This article takes a close look at recent trends, focusing on total intra-EU trade in goods and the most traded products. It presents statistics for the EU-28 aggregate and for individual Member States for the period covering 2002 to 2017, although the composition of the actual EU has changed over this period.

Statistics on international trade in goods between Member States of the European Union (EU) - especially the size and evolution of imports and exports - enable the EU and national authorities to evaluate the growth of the Single Market and the integration of EU economies. These statistics also provide EU businesses with essential information for their sales and marketing policies.

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

Evolution of intra-EU trade in goods: 2002-2018

The seasonally adjusted value of monthly total exports of goods for EU-28 Member States to other Member States is shown in Figure 1. In 2002 and 2003 the level of exports of goods was fairly stable, followed by a period of rapid increase between 2004 and 2008. From July 2008 to May 2009 there was a sharp decrease in the value of exports of goods. Following this decline the value of exports of goods began to increase again. In August 2011 it surpassed the level seen before the decrease and it has continued to increase until now.
Since the introduction of the Intrastat data collection system for intra-EU trade in goods on 1 January 1993, the value of intra-EU exports of goods has been consistently higher than that of intra-EU imports of goods. In theory, as intra-EU exports of goods are declared FOB-type value and intra-EU imports of goods CIF-type value, the value of intra-EU imports of goods should be slightly higher than that of intra-EU exports of goods. The analysis presented in this article considers intra-EU exports of goods only, as it is the more reliable measure of total intra-EU trade in goods since, at aggregated levels, total intra-EU exports of goods has better coverage than total intra-EU imports of goods.

**Intra-EU trade in goods by Member State**

There is a wide variation in the value of export trade in goods by Member State with partners within the EU, as can be seen in Figure 2. In 2017 the value of export trade in goods within the EU ranged from EUR 750 billion for Germany (22.4 % of total intra-EU exports) to just over EUR 1 billion for Cyprus (0.03 % of total intra-EU exports).
There were ten Member States (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland and the United Kingdom) whose exports of goods to partners in the EU were over EUR 100 billion in 2017, accounting for almost 83% of the total value of intra-EU exports of goods.

In seven Member States (Cyprus, Poland, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, Lithuania and Slovakia) the value of exports of goods to partners in the EU-28 has increased more than 10% annually between 2003 and 2017 and in another six (the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Hungary, Croatia and the Netherlands) the annual average growth was between 5% and 10% (see Table 1). In the remaining countries average growth was less than 5%.

Table 1: Exports of goods to other Member States, 2003, 2010 and 2017 (EUR billion) Source: Eurostat. Comext table DS-057009

Twenty Member States have three partners within the EU accounting for the majority (over 50%) of their intra-EU exports (see Figure 3). For a further eight the share of the top three intra-EU export partners is...
between 39% and 50%. The top-3 partners are often large countries but also quite frequently countries in close geographical proximity. All but two countries (Malta and Germany itself) had Germany as one of their top-3 partners. The Netherlands was a top-3 partner for thirteen countries and Italy for ten countries. All countries had at least one EU neighbour among their top-3 partners.

Figure 3: Top-3 partners of each Member State in intra-EU exports of goods, 2017 (% share of total intra-EU exports of goods) Source: Eurostat DS-018995

Intra-EU trade in goods balance

It can be difficult to interpret figures in absolute terms for individual Member States. In particular their trade in goods balances must be interpreted with caution for the phenomenon of Quasi-transit.

Figure 4a shows that, as with the size of the exports flows for trade in goods, there was also a wide variation between Member States in the balance of these two flows. Seventeen Member States have trade in goods deficits (meaning imports are larger than exports) with other EU Member States whereas the other eleven had trade in goods surpluses (exports larger than imports). The largest deficits were recorded for the United Kingdom (EUR 110 billion) and France (EUR 107 billion) while the largest surplus was found in the Netherlands (EUR 198 billion).
Because of the large differences in trade balances it is difficult to compare countries with small trade balances. For this reason they are shown separately in figure 4b.

