

EU trade in COVID-19 related products

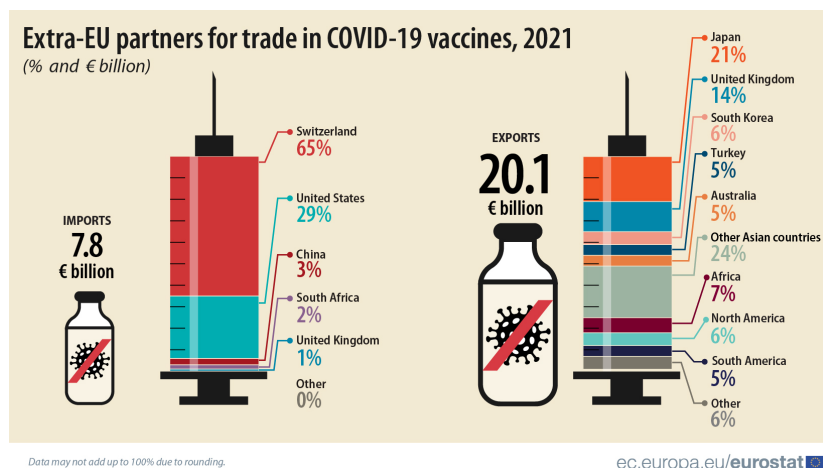
Statistics Explained

Data extracted in March 2022.

Planned article update: no update planned.

" Switzerland and the United States were the largest EU trade partners for COVID-19 related products in 2021. "

" Switzerland accounted for almost two thirds of extra EU imports of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. "



To help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world have taken a variety of restrictive measures, which have negatively affected international trade in goods, with a few noteworthy exceptions. Among these are goods used in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic: sterilisation products (incl. disinfectants), medical vehicles and furniture, protective garments, diagnostic testing equipment, medical devices, oxygen therapy equipment and medical consumables, or so called 'COVID-19 related products'. In this article, imports and exports of these goods are presented by product group and compared over time with other similar products, across EU Member States and by main trade partner. Finally imports and exports of COVID-19 vaccines are presented by main partners and by Member State.

Imports of COVID-19 related products grew by 12 % on average between 2019 and 2021

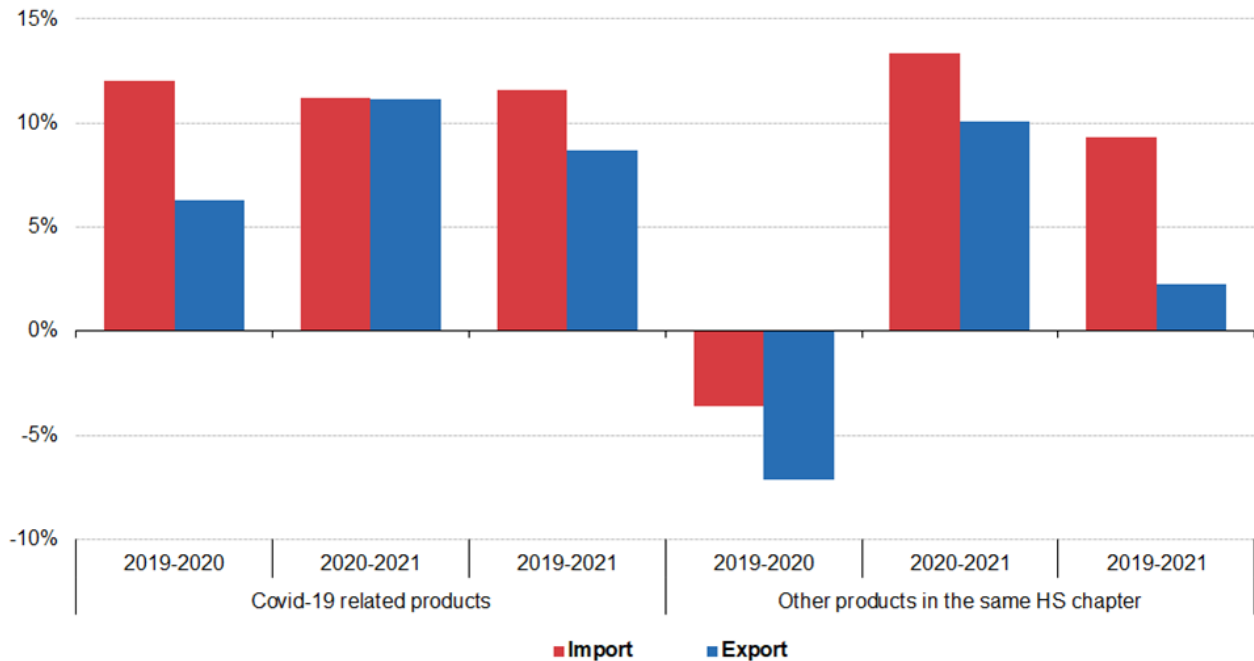
In 2020, extra-EU imports and exports of COVID-19 related products increased by 12 % and 6 % respectively, compared to 2019 (Figure 1). In contrast, trade in other similar products¹, dropped by 4 % for imports and by 7 %

¹This graph compares COVID-19 related products with products in the same chapter of the Harmonised System (HS) product classification, i.e. they are compared with other similar products that are however not directly used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

for exports. In 2021 compared to 2020 trade in COVID-19 related products continued to grow by 11 % for both imports and exports while similar products' imports grew by 13 % and their exports by 10 % in 2021. Looking at average annual growth between 2019 and 2021, imports of COVID-related products grew by 12 % compared to 9 % for similar products while exports of COVID-19 related products grew by 9 % compared to 2 % for similar products.

Extra-EU trade in Covid-19 related products, 2019-2021

average annual change



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-1180622)

eurostat

Figure 1: Extra-EU trade in Covid-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

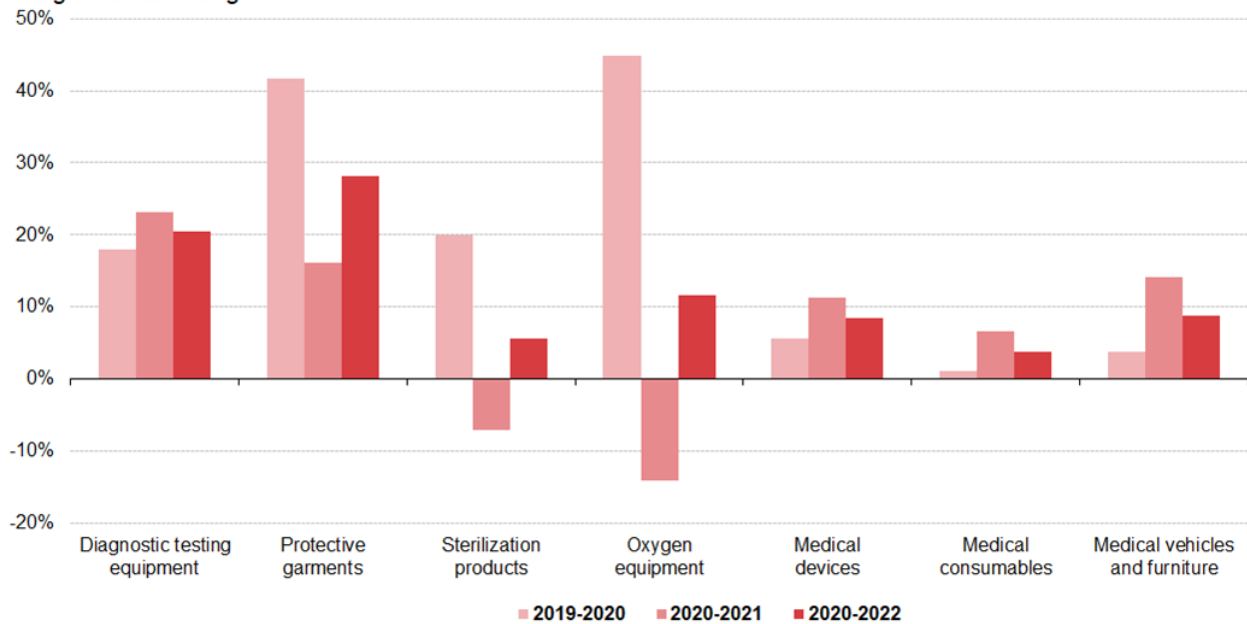
Despite the economic downturn and a decrease in total extra-EU trade, imports increased for all types of COVID-19 related products in 2020 (Figure 2). Imports of oxygen equipment and protective garments recorded the highest increase (respectively by 44.9 % and 41.6 % compared with 2019) amongst COVID-19 related products, followed by sterilization products (20.1 %). In 2021 compared to the high level in 2020, imports for oxygen equipment and sterilization products fell. However, combined over the period 2019 to 2021 all product groups' imports increased with the highest annual average increases for protective garments (28.2 %) and diagnostic testing equipment (20.6 %).

