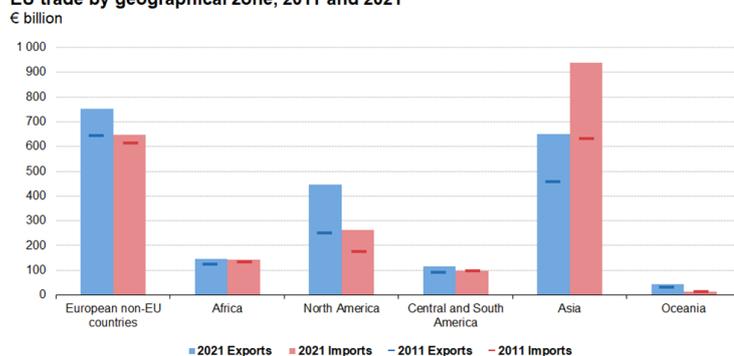
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_maineu)

eurostat

Figure 1: Evolution of extra EU trade, 2011-2021 (€ billion) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

In 2021, about 44 % of EU imports came from Asian countries while other European countries accounted for 31 % and North America for 12 % (see Figure 2). The main destination for EU exports in 2021 were other European countries with 35 % of the total exports, followed by Asia (30 %) and North America (20 %). The EU had a considerable deficit in trade with Asian countries (- € 299 billion), while there were large surpluses in trade with other European countries (+ € 105 billion) and North America (+ € 184 billion).

EU trade by geographical zone, 2011 and 2021



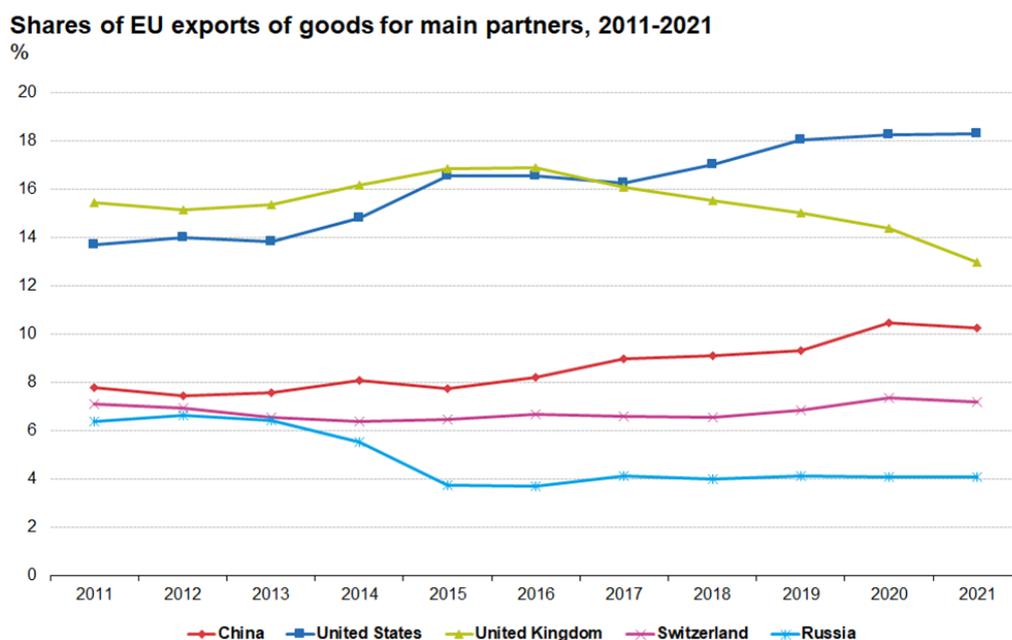
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_maineu)

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Figure 2: EU trade by geographical zone, 2011 and 2021 (€ billion) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

Main EU partners

In 2021, the USA was the EU's major trading partner in exports (see Figure 3). Between 2011 and 2021 its share grew from 13.7 % to 18.3 %, an increase of 4.6 percentage points (p.p.) China's share in extra-EU exports grew by 2.5 p.p. Swiss exports in this period were relatively stable, growing by only one tenth of a percentage point. Russia and the United Kingdom saw their shares decline by 2.3 p.p. and 2.5 p.p. respectively

