Trade in raw materials is extremely important for the sustainability of European countries and their economies. Construction, chemicals, the automotive and aerospace industries, machinery and equipment are some of the sectors that are most dependent on access to raw materials.

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.

General view on EU trade deficit

The EU has had an ongoing trade deficit in raw materials (SITC sections 2 and 4, including non-manufactured goods such as oilseeds, cork, wood, pulp, textile fibres, ores and other minerals as well as animal and vegetable oils) since 2002. Both imports and exports dropped in 2009 and quickly recovered. Imports peaked in 2011 at EUR 85 billion and exports reached a first high point a year later at EUR 48 billion. After these peaks there was a steady decline until 2016 when imports were EUR 68 billion and exports EUR 42 billion. However, by 2018 imports increased to EUR 82 billion, and exports reached EUR 51 billion.
Figure 1: EU-28 exports, imports and trade balance in raw materials, 2002-2018 (EUR billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-018995)

Figure 2 gives an overview of the value, weight and average price of imports and exports of raw materials from 2002 to 2018. It shows that not only in value but also in weight, the EU imports were higher than exports. However some differences can be noted. In value and weight EU exports from 2002 to 2008 followed the same trend, while in 2009 a decrease in value led to a fall in average export prices. Between 2010 and 2012 values grew slightly more than weight as the average export prices reached a high point peak. After 2012 prices started to fall again. In 2018 prices were 48 % higher than they were in 2002.

For EU imports the decline in 2009 was stronger than for exports. Moreover the decline in value was stronger than in weight as prices also were falling. Just as in exports, imports prices also started to recover and reached a high point peak in 2012. Between 2012 and 2016 they fell but in recent years they recovered somewhat. During the whole period the average price for of exports was well above the average price for of imports.
In 2018, the most traded product group in value was 'Metals, minerals and rubber' (42 % in exports and 50 % in imports), followed by 'Animal and vegetable raw materials' (28 % in exports and 30 % in imports). 'Wood, cork, paper and textiles' was the least traded product group with 30 % of exports and 20 % of imports of raw materials (see Figure 3).
Figure 3: EU-28 exports and imports of raw materials by product category, 2018

Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)

Figure 4 gives a more detailed product breakdown of EU exports and imports. 'Metalliferous ores and metal scrap' (SITC 28) were the most traded raw material with exports of EUR 16.2 billion (32% of all exports of raw materials) and imports of EUR 31.9 billion (39% of all imports of raw materials). This product group also had the largest trade deficit. Other large deficits were seen in 'oilseeds and oleaginous fruits' (SITC 22) and 'animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes' (SITC 41 to 43). There were trade deficits for all but three of the products shown, the exceptions being 'other crude animal and vegetable materials' (SITC 29), 'hides, skins and furskins, raw' (SITC 21), 'other crude animal and vegetable materials' (SITC 29) and 'textiles, fibres and their wastes' (SITC 26).
Figures 5, 6 and 7 show the exports, imports and trade balance over time for the three product groups. Figure 5 shows that the trade deficit of ‘animal and vegetable raw materials’ was highest in 2008. Between 2008 and 2018 exports and imports increased by EUR 5.5 billion and EUR 4.6 billion respectively. Growth was especially high in the years immediately following the 2009 financial crisis and flattened somewhat in the latter years.
The trade deficit of ‘wood, cork, paper and textiles’ was highest in 2002. In 2009 imports dropped by EUR 4 billion compared with the previous year, while exports only fell by EUR 1 billion. Thereafter imports and exports were always close and in 2017 the EU even had a small trade surplus for this product group. In 2018 there was a trade deficit of EUR 1 billion.
In 2009 imports of 'metals, minerals and rubber' fell by EUR 20 billion compared with the previous year, while exports only fell by EUR 3.2 billion. However, in contrast to 'wood, cork, paper and textiles', imports recovered strongly in the following years and therefore the trade deficit returned to pre-crisis levels by 2011 when it reached EUR 28 billion. From then onward it slowly diminished until reaching EUR 15 billion in 2016 and then increased again to reach EUR 19 billion in 2018.
Figure 7: EU-28 exports, imports and trade balance of metals, minerals and rubber, 2002-2018 (EUR billion) Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)

