

# United Kingdom-EU - international trade in goods statistics

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in March 2022*

*Planned article update: March 2023*

" In 2021, the United Kingdom was the second largest partner for EU exports of goods (13.0 %) and the fourth largest partner for EU imports of goods (6.9 %)."

" Among EU Member States, Germany was both the largest importer of goods from and the largest exporter of goods to the United Kingdom in 2021."

This article provides a picture of the international trade in goods between the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom. It analyses the type of goods exchanged between the two economies and the shares of each EU Member State in those exchanges. 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 goods traded, specific characteristics of trade as well as background information.

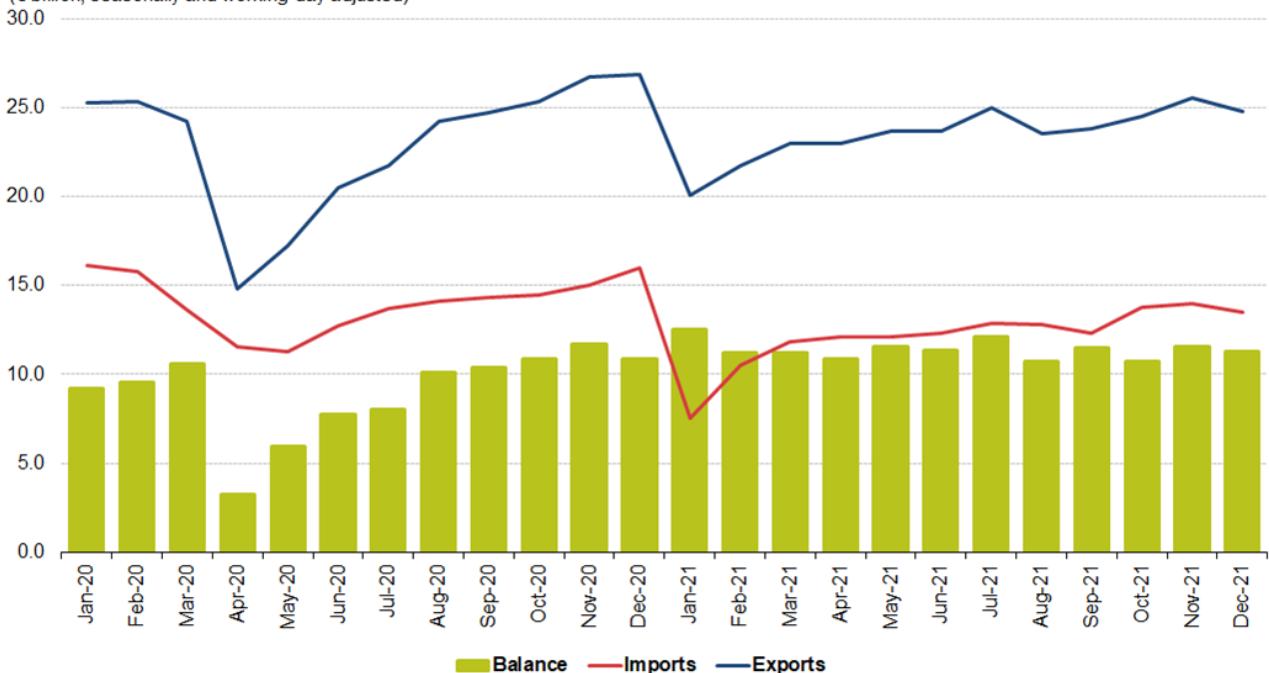
## Recent developments

The COVID-19 crisis caused both exports and imports between the EU and the United Kingdom to fall in 2020, as shown in Figure 1. Imports reached a minimum of € 7.5 billion in January 2021. By December 2021 they had recovered to € 13.5 billion.

Exports reached a minimum of € 14.8 billion in April 2020. By December 2021 they had recovered to € 24.8 billion.

## EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom, 2020-2021

(€ billion, seasonally and working-day adjusted)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)

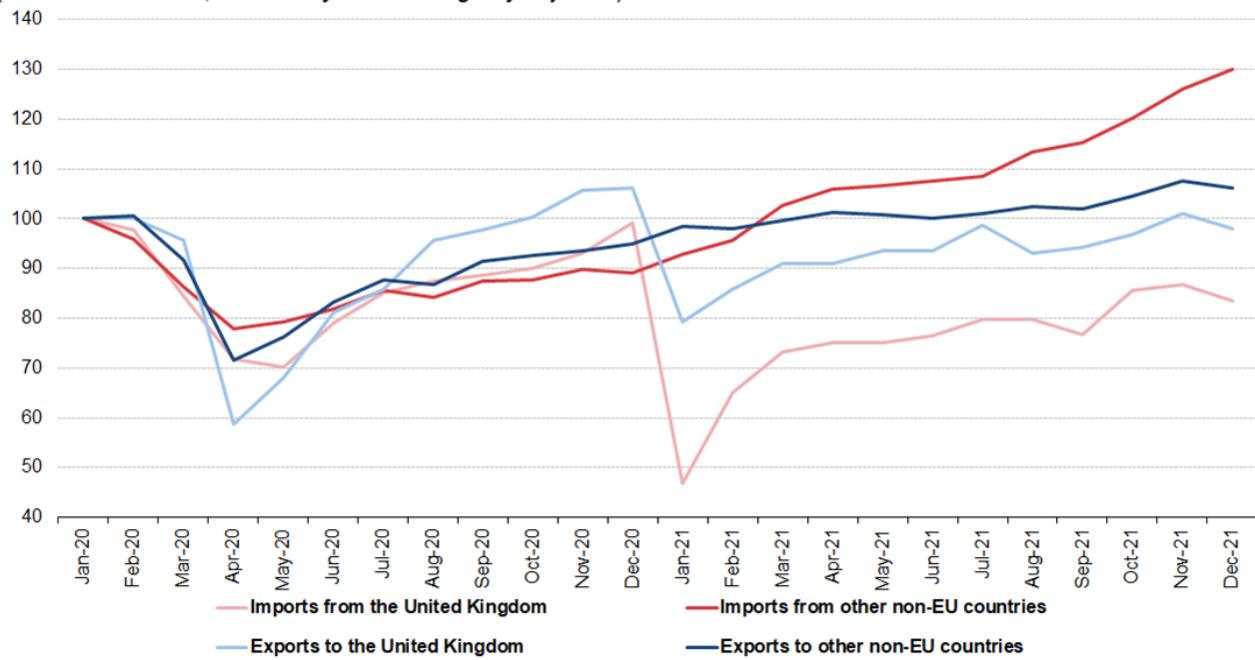
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**Figure 1: EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom, 2020-2021 (€ billion, seasonally and working-day adjusted) Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)**

