

# Extra-EU trade in primary goods

Statistics Explained

*Data from April 2022.*

*Planned article update: April 2023.*

**" In trade between the EU and non-Member States, primary goods made up 16 % of all EU exports and 28 % of EU imports in 2021"**

**" In 2021 there was a trade deficit of € 250 billion which was almost twice as much as in 2020. "**

**"In 2021, in primary goods, food & drink (50 %) is the largest group in exports while energy (63 %) is the largest group in imports"**

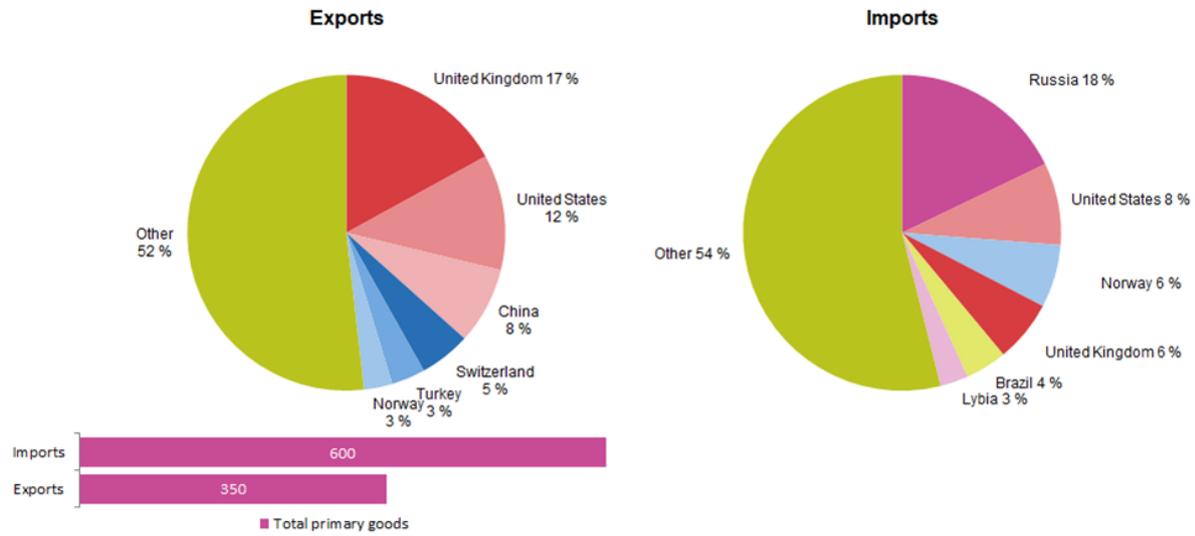
This article focuses on the structure and evolution of the [European Union \(EU\)](#) international trade in [primary goods](#) : [imports](#) and [exports](#) at EU level. Primary goods, also called [commodities](#) , are goods sold for production or consumption just as they were found in nature; they include crude oil, coal, iron, and agricultural products like wheat or cotton. 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.

## EU is a net importer of primary goods

In 2021 the main partner for EU exports of primary goods was the United Kingdom (17 %) followed by the United States (12 %) and China (8 %), see Figure 1. Russia (18 %) was the largest origin of EU imports of primary goods followed at some distance by the United States (8 %), Norway and the United Kingdom (both 6 %).

