

Services trade by enterprise characteristics - STEC

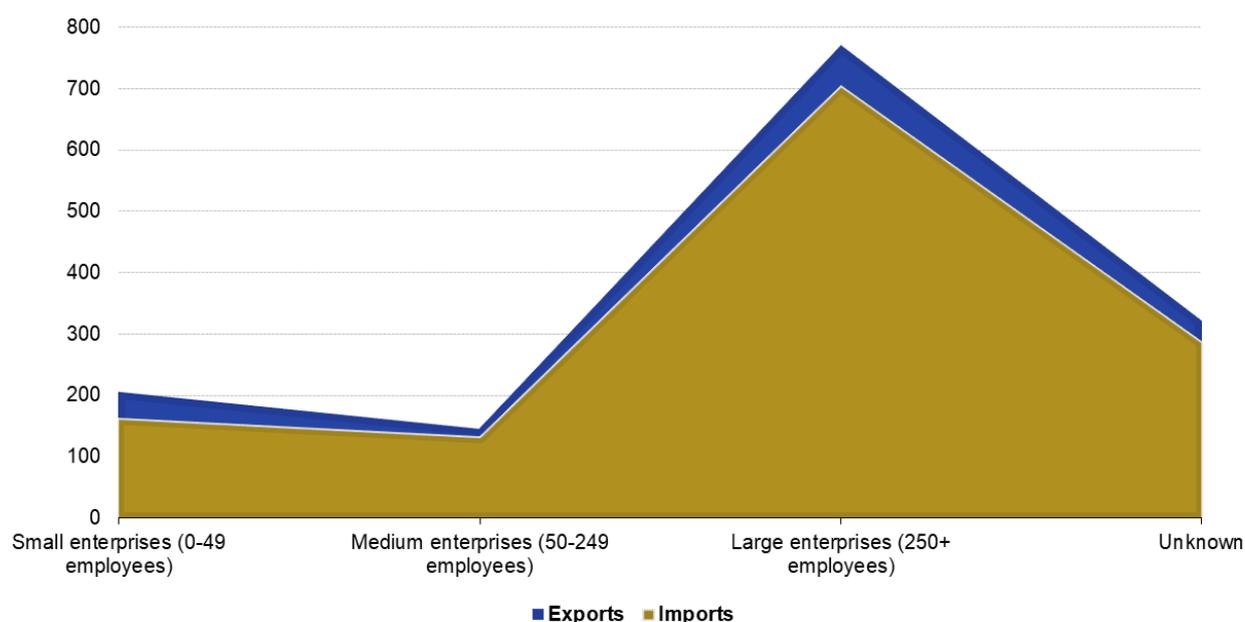
Statistics Explained

Data extracted in October 2025
Planned article update: October 2026

Highlights

In 2023, large enterprises (250+ employees) dominated EU services exports, with the highest shares Germany (73%), Finland (67%) and Denmark (66%). Approximately half of the EU services trade exports were driven by 3 dominant economic activities in 2023: information and communication, manufacturing and transportation and storage. The Luxembourgish and Irish services trading enterprises were tightly integrated into global markets, with over 79% of their services exports and over 83% of imports controlled by foreign enterprises.

Services by EU enterprises, partner extra-EU, 2023 (billion euro)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec01])

eurostat

Services by EU enterprises, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by enterprise size) Source: Eurostat (ext_stec01)

The services trade by enterprise characteristics ([STEC](#)) statistics offer insights into the types of enterprises involved in international trade in services. They reveal how businesses across various industries provide services and how this aligns with their primary activities. This article presents data on services trade, broken down by enterprise size, ownership, and economic activity based on data from the 27 [EU countries](#) , as well as the [EFTA country](#) Norway, for the reference year 2023.

General overview

This article analyses services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) data for the 27 EU countries and Norway for the reference year 2023. The trading partner breakdown used in the analysis focuses on extra-EU countries (i.e. countries outside the EU).

The data reveal notable differences between countries in how enterprises engage with globalisation. In international trade in services, Luxembourg and Ireland stood out as highly open to global markets. Foreign-owned affiliates dominated these countries' markets, contributing substantially to service exports—accounting for 89% in Luxembourg and 79% in Ireland. Conversely, domestic service providers held a stronger position in countries such as Denmark, Finland, Malta and France, where they made up more than 59% of service exports.

STEC data also allow analysis on the size of enterprises involved in services trade. For instance, the largest share of exports was dominated by large enterprises with 250+ employees in 2023, accounting for over half of total exports (around 54%). Large enterprises, though constituting only 0.2% of the total number of EU enterprises, played a pivotal role in EU's services trade. Small enterprises (with up to 49 employees) were responsible for 68% of Malta's services exports, but only 2% in Greece. Malta's high share was largely driven by companies in sectors like financial services (NACE 64, excluding insurance and pension funding) and gambling/betting activities (NACE 92), which typically require fewer employees to provide services. Generally, small enterprises tend to be domestically controlled, while large enterprises are more often foreign-controlled.

Trade in services by enterprise size

In 2023 large enterprises (over 250 employees) dominated EU trade in services, accounting for 54% of exports and 55% of imports; SMEs accounted for 24% of exports and 23% of imports.

Data on enterprise size class help determine whether trade in services is dominated by small (up to 49 employees), medium (50-249 employees) or large enterprises (250+ employees). EU services exports largely vary depending on enterprise size and economic activity. In 2023, large enterprises (250+ employees), though constituting only 0.2% of the total number of EU enterprises, were the dominant players in EU services exports to non-EU countries, accounting for 54% of EU exports and 55% of imports (Figure 1). That reflects their broader international presence and capacity to scale cross-border services (e.g. in finance, IT, logistics).