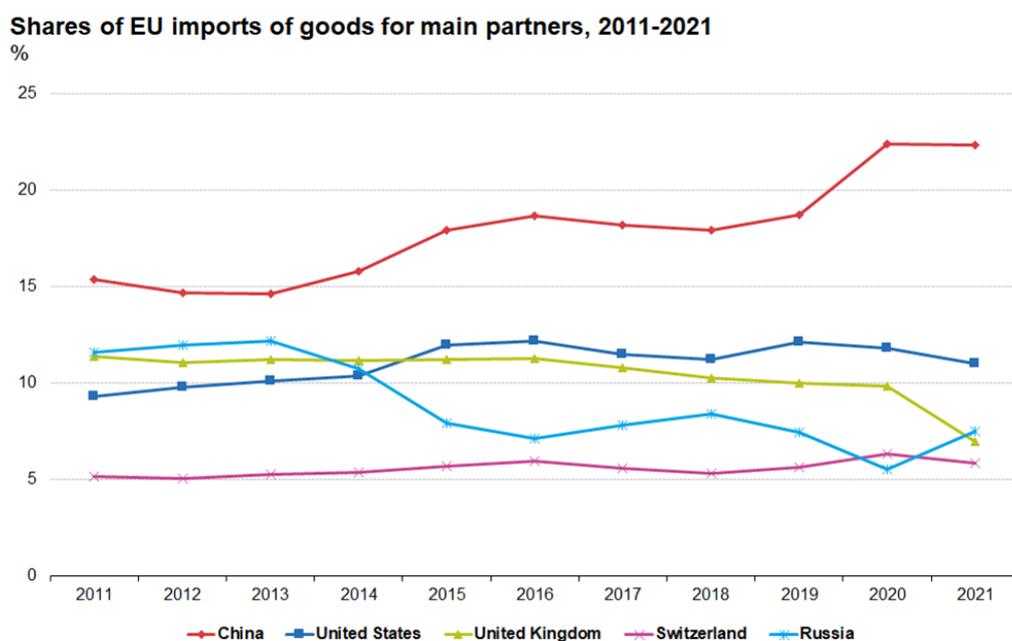


Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_maineu)

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Figure 3: Main trading partners' shares of EU exports, 2011-2021 (%) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

The EU's main import partner in 2021 was China (see Figure 4). Its share increased from 15.4 % of total extra-EU imports in 2011 to 22.4 % in 2021, an increase of 7.0 p.p. The shares of the United States and Switzerland also grew, by 1.7 p.p. and 0.7 p.p. respectively while the United Kingdom (-4.4 p.p.) and Russia (-4.1 p.p.) both saw their shares decrease.



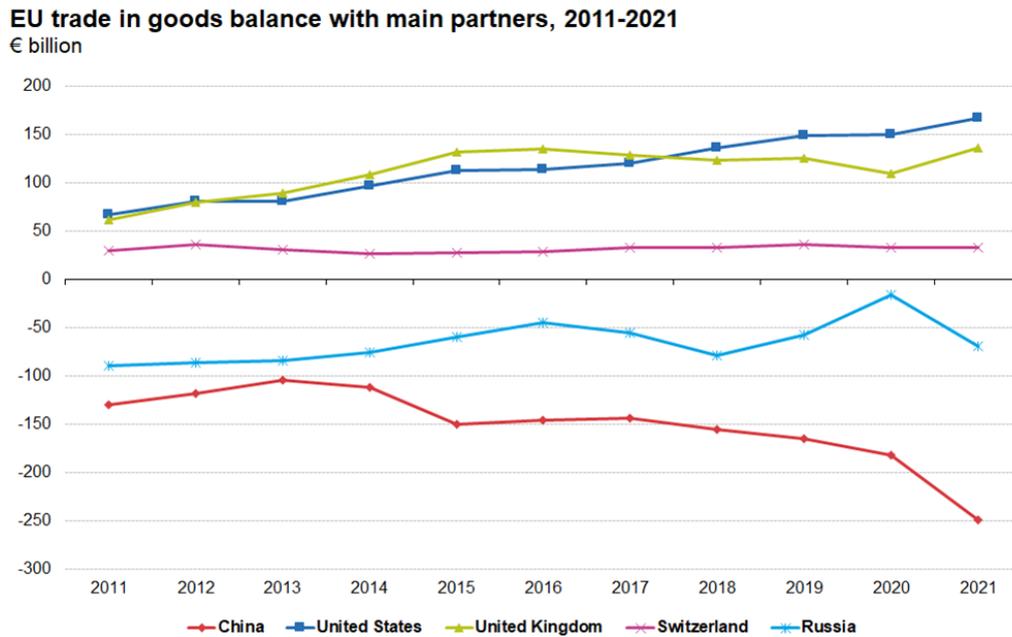
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_maineu)