## EU main trade partners in primary goods, 2021

%



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

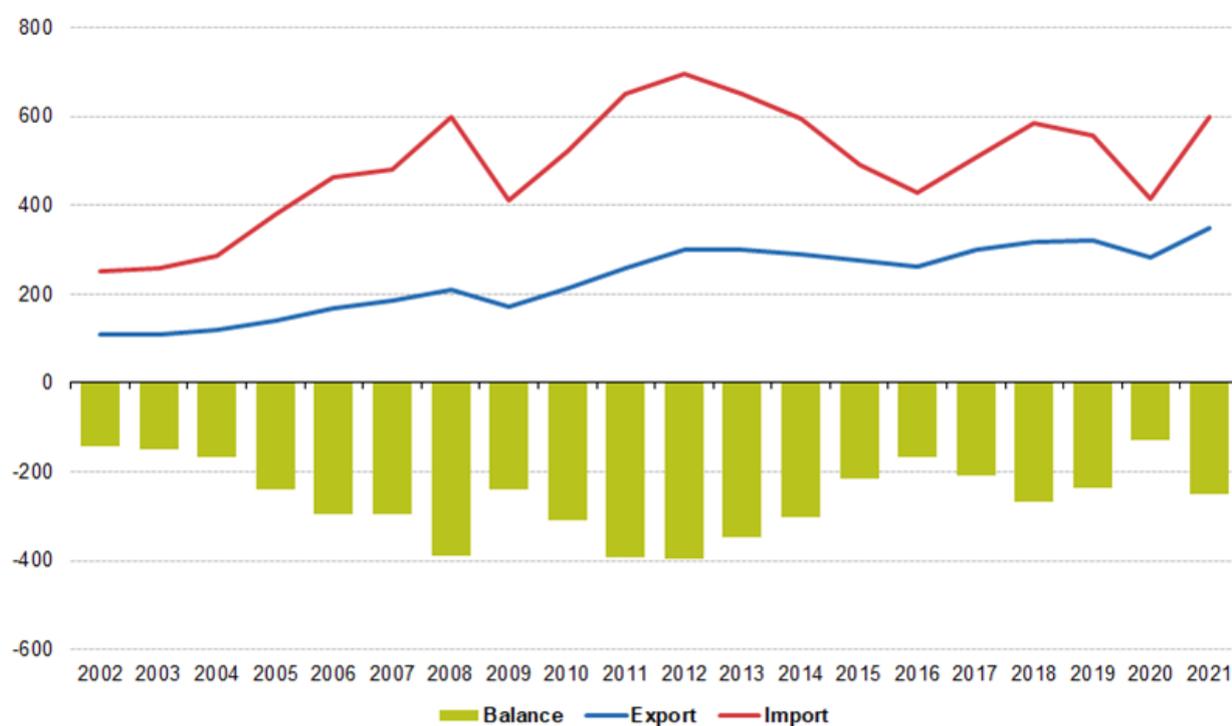
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**Figure 1: EU main trade partners in primary goods, 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

In 2021 the EU exported € 350 billion of primary goods to, and imported € 600 billion of primary goods from countries outside the EU (see Figure 2). Due to a combination of increasing prices and the strong recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic this was much higher than the year before. Compared with 2020, exports increased by € 67 billion and imports increased by € 186 billion. Even when comparing with 2019, the year before the pandemic, exports increased by € 29 billion and imports increased by € 42 billion.

## EU trade in primary goods, 2002 - 2021

€ billion



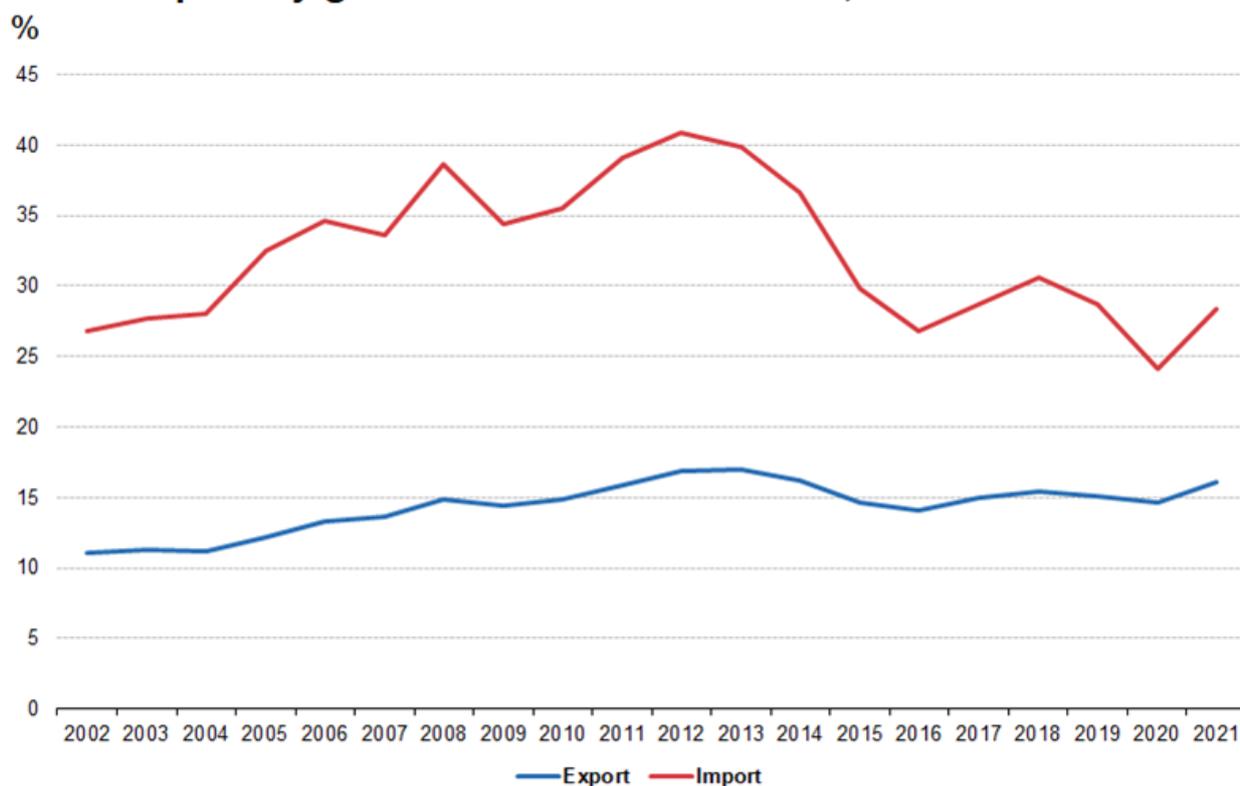
Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