It should be noted that most COVID-19 related products cannot be precisely identified and they are grouped together with products not specific to COVID-19. Nevertheless, some trends can be observed.

These products were selected based on an indicative list elaborated by the Commission in the framework of Commission Decision N° C(2020) 2146, on the basis of a joint WCO/WHO list for COVID-19 medical supplies. More information can be found in [this document](#).

Extra-EU growth rates of imports of Covid-19 related products, 2019-2021

average annual change



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

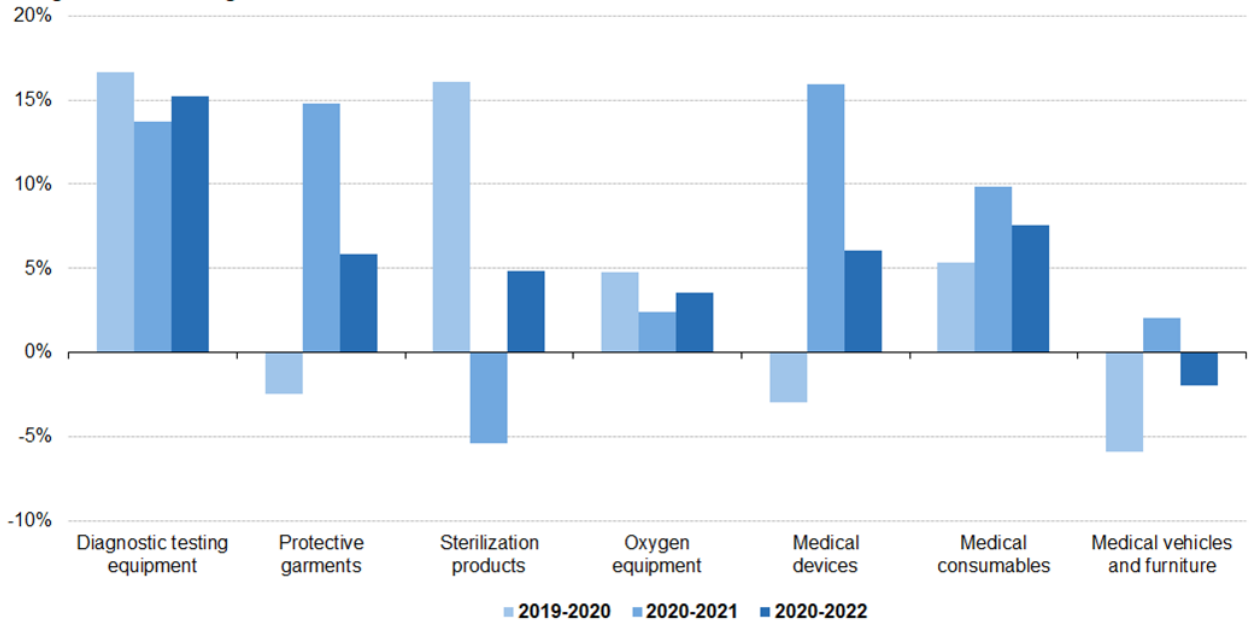
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Figure 2: Extra-EU growth rates of imports of Covid-19 related products Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

In 2020, the highest increases for extra-EU exports were recorded for diagnostic testing equipment (16.6 %) and sterilization products (16.1 %) see Figure 3. There were decreases for medical vehicles and furniture, medical devices and protective garments. Between 2019 and 2021, average annual increases were highest for diagnostic testing equipment (15.2 %), medical consumables (7.6 %), medical devices (6.1 %) and protective garments (5.8 %).

Extra-EU growth rates of exports of Covid-19 related products, 2019-2021

average annual change



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

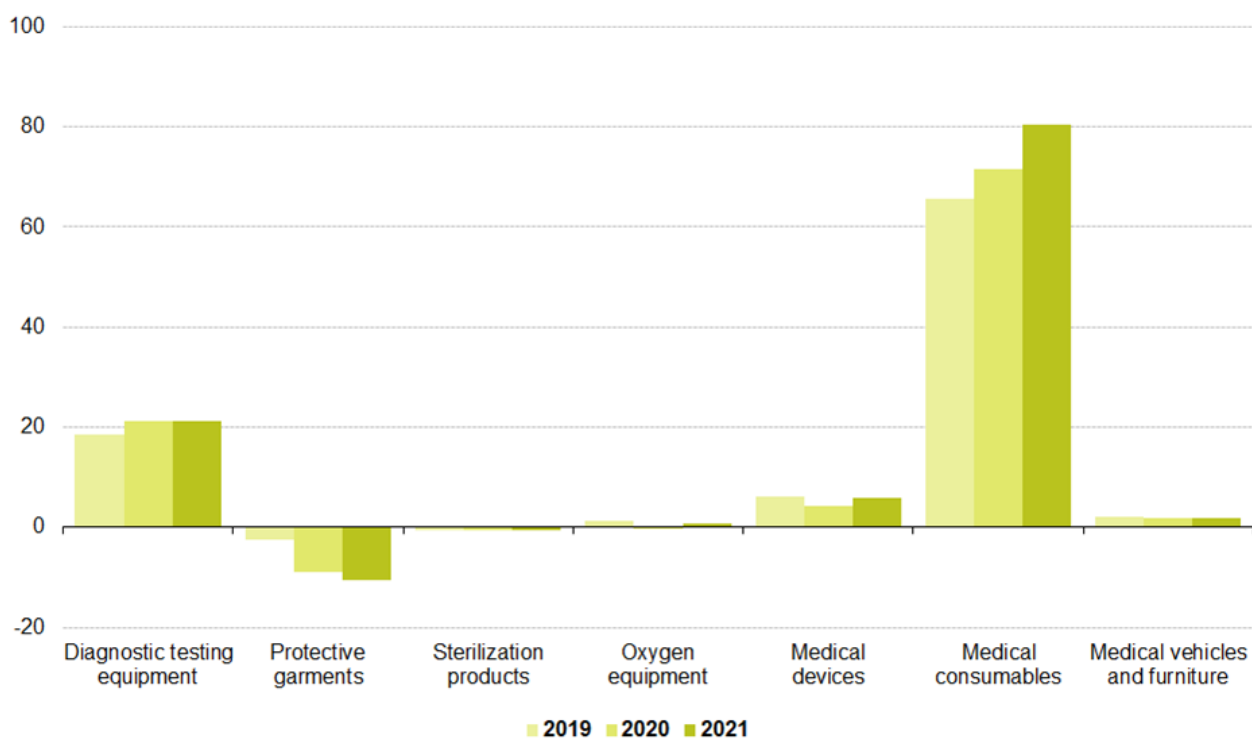
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Figure 3: Extra-EU growth rates of exports of Covid-19 related products Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

The trade balance for COVID-19 related products increased by € 15.0 billion for medical consumables which includes COVID-19 vaccines, between 2019 and 2021 (Figure 4). There was also a € 2.6 billion increase for diagnostic testing equipment while there was a decrease of € 8.1 billion for protective garments and € 0.7 billion for oxygen equipment. Balances for the other product groups did not change much.