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Figure 4: Main trading partners' shares of EU imports, 2011-2021 (%) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

The EU trade surplus with the United States grew from € 67 billion in 2011 to a record high of € 167 billion in 2021. (see Figure 5). The EU also had trade surpluses with the United Kingdom (€ 137 billion) and Switzerland (€ 33

billion). With Russia the EU had a trade deficit (€ 69 billion) mainly due to the imports of energy products. The trade deficit with China was € 249 billion in 2021, mostly due to imports of manufactured goods.



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_it_maineu)

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Figure 5: Main trading partners' trade balance with the EU, 2011-2021 (€ billion) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

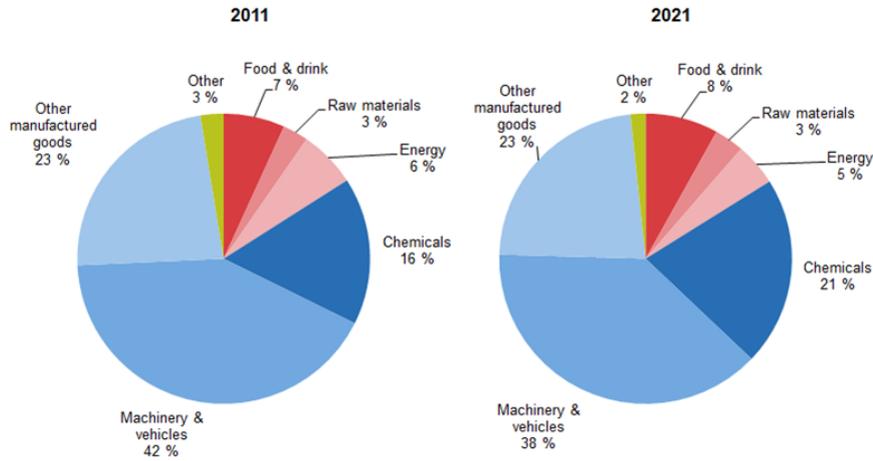
EU trade by main product groups

Figures 6 and 7 show exports and imports by product group. The primary products (food and drink, raw materials and energy) are shown in red colours while the manufactured products (chemicals, machinery and vehicles and other manufactured goods) are shown in blue colours.

The EU exports mainly manufactured products: both in 2011 and 2021 their share was more than 80 % of total EU exports (see Figure 6). Within this group, machinery and vehicles made up 42 % of the total exports in 2011, falling to 38 % in 2021. In 2021, other manufactured goods accounted for 23 % and chemicals for 21 %. Primary products accounted for 16 % of total exports. This category is made up of food and drink (8 %), energy products (5 %) and raw materials (3 %).

EU exports by product group, 2011 and 2021

%



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_intratrd)

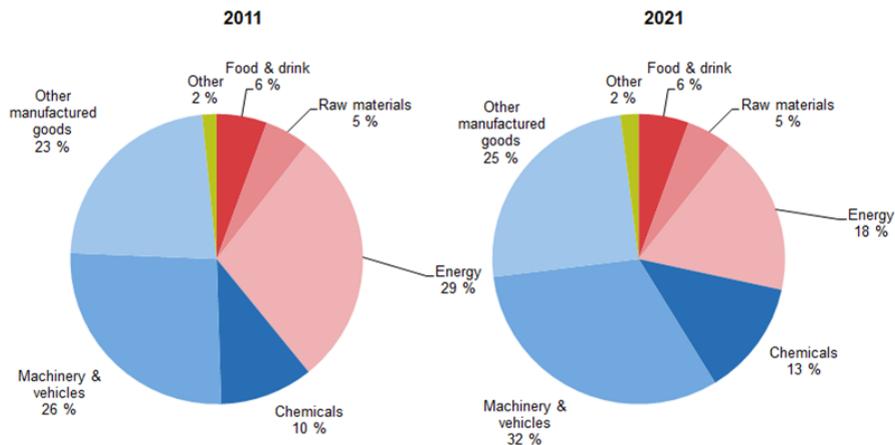
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Figure 6: EU exports by product group, 2010 and 2020 (%) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

The majority of EU imports are also manufactured goods (see Figure 7). Their share in total EU imports increased from 59 % in 2011 to 70 % in 2021. The breakdown diverges from exports: machinery and vehicles (32 %) and chemical products (13 %) have smaller shares while the share of other manufactured goods (25 %) is slightly higher than in exports. The share of energy in imports has significantly decreased in the last decade. In 2011 it accounted for 29 % of imports, while in 2021 the share had fallen to 18 %. This decrease is closely related to the fall of the oil price in this period.

