This article presents some characteristics of the European Union’s (EU) international trade in sporting goods. It considers the EU’s share in world import and export markets, intra-EU and extra-EU trade, the EU’s most widely traded sporting goods categories and the EU’s main trading partners.

Eurostat’s statistics on international trade in sporting goods can be used to measure trade in sporting goods versus trade as a whole, both at national and EU levels. Here, the term ‘goods’ means all movable property, i.e. products having a physical and tangible dimension. International trade in services (e.g. licences) is therefore not included.

The EU figures provided in this article exclude intra-EU trade. In other words, the EU as a whole is deemed to be one entity for which internal exchanges (between Member States) are not counted. However, national figures include all exchanges with any other country, whether an EU Member State or not.

Please note that all data in this article relate to the EU-27 (after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union), including time series.

The value of extra-EU trade in sporting goods in 2018

In 2018, the EU’s trade in sporting goods (the sum of extra-EU exports and imports) with the rest of the world was valued at EUR 22.35 billion (EUR 10.9 billion of exports and EUR 11.4 billion of imports). Both imports and exports have significantly increased compared with 2013: in relative terms, exports recorded a higher growth than imports (+71.3 % against +59.4 %), corresponding to an increase by EUR 4.6 billion for exports against EUR 4.3 billion for imports. Looking at the overall numbers, the EU’s trade deficit in sporting goods decreased by around EUR 0.3 billion, from EUR 0.78 billion in 2013 to EUR 0.49 billion in 2018.

The largest relative increase (more than twofold) in sporting goods exports occurred in the ‘sports footwear’ category, followed by ‘boats and water sport equipment’ category (which had the highest absolute increase). The largest export decrease was recorded in the ‘golf equipment’ category, which had lost more than 20 % of its value.

Regarding imports of sporting goods, the ‘sports footwear’ category came to the fore, with a value in 2018 2.2 times higher than five years ago. The value of ‘boats and water sport equipment’ was 87 % higher in 2018 than in 2013. None of the considered categories recorded a decrease in imports during these five years (see Table 1).
At national level, in 2018, a trade surplus (concerning intra and extra-EU trade) was recorded in 12 Member States and a trade deficit in 14 Member States. Estonia posted zero trade balance for that year (see Table 2). The largest trade surplus, almost EUR 2 billion, belonged to Italy. The value of Italian sporting goods exports was almost twice as high as imports and was mainly based on exports of boats and water sport equipment (46.5% of total exports, see Table 3). After Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania had the highest export/import surplus ratios in sporting goods among the Member States – over 1.5 times. Belgium mainly exported sports footwear which accounted for just over three-quarters of the total value of sporting goods exported from this country (76.6%). Bicycles contributed most to Bulgaria and Lithuania sport exports (respectively 47.4% and 43.0%), while in Romania ski and related equipment (40.5%) and sports footwear (30.7%) led in the exported products. On the other hand, Spain recorded the largest deficit of trade in sporting goods (over EUR 1 billion) - the value of imports was higher than the value of exports in most of the categories of sporting goods.

In 2018, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy were the EU’s largest exporters of sporting goods in terms of value (each of these Member States recorded exports above EUR 4 billion), followed by Belgium (EUR 3.6 billion). The largest importers were Germany (EUR 5.1 billion), France (EUR 3.6 billion) and the Netherlands (EUR 3.2 billion) (see Table 2). The high ranking of medium-size countries like the Netherlands and Belgium is due to the impact of quasi-transit of goods, the so-called ‘Rotterdam effect’, affecting Member States with big ports at the external border of the European Union (for more details, please see the Methodology/Metadata section).
Looking at the EU-27 international trade in sporting goods between 2013 and 2018 (see Figure 1), there has been a steady increase in absolute terms. Referring to relative terms, after a peak in 2016, the import shares of extra-EU trade registered a slight decrease both in 2017 and 2018, while the export shares grew slightly over the whole period.