Extra-EU balance of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat 

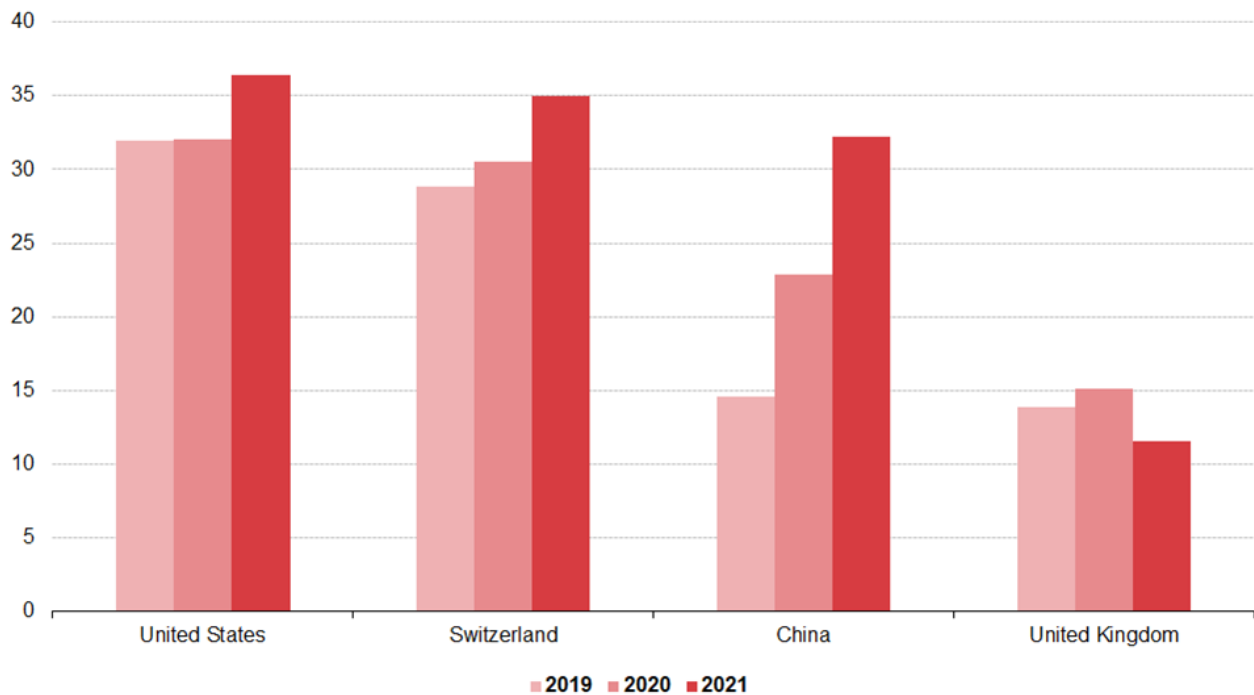
Figure 4: Extra-EU balance of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

The United States and Switzerland were the largest trade partners for COVID-19 related products

The United States (€ 36 billion) and Switzerland (€ 35 billion) were the main partner countries for imports of COVID-19 related products in 2021 (Figure 5) followed by China (€ 32 billion) and the United Kingdom € 12 billion). These four partners accounted for 73 % of all COVID-19 related imports in 2021. Between 2019 and 2021, imports from China (+ € 18 billion), Switzerland (+ € 6 billion) and the United States (+ € 4 billion) all increased while imports from the United Kingdom decreased by € 2 billion.

Extra-EU imports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

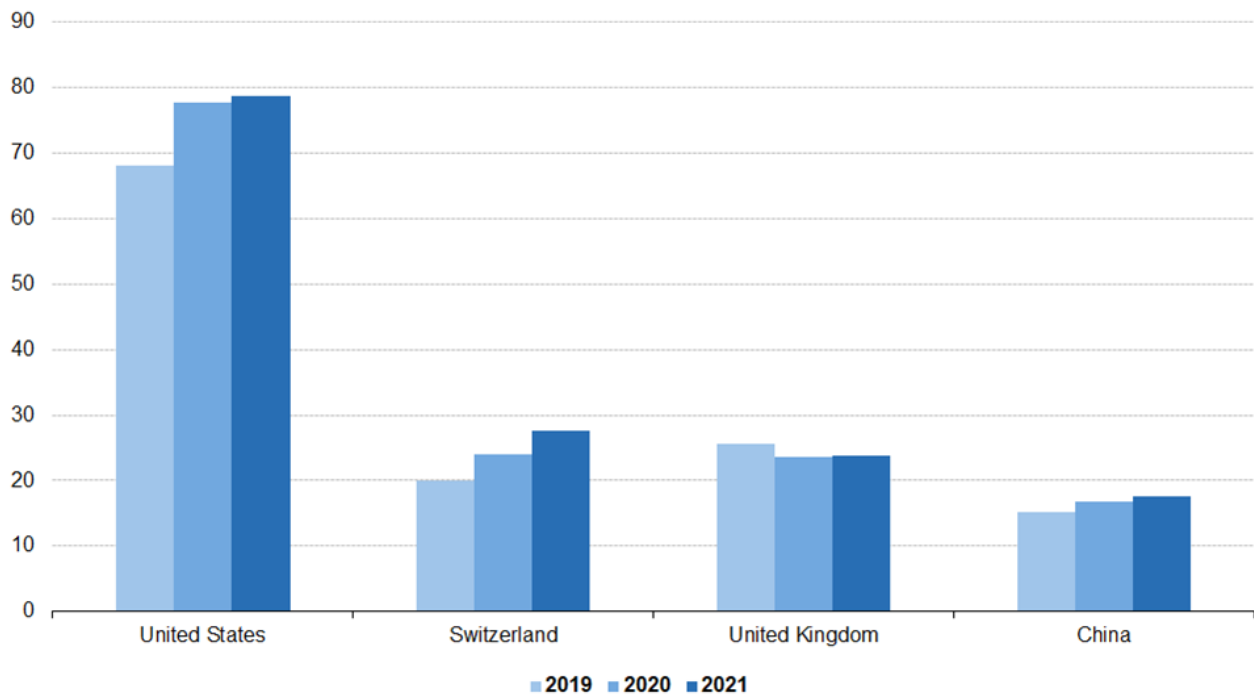
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Figure 5: Extra-EU imports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

The United States (€ 79 billion) was the largest partner of COVID-19 related exports (Figure 6), followed at some distance by Switzerland, (€ 28 billion) the United Kingdom (€ 24 billion) and China (€ 17 billion). These four partners accounted for 58 % of all COVID-19 related exports in 2021. Between 2019 and 2021, exports to the United States (+ € 11 billion), Switzerland (+ € 8 billion) and China (€ 2 billion) all increased while exports to the United Kingdom (- € 2 billion) decreased.

Extra-EU exports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021

€ billion



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat 

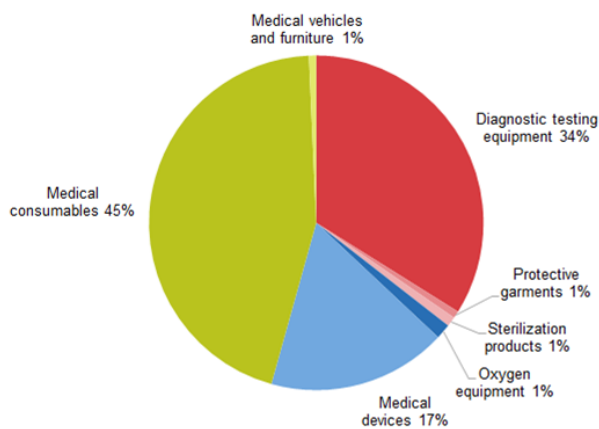
Figure 6: Extra-EU exports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

In imports of COVID-19 related products (Figure 7), medical consumables was the largest product group for Switzerland (65.2 %), the United Kingdom (53.4 %) and the United States (46.1 %) while for China the largest group was protective garments (37.7%). Diagnostic testing equipment was the second largest group for all four main partners.