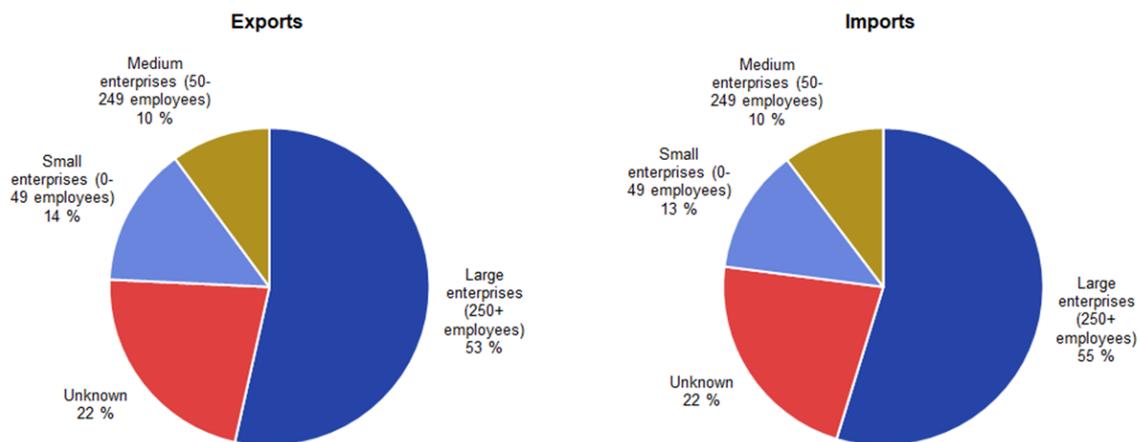
In 2023, small enterprises (up to 49 employees) contributed 14%, surpassing medium-sized enterprises (50 to 249 employees), which accounted for 10% of exports. Small enterprises accounted for € 41.7 billion surplus, showing strong competitiveness, particularly in digital services, consulting, and finance, where small firms can be agile and specialised.

Medium-sized enterprises (from 50 to 249 employees) showed balanced growth and contributed with about 10% of exports and imports. Their € 12.8 billion surplus is modest but healthy, suggesting opportunity for growth via trade support programs. A portion of EU trade (22% both for exports and imports) could not be linked to a specific enterprise size class, covering non-linkable trade categories such as financial intermediation services indirectly measured (FISIM), travel, and unknown parts.

In 2023, EU enterprises recorded a strong surplus in extra-EU services trade. While large enterprises dominated, small enterprises are crucial contributors, especially in high-value service niches. Enhancing small and medium enterprises (SME) support could unlock further trade potential across all enterprise sizes.

Services by EU enterprises, partner extra-EU, 2023

(% by enterprise size)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec01])

eurostat

Figure 1: Services by EU enterprises, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by enterprise size) Source: Eurostat ext_stec01

The analysis by NACE activities and by enterprise size shows the distribution of export values (in thousand euros) across NACE sectors by enterprise size class within the EU, focusing on extra-EU trade in 2023. Each size class (by number of employees) showed clear sectoral specialisation, with consistent dominance by certain activities across the board.

In 2023, three key sectors (information and communication, manufacturing and financial and insurance activities) were driving more than half of EU services trade. Across the EU, exports were led by services, technology, and industry, with information and communication (21%) topping the list. The dominance of intangible exports suggests the EU's growing specialisation in knowledge-based economies.

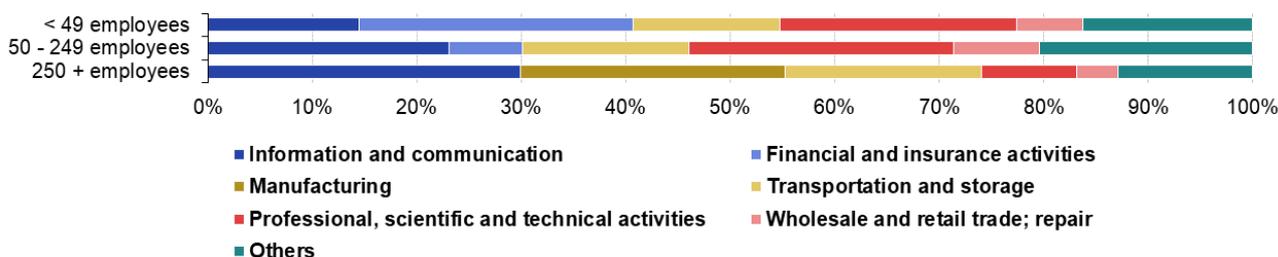
Among small enterprises, the financial sector was the primary contributor to export flows, accounting for 26%, followed by professional, scientific and technical activities (23%), information and communication (15%) and transportation and storage (14%). Despite the smaller firm size, this class is remarkably active in knowledge-intensive services and digital sectors.

For medium-sized enterprises, the majority of exported services trade came from the professional, scientific and technical sector (25%), followed by information and communication (23%) and transport and storage (16%). Medium-sized enterprises were strong in tech and transport, aligning with scalable service delivery and physical trade operations

Large enterprises involved in services exports in 2023 were primarily active in the information and communication sector (30%) followed by the manufacturing sector (25%), transport and storage (19%). These 3 economic activities accounted for nearly 75% of exports from EU large enterprises. Large enterprises dominated capital-intensive sectors with strong infrastructure and export pipelines, such as tech, manufacturing, and logistics.