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**Figure 2: EU trade in primary goods, 2002 - 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

The share of primary products in total extra EU exports was 11 % in 2002 and peaked at 17 % in 2012 and 2013. Between 2017 to 2021 it hovered around 15 % to 16 % (see Figure 3). In contrast, there was more fluctuation in the share of primary products in total extra EU imports. It was 27 % in 2002, peaking at 41 % in 2012 and had a minimum of 24 % in 2020. In 2021 the share was 28 %. These fluctuations are partly related to changing prices of primary goods.

### Share of primary goods in total extra EU trade, 2002 - 2021



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

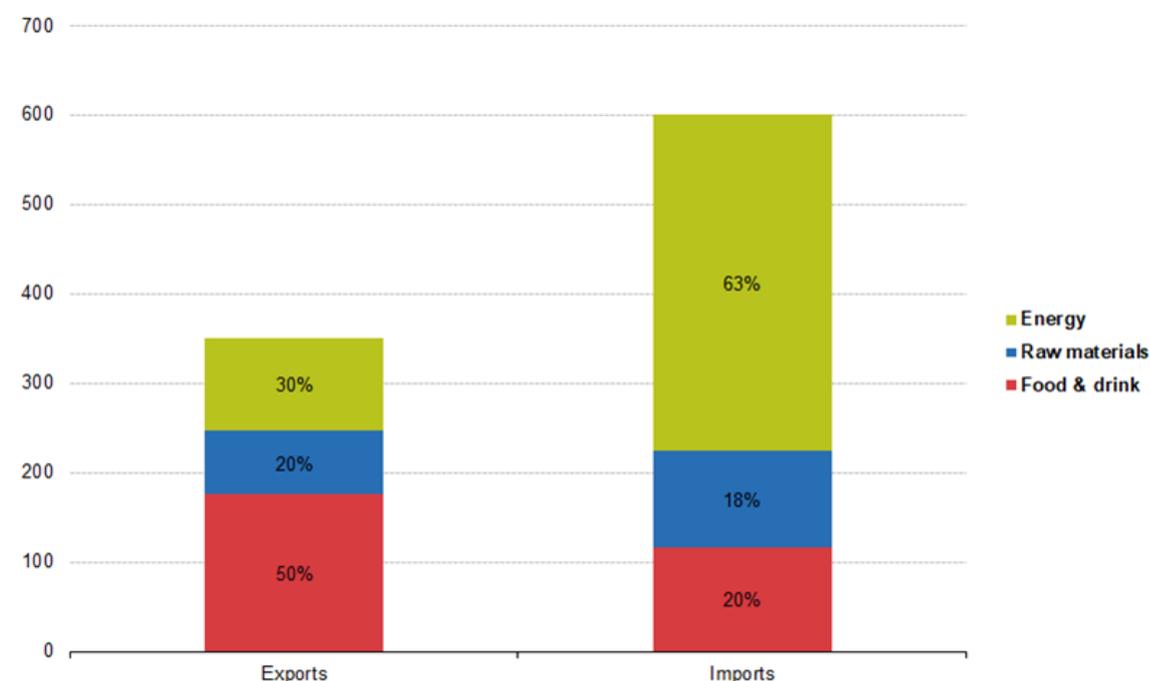


**Figure 3: Share of primary goods in total extra EU trade, 2002 - 2021 (%) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

Exports of primary products consisted of 50 % for food & drink, followed by 30 % for energy and 20 % for raw materials (see Figure 4) in 2021. In imports of primary products, the share for energy was 63 %, followed by 20 % for food & drink and 18 % for raw materials.