EU imports by product group, 2011 and 2021

%



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_lt_intratrd)

eurostat

Figure 7: EU imports by product group, 2010 and 2020 (%) - Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-063325)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Download Excel file](#)

Data sources

EU data is taken from Eurostat's COMEXT database. COMEXT is the reference database for international trade in goods. It provides access not only to both recent and historical data from the EU Member States but also to

statistics of a significant number of third countries. International trade aggregated and detailed statistics disseminated via the Eurostat website are compiled from COMEXT data according to a monthly process.

Data are collected by the competent national authorities of the Member States and compiled according to a harmonised methodology established by EU regulations before transmission to Eurostat. For extra-EU trade, the statistical information is mainly provided by the traders on the basis of customs declarations.

EU data are compiled according to Community guidelines and may, therefore, differ from national data published by the Member States. Statistics on extra-EU trade are calculated as the sum of trade of each of the 27 EU Member States with countries outside the EU. In other words, the EU is considered as a single trading entity and trade flows are measured into and out of the area, but not within it.

The United Kingdom is considered as an extra-EU partner country for the EU for the whole period covered by this article. However, the United Kingdom was still part of the internal market until the end of the transitory period (31 December 2020), meaning that data on trade with the United Kingdom are still based on statistical concepts applicable to trade between the EU Member States. Consequently, while imports from any other extra-EU trade partner are grouped by country of origin, the United Kingdom data reflect the country of consignment. In practice this means that the goods imported by the EU from the United Kingdom were physically transported from the United Kingdom but part of these goods could have been of other origin than the United Kingdom. For this reason, data on trade with the United Kingdom are not fully comparable with data on trade with other extra-EU trade partners.

Unit of measure Trade values are expressed in billions (10⁹) of euros. They correspond to the statistical value, i.e. to the amount which would be invoiced in case of sale or purchase at the national border of the reporting country. It is called a **FOB** value (free on board) for exports and a **CIF** value (cost, insurance, freight) for imports.

Context

Europe is the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods and services, and is itself the biggest export market for around 80 countries. Trade is an important indicator of Europe's prosperity and place in the world, and the bloc has become deeply integrated into global markets both for the products it sources and the exports it sells.

Because the 27 Member States of the European Union share a single market and a single external border, they also have a single trade policy. Both in the [World Trade Organization](#), where the rules of international trade are agreed and enforced, and with individual trading partners, EU Member States speak and negotiate collectively.

Other articles

- [International trade in goods](#)
- [International trade in services](#)

Maintables

- [International trade in goods](#), see:

International trade data (t_ext)

International trade long-term indicators (t_ext_lti)

International trade short-term indicators (t_ext_sti)

Database

- [International trade in goods](#)

International trade data (ext)

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International trade detailed data (detail)

Dedicated section

- [International trade in goods](#)

Visualisations

- [Top 5 partners in trade in goods](#)
- [My Country in a bubble](#)

Methodology

- [International trade in goods statistics - background](#)
- [International trade in goods](#) (ESMS metadata file — ext_go_agg_esms)
- [User guide on European statistics on international trade in goods](#)

Legislation

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 471/2009](#) of 6 May 2009 on Community statistics relating to external trade with non-member countries
- [Summaries of EU Legislation: Extrastat: statistics relating to trade with non-EU countries](#)
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 92/2010](#) of 2 February 2010 implementing Regulation (EC) No 471/2009, as regards data exchange between customs authorities and national statistical authorities, compilation of statistics and quality assessment
- [Regulation \(EU\) No 113/2010](#) of 9 February 2010 implementing Regulation (EC) No 471/2009 , as regards trade coverage, definition of the data, compilation of statistics on trade by business characteristics and by invoicing currency, and specific goods or movements.

External links

- [European Commission - Globalisation](#)
- [European Commission - Trade](#)