Digital and knowledge-based services (especially information and communication, and professional, scientific and technical activities) were key export sectors across all firm sizes. Manufacturing and logistics remained essential, especially for large firms, pointing to the need for continued investment in supply chains and industrial capacity. Micro and small firms were punching above their weight in digital and financial exports — policies supporting tech startups and access to global markets could amplify this impact.

EU services exports by enterprise size classes and top 5 economic activity, partner extra-EU, 2023 (%)



Note: The observed NACE activities are: 1) Agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying; 2) Manufacturing; 3) Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; 4) Construction; 5) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; 6) Transportation and storage; 7) Accommodation and food service activities; real estate activities; public administration, defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; other services; 8) Information and communication; 9) Financial and insurance activities; 10) Professional, scientific and technical activities; 11) Administrative and support service activities 12) Unknown NACE activity
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec01])

eurostat

Figure 2: EU services exports by enterprise size class and top economic activities, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by enterprise size and economic activity) Source: Eurostat ext_stec01

Key takeaways:

- Large enterprises are the backbone of the EU's services exports, they usually have the capital, infrastructure, and networks necessary to operate across borders and scale their services internationally, being more dominant in Germany, Finland and Denmark.
- Global competitiveness might be encouraged through innovation and market access support for large enterprises.

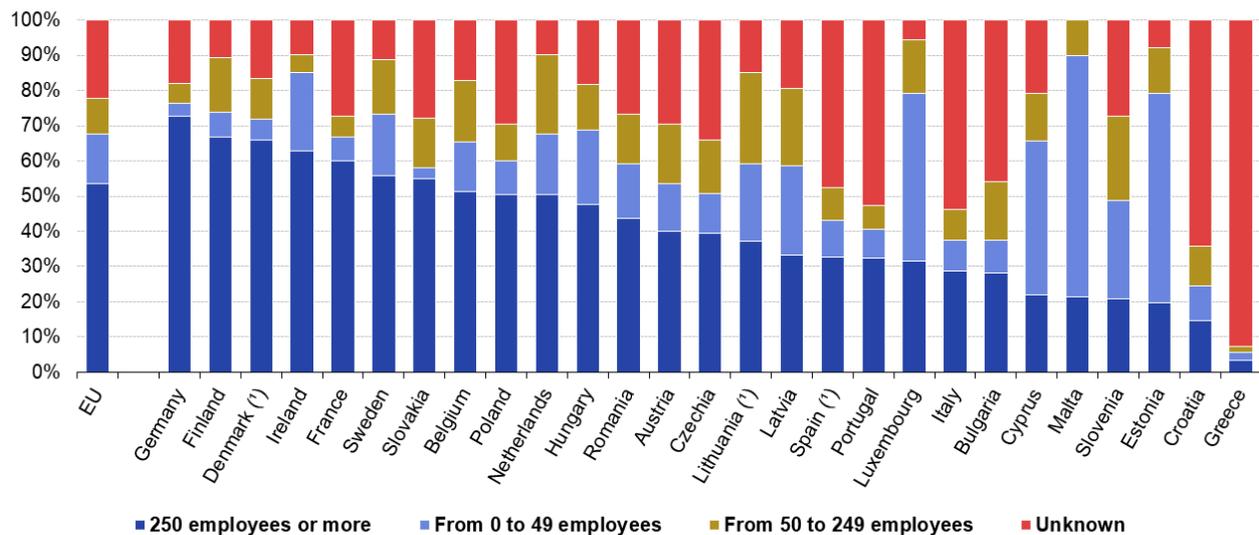
The exports of large enterprises predominated in Germany (73%), Finland (67%), Denmark (66%), Ireland (63%) and France (60%).

While overall contributions from small enterprises were lower, some countries showed remarkably high shares from small firms. The analysis (Figure 3) reveals that, in 2023, smaller enterprises played a dominant role in smaller countries, contributing the largest share of services exports in Malta (68%), Estonia (60%), Luxembourg (48%) and Cyprus (44%). However, their contribution was much smaller in economies such as Slovakia (3%) and Greece (2%). In smaller or highly service-oriented economies (especially financial or digital hubs), small firms were key exporters — often tech startups, fintech, or digital service providers.

In 2023, medium-sized enterprises (50–249 employees) contributed steadily but didn't predominate in any major economy. Their highest contributions were in: Lithuania (26%), Slovenia (24%), the Netherlands and Latvia (each 22%). Medium firms often act as scalable specialists in consulting, logistics, or B2B services — growing beyond the small firm stage but still agile.

At the other end, in Germany (73%), Finland (67%), Denmark (66%), Ireland (63%) and France (60%) large enterprises (which tend to be foreign controlled) had a dominant role. The dominance of large enterprises was particularly strong in western and northern Europe and they predominated in industrial economies, reflecting scale advantages in tech, logistics, and finance. Across most EU countries, large enterprises dominated services exports, with over half of total exports originating from firms with 250+ employees. This confirms that large firms have the infrastructure, networks, and capacity to operate across borders, particularly in sectors like ICT, finance, logistics, and professional services.