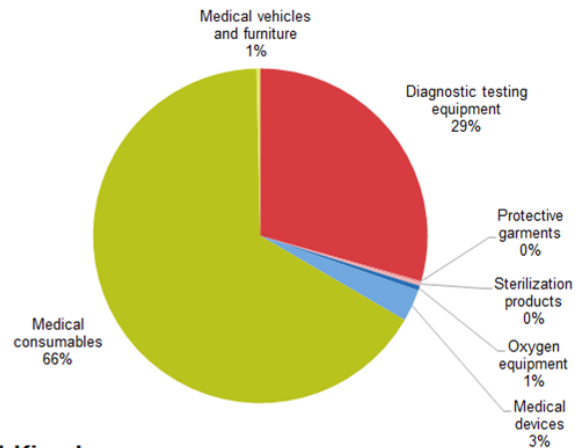
Imports of COVID-19 related products to main partners, 2021

share by product category

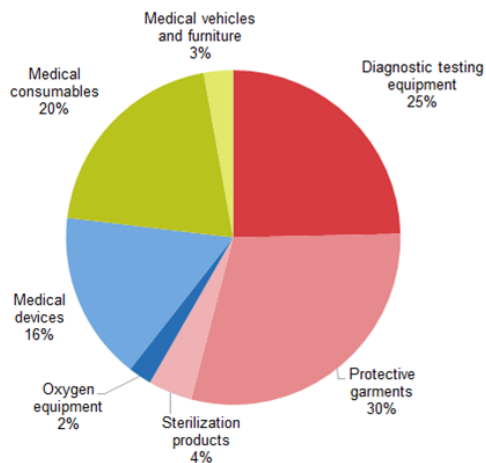
United States



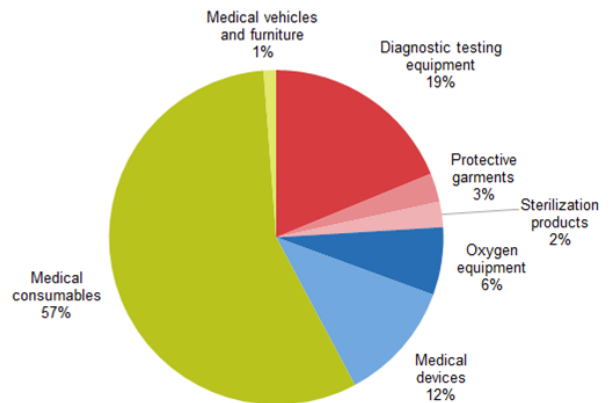
Switzerland



China



United Kingdom



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat 

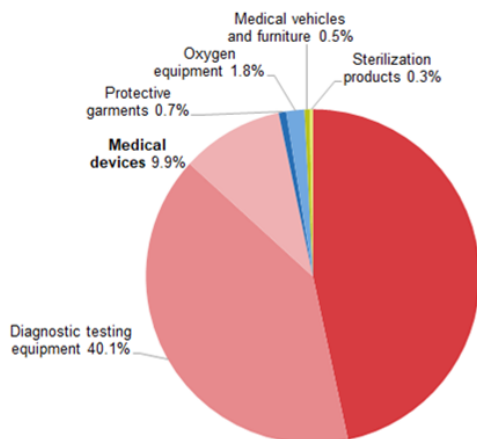
Figure 7: Imports of COVID-19 related products to main partners, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

In exports of COVID-19 related products (Figure 8), medical consumables was the largest product group for each of the four main partners. For the United States, the United Kingdom and Switzerland the second largest group was diagnostic testing equipment while for China medical devices was second, just half a percent behind diagnostic testing equipment.

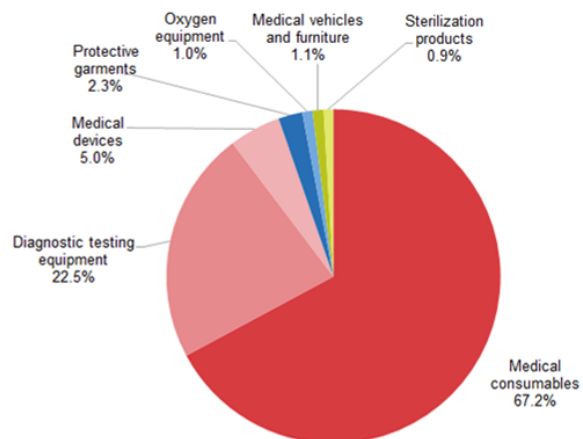
Exports of COVID-19 related products to main partners, 2021

share by product category

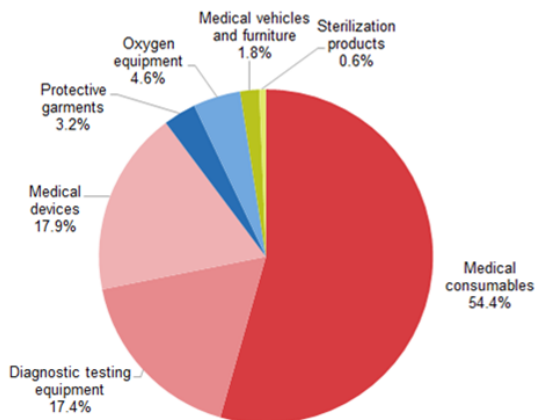
United States



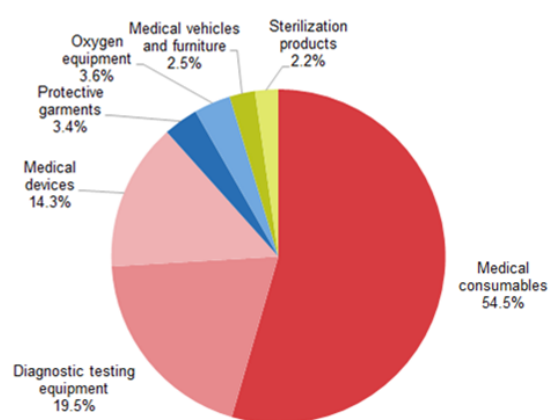
Switzerland



China



United Kingdom



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

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Figure 8: Exports of COVID-19 related products to main partners, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

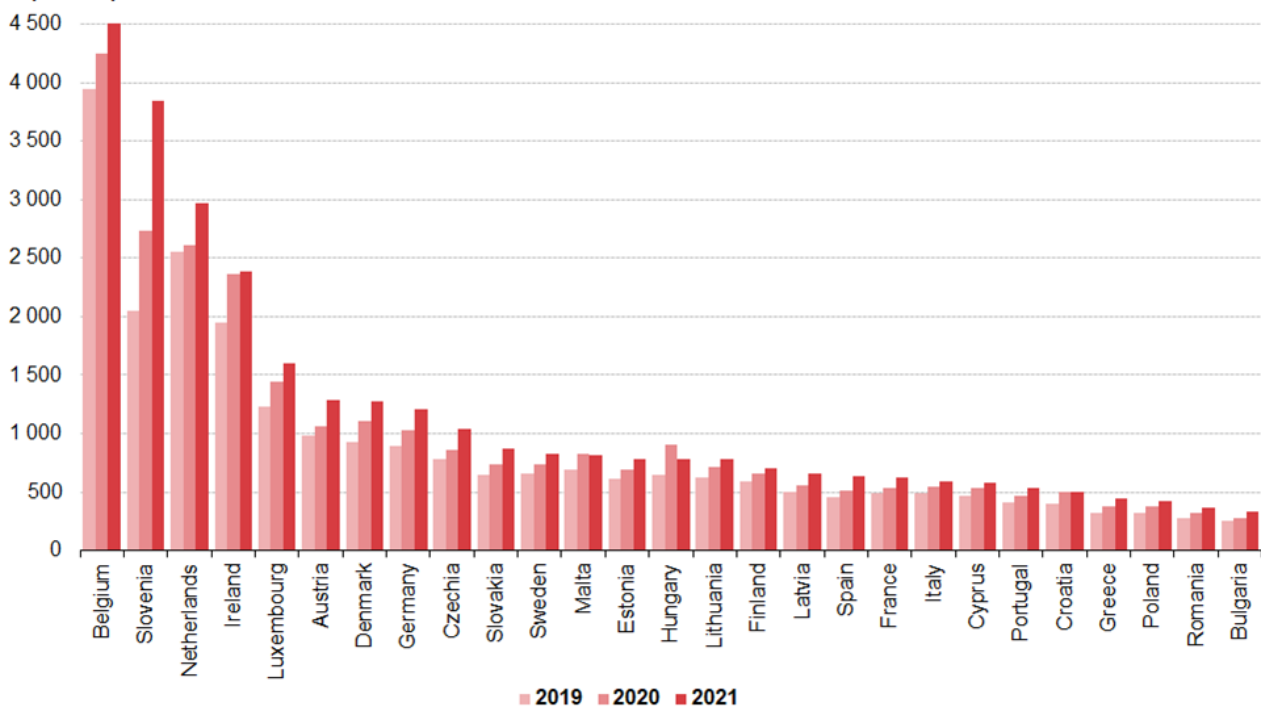
Per capita trade largest in Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands and Slovenia

