This article forms part of an online publication *Culture statistics*. Trade statistics for cultural goods provide information on the value of international exchanges of these goods and show the weight of cultural trade within all EU-27 international trade. The analysis presented concerns data from 2013 to 2018, and shows the following information related to trade in cultural goods:

- export and import values in absolute and relative terms (EUR million and as a share of total trade);
- extra-EU and intra-EU trade;
- the type of goods traded;
- the EU’s main trading partners.

**Cultural trade 2013-2018 at EU-27 and national level**

This article analyses recent statistics on cultural trade for the European Union (EU); data are also presented for the United Kingdom and for the candidate countries of Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Turkey.

Cultural goods are products of artistic creativity that convey artistic, symbolic and aesthetic values. Examples include antiques, works of art, jewellery, books, newspapers, photos, films, music or video games. The cultural goods heading is very heterogeneous: while some of these goods are products of mass consumption, others are very specialist items where demand or supply may be small. For example, there is much lower demand for embroidery, maps, architectural plans or drawings, than for books, video game consoles or jewellery. Such differences in the characteristics of cultural products, the relative specialisation of different EU Member States in producing these goods, and technological innovations driving new consumption patterns, all have an impact on the level of trade in cultural goods.

The definition of cultural goods used within this article excludes large-scale manufactured products that facilitate access to cultural content (for example, television sets, Blu-ray players, hi-fi equipment, smartphones, computers or tablets). For film, music and video games, the category includes all recorded media, magnetic or optical, which provides support to access cultural content. Musical instruments, which represent a means of artistic expression, are also included.
EU cultural trade — a growing trade surplus

In 2018, as well as in 2013, the EU-27 recorded a trade surplus for cultural goods. However, its value fell from EUR 5.2 billion in 2013 to EUR 3.6 billion in 2018, reflecting a faster increase in the value of imports (up from EUR 12.5 billion to EUR 17.2 billion) than in the value of exports (up from EUR 17.7 billion to EUR 20.8 billion). The ratio of exports to imports — otherwise known as the cover ratio — was 1.41 in 2013 and 1.21 in 2018, confirming that the value of EU-27 imports of cultural goods increased at a slightly faster pace than the value of exports (see Table 1).

During the period 2013 to 2018, the annual average growth rate (AAGR) for EU-27 exports of cultural goods was 3.2 %, while the corresponding rate of change for imports was twice as high — 6.5 %; note that all changes are in current price terms.

A more detailed analysis by product reveals a growth for EU-27 exports and imports during the period 2013 to 2018 for photographic plates and films, video game consoles, jewellery, musical instruments, books, craft articles and architectural plans and drawings. Antiques exports remained unchanged, while imports of cultural goods from this category increased by 10.5 % per year: the same pattern was registered for works of art, with a slight decline in exports and a significant increase by 9.1 % per year for imports. There was also a fall in the value of exports as well as imports for recorded media (for example, CDs, DVDs, magnetic tapes and vinyl records), maps and newspapers, journals and periodicals.

Table 1: Extra-EU trade in cultural goods, EU Member States, 2013 and 2018

Table 1: Extra-EU trade in cultural goods, EU Member States, 2013 and 2018

Given their share of EU-27 trade in cultural goods, jewellery, recorded media and works of art were the largest contributors to the EU-27’s trade surplus in 2018.

Among the various cultural goods covered in the scope, the largest contraction in EU-27 exports between 2013 and 2018 was recorded for the categories of newspapers, journals and periodicals (down 9.2 % per year) and maps (down 6.1 % per year). The ‘newspaper, journals and periodicals’ category, whose imports and exports decreased each year at a similar rate (9.9 % per year for imports), reflects a shift towards digital media: an increasing number of cultural goods are being made available in digital form on the internet (sometimes supplementing and other times replacing physical media).

The value of imports of cultural goods in the Member States increased faster than the value of exports.
A range of factors could lead to a rise or fall in the value of trade in cultural goods. Economic developments (the stage in the economic cycle), the shift to digital technologies for various types of content and market challenges arising from the introduction of new technologies may affect consumption patterns for cultural goods and result in a shift in the relative share of these products within the overall basket of traded cultural goods.