Table 2: International trade in sporting goods, 2013 and 2018

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<tr>
<th>Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prd)</th>
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99% of total exports. On the other hand, slight drops were recorded in Estonia (-2.7%), Malta and Hungary (both -2.5%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Average annual growth rate of exports of sporting goods, 2013–18(%)Source: Eurostat (sprt_prd)

Regarding imports over the same period, 26 of the 27 EU Member States saw an increase, while only Malta showed a very slight decrease (-0.2%). In Cyprus, Poland and the Netherlands, imports increased by over 20% yearly: in Romania and Greece the average annual growth rate of imports passed the 15% threshold (see Figure 3). As with exports, the significant rise in imports for Cyprus (+78%) can be explained by the growing contribution of the category related to boats and water sports equipment, which accounted for 93% of total imports.

Figure 3: Annual average rate of change for the import of sporting goods, 2013-2018(%)Source: Eurostat (sprt_prd)

Extra-EU and intra-EU trade in sporting goods

The international trade of EU Member States can be analysed from two perspectives: intra-EU trade (between EU Member States) and extra-EU trade (with non-EU countries). The ratio between the two is an indication of the heterogeneity of a country’s trade patterns and, to some extent, may reflect historical ties and geographical
Looking at exports in 2018, over half of the EU’s total trade in sporting goods was intra-EU (60 %). At country level, intra-EU trade accounted for the majority of exports in 21 of the 27 EU Member States: the figures ranged from 53.7 % in Sweden to 94.8 % in Romania (see Figure 4). By contrast, six countries recorded more exports outside the European Union than to the intra-EU market, with the largest shares recorded in Cyprus (97.4 %) and Malta (93.7 %), followed by Ireland (78.5 %), Italy (56.3 %), the Netherlands (56.0 %) and Finland (53.6 %) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Share of extra-EU and intra-EU trade within all exports of sporting goods, 2018(%)Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prd)

For the EU as a whole, intra-EU imports accounted for 57 % of international trade in sporting goods. Looking at individual countries, in 22 of 27 EU Member States the value of intra-EU imports of sporting goods was greater than the value of extra-EU imports. Intra-EU imports shares for these countries varied from 55.2 % in Germany to 88.5 % in Slovakia. Five EU Member States imported more sporting goods from outside the EU than from inside (see Figure 5): the Netherlands, Belgium, Malta and, with shares over 80 %, Ireland and Cyprus.

Figure 5: Share of extra-EU and intra-EU trade within all imports of sporting goods, 2018(%)Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prd)
Main product groups

The list of sporting goods that are traded internationally contains the equipment necessary for doing sports (e.g. skis or balls), clothing (e.g. swimwear or footwear) and some articles that can be used for sport and leisure activities (e.g. boats and water sports equipment, bicycles or fishing equipment).

The main three groups of sporting goods among those analysed here are ‘boats and water sports equipment’, ‘sports footwear’ and ‘gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment’. In 2018, they generated more than three quarters of the value of extra-EU exports, with ‘boats and water sports equipment’ (including vessels for pleasure and sport, sailboats, sailboards or water sports boats or boards) accounting for more than half of this value (56.9 %) (see Figure 6). ‘Sports footwear’ (13.4 %) and ‘gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment’ (11.9 %) were the only other two categories of analysed sporting goods with a 2-digit share in the extra-EU export in 2018. It is worth noting that boats and water sports equipment, as well as sports footwear, were the only groups of products where the shares of extra-EU export increased from 2013 to 2018.

For extra-EU imports, the picture in 2018 was somewhat different, with sports footwear (29.6 %) as the main contributor ahead of boats and water sports equipment (22.3 %) and gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment (19.7 %). None of the other categories exceeded 10 % of value of extra EU-imports of sporting goods. Since 2013, only sports footwear and boats and water sports equipment have increased their share among analysed group of products in 2018, with a significant growth of 8 percentage points for sports footwear (see Figure 7).
At national level, in 2018, boats and water sport equipment reached more than 50% of the value of exports of sporting goods in Cyprus, Malta, Finland and the Netherlands and also accounted for the largest share of sporting products in France, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia.