Figure 2 compares EU trade with the United Kingdom to EU trade with other non-EU countries. Between January 2020 and December 2021, EU imports from the United Kingdom decreased by 16.4 % while imports from other non-EU countries increased by 30.1 %. EU exports to the United Kingdom decreased by 2.1 % while exports to other non-EU countries increased by 6.1 %. Comparisons between 2020 and 2021 should be interpreted with caution because of a change in methodology as explained in the section on data sources below.

## EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom and other non-EU countries, 2020-2021

(Jan 2020 = 100 %, seasonally and working-day adjusted)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)

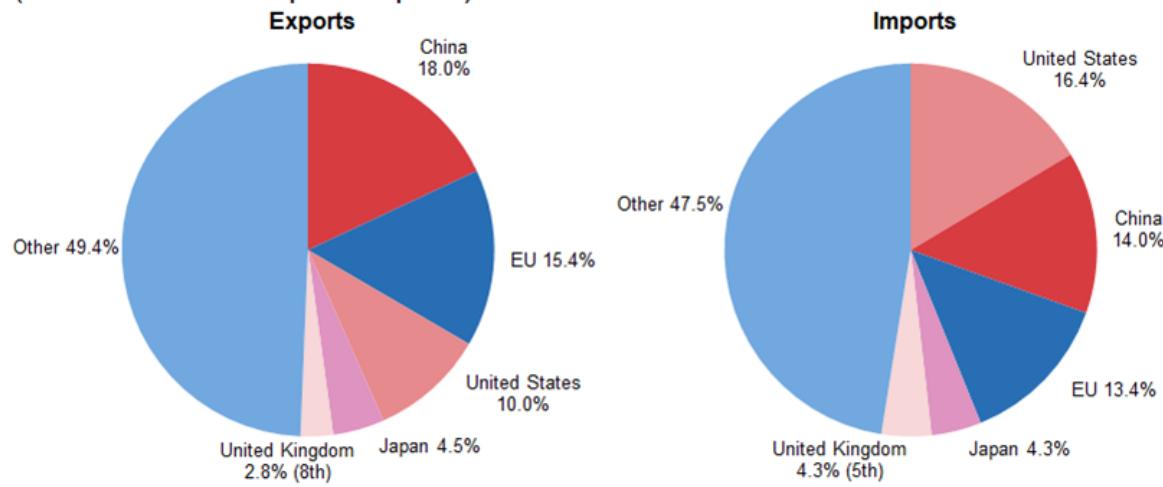
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**Figure 2: EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom and other non-EU countries, 2020-2021 (Jan 2019 = 100 %, seasonally and working-day adjusted) Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc)**

## EU and the United Kingdom in world trade in goods

Figure 3a shows the position of the United Kingdom among the largest traders of goods in the world in 2020. The four largest exporters were China (€ 2 268 billion, 18.0 %), the EU (€ 1 933 billion, 15.4 %), the United States (€ 1 253 billion, 10.0 %) and Japan (€ 561 billion, 4.5 %). The four largest importers were the United States (€ 2 108 billion, 16.4 %), China (€ 1 801 billion, 14.0 %), the EU (€ 1 717 billion, 13.4 %) and Japan (€ 556 billion, 4.3 %). Figure 3b has some more details. It shows that the United Kingdom (€ 354 billion, 2.8 %) was the eighth largest exporter in the world between Mexico (€ 366 billion, 2.9 %) and Canada (€ 342 billion, 2.7 %). The United Kingdom (€ 556 billion, 4.3 %) was the fifth largest importer in the world between Japan (€ 556 billion, 4.3 %) and Hong Kong (€ 499 billion, 3.9 %).