Services exports by enterprise size class and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by enterprise size)



Note: data not available for Norway due to confidentiality
 (*) provisional data for Denmark, Spain and Lithuania
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_stec01)

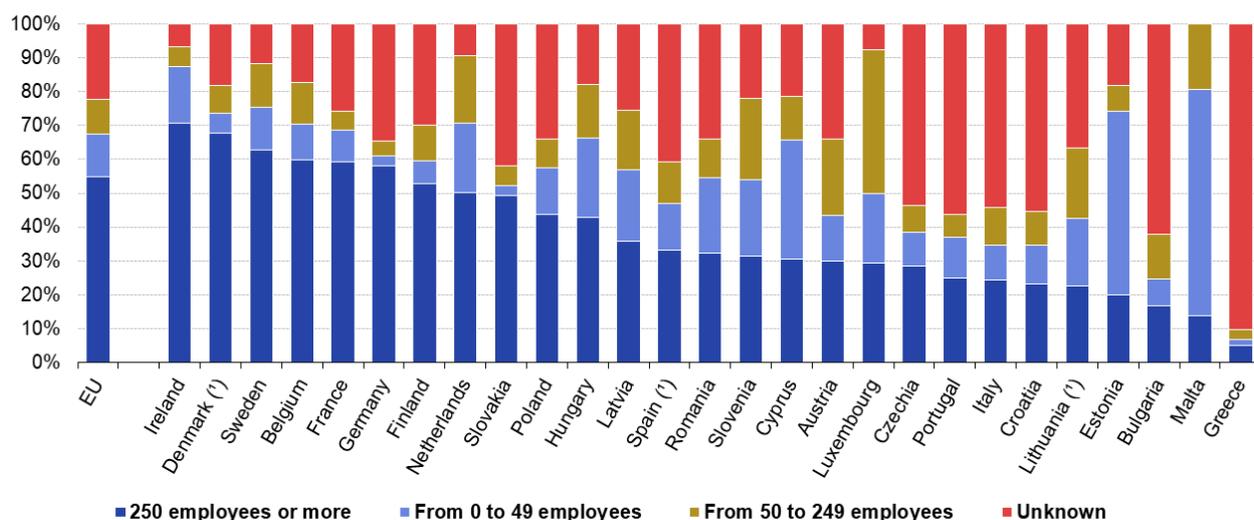


Figure 3: Services exports by enterprise size class and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat (ext_stec01)

The pattern of service imports closely mirrored that of exports (Figure 4). In 2023, large enterprises accounted for at least half of services imports in Ireland (71%), Denmark (68%), Sweden (63%), Belgium (60%), France (59%) and Germany (58%). Meanwhile, smaller enterprises were responsible for the largest share of imports in Malta (67%), Estonia (54%) and Cyprus (35%). Middle-sized enterprises were dominant in Luxembourg (43%), Slovenia (24%), Austria (23%) and Lithuania (21%).

Services imports by enterprise size class and country, partner extra-EU, 2023

(% by enterprise size)



Note: data not available for Norway due to confidentiality

(*) provisional data for Denmark, Spain and Lithuania

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_stec01)

eurostat

Figure 4: Services imports by enterprise size class and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (%) Source: Eurostat ext_stec01

Key takeaways:

- Country differences reveal diverse service export models - some rely on few large players, others on broad SME bases.
- Germany, having the second-highest total, is driven overwhelmingly by large firms.
- Small enterprises matter, especially in smaller and service-focused economies, particularly in digital and finance-heavy countries.
- Countries like Ireland, Luxembourg, and Malta prove that small economies with open, service-based sectors can be global leaders in services exports.
- The “Unknown” category is too large in some countries (Greece over 90% both for exports and imports), meaning that the data quality should be prioritised to improve SME visibility.

Trade in services by enterprise ownership

EU services trade is largely carried out by foreign-controlled businesses.

The ownership type indicates whether an enterprise is domestically or foreign-controlled. A high proportion of foreign-controlled services traders suggests that the economy is deeply integrated into international markets and global value chains. This is often reflected in foreign affiliates holding a dominant position in services trade.

The EU aggregate for this indicator should be interpreted with caution, as many "foreign controlling enterprises" are actually located in other EU countries. This arises from the definition of "domestic" enterprises, which is based on the perspective of the reporting country. An enterprise is considered foreign-controlled if it is outside the reporting country, potentially including other EU countries.

For some countries a significant share of data was categorised as "unknown," which affects the reliability of this breakdown. For imports, unknown values exceeded 50% in Greece (91%), Germany (67%), Bulgaria (62%), Croatia (55%), Italy and Czechia (both 54%). For exports, the unknown share was notably high in Greece (93%),

Croatia (64%), Germany (55%), and Italy (54%). This substantial proportion of unknown data should be considered when interpreting the results.

The analyses shows that the Luxembourgish and Irish economies were deeply integrated into international markets and global value chains, having the highest share of foreign-controlled enterprises. Foreign-controlled enterprises played a dominant role in Luxembourg, contributing 89% of services exports and 83% of imports, and in Ireland, where they accounted for 79% of exports and 83% of imports. Foreign-controlled enterprises were also responsible for most services exports from the Netherlands (64%) and Hungary (61%). In these countries more than half of the exports came from enterprises with foreign control, indicating a significant influence of foreign investment.

In contrast, domestically controlled enterprises represented more than half of services exports from Denmark (70%), Finland (62%), Malta (60%) and France (59%) (Figure 5).