In Belgium and Luxembourg, over three quarters of exports of sporting goods concerned sports footwear. It was also the main group of sporting products exported by Germany and Greece. With a share higher than 40%, gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment was the main export contributor for Hungary and Slovakia, along with Czechia, Denmark, Ireland, Spain and Sweden where its share exceeded all the other sporting products groups. Skis and related equipment was the main export category for Austria and Romania, 'bicycles' the highest one for Portugal, Bulgaria and Lithuania, sportswear the most common for Croatia and fishing equipment for Estonia (see Table 3).

Table 3: Exports of sporting goods by group of products, 2018

Among the individual EU Member States, in 2018, sports footwear was the main import category in 20 Member States.
States, peaking in Belgium with more than half of total sporting goods imports. The largest shares of imports of boats and water sport equipment were recorded in Malta and Cyprus, with over 90% of total imports; this was also the primary category for Croatia and the Netherlands.

Of the remaining categories, gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment had the highest shares in import of Czechia and Finland, while skis and related equipment was the main import contributor for Austria (see Table 4).

Table 4: Imports of sporting goods by group of products, 2018

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<tr>
<th>Main trading partners</th>
<th>Imports of sporting goods by group of products, 2018</th>
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<td>Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prd)</td>
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When considering the aggregate of the trade of all Member States, the single European market remains the major export destination and source of imports for sporting goods (see Figure 4 and Figure 5).

In 2018, the most common destination for sporting goods exported from the EU (export extra-EU) were the Cayman Islands (23.7%), the United Kingdom (16.0%) and United States (15.4%) - more than half of sporting goods exports went to these three countries (see Figure 8). All exports of sporting goods to the Cayman Islands were basically reduced to the ‘boats and water sport equipment’ category. A significant percentage of this type of goods (mainly luxury yachts) was also exported to the United States, accounting for more than half of exports of sporting goods to this destination. The relative significance of the Cayman Islands as an export market for EU sporting goods doubled between 2013 and 2018, increasing from 10.2% to 23.7%, while both the United Kingdom and the United States remained at the same level.
Figure 8: Top 10 main partners for extra EU-27 exports of sporting goods, EU-27, 2013 and 2018(%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prt)

Figure 9 shows the ten main partners for imports of sporting goods. In 2018, one third of sporting goods were imported into the European Union from China (33.0 %), 12.5 % from Vietnam and 12.4 % from the United Kingdom - these three countries accounted for more than an half of the total EU imports for sporting goods. The share for China was lower in 2018 than in 2013 (33.0 % compared with 38.4 %), while Vietnam more than doubled its share (from 6.6 % in 2013 to 12.5 % in 2018). The United Kingdom also registered a growth (from 9.7 % to 12.4 %).

In 2018, 'articles and equipment for general physical exercise' was a main category of sporting goods imported from China and 'sports footwear' the predominant one from the United Kingdom. Sports footwear covered almost 90 % of all sporting goods imported from Vietnam.

Figure 9: Top 10 main partners for extra EU-27 imports of sporting goods, EU-27, 2013 and 2018(%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_trd_prt)

Source data for tables and graphs
- Download Excel file
Data sources

The identification of the list of sporting goods is based on the Vilnius Definition of sport, the Study on the Contribution of Sport to Economic Growth and Employment in the EU and the UNESCO Framework for Culture statistics (which considers sport as a domain related to culture).

International trade statistics are stored in COMEXT, Eurostat’s database of international trade in goods. COMEXT contains statistics on goods traded between Member States (intra-EU trade) and goods traded by Member States with non-EU countries (extra-EU trade). The trade values for other political or geographical entities, such as the European Free Trade Association and candidate countries are also collected. The COMEXT database is built around six main dimensions:

- reporter (country declaring commercial transactions);
- partner (trade partners of the declaring country — all countries of the world);
- flow (exports and imports);
- product (items by HS, CN or SITC, BEC and CPA depending on the dataset);
- time (annual and monthly data);
- type of indicator (the value or quantity of traded products).