## The United Kingdom among the world's largest traders of goods, 2020 (% share of world exports/imports)

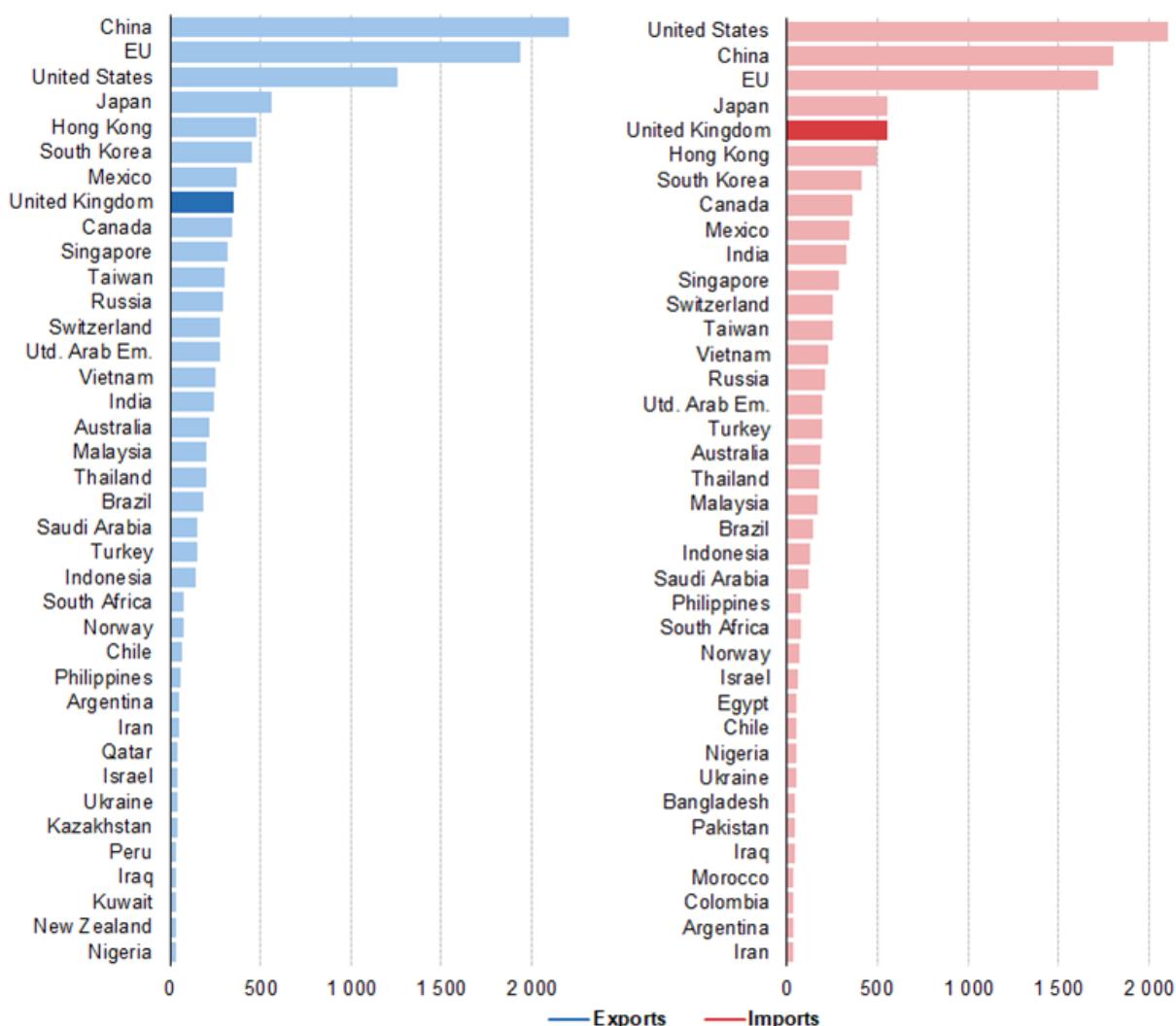


Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD

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**Figure 3a: The United Kingdom among the world's largest traders of goods, 2020 (% share of world exports/imports)** Source: Eurostat (ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD

## Top traders in goods with a focus on the United Kingdom, 2020 (\$ billion)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD

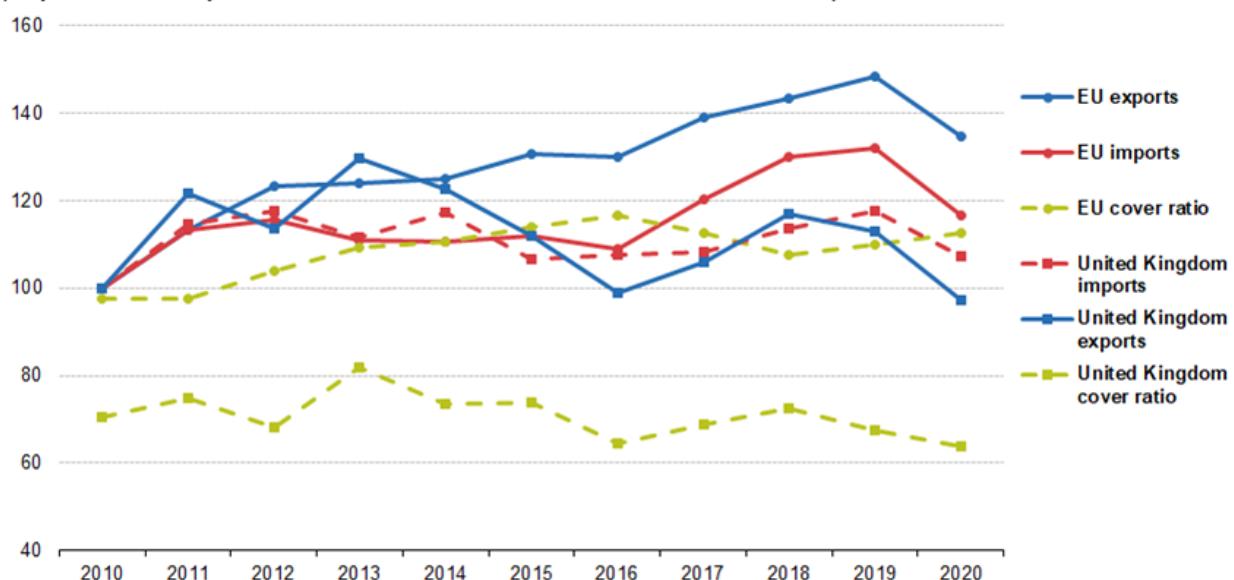
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### Top traders in goods with a focus on the United Kingdom, 2020 (\$ billion) Source: Eurostat (ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD

The imports and exports of goods of the EU and the United Kingdom indexed at 100 in 2010 for the period to 2020 are shown in Figure 4. It also shows the cover ratio (exports / imports) for this period. Exports from the EU were lowest in 2010 (100) and highest in 2019 (149) and were 135 in 2020. Imports to the EU were lowest in 2010 (100) and highest in 2019 (132) and were 117 in 2020. The cover ratio for the EU was lowest in 2011 (97 %) and highest in 2016 (116 %) and was 113 % in 2020. Exports from the United Kingdom were lowest in 2020 (97) and highest in 2013 (130). Imports to the United Kingdom were lowest in 2010 (100) and highest in 2019 (118) and were 107 in 2020. The cover ratio for the United Kingdom was lowest in 2020 (64 %) and highest in 2013 (82 %).