Figure 9 shows that per capita imports of COVID-19 related products in 2021 were highest in Belgium (€ 4 988), Slovenia (€ 3 841) (see footnote 2), the Netherlands (€ 2 967) and Ireland (€ 2 386). These same four countries, but in a different order, also had the highest per capita exports (Figure 10). Ireland had by far the highest per capita values (€ 12 621), reflecting a high specialisation in the trading of these products, especially diagnostic test equipment and medical consumables. Ireland was followed by Belgium (€ 7 431), Slovenia (€ 4 038) and the Netherlands (€ 3 934). The lowest values for imports per capita were observed in Greece (€ 445), Poland (€ 420), Romania (€ 371) and Bulgaria (€ 337). The majority of countries (18 out of 27) recorded per capita imports between € 500 and € 1 500.

Per capita figures should be interpreted with care. Imports and exports are not always products for domestic final consumption but can also be used in the production of other goods or in processing activities. Also, [quasi transit trade](#) can overvalue both imports and exports in particular in countries with large ports. Finally, production for domestic consumption is not included in these figures.

Imports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021

€ per capita



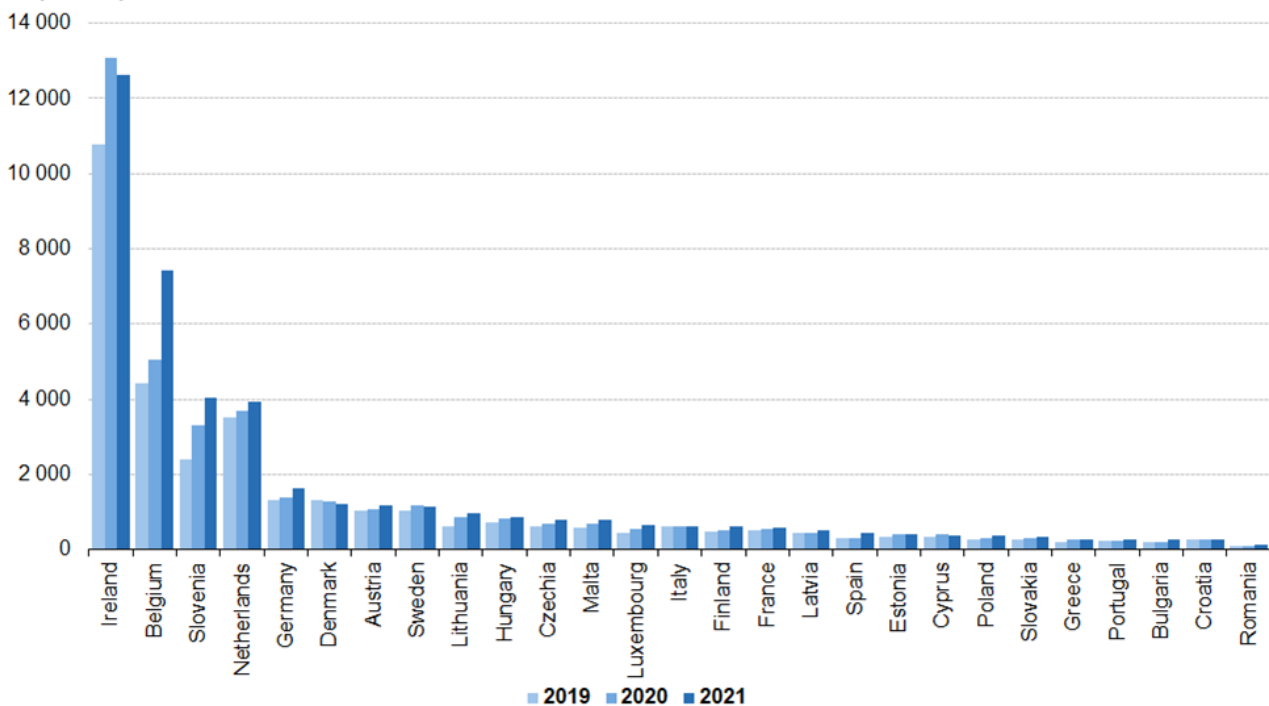
Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283 and proj_19np)



Figure 9: Imports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Exports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021

€ per capita



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283 and proj_19np)



Figure 10: Exports of COVID-19 related products, 2019-2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Tables 1 and 2 show per capita imports and exports in 2021 by product group. Belgium had the highest per capita value in imports of diagnostic test equipment (€ 1 175). The Netherlands had the highest values for protective garments (€ 274), sterilization products (€ 104) and medical devices (€ 464). Slovakia had the highest value (€ 107) for oxygen therapy equipment, Slovenia for medical consumables (€ 3 160) and Luxembourg (€ 48) for medical vehicles and furniture. The variation in values between Member States (as measured by the relative standard deviation) was largest for diagnostic test equipment and medical consumables. In contrast the variation in values between Member States was smallest for protective garments.

Imports of COVID-19 related products per capita, 2021

€ per capita

	Diagnostic testing equipment	Protective garments	Sterilization products	Oxygen equipment	Medical devices	Medical consumables	Medical vehicles and furniture	Total COVID-19 related products
Belgium	1 175	236	61	47	292	3 151	27	4 988
Bulgaria	35	35	8	5	44	204	6	337
Czechia	152	230	20	87	95	437	14	1 035
Denmark	256	221	52	23	139	563	20	1 274
Germany	320	139	21	61	128	518	16	1 202
Estonia	65	107	19	11	105	458	15	780
Ireland	604	155	28	34	164	1 386	15	2 386
Greece	93	42	17	5	39	246	4	445
Spain	75	72	9	23	56	392	7	634
France	130	99	16	15	72	277	12	621
Croatia	110	58	9	8	39	266	10	500
Italy	133	69	10	13	55	307	5	593
Cyprus	75	62	9	4	61	361	6	579
Latvia	102	79	17	10	65	373	9	654
Lithuania	119	96	31	16	82	415	18	778
Luxembourg	294	213	27	15	133	873	48	1 604
Hungary	164	116	10	38	57	386	7	778
Malta	40	98	7	5	38	617	7	812
Netherlands	698	274	104	65	464	1 332	30	2 967
Austria	344	226	24	28	162	472	28	1 285
Poland	53	85	14	21	53	186	8	420
Portugal	77	78	12	30	57	270	5	529
Romania	46	62	12	27	32	184	9	371
Slovenia	327	185	16	25	106	3 160	21	3 841
Slovakia	124	189	13	107	78	342	15	867
Finland	99	149	24	30	102	285	13	702
Sweden	112	157	44	43	107	346	16	826

Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat 

Table 1: Imports of COVID-19 related products per capita, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

According to the relative standard deviation, the total export of COVID-19 related products showed a higher per capita variability with respect to the import values for all the groups, with the highest values for diagnostic test equipment. Ireland had by far the highest per capita exports in diagnostic test equipment (€ 5 695) and medical consumables (€ 6 280). Czechia led in oxygen equipment (€ 117). Latvia had the highest per capita values for the export of medical vehicles and furniture (€ 39) while the Netherlands was first for protective garments (€ 263), sterilization products (€ 115) and medical devices (€ 706).