The increase in imports of cultural goods between 2013 and 2018 was registered for the whole EU-27 and at Member State level. Among the EU Member States, only 11 countries had a positive trade balance in cultural goods trade in 2018 (see Table 2). In 2018, the largest positive balance of trade in cultural goods was recorded in Italy (over EUR 4.5 billion), Germany (EUR 1.1 billion) and Poland (EUR 0.7 billion). Compared with 2013, the positions of the trade balance leaders did not change, but only Poland (79%) recorded an increase in the trade balance in this period. At the same time, the Netherlands, which had a trade balance similar to Poland in 2013, noted a reduction in the difference between exports and imports by 80%.

Looking at absolute values, the largest export growth in international trade in cultural goods from 2013 to 2018 was recorded in Poland (EUR 2.5 billion), Germany (EUR 1.8 billion) and France (EUR 1.6 billion). In turn, Ireland (EUR 0.31 billion) and Austria (EUR 0.25 billion) recorded the largest decreases in the value of exports. The highest import growth of cultural goods in the European Union was recorded in Germany (EUR 2.3 billion), Poland (EUR 2.2 billion) and France (EUR 1.6 billion). Imports of cultural goods increased in 22 of the EU Member States from 2013 to 2018: the only exceptions were Belgium, Finland, Sweden, Malta and Hungary.

Table 2: Extra-EU trade in cultural goods, EU Member States, 2013 and 2018

<table>
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<th>Country</th>
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Exports

Between 2013 and 2018, the export value of cultural goods rose in 17 of the EU Member States. Poland had the highest average growth rates, at 29.2 % per year, followed by Czechia (19.0 % per year); among the Member States that recorded a double-digit growth rate during the period under consideration were also Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Romania (see Figure 1). In Poland, exports of cultural goods grew from EUR 0.96 billion to almost EUR 3.5 billion and in Czechia from EUR 0.7 billion to EUR 1.67 billion. In 2018, in Poland, more than half of the exports of cultural goods consisted of products from the 'Video game consoles' and 'Books' categories, whereas in Czechia the 'Recorded media' category alone accounted for more than half of the value of total exports of cultural goods (see Table 3).

The value of exports of cultural goods fell between 2013 and 2018 by 19.6 % per year in Malta and by 10.1 % in Ireland. In Malta, the fall in the value of exports was caused largely by a decline in the level of jewellery exports. In Ireland, the decline in the value of exports was largely attributed to a reduction in the value of exports for recorded media.

Imports

Turning to the development of imports of cultural goods during the period 2013-2018, by far the highest average rate of growth among the EU Member States was recorded in Poland (37.8 % per year) — this could be largely attributed to a rising level of imports of video game consoles, recorded media and books. The value of imports of cultural goods increased also in another 21 Member States between 2013 and 2018, most notably in Czechia and Slovenia. The steepest reductions in the value of imports for cultural goods were registered in Malta (down by 11.9 % per year) and in Finland (down by 4.8 % per year) (see Figure 2).
Figure 2: Annual average rate of change for the import of cultural goods, 2013-2018(%)Source: Eurostat (cult_trd_prd)

Contribution of cultural trade to overall exports

Cultural goods account for a relatively low proportion of the EU-27’s overall level of (extra-EU) exports. Just like in 2013, in 2018 the export of cultural goods accounted for only 1 % of all European Union exports (see Figure 3).

At Member State level (and therefore based on extra- and intra-EU trade), Italy (1.7 %), France (1.7 %), and Poland (1.6 %) were the only EU Member States where the share of cultural goods in total exports was higher than the EU-27 average (1.0 %) in 2018. Cultural goods accounted for a relatively low share of total exports in Finland, Hungary and Romania.