## Trade in goods of the EU and the United Kingdom, 2010-2020

(exports and imports indexed at 100 in 2010, cover ratio in %)



Notes:

- While the trade balance provides information on the absolute value of trading positions, the cover ratio provides a relative measure that is based on the ratio (expressed in percentage terms) between the value of exports and the value of imports; if exports are higher than imports then the cover ratio will be above 100.

- Exports and imports are indexed at 100 in 2010

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD

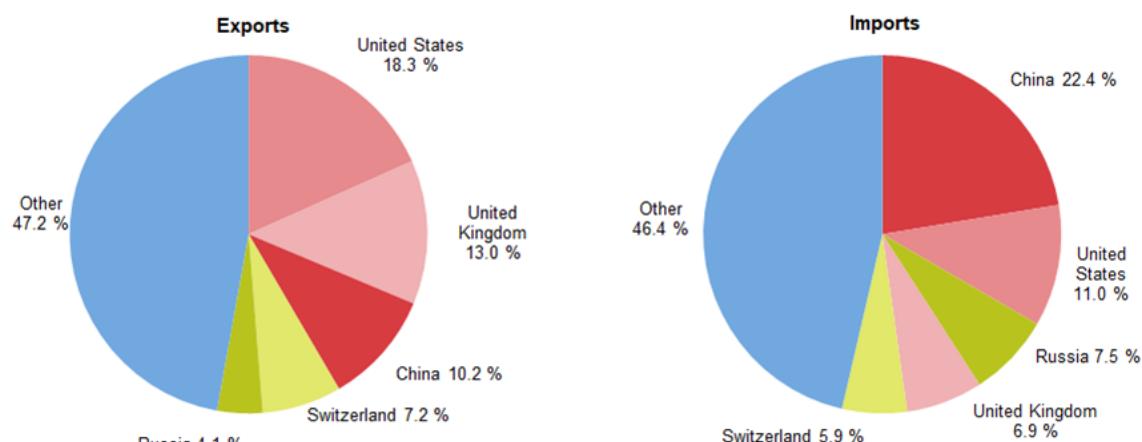
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**Figure 4: Trade in goods of the EU and the United Kingdom, 2010-2020 (exports and imports indexed at 100 in 2010, cover ratio in %) Source: Eurostat (ext\_lt\_introeu27\_2020) and UNCTAD**

### Exports to the United Kingdom increased but imports decreased between 2011 and 2021.

The position of the United Kingdom among the largest trade partners of the EU in 2021 can be seen in Figure 5. In 2021, the United Kingdom was the second largest partner for EU exports of goods (13.0 %). It was preceded by the United States (18.3 %) and followed by China (10.2 %), Switzerland (7.2 %) and Russia (4.1 %). It was the fourth largest partner for EU imports of goods (6.9 %), preceded by China (22.4 %), the United States (11.0 %) and Russia (7.5 %) and followed by Switzerland (5.9 %).

## The United Kingdom among the EU's main partners for trade in goods, 2021 (% share of extra-EU exports/imports)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)

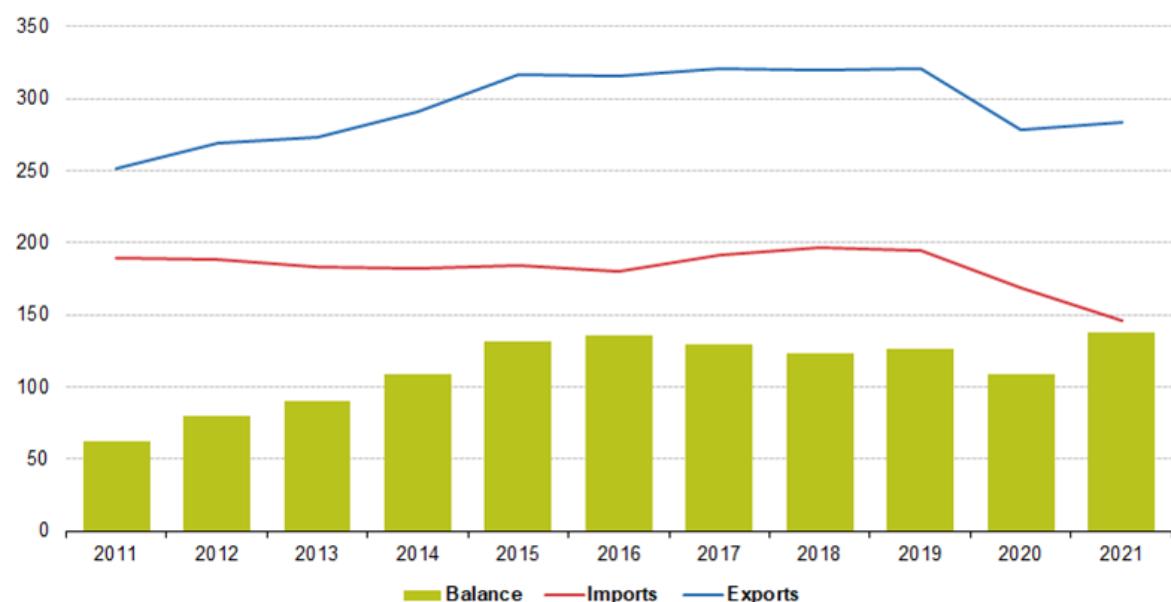
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**Figure 5: The United Kingdom among the EU's main partners for trade in goods, 2021 (% share of extra-EU exports/imports)**  
Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995

Figure 6 shows the exports, imports and trade balance between the EU and the United Kingdom from 2011 to 2021. In 2011, the EU had a trade surplus with the United Kingdom of € 62 billion. The trade surplus remained throughout the whole period, reaching € 138 billion in 2021. Exports to the United Kingdom increased but imports decreased between 2011 and 2021. EU exports to the United Kingdom were highest in 2017 (€ 321 billion) and lowest in 2011 (€ 251 billion). EU imports from the United Kingdom were highest in 2018 (€ 197 billion) and lowest in 2021 (€ 146 billion).

## EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom, 2011-2021

(€ billion)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)

eurostat

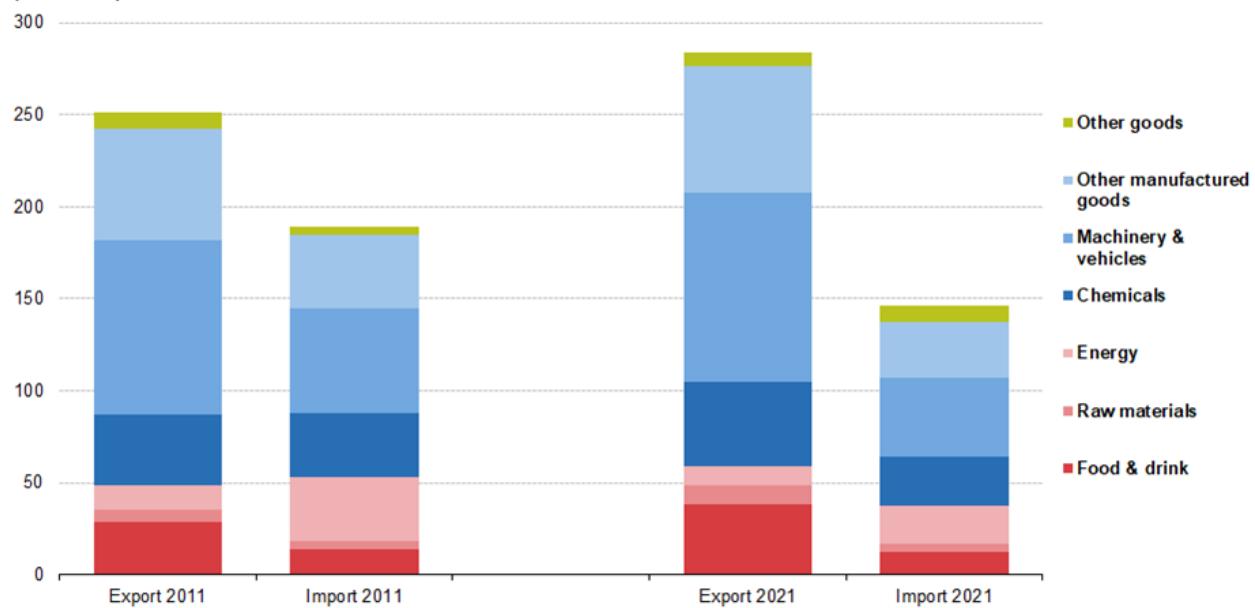
**Figure 6: EU trade in goods with the United Kingdom, 2011-2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995**

### EU-the United Kingdom trade by type of goods

The breakdown of EU trade with the United Kingdom by SITC groups is shown in Figure 7. The red shades denote the primary goods: food & drink, raw materials and energy, while the blue shades show the manufactured goods: chemicals, machinery & vehicles and other manufactured goods. Finally, other goods are shown in green. In 2021, EU exports of manufactured goods (77 %) had a higher share than primary goods (21 %). The most exported manufactured goods were machinery & vehicles (36 %), followed by other manufactured goods (24 %) and chemicals (16 %). In 2021, EU imports of manufactured goods (68 %) also had a higher share than primary goods (26 %). The most imported manufactured goods were machinery & vehicles (29 %), followed by other manufactured goods (21 %) and chemicals (18 %).

## EU trade with the United Kingdom by product group, 2011 and 2021

(€ billion)



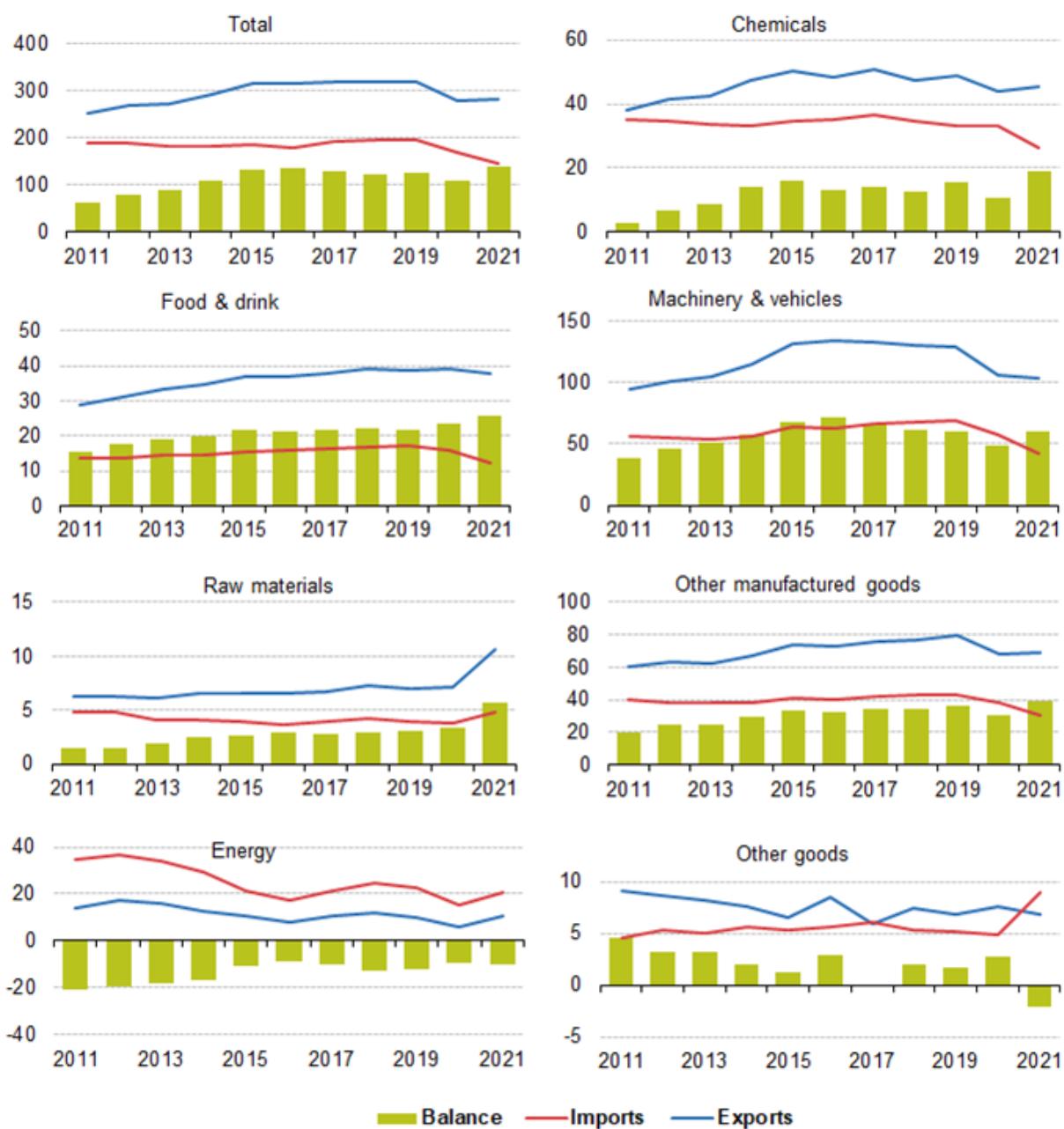
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)