EU-28 trade partners for raw materials

Figures 8 to 11 show the main partners of the EU for trade in raw materials in total and separately for the three product groups. Each figure shows the shares of the six main partners and is accompanied at the bottom by two bars showing the exports and imports in absolute values. The United States appears in all these figures both as a top 6 export and import partner.

Figure 8 shows that for EU raw materials China was the main export destination with just over a fifth of all exports. It was followed at some distance by Turkey and the United States each with a share of 10 %. The top six export partners accounted for more than half of all exports. The United States and Brazil were the largest partners for imports, together they accounted for more than a quarter of all imports, while the top six combined, made up 48 % of all imports.
In animal and vegetable raw materials the top 3 exporter partners (the United States, China and Russia) as well as the top 3 partners for imports (the United States, Indonesia and Brazil) accounted for about a third of trade. However since the next three partners for exports had somewhat smaller shares than in imports, the total of the top six export partners was 46 %, while the top six import partners accounted for 55%.

Figure 8: EU-28 exports and imports of raw materials by main partner, 2018 Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)

Figure 9: EU-28 exports and imports of animal and vegetable raw materials by main partner, 2018 Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)
In exports of 'wood, cork, paper and textiles', China’s share of 29 % was more than that of the next 5 partners combined. The top 6 accounted for 56 % of all exports. On the imports side Brazil (18 %) and the United States (17 %) were the main partners. Here the top 6 had a combined share of 60 %.

Figure 10: EU-28 exports and imports of wood, cork, paper and textiles by main partner, 2018
Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)

Almost a quarter of all exports of 'metals, minerals and rubber' is was destined for China, well ahead of Turkey (18 %), the only are other destination with a share over 10 %. The top 6 had a combined share of 65 %. Imports, led by Brazil (12 %) and the United States (11 %) were less concentrated with the top 6 accounting for just below half of all imports.
Figure 11: EU-28 exports and imports of metals, minerals and rubber by main partner, 2018
Source: Eurostat (Comext DS-DS-018995)

Source data for tables and graphs
- [Download Excel file](#)

Data sources
EU 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’s 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.

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.

Product classification

Raw materials are defined according to the fourth revision of the [Standard international trade classification](#). They include sections 2Crude materials, inedible, except fuels and 4Animal and vegetable oils, fats and waxes.

Unit of measure
Trade values are expressed in millions (106) or billions (109) of euros. They correspond to the statistical value, i.e. to the amount which would be invoiced in case of sale or purchase at the national border of the reporting country. It is called a [FOB](#) value (free on board) for exports and a [CIF](#) value (cost, insurance, freight) for imports.

Context
In terms of percentage, the EU is highly dependent on imports of raw materials. For this reason, raw materials security and related strategies have become one of the key priorities in the EU’s external actions and form an...
integral component of the EU’s interior policy making. The foundations of these strategies were laid in three key documents:

- **COM(2011) 25 final** tackling the challenges in commodity markets and on raw materials; and
- **COM(2014) 297 final** on the review of the list of critical raw materials for the EU and the implementation of the raw materials initiative, based in the global economic situation and the EU’s high dependence on imports of certain raw materials.

**See also**
- International trade in goods
- Intra-EU - most traded 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)

**Dedicated section**

- International trade in goods

**Methodology / Metadata**

- 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**

**Legal background**

- **Summaries of EU Legislation: Extrastat: statistics relating to trade with non-EU countries**
visualisations

- Top 5 partners in trade in goods
- My Country in a bubble

External links

- European Commission — Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Non-energy raw materials
- European Commission — Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Defining 'critical' raw materials

Notes

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International trade in raw materials