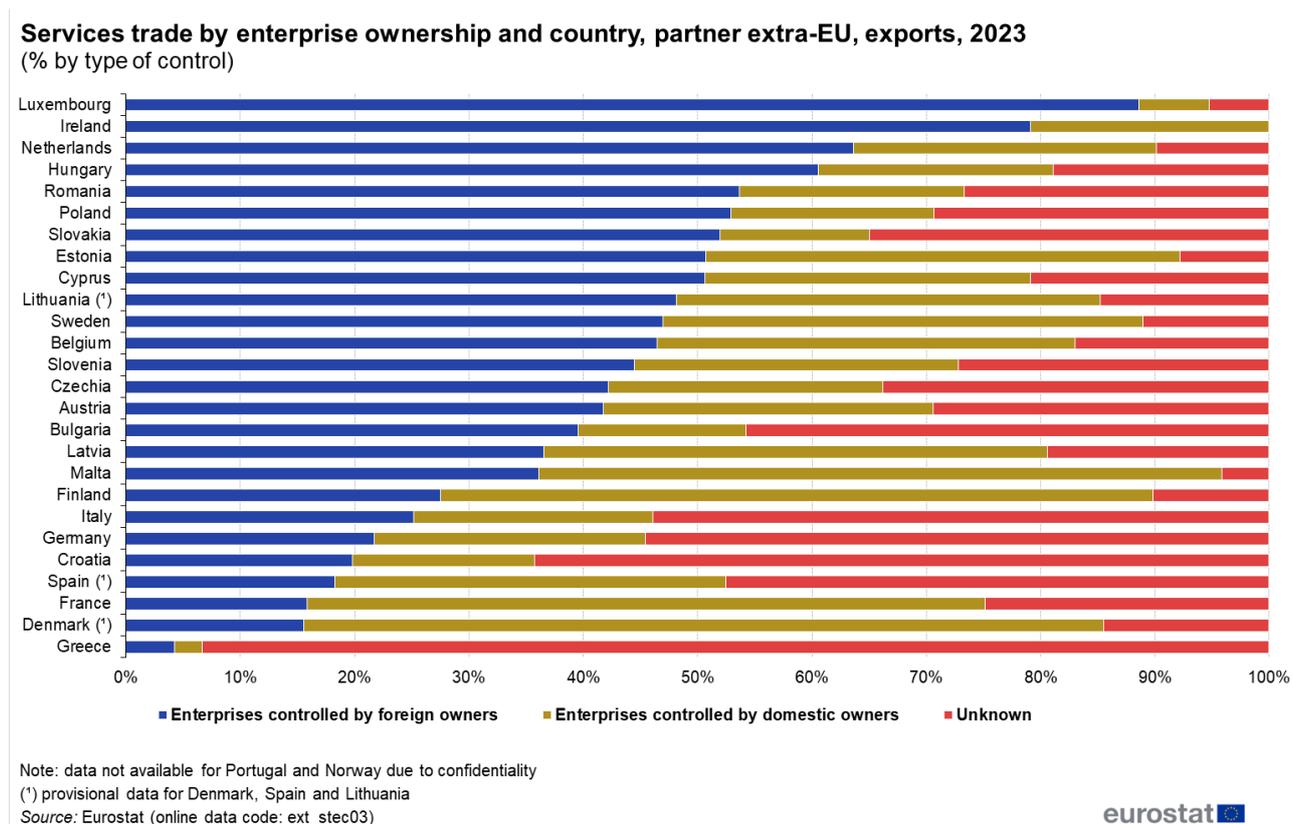
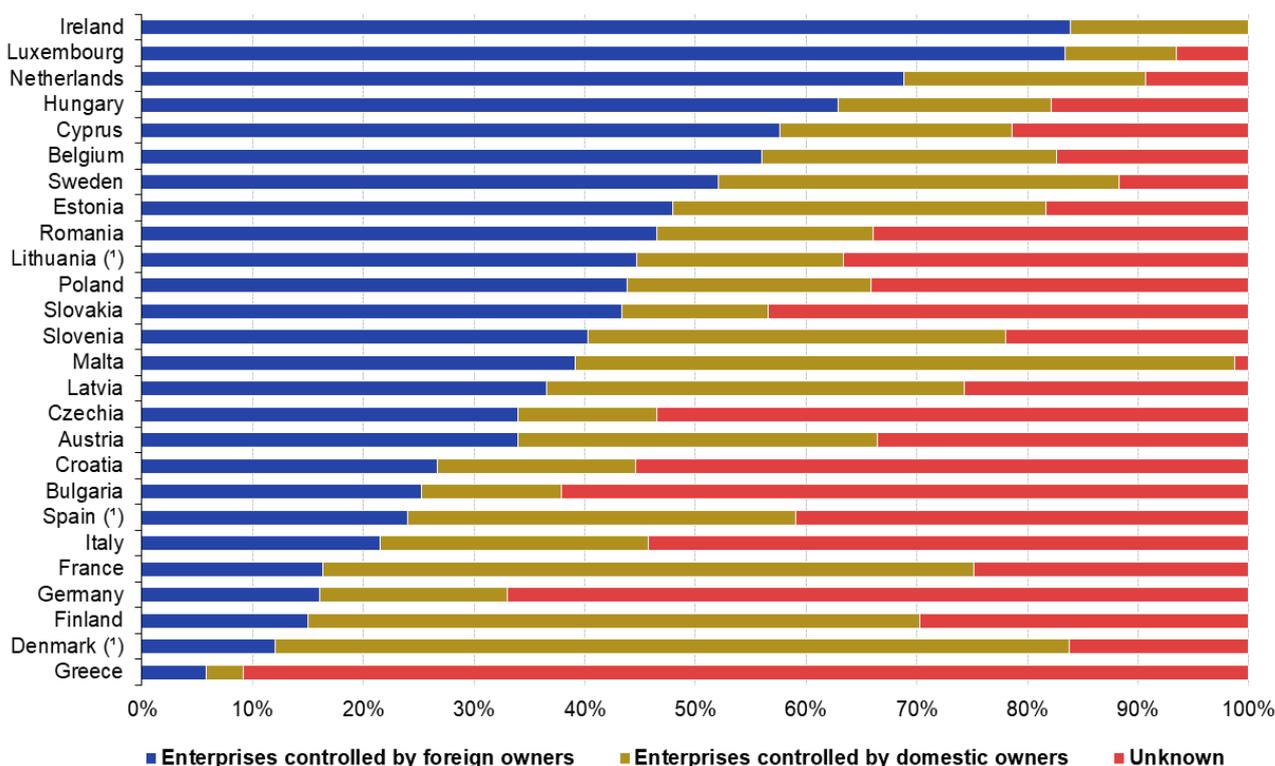