eurostat

**Figure 7: EU trade with the United Kingdom by product group, 2011 and 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995**

Figure 8 shows the evolution of EU imports and exports by SITC group since 2011. In 2021, the EU had trade surpluses in machinery & vehicles (€ 60 billion), other manufactured goods (€ 39 billion), food & drink (€ 26 billion), chemicals (€ 19 billion) and raw materials (€ 6 billion). The EU had trade deficits in other goods (€ 2 billion) and energy (€ 10 billion).

## EU trade with the United Kingdom by group, 2011-2021 (<sup>€</sup> billion)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitz and DS-018995)

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Figure 8: EU trade with the United Kingdom by group, 2011-2021 (<sup>€</sup> billion) Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitz) and Comext DS-018995

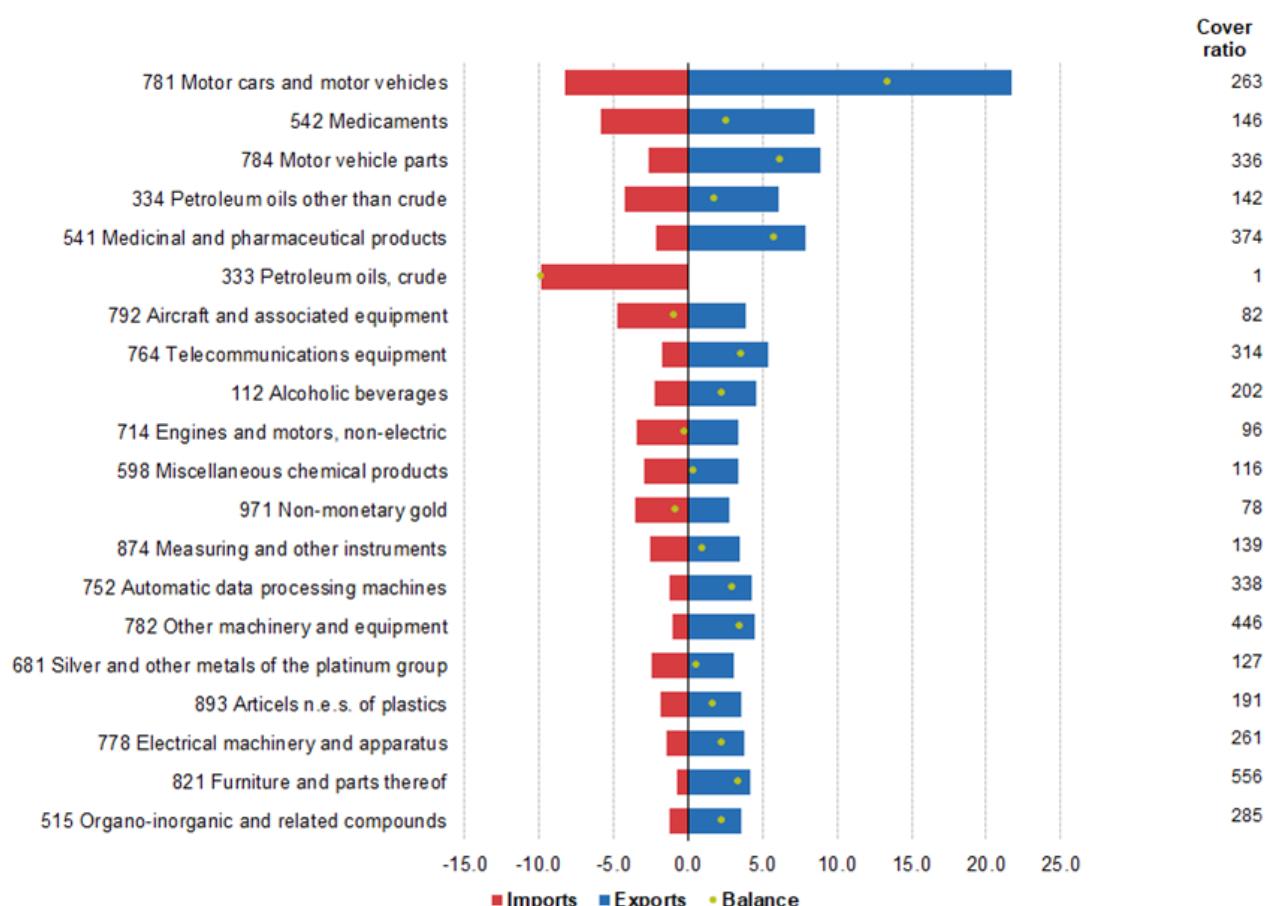
### EU-the United Kingdom most traded goods

More detail about the goods exchanged between the EU and the United Kingdom is given in Figure 9, showing the 20 most traded goods at SITC-3 level. These top 20 goods covered 38 % of total trade in goods in 2021. Eight belonged to machinery and vehicles, four each to chemicals and other manufactured goods, two to energy, one each to food and drink and other goods. The most traded group of goods at this level was motor cars and motor vehicles. Another interesting way to look at the data is to investigate the cover ratio (exports / imports) of traded goods, showing the direction of the trade flows between the two economies. These ratios can be found in the

right-hand margin of Figure 9. One product (petroleum oils, crude with 1 %) was below 50 %, indicating EU imports from the United Kingdom were at least twice as large as EU exports to the United Kingdom. Ten products were above 200 %, indicating EU exports to the United Kingdom were more than twice as large as EU imports from the United Kingdom. Nine products were between 50 % and 200 %, showing more balanced trade.