## Export and imports of primary goods by main groups, 2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

eurostat 

**Figure 4: Export and imports of primary goods by main groups, 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

The remainder of the article will look at the development and the top trading partners of the EU for the three groups distinguished in primary goods: food & drink, raw materials and energy products.

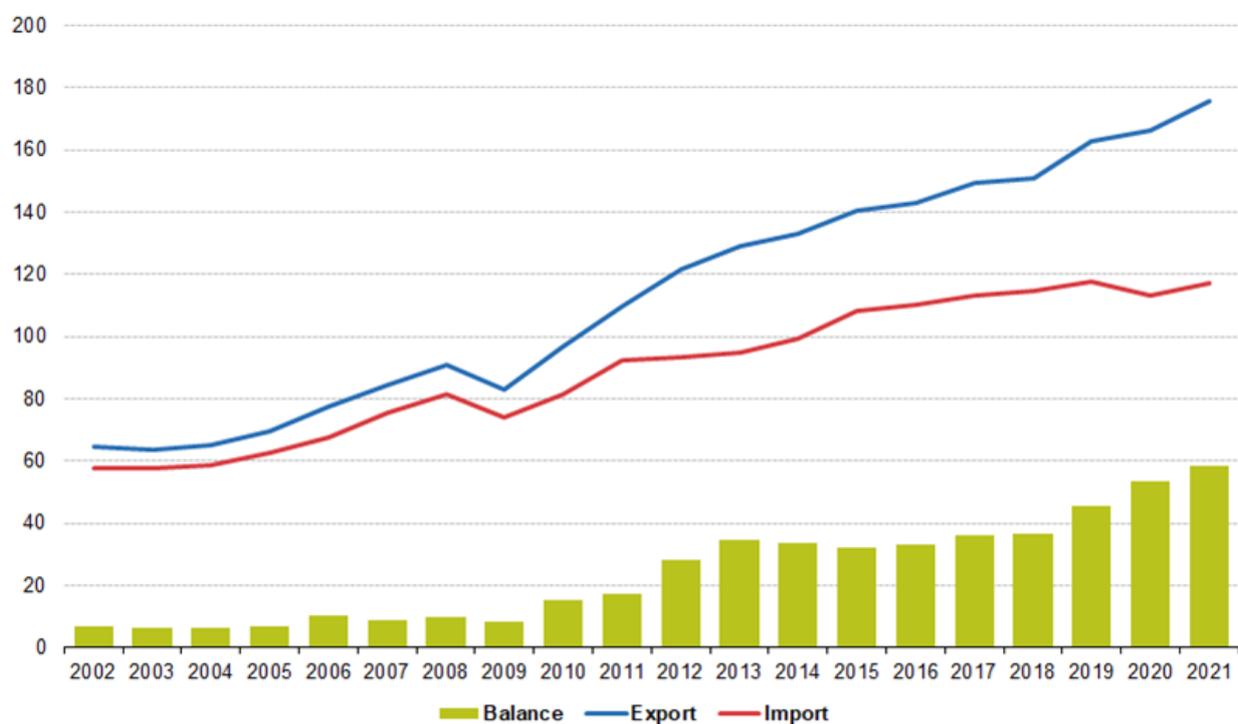
### Food and drink: the United Kingdom main partner for EU trade

Product group 'food and drink' (SITC Sections 0 and 1) includes agricultural products such as food and live animals, beverages and tobacco.

Trade in food & drink grew rapidly since 2002, especially between 2009 and 2012, with exports growing stronger than imports (see Figure 5). In 2021, imports grew by € 4 billion while exports increased by € 9 billion. Consequently the trade balance increased by € 5 billion from € 53 billion in 2020 to € 58 billion in 2021.