Figure 5: Services exports by enterprise ownership and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by type of control)
Source: Eurostat ext_stec03

The relative contributions of domestically and foreign-controlled enterprises also varied in relation to services imports (Figure 6). Domestically controlled enterprises were responsible for less than 13% of the services imports in Greece, Luxembourg, Czechia and Bulgaria. The highest proportion of services imports by domestically controlled enterprises was in Denmark (72%), followed by Malta (60%), France (59%) and Finland (55%). In Luxembourg (84%) and in Ireland (83%) of the imports were due to the activities of the foreign-controlled enterprises.

Services imports by enterprise ownership and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by type of control)



Note: data not available for Portugal and Norway due to confidentiality

(*) provisional data for Denmark, Spain and Lithuania

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext_stec03)

eurostat

Figure 6: Services imports by enterprise ownership and country, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by type of control) Source: Eurostat ext_stec03

Key takeaways:

- Overall, the EU shows a greater share of enterprises controlled by foreign owners than domestic ones.
- Across the EU, the impact of globalisation on business is evident: foreign-owned enterprises account for 43% of total exports and 47% of total imports — both higher than the shares of domestically owned enterprises, which stand at 32% and 27%, respectively.
- Ownership patterns vary widely across countries, reflecting economic, regulatory, and market differences.
- Luxembourg, Ireland and the Netherlands stand out for their very high proportion of foreign-controlled enterprises, likely reflecting their roles as major hubs for international business. Luxembourg and Ireland have the highest foreign ownership (89% and 79% for exports and 84% and 83% for imports).
- Countries like Denmark, Finland, France, and Malta have strong domestic control, which could indicate a more locally rooted business environment.
- Several countries have high proportions of unknown ownership.
- Germany and Italy have significant (over 50%) unknown ownership proportions despite being large economies, which may suggest complexities in ownership classification/structure.

Trade in services by enterprises' economic activity

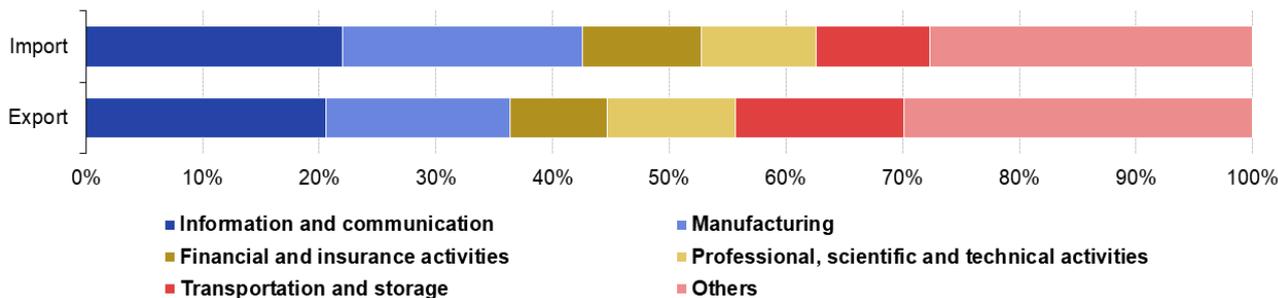
About half of total EU export flows came from traders whose primary activity falls under three key economic activities: information and communication (21%), manufacturing (16%) and transportation and

storage (14%).

The economic activity of a trading enterprise reflects its main area of operation. Enterprises in certain sectors, such as manufacturing, primarily export goods, while others, particularly those within NACE Sections H-N, are more focused on services. The EU export flows came from traders whose primary activity falls within one of the following 3 key sectors: information and communication (21%), manufacturing (16%) and transportation and storage (14%), (Figure 7).

EU services exports for leading economic activities, partner extra-EU, 2023

(% by economic activity)



Note: The observed NACE activities under "Others" are: Agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; Construction; Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; Accommodation and food service activities; real estate activities; public administration, defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; other services; Administrative and support service activities; Unknown NACE activity.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec02])