Table 2 shows the trade in goods balance for 2003, 2010 and 2017. Over this period, most Member States have continuously been either net importers of goods (thirteen countries among which for example France and the United Kingdom) or net exporters of goods (seven countries among which for example Germany and the Netherlands). However, the extent of the positive or negative balance has changed for many Member States. For example France continues to be a net importer of goods from other Member States, but the negative goods balance has increased from EUR 16 billion to EUR 107 billion between 2003 and 2017. In the same period, the Czech Republic continues to be a net exporter of goods but its positive balance has increased from EUR 5 billion to EUR 21 billion. Between 2003 and 2017 some Member States have become net importers of goods,
for example Finland, whose trade in goods balance moved from EUR +3 billion in 2002 to EUR -9 billion in 2017. Conversely there are other Member States who over the same period changed from being net importers of goods to net exporters of goods. For example Poland, whose trade deficit of EUR -3 billion in 2003 moved to a surplus of EUR +17 billion in 2017.

Table 2: Trade in goods balance with other Member States, 2003-2017 (EUR million) Source: Eurostat DS-018995

The intra-EU trade in goods balance and its evolution over time give some detail on the impact of goods trade on the economy. However, it is difficult to compare net trade in goods balances across Member States because of the differences in the size of their economies. Another way to compare the value of imports to exports is to consider the ratio of 'goods exports divided by goods imports'. For this ratio those countries with a value less than 100 % are net importers while those with a value more than 100 % are net exporters of goods. Table 3 shows this statistic by Member State for trade with other members of the European Union for the years 2003, 2010 and 2017. As mentioned earlier, France and the United Kingdom have the largest negative intra-EU trade in goods balance, however the measure used in Table 3 has them ranked 21st and 24th respectively, similar to other Member States with much lower trade deficits such as Luxembourg and Latvia and above Greece, Croatia, Malta and Cyprus. At the other end, Germany, which has the 2nd largest trade surplus, ranks 8th in Table 3, similar to countries such as Poland and Slovakia which have much lower trade surpluses in absolute terms.
Table 3: Intra-EU exports divided by intra-EU imports, 2003-2017(%) Source: Eurostat DS-018995

Table 4 considers the trade relationship of individual Member States with non-EU partners to add further context to the interpretation of Intra-EU trade in goods balances. It shows the ratio of ‘goods exports divided by goods imports’ by Member State for trade with non-EU trading partners for the years 2003, 2010 and 2017. The ratio is highest in Ireland (218 %) and lowest in the Netherlands (52 %).

Table 4: Extra-EU exports divided by extra-EU imports, 2003-2017(%) Source: Eurostat DS-018995

Combining Tables 3 and 4 we see that Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom have values less than 100 % (trade deficits) in both Tables 3 and 4 while Germany, Ireland
and Italy have value above 100% (trade surpluses) in both tables. The remaining 17 countries are almost evenly divided between having intra-EU surpluses and extra-EU deficits (eight countries) or the other way around (nine countries). It is also interesting to compare the ratios for the Netherlands in Tables 3 and 4, the former showing in recent years exports to EU partners approaching almost twice the value of its imports, while the latter shows the value of exports to non-EU partners is around half the value of imports. Both of these figures are affected by quasi-transit, with the Netherlands being a frequent point of entry for goods coming into the European Union.

Table 5 shows a greater balance between the Netherlands imports and exports of goods to both EU-28 Member States and non-EU countries combined. It is one of 17 countries with an overall export-import ratio between 85% and 115%. Ratios above this interval are found only in Ireland (155%), and Germany (124%), while Cyprus (36%), Malta (43%), Greece (57%), Croatia (65%), the United Kingdom (69%), Luxembourg (70%), Portugal (80%) and Romania and Latvia (both 83%) have ratios below 85%.

Table 5: Total exports divided by total imports, 2003-2017(%) Source: Eurostat DS-018995

Finally, when considering the trade relationships between a country and its trading partners consideration must also be given to the impact of trade in services to get a more complete picture. See for example the recent article on Trade in Services.

Intra-EU trade in goods compared with extra-EU trade in goods

Traditionally, the EU Member States as a whole have traded goods more with other Member States than with countries outside the EU. Figure 5 shows that in 2017, with the exception of the United Kingdom and Cyprus, all Member States exported more goods to partners within the EU than outside the EU. There is a relatively large variation among Member States in this proportion, ranging from 86% of Slovakia’s total exports of goods going to other EU Member States to under 38% of Cyprus’ total goods exports.
Between 2003 and 2017, the ratio of trade with EU-28 partners by trade with extra EU partners decreased for all but three Member States. Decreases of more than 200 percentage points (p.p.) were found in the Czech Republic (-212 p.p.), Estonia (-217 p.p.) and Luxembourg (-309 p.p.). Only in Bulgaria (+22 p.p.), Malta (+21 p.p.) and Sweden (+2 p.p.) did this ratio increase.