## Most traded goods between EU and the United Kingdom, 2021

(€ billion)



Note: While the trade balance provides information on the absolute value of trading positions, the cover ratio provides a relative measure that is based on the ratio (expressed in percentage terms) between the value of exports and the value of imports; if exports are higher than imports then the cover ratio will be above 100.

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

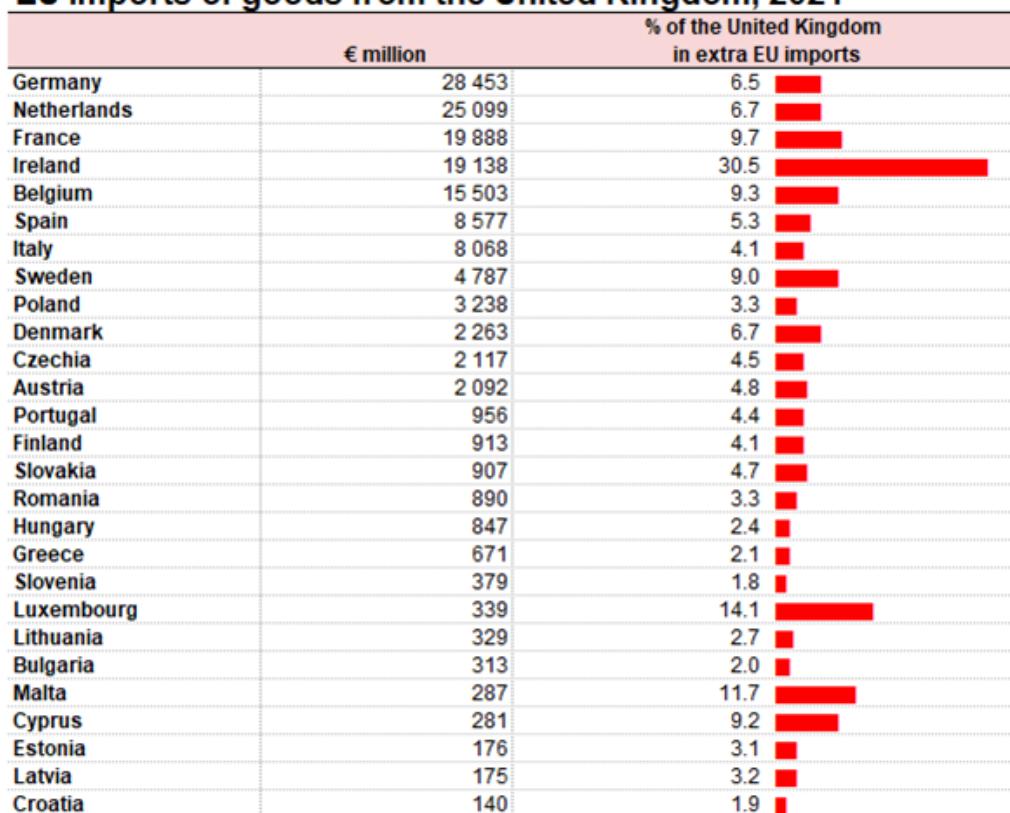
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**Figure 9: Most traded goods between EU and the United Kingdom, 2021 (€ billion) Source: Eurostat DS-018995**

### Trade with the United Kingdom by Member State

Table 1a shows the imports of goods from the United Kingdom by Member State. The three largest importers from the United Kingdom in the EU were Germany (€ 28 453 million), the Netherlands (€ 25 099 million) and France (€ 19 888 million). Ireland (30.5 %) had the highest share for the United Kingdom in its extra-EU imports.

## EU imports of goods from the United Kingdom, 2021



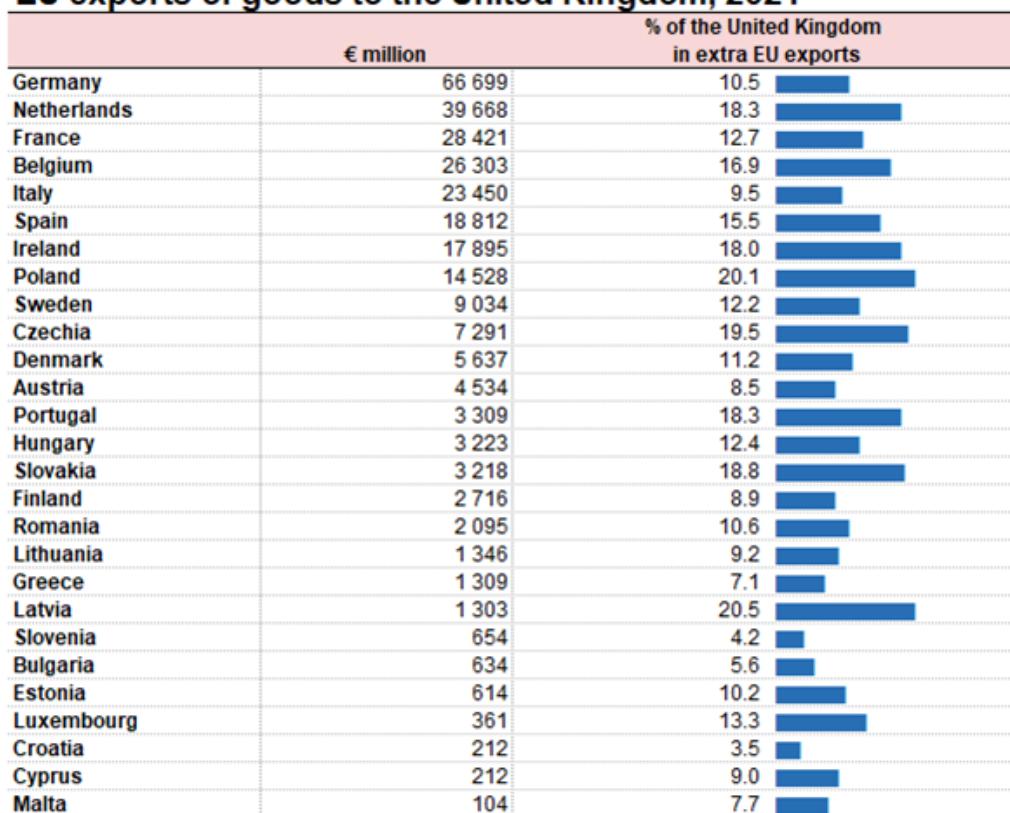
Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)