Exports of COVID-19 related products per capita, 2021

€ per capita

	Diagnostic testing equipment	Protective garments	Sterilization products	Oxygen equipment	Medical devices	Medical consumables	Medical vehicles and furniture	Total COVID-19 related products
Belgium	1 235	240	96	36	308	5 495	20	7 431
Bulgaria	5	25	10	1	81	128	2	251
Czechia	38	178	15	117	143	274	26	790
Denmark	195	166	14	22	118	645	34	1 194
Germany	375	142	17	78	192	778	34	1 616
Estonia	17	92	11	12	164	101	14	411
Ireland	5 695	64	13	67	491	6 280	10	12 621
Greece	6	13	1	2	7	249	0	277
Spain	27	43	11	5	18	324	4	432
France	61	73	18	9	46	354	8	569
Croatia	55	24	2	3	11	152	5	251
Italy	94	82	6	13	51	359	25	629
Cyprus	12	1	1	0	8	348	0	371
Latvia	43	69	8	14	59	289	39	520
Lithuania	391	83	23	15	117	335	11	975
Luxembourg	239	86	4	5	83	181	35	633
Hungary	165	99	56	7	67	444	8	847
Malta	11	63	0	5	88	604	0	771
Netherlands	993	263	115	78	706	1 745	34	3 934
Austria	376	179	26	22	120	430	22	1 175
Poland	35	81	16	38	47	126	11	354
Portugal	6	46	5	54	51	112	4	277
Romania	2	28	0	30	15	53	2	131
Slovenia	359	232	11	29	126	3 256	24	4 038
Slovakia	6	102	17	39	52	99	6	320
Finland	117	60	12	17	216	183	13	618
Sweden	225	113	30	33	102	618	16	1 136

Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

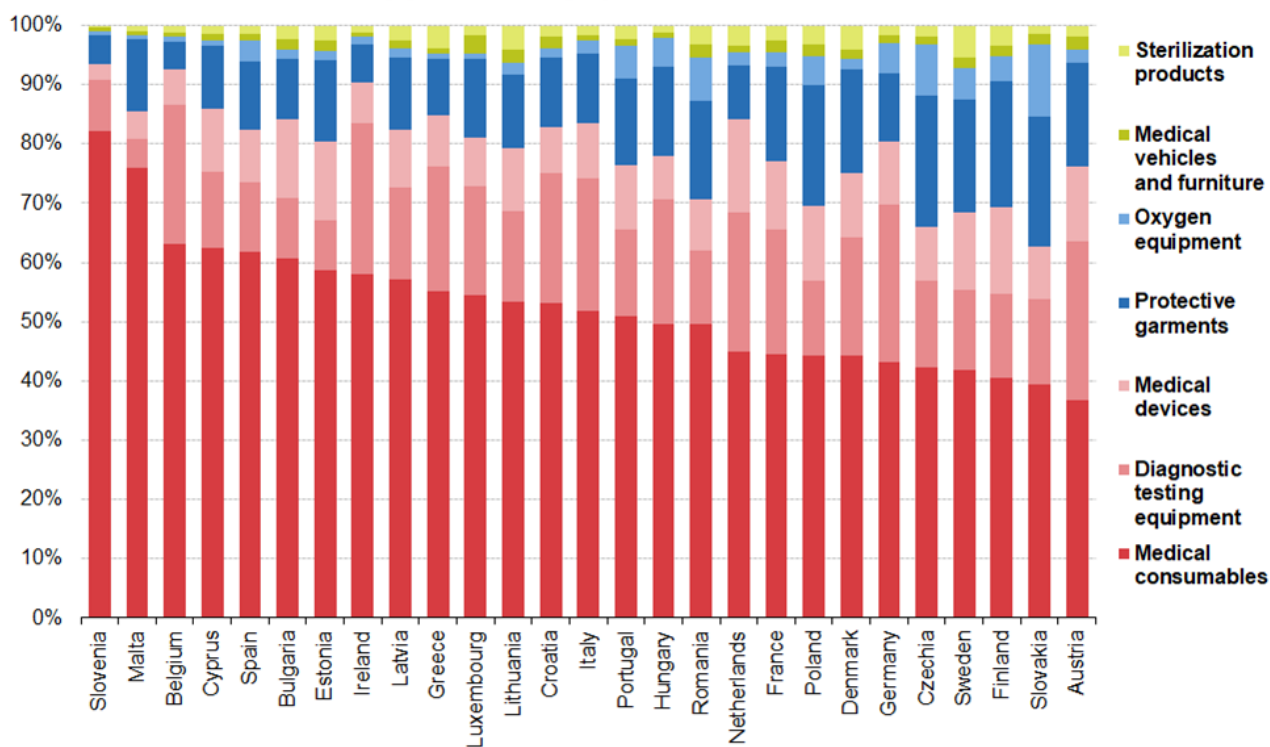
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Table 2: Exports of COVID-19 related products per capita, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Among all Member States, the most imported product group was medical consumables with the highest shares in Slovenia (82 %) and Malta (76 %) see Figure 11. The shares for diagnostic equipment were highest in Germany (27 %), Ireland (25 %) and Belgium (24 %). The Netherlands (16 %) and Finland (15 %) had the highest share in medical devices. Slovakia, Czechia (both 22 %) and Finland (21 %) had the highest shares in protective garments. Slovakia (12 %) had the highest share in oxygen therapy equipment, Luxembourg (3 %) in medical vehicles and furniture and Sweden (5 %) in sterilization products.

Imports of COVID-19 related products, 2021

intra-EU + extra-EU, shares by product category



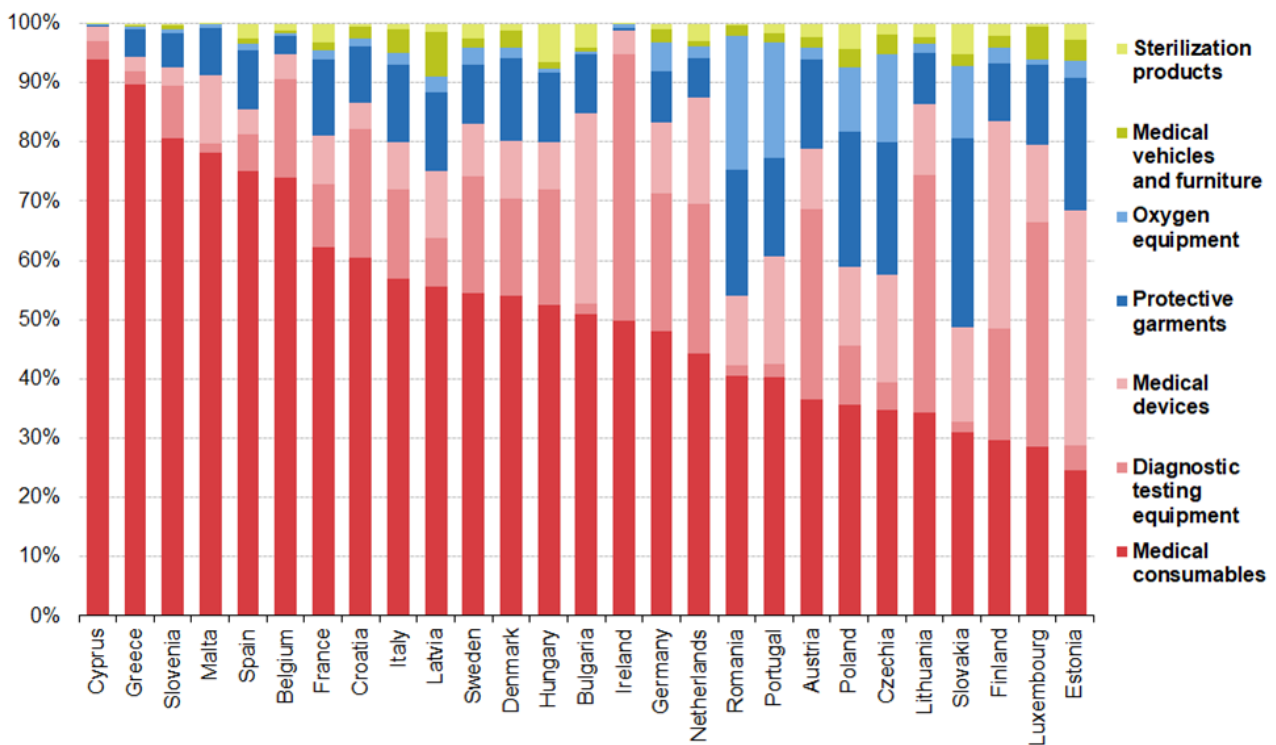
Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat

Figure 11: Imports of COVID-19 related products, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

In 22 Member States, the most exported product group was medical consumables with the highest shares in Cyprus (94 %) and Greece (90 %) as shown in Figure 12. The share for diagnostic equipment was highest in Ireland (45 %). Finland (35 %) had the highest shares in medical devices, Slovakia (32 %) in protective garments and Latvia (8 %) in medical vehicles and furniture. Romania (23 %) had the highest shares in oxygen equipment and Hungary (7 %) in sterilization products.