**Intra-EU trade in goods by main product groups**

In the internal market, international trade in goods is mainly manufactured products: their share in 2017 was 80 % of total intra-EU exports of goods. Of this, machinery and vehicles made up 37 % of the total goods.
exports (see Figure 6), while other manufactured goods accounted for 27% and chemical products for 16%. Primary products accounted for 18% of total exports of goods; made up of food and drink (10%), energy products (5%) and raw materials (3%).

![Intra EU-28 exports of goods by product type, 2003, 2010 and 2017](image)

**Figure 6: Intra EU-28 exports of goods by product type, 2003, 2010 and 2017 (% share of total exports of goods) Source: Eurostat (ext_it_inratrd)**

There is a large difference in the proportion of manufactured goods in total exports of goods between Member States (see Table 7), from around 90% of all goods exports in the Czech Republic and Slovakia to just 54% for Greece. In 2017, both larger economies (for example Germany and Italy) and smaller economies (for example Luxembourg and Slovenia) have a proportion of manufactured goods exported greater than the EU average. Similarly there are also larger (for example the United Kingdom and Spain) and smaller economies (for example Estonia and Cyprus) that have a proportion below the EU average. The structure of intra-EU goods exports has slightly changed in recent years. Between 2003 and 2017, the share of primary products increased from 16% to 19% while the respective share of manufactured goods declined from 82% and 80%.
Table 7: Member States’ share of exports of goods by product type, 2003-2017 (% share of total exports of goods) Source: Eurostat (ext_lt_intratrd)

Individually, 23 out of the 28 Member States saw a decrease between 2003 and 2017 in the proportion of their goods exports in the manufactured goods category. The largest decreases were found in Malta (-17 p.p.) and Greece (-11 p.p.). The five Member States with increasing shares were Latvia (+4 p.p.), Cyprus (+3 p.p.), Denmark and the Netherlands (both +2 p.p.) and Slovakia (+1 p.p.).

Source data for tables and graphs
- Intra-EU trade in goods - recent trends (Excel file)

Data sources
EU international trade data comes from Eurostat’s COMEXT database.

COMEXT is the Eurostat 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 non-EU 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.

Information on intra-EU trade is collected by the EU Member States using the various media placed at the disposal of the information providers. These may be paper or electronic declarations provided for at national level. The declarations are addressed directly to the competent national administrations.

European statistics on international trade in goods are compiled according to the EU concepts and definitions and may, therefore, differ from national data published by Member States.

Context
The EU’s single or internal market is a market where goods, services, capital and people can circulate freely. The free movement of goods principle requires that national barriers to the free movement of goods within the EU be removed. Articles 34 to 36 of the Treaty of the functioning of the European Union prohibit quantitative...
restrictions on imports, exports or goods in transit and all similar restrictive measures between member countries. All measures capable of hindering directly or indirectly such imports are considered to be quantitative restrictions.

Additionally because the 28 Member States of the European Union share a single market and a single external border, they also have a single trade policy. Both in the World Trade Organization, where the rules of international trade are agreed and enforced, and with individual trading partners, EU Member States speak and negotiate collectively.

The importance of the EU’s internal market is underlined by the fact that the proportion of intra-EU trade in goods is higher than extra-EU trade in goods in most EU Member States with few exceptions. The variation in the proportion of total trade in goods accounted for by intra-EU trade reflects to some degree historical ties and geographical location.

See also

- Intra-EU - most traded goods
- International trade in goods
- The EU in the world - international trade
- International trade in services

Main tables

- International trade in goods, 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, see:
  - International trade in goods - aggregated data (ext_go_agg)
  - International trade in goods - detailed data (detail)

Dedicated section

- International 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

Visualisations

- Did you know? Some funny and curious facts about trade of the EU
- Top 5 partners in trade in goods
- My Country in a bubble

External links

- European Commission - Globalisation
- European Commission - Trade
- European Commission - Single market for goods