## EU trade in food and drink, 2002 - 2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

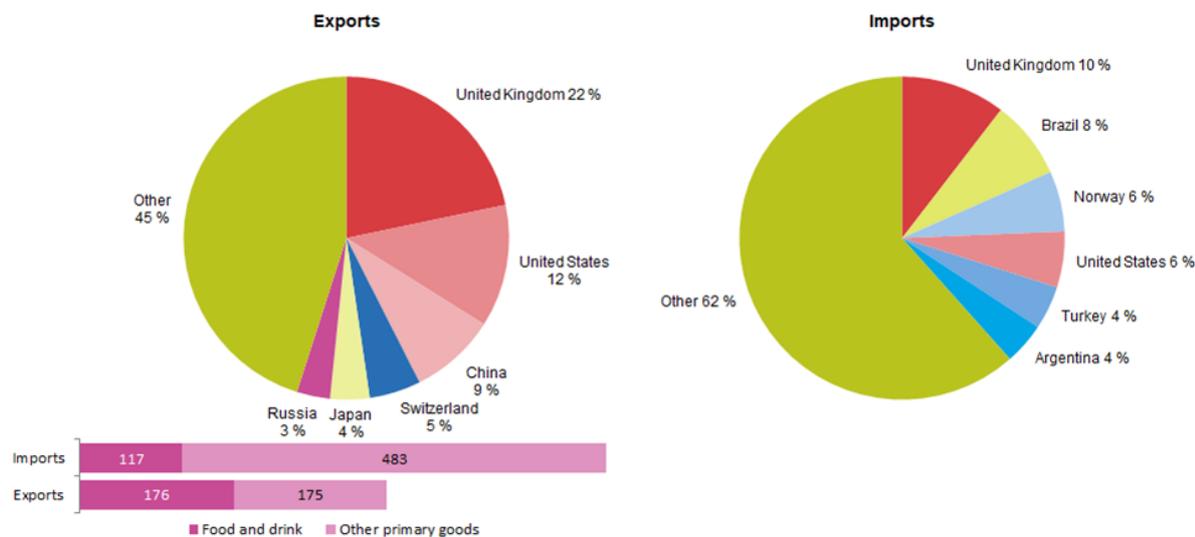
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**Figure 5: EU trade in food and drink, 2002 - 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

The United Kingdom (22 %) was the main destination for EU exports of food & drink in 2021, followed by the United States (12 %) and China (9 %). The United Kingdom (10 %) was also the largest origin for imports of food & drink, ahead of Brazil (8 %) Norway and the United States (both 6 %).

## EU main trade partners in food and drink, 2021

% and € billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

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**Figure 6: EU main trade partners in food and drink, 2021 (% and € billion) Source: Eurostat (TET00034)**

More details on trade in food & drink can be found in [this article on agricultural goods](#) .

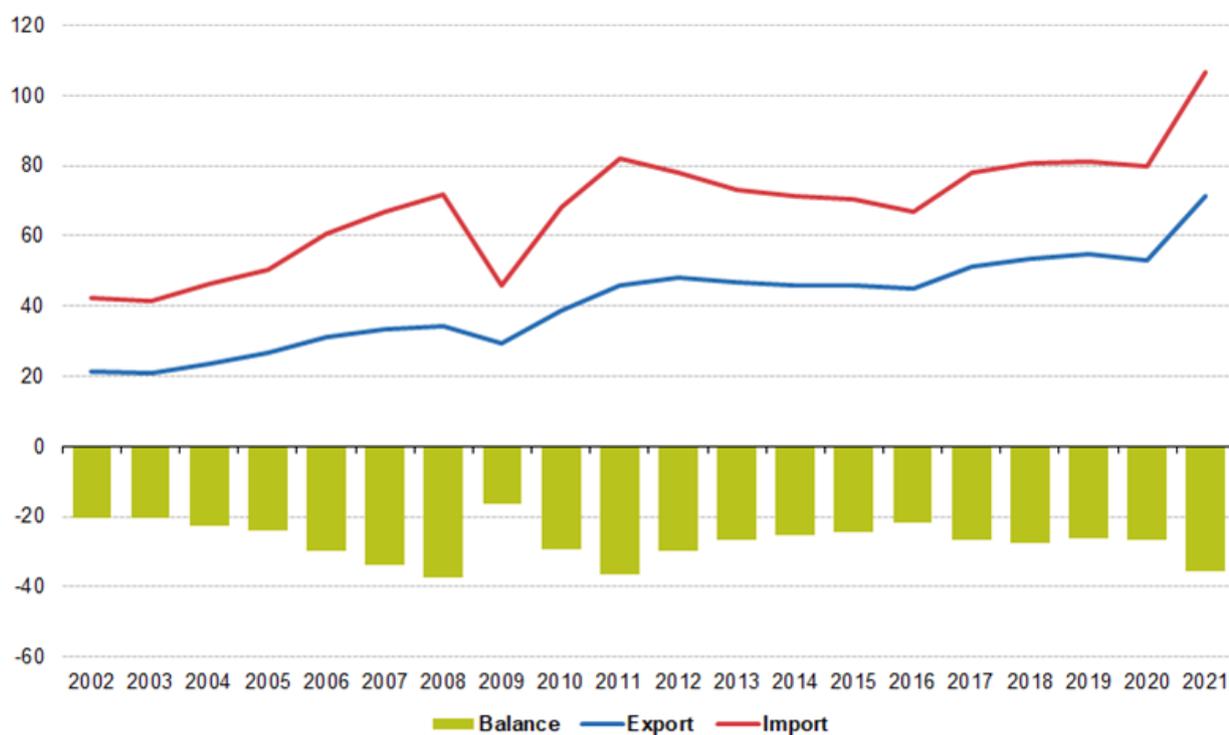
## Raw materials: EU imports most from the United States and Brazil