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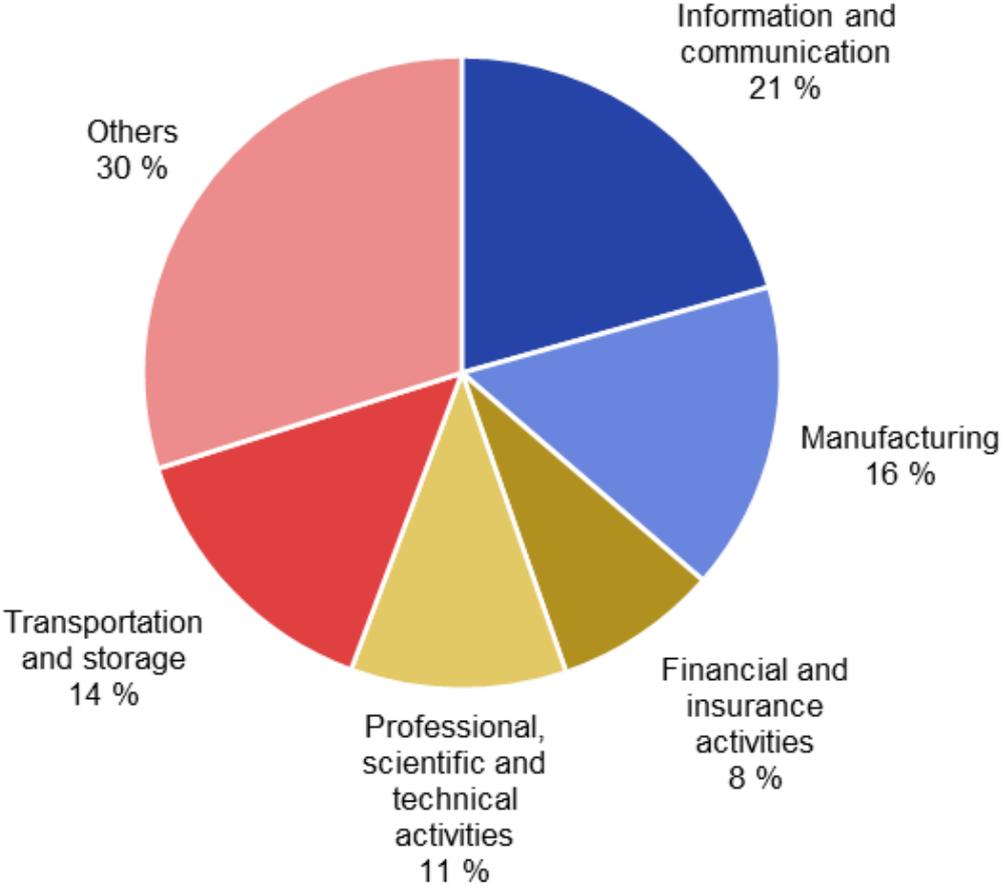
Figure 7: EU services flows for leading economic activities, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by economic activity)

Source: Eurostat ext_stec02

The 5 leading economic activities (transportation and storage, information and communication, manufacturing, professional, scientific and technical activities, and financial and insurance activities) accounted for 70% of total EU export trade flows and 73% of the imports.

EU services flows for the top 5 economic activities, partner extra-EU, 2023

(% by economic activity)



Note: The observed NACE activities are: Agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; Construction; Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; Accommodation and food service activities; real estate activities; public administration, defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; other services; Administrative and support service activities; Unknown NACE activity.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec02])



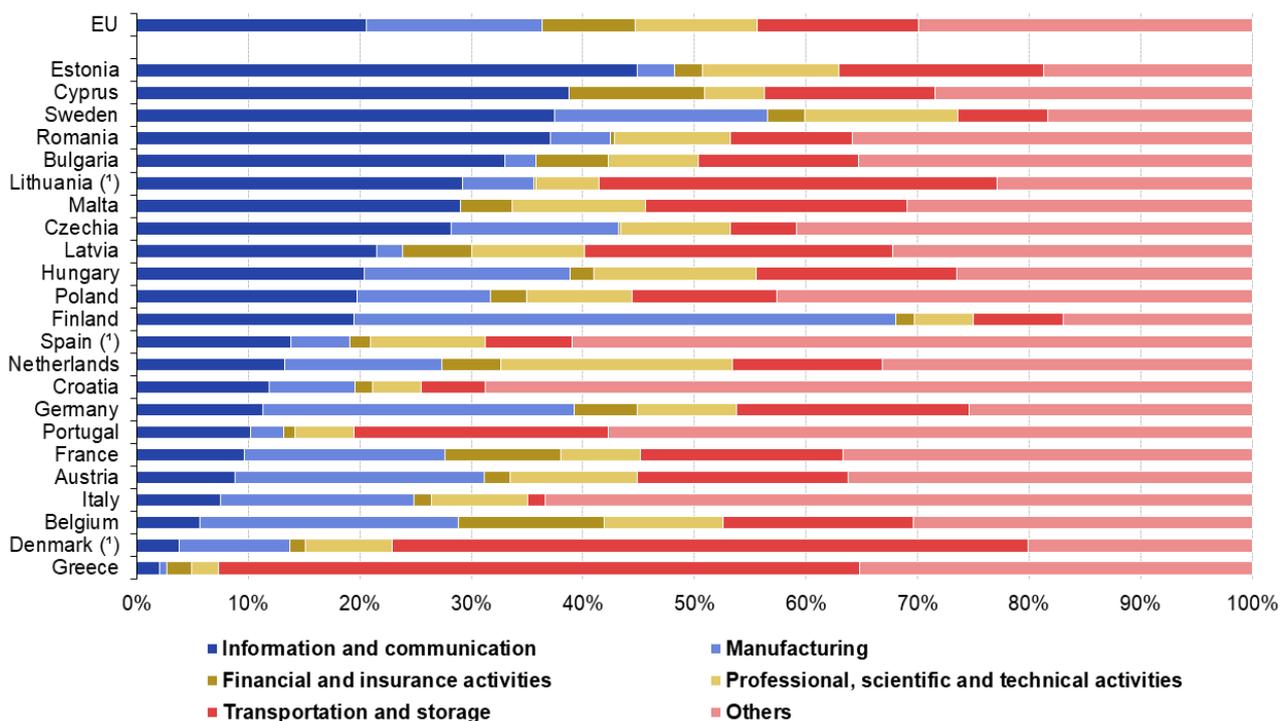
Figure 8: EU services exports for leading economic activities, partner extra-EU, 2023 (% by economic activity) Source: Eurostat ext_stec02

The economic activities of the traders varied significantly across EU countries.