Exports of COVID related products, 2021 intra-EU + extra-EU, shares by product category



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

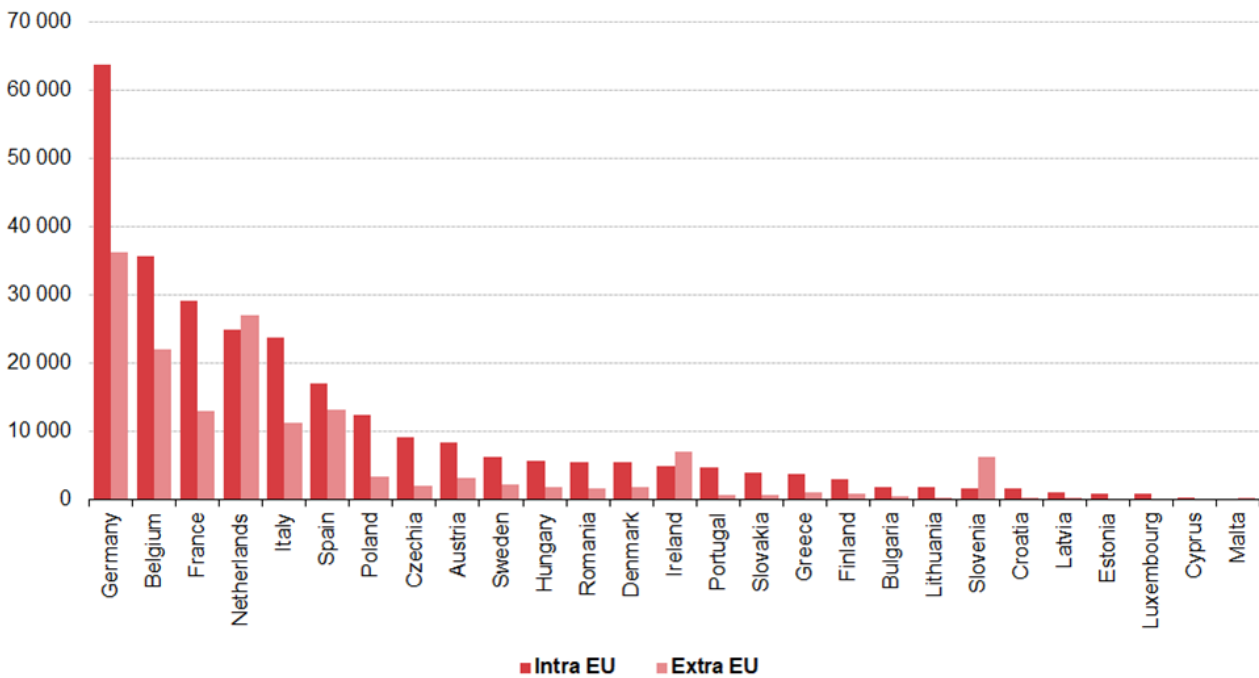
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Figure_12: Exports of COVID-19 related products, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Germany was the largest importer of COVID-19 related products for both intra-EU and extra-EU imports (Figure 13). In all but four Member States (the Netherlands, Ireland, Slovenia and Malta) intra-EU imports were larger than extra-EU imports.

Intra-EU and extra-EU imports of COVID-19 related products, 2021

€ million



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

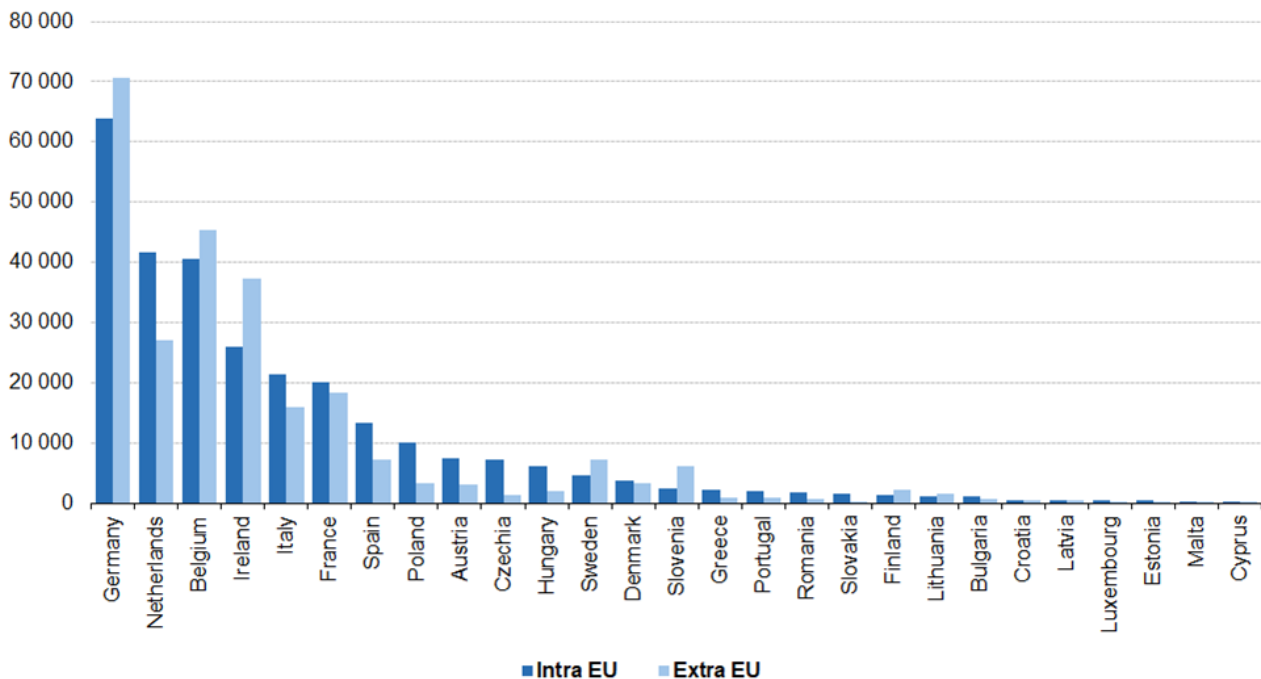
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Figure_13: Intra-EU and extra-EU imports of COVID-19 related products, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Germany was also the largest exporter of COVID-19 related products for both intra-EU and extra-EU exports (Figure 14). In all but seven Member States (Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Sweden, Slovenia, Finland and Lithuania) intra-EU exports were larger than extra-EU exports.