Raw materials (SITC Sections 2 and 4) include non-manufactured goods like oilseeds, cork, wood, pulp, textile fibers, ores and other minerals as well as animal and vegetable oils.

The EU had an ongoing trade deficit in raw materials (see Figure 7). They grew between 2002 and 2008 but then fell in 2009 and after an initial recovery started to decline until 2016. After that they increased again and both exports (€ 71 billion) and imports (€ 107 billion) peaked in 2021. Thus the trade deficit reached € 35 billion which was the highest value since 2012.

## EU trade in raw materials, 2002 - 2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

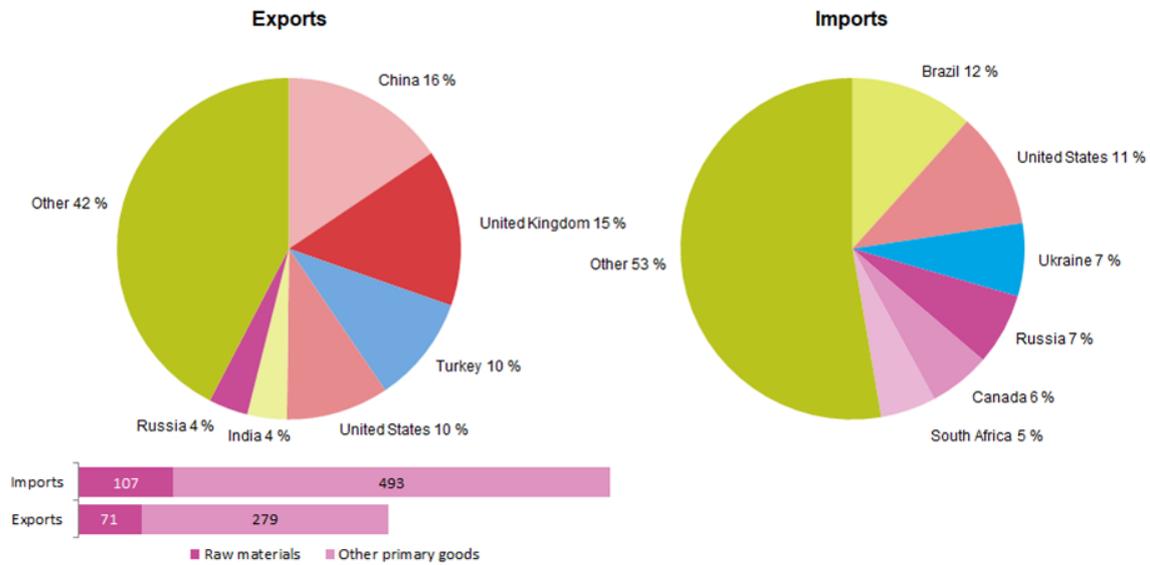
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**Figure 7: EU trade in raw materials, 2002 - 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

China, with 16 %, was the largest export destination of raw materials from the EU, followed by the United Kingdom with 15 % (see Figure 8). EU imports of raw materials came mainly from Brazil and the United States with 12 % and 11 % respectively.

## EU main trade partners in raw materials, 2021

% and € billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

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**Figure 8: EU main trade partners in raw materials, 2021 (% and € billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

More details on trade in raw materials can be found in [this article on raw materials](#) .