Figure 9 shows the proportions of services exports attributable to enterprises in different activities, as defined by their main economic activity. In 2023, Ireland and Luxembourg had massive exports in financial and insurance, and information and communication sectors, while transportation and storage was significant in Denmark and Germany.

The least contributing sectors for majority of the countries were: i) agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying, ii) electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities and iii) construction.

Services exports by economic activity of the enterprise, partner extra-EU, 2023 (%)



Note: data not available for Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Slovakia and Norway due to confidentiality. The observed NACE activities under "Others" are: Agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities; Construction; Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; Accommodation and food service activities; real estate activities; public administration, defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities; other services; Administrative and support service activities; Unknown NACE activity

(*) provisional data for Denmark, Spain and Lithuania

Source: Eurostat (online data code: [ext_stec02])

eurostat

Figure 9: Services exports by country and economic activity of the enterprise, partner extra-EU, 2023 (%)
Source: Eurostat ext_stec02

Source data for tables and graphs

- [2023 STEC tables and graphs](#)

Data sources

Since July 2022, Eurostat has begun disseminating the available voluntary STEC data. The published data includes the following breakdowns:

- Services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) by NACE Rev.2 activities and enterprise size class:

[\(ext_stec01\)](#) ;

- Services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) by NACE Rev.2 activities and EBOPS 2010 items:

[\(ext_stec02\)](#) ;

- Services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) by NACE Rev.2 activities and type of ownership:

[\(ext_stec03\)](#) .

In October 2024, the first official STEC data under the European Business Statistics Regulation (EU) 2019/2152 were published, covering EU aggregates for the reference year 2022. In February 2025, data for the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland for the reference year 2022, along with some historical data, were disseminated. The country data for reference year 2023 were published during the third quarter of 2025 and the EU aggregates in October the same year.

The development of STEC statistics marks a significant advancement in integrating services trade data into business statistics. These statistics establish a connection between the volume of trade in services and the characteristics of the enterprises involved. They provide insights into specific enterprise characteristics, such as size, economic activity, and ownership. STEC data are generated by combining statistical business register information with data on international trade in services at the enterprise level. This integration allows for the linkage of each enterprise's export and import values to its corresponding characteristics, as recorded in the business register.

The resulting dataset offers a breakdown of the trader population by enterprise size (small, medium, and large), ownership type (domestic or foreign-controlled), and primary economic activity by NACE Rev 2.0 codes. By linking different datasets, STEC adds value to the data without increasing the respondent burden on enterprises and with minimal costs for data compilers.

Context

International trade in services has increasingly become a key driver of economic globalisation. Many services, including health, education, and business services, have become tradable thanks to digitalisation. Additionally, new services have emerged in international markets through information and communication technologies (ICT), digital platforms, and digitalisation, which have led to the creation of new markets and expanded digital trade.

The growing importance of international trade in services, due to digitalisation and the development of new services, has increased demand for STEC data, which complement the big picture provided by traditional trade statistics. While international trade in services statistics provide a view of services flows between countries, broken down by service type, they do not reveal details about the enterprises engaged in that trade.

STEC statistics offer valuable insights into traders operating in the international services market. They help answer key questions such as: "Who are the traders?" and "What are the characteristics of the trading enterprises?". These statistics offer additional insights into trade by profiling enterprises based on attributes like number of employees, ownership type, and economic activity. Profiling traders is essential to understanding the micro-level incentives and consequences of services trade.

STEC data also contribute to the broader statistical framework on measuring economic globalisation and global value chains (GVCs), enabling more informed and targeted trade policies. By identifying the ownership status (foreign or domestic) of enterprises engaged in trade, STEC data shed light on the role of multinational enterprises in driving globalisation and explicitly address the link between trade and investment. Furthermore, the data enhance the allocation of services exports and imports by the industry type of the trading enterprise. This information is useful for the development of the EU's inter-country supply, use, and input-output tables, as part of the ([FIGARO project](#)).

Together, STEC and trade in goods by enterprise characteristics (TEC) statistics provide a comprehensive picture of the enterprises active in international markets.

The importance of STEC statistics has been officially recognised and integrated as a regular reporting requirement

for EU countries under the [European Business Statistics Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2152](#) , making STEC statistics official for the first time. The first reference year for STEC data reporting under this regulation is 2022. The methodology for compiling STEC statistics is outlined in the [Eurostat-OECD Compilers Guide for Statistics on Services Trade by Enterprise Characteristics](#) .

The first official STEC dataset worldwide was published as follows:

- On 1 October 2024: Data for EU aggregates only, covering the reference year 2022.
- On 28 February 2025: A complete dataset for EU Member States, Norway and Iceland for the reference year 2022, along with some back data submitted by a few countries.

All EU Member States reported 100% of the legally required mandatory data points as per the European Business Statistics Regulation (EU) 2019/2152.

Services trade by enterprise characteristics (STEC) mandatory cells per data set

	STEC by NACE Rev.2 activities and enterprise size class (ext_stec01)	STEC by EBOPS 2010 items and NACE Rev.2 activities (ext_stec02)	STEC by NACE Rev.2 activities and type of ownership (ext_stec03)	Total
Mandatory cells	390	1092	312	1794

Source: Eurostat



Table 1: STEC mandatory cells per data set Source: Eurostat

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- [International trade in goods by enterprise characteristic](#)
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Publications

- [Compilers Guide for statistics on Services Trade by Enterprise Characteristics \(STEC\)](#)

External links

- [Manual of the Statistics on International Trade in Services 2010 \(MSITS 2010\)](#)
- [Compilers Guide for the Manual of the Statistics on International Trade in Services](#)