**Table 1a: EU imports of goods from the United Kingdom, 2021** Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995

Table 1b shows the exports of goods to the United Kingdom by Member State. The three largest exporters to the United Kingdom in the EU were Germany (€ 66 699 million), the Netherlands (€ 39 668 million) and France (€ 28 421 million). Latvia (20.5 %), Poland (20.1 %) and Czechia (19.5 %) had the highest shares for the United Kingdom in their extra-EU exports.

## EU exports of goods to the United Kingdom, 2021



Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)



**Table 1b: EU exports of goods to the United Kingdom, 2021** Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995

The trade in goods balance between the EU Member States and the United Kingdom is shown in Table 1c. It shows that 24 Member States had a trade surplus with the United Kingdom. The largest surplus was held by Germany (€ 38 246 million), followed by Italy (€ 15 382 million) and the Netherlands (€ 14 569 million). There were three Member States that had a trade deficit with the United Kingdom. The largest deficit was held by Ireland (€ 1 243 million), followed by Malta (€ 183 million) and Cyprus (€ 69 million).

## EU trade balance of goods with the United Kingdom, 2021 (€ million)

	€ million
Germany	38 246
Italy	15 382
Netherlands	14 569
Poland	11 290
Belgium	10 800
Spain	10 235
France	8 533
Czechia	5 174
Sweden	4 247
Denmark	3 373
Austria	2 443
Hungary	2 376
Portugal	2 352
Slovakia	2 311
Finland	1 803
Romania	1 205
Latvia	1 128
Lithuania	1 017
Greece	638
Estonia	438
Bulgaria	321
Slovenia	275
Croatia	72
Luxembourg	22
Cyprus	-69
Malta	-183
Ireland	-1 243

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc and DS-018995)



**Table 1c: EU trade balance of goods with the United Kingdom, 2021** Source: Eurostat (ext\_st\_eu27\_2020sitc) and Comext DS-018995

### Source data for tables and graphs

- EU - United Kingdom international trade in goods statistics - graphs and tables

### 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-27 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-27 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-27 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-27 trade partners.

Data for the non-EU-27 countries used in figures 1 to 3 are taken from the UNCTAD database of the United Nations. For the calculation of shares the world trade is defined as the sum of EU trade with non-EU countries (source: Eurostat) plus the international trade of non-EU countries (source: UNCTAD).

## Methodology

According to the EU concepts and definitions, extra-EU trade statistics (trade between EU Member States and non-EU countries) do not record exchanges involving goods in transit, placed in a customs warehouse or given temporary admission (for trade fairs, temporary exhibitions, tests, etc.). This is known as 'special trade'. The partner is the country of final destination of the goods for exports and the country of origin for imports.

## Product classification

Information on commodities exported and imported is presented according to the [Standard international trade classification \(SITC\)](#). A full description is available from Eurostat's classification server [RAMON](#).

## Unit of measure

Trade values are expressed in millions or billions (1 000 millions) of euros. They correspond to the statistical value, i.e. to the amount which would be invoiced in the event 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

Trade is an important indicator of Europe's prosperity and place in the world. The bloc is deeply integrated into global markets both for the products it sources and the exports it sells. The EU trade policy is one of the main pillars of the EU's relations with the rest of the world.

Because the 27 EU Member States share a single market and a single external border, they also have a single trade policy. EU Member States speak and negotiate collectively, both in the [World Trade Organization](#), where the rules of international trade are agreed and enforced, and with individual trading partners. This common policy enables them to speak with one voice in trade negotiations, maximising their impact in such negotiations. This is even more important in a globalised world in which economies tend to cluster together in regional groups.

The openness of the EU's trade regime has meant that the EU is the biggest player on the global trading scene and remains a good region to do business with. Thanks to the ease of modern transport and communications, it is now easier to produce, buy and sell goods around the world which gives European companies of every size the potential to trade outside Europe.

## Other articles

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

## Main tables

- [International trade in goods \(t\\_ext\\_go\)](#), see:

International trade in goods - long-term indicators (t\_ext\_go\_lti)

International trade in goods - short-term indicators (t\_ext\_go\_sti)

## Database

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

International trade in goods - aggregated data (ext\_go\_agg)

International trade in goods - long-term indicators (ext\_go\_lti)

International trade in goods - short-term indicators (ext\_go\_sti)

International trade in goods - detailed data (detail)

- [Full access to detailed statistics on international trade in goods \(Comext\)](#) , see:

EU trade since 1988 by SITC (DS-018995)

## 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 \(ESMS metadata file — ext\\_go\\_esms\)](#)
- [User guide on European statistics on international trade in goods](#)

## External links

- [European Commission](#)

- [Globalisation](#)

- [Trade](#)