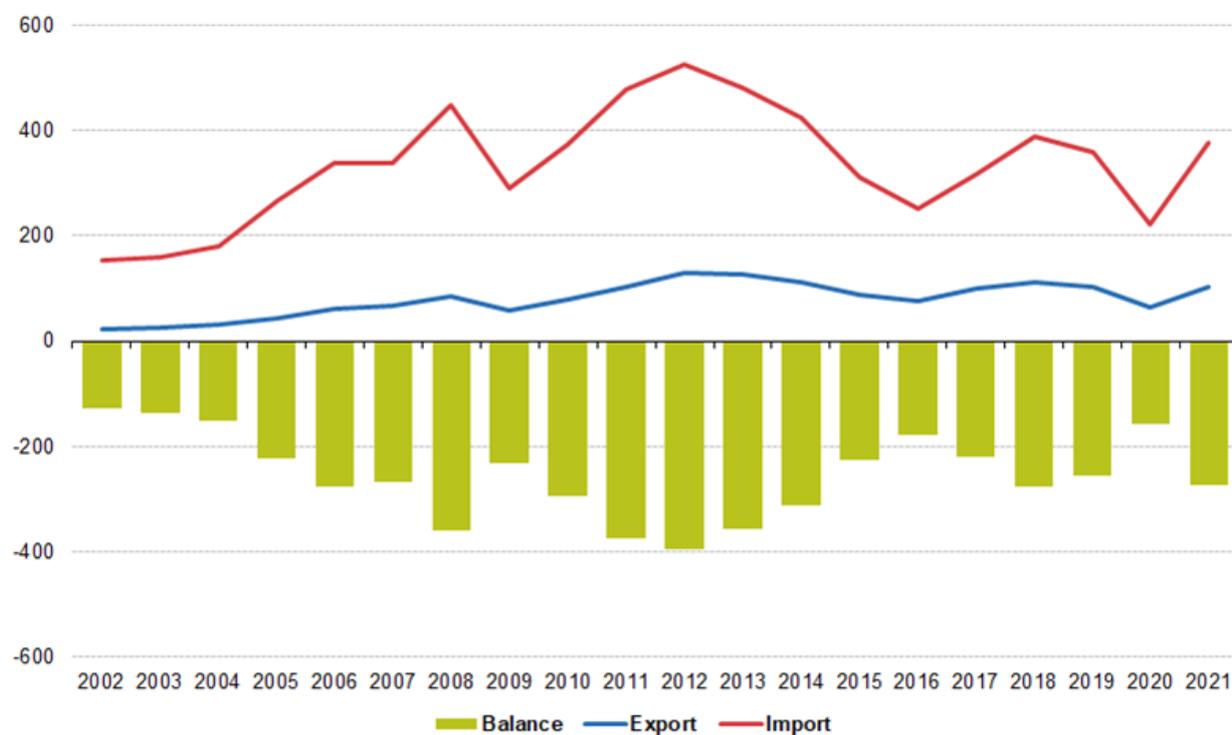
## Energy products: Russia main partner for EU imports of energy

The main goods of energy products (SITC Section 3) are crude oil, refined petroleum products, coal, gas and electric current.

The EU is dependent on imports of energy products. This has led to a structural trade deficit, which reached a record level of € 395 billion in 2012 (see Figure 9). The value of imports closely followed the price of crude oil which explains the decline in the trade deficit between 2012 and 2016 when it had fallen to € 178 billion. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic both imports and exports of energy products fell drastically in 2020, with exports dropping from € 103 billion to € 64 billion and imports dropping from € 359 billion to € 221 billion. However, in 2021 both recovered strongly, with exports reaching € 104 billion and imports € 376 billion.