Intra-EU and extra-EU exports of COVID-19 related products, 2021

€ million



Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

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Figure_14: Intra-EU and extra-EU exports of COVID-19 related products, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Trade in COVID-19 vaccines

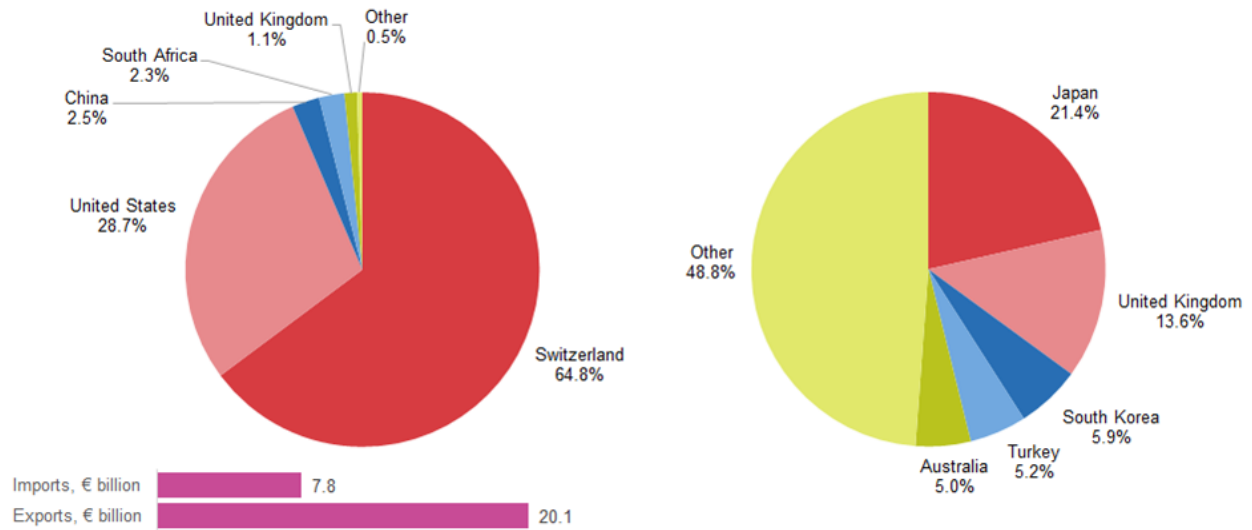
The EU exported € 20.1 billion worth of COVID-19 vaccines to countries outside the EU in 2021. The largest export destinations were Japan (21.4 %), the United Kingdom (13.6 %), South Korea (5.9 %), Turkey (5.2 %) and Australia (5.0 %) see Figure 15. Imports (€ 7.8 billion) were much smaller than exports and came predominantly from Switzerland (64.8 %) and the United States (28.7 %).

Extra-EU partners for trade in COVID-19 vaccines, 2021

% and € billion

Import

Export



No import data available for Cyprus and Austria

No export data available for Cyprus

Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat

Figure_15: Extra-EU partners for trade in COVID-19 vaccines, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Germany (€ 7.9 billion), Spain (€ 5.5 billion) and Belgium (€ 3.6 billion) were the largest importers of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021 (Table 3). These three Member States were also the largest importers per capita. Belgium (€ 316) had the largest imports per capita followed by Spain (€ 117) and Germany (€ 95). As mentioned before, per capita figures should be interpreted with care since they do not take into account own production, processing and transit trade.

Imports of COVID-19 vaccines by Member State, 2021

	€ million	Share of EU total	Population (million)	€ per capita
Germany	7 907	30.4%	83.2	95
Spain	5 531	21.3%	47.3	117
Belgium	3 640	14.0%	11.5	316
France	2 378	9.1%	67.3	35
Italy	1 856	7.1%	59.6	31
Poland	995	3.8%	38.0	26
Netherlands	933	3.6%	17.4	54
Hungary	370	1.4%	9.8	38
Sweden	359	1.4%	10.3	35
Portugal	316	1.2%	10.3	31
Czechia	272	1.0%	10.7	25
Romania	256	1.0%	19.3	13
Denmark	232	0.9%	5.8	40
Greece	228	0.9%	10.7	21
Ireland	214	0.8%	5.0	43
Slovakia	113	0.4%	5.5	21
Bulgaria	95	0.4%	7.0	14
Croatia	81	0.3%	4.1	20
Lithuania	76	0.3%	2.8	27
Latvia	52	0.2%	1.9	27
Slovenia	46	0.2%	2.1	22
Estonia	24	0.1%	1.3	18
Luxembourg	16	0.1%	0.6	25
Malta	6	0.0%	0.5	13

No data available for Cyprus, Austria and Finland

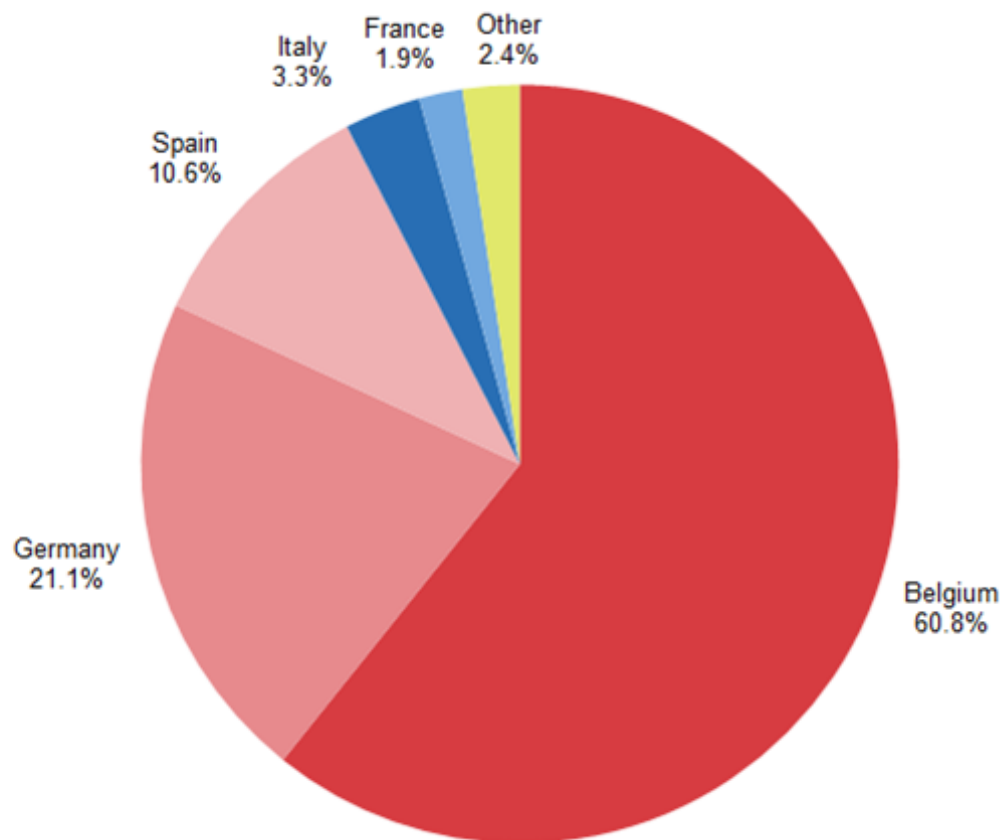
Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283 and demo_p_jan)

eurostat 

Table 3: Imports of COVID-19 vaccines by Member State, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Belgium (60.8 %), Germany (21.1 %) and Spain (10.6 %) were also the largest exporters of COVID-19 vaccines among EU Member States in 2021.(Figure 16)

Exports of COVID-19 vaccines by Member State, 2021 share of total (intra+extra) exports



No data available for Cyprus and Finland.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: DS-059283)

eurostat 

Figure 16: Exports of COVID-19 vaccines by Member State, 2021 Source: Eurostat (DS-059283)

Footnote

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-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.

Methodology

In this article some products are classified as COVID-19 related products. They are compared over time and across countries, and also to products in the same chapter of the Harmonised System (HS) product classification, i.e. they are compared to other similar products that are however not directly used in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that most COVID-19 related products cannot be precisely identified and they are grouped together with products not specific to COVID-19. Nevertheless, some trends can be observed.

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

The COVID-19 products in this article were selected based on an indicative list elaborated by the Commission in the framework of Commission Decision N° C(2020) 2146, on the basis of a joint WCO/WHO list for COVID-19 medical supplies. More information can be found in [this document](#).

Unit of measure

Trade values are expressed in millions or billions (10⁹) 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 an important element of the external dimension of the 'Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' and 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](#)
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