Based on the number of dimensions available in COMEXT database, the following indicators are compiled for imports and exports of sporting goods:

- value of trade in thousands of euros (THS_EUR);
- percentage of country’s total trade (PC_TOT);
- percentage of total EU-27 trade (PC_EU27_2020);
- percentage of total EU-28 trade, European Union from 2013 to 2020 (PC_EU28);
- percentage of total sport trade — at country and EU level (PC).

The data are compiled for the following trade partners:

- intra-EU;
- extra-EU;
- intra-EU28 (European Union from 2013 to 2020);
- extra-EU28 (European Union from 2013 to 2020);
- world (intra-EU and extra-EU);
- main extra-EU trading partners.

Methodology

Internationally traded sports-related items are selected using the Harmonized System (HS) classification. They are then aggregated into meaningful groups according to sporting disciplines or specific sports equipment and accessories.

The groups of products (covered by HS six-digit codes) are the following: skis and related equipment; skates; boats and water sports equipment; golf equipment; racket sports (tennis and badminton) equipment; balls; gymnastic, athletic and swimming equipment; fishing equipment; bicycles; parachutes; sportswear; footwear; and sporting shotguns. For a detailed list of aggregates of sport products, see the metadata on trade in sporting goods.

Brexit

Due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union, the ’Statistics Explained – International trade in sporting goods’ article presents the UK as a third country. From the source tables listed in this article, it is also possible to find the EU-28 aggregate, related to the EU composition of 28 Member States from 2013 to 2020, for the entire time series.
The impact of quasi-transit or the so-called 'Rotterdam effect'

Trade flows of the EU Member States may be overvalued because of the quasi-transit trade. However, the trade balance of the concerned Member State is not impacted, as the quasi-transit should increase by the same amount as the intra- and extra-EU trade flows (extra-EU imports followed by dispatches to the Member State of actual destination or arrivals from the Member State of actual export followed by extra-EU exports to the country of actual destination). The quasi-transit is known to affect mostly the Member States with big ports at the external border to the European Union and in particular the Netherlands. This is why its impact on figures is known as the 'Rotterdam effect'. In case of imports, the goods destined to other EU Member States arriving in Dutch ports are recorded, according to Community rules, as extra-EU imports by the Netherlands (the country where goods are released for free circulation) and as dispatches from the Netherlands to the Member States of actual destination, even though there is no link with economy of the Netherlands. The quasi-transit is known to influence more the imports but exports are also affected. In exceptional cases, the customs clearance occurs not in the actual Member State of export but in the Member State of exit, i.e. in the Member State from which the goods are taken out of the EU customs territory.

Context

The multiannual work programmes (EU Work Plan for Sport for 2014–2017; EU Work Plan for Sport 2017–2020) represent a tangible example of the importance that sport has gained in European policy initiatives. These programmes, agreed by the Council, set the priorities and the principles for cooperation between the European Commission and Member States in the field of sport.

Sport and its spillover effects in manufacturing, services and international trade are having a growing impact on the world's economies and societies. Comparable statistics — such as those on the number of jobs created in sport-related sectors or on the contribution of international trade in sporting goods to total international trade — provide indicators that can assess the relative contribution of sport in the economy.

Other articles

• Employment in sport

Visualisations

• Sport

Publications

• Leaflet on sport statistics — 2018 edition
• The economic dimension of sport

Database

• International trade in sporting goods (sprt_trd), see:
  Intra and extra-EU trade in sporting goods by product (sprt_trd_prd)
  Intra and extra-EU trade in sporting goods by product and partner (sprt_trd_prt)

Dedicated section

• Sport
Methodology

For a detailed list of aggregates of sport products, see the metadata on trade in sporting goods.

- **International trade in sporting goods (sprt_trd)** (ESMS metadata file — sprt_trd)

- **International trade in goods** (ESMS metadata file — ext_go_agg_esms)

- **Vilnius definition of sport**