## EU trade in energy products, 2002 - 2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

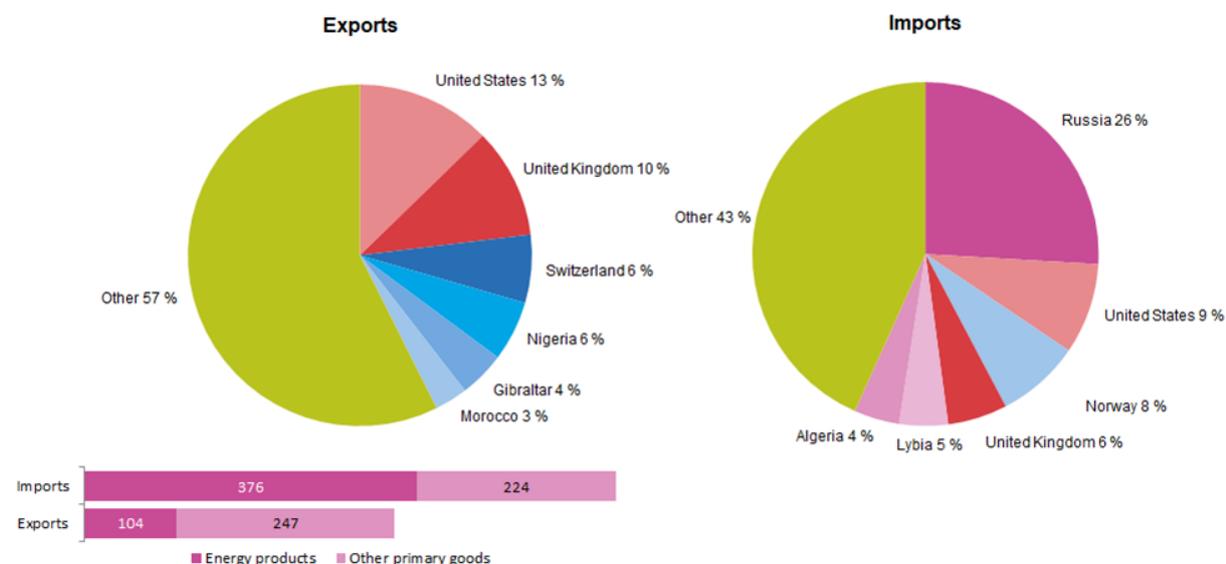
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**Figure 9: EU trade in energy products, 2002 - 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

In 2021, the United States (13 %) and the United Kingdom (10 %) were the main destinations of EU exports of energy. The major origin for EU imports of energy was Russia (26 %) followed by the United States (9 %) and Norway (8 %).

## EU main trade partners in energy products, 2021

% and € billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-018995)

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**Figure 10: EU main trade partners in energy products, 2021 (% and € billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext data code: DS-018995)**

More details on trade in energy can be found in this article on [EU imports of energy products](#).

### Source data for tables and graphs

- [Excel file with graphs for primary goods](#)

### Data sources

The [Standard international trade classification \(SITC\)](#) distinguishes five main categories (sections) of primary goods:

- food and live animals (SITC 0);
- beverages and tobacco (SITC 1);
- crude materials, excluding fuels (SITC 2);
- mineral fuels (SITC 3);
- animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes (SITC 4).

Sections 0 and 1 are often grouped together as 'food and drink', 2 and 4 as 'raw materials'.

### Data sources

EU data come from Eurostat's [COMEXT](#) database. COMEXT is the Eurostat reference database for international trade. 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 from Eurostat website are compiled from COMEXT data according to a monthly process. Because COMEXT is updated on a daily basis, data published on the website may differ from data stored in COMEXT in case of recent revisions.

EU data are compiled according to community guidelines and may, therefore, differ from national data published by Member States. Statistics on extra-EU trade are calculated as the sum of trade of each of the 27 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 among Member States within it the EU.

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 (10<sup>9</sup>) 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

Primary goods belong to three categories of products: agricultural products, raw materials and energy. The EU is the world's foremost trader in agricultural products. Europe imports mostly basic agricultural commodities, but its exports are based on high-quality farm products and other processed agricultural products. Recognising the crucial role that agriculture plays in many developing countries, the EU has granted extensive market access to agricultural imports from developing countries. The European Union, due to the characteristics of the European industrial base, is highly dependent on imports of raw materials for its **competitiveness** and for its economic development. An increase in worldwide demand in raw materials in the future is expected; this increase will be largely due to economic growth in emerging economies. The European Union is also dependent on imports of energy from other countries. One of the key priorities is therefore to run a strategic international energy policy which leads to stable and secure supply routes.

### Other articles

- [Extra-EU trade in goods](#)
- [Extra-EU trade in manufactured goods](#)
- [Extra-euro area trade in goods](#)
- [International trade in goods](#)

### Main tables

- [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)

International trade long-term indicators (ext\_lti)

International trade short-term indicators (ext\_sti)

International trade detailed data (detail)

## Dedicated section

- [International trade in goods](#)

## Data visualisations

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

## 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 - Raw Materials](#)
- [European Commission - Agriculture and Rural Development](#)
- [European Commission - Energy](#)
- [European Commission - Trade](#)