Between 2013 and 2018, the contribution of cultural goods to total exports (in value terms) increased in 11 Member States, with the biggest relative increases in Poland (up from 0.6 % to 1.6 %) and Czechia (up from 0.6 % to 1.0 %). In 15 Member States, the share of cultural goods in total exports decreased — Cyprus, Malta and Ireland stood out as they recorded the largest relative reductions. Cyprus has reduced its share of cultural goods in total exports by four times, while Malta and Ireland by around three times. Among the Member States, only the Netherlands has maintained its share of cultural goods exports in total exports at an unchanged level.
Contribution of cultural trade to overall imports

In the EU-27, cultural goods accounted for 0.9 % of total (extra-EU) imports in 2018, compared with a 0.8 % share in 2013 (see Figure 4). In 13 EU Member States, the share of cultural goods in total imports was higher in 2018 than it was in 2013. The contribution of cultural goods to total imports grew notably in Poland and Czechia. The highest share of cultural goods in total imports in 2018 was recorded in France (1.4 %), followed by Poland, Austria and Luxembourg where this share was higher than the EU average. The share of cultural goods in total imports was at its lowest in Hungary, Romania, Lithuania and Estonia.

Figure 3: Exports of cultural goods as a share of total exports, 2013 and 2018(%)Source: Eurostat (cult_trd_prd)
Intra- and extra-EU trade

In a majority of the EU Member States, intra-EU exchanges of cultural goods were of greater value than extra-EU trade.

The trade of EU Member States can be analysed from two perspectives: intra-EU trade (between EU Member States) and extra-EU trade (with non-member 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 location. Care should be taken when interpreting the size of intra-EU trade relative to the size of extra-EU trade, in particular because of the importance of quasi-transit trade in some EU Member States (for example, the Netherlands).  

In 2018, the total value of cultural goods exported by EU Member States was estimated at around EUR 41.9 billion. 43.3 % of these cultural goods were destined for other EU Member States, while 56.7 % were destined for non-member countries (see Figure 5). Looking in more detail, there were 20 EU Member States where at least half of the total export value of cultural goods was made up of trade with other EU Member States. In several cases, this share was considerably higher, exceeding 80 % in Czechia and Slovakia. By contrast, the value of extra-EU exports exceeded the value of intra-EU exports in Sweden, Cyprus, Ireland, Finland, Italy, France and Malta.

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1The high share recorded in the Netherlands may be attributed in part to the impact of quasi-transit of goods, in other words, the so-called ‘Rotterdam effect’ (see the Data sources section for more details).
Figure 5: Share of extra-EU and intra-EU trade within all exports of cultural goods, 2018 (%)

Source: Eurostat (online data code: cult_trd_prd)

Figure 6 provides a similar analysis but in terms of imports of cultural goods. In 2018, the total value of cultural goods imported by EU Member States was estimated at around EUR 36.8 billion. The share of intra-EU imports (50.9 %) in the total value of cultural goods imported into the EU Member States was comparable to the value of extra-EU imports (49.1 %). There were 20 EU Member States where imports from the intra-EU market exceeded half of all imports of cultural goods. For some countries - Austria, Czechia, Portugal and Poland - the share of intra-EU imports surpassed 80 %. On the other hand, the import from outside the European Union slightly exceeded 50 % of total imports of cultural goods in Greece, Spain, France, Italy and Malta. For two Member States, shares of imports of cultural goods from outside the European Union were clearly higher — at 76.3 % for the Netherlands and 89.3 % for Ireland.
Jewellery accounted for 50% of the value of extra-EU exports of cultural goods in 2018. The combined share of jewellery, works of art, recorded media, books and video game consoles was almost 90% of the EU-27's exports of cultural goods (see Table 3).

When considering trade in the various types of cultural goods, some particular specialisations within individual EU Member States become apparent. Jewellery accounted for more than half of all exports of cultural products in Italy (77.0%), Cyprus (76.7%) and France (60.8%) and accounted for the largest share of cultural products exported from Malta, Luxembourg and Greece. Recorded media were the principal cultural goods in the exports from seven Member States, accounting for more than half of all exports of cultural products in Ireland, Czechia and Austria. Books were the leading type of cultural exports in six Member States and their share was over 50% in Latvia and Hungary. Video game consoles had the highest share of exports of cultural goods in a further five Member States, accounting for 50.1% of the total in the Netherlands (see footnote 1). The largest share of exports of cultural goods in Portugal (35.2%) was composed of craft articles (hand-made fabrics and ornamental articles), while the most common cultural products that were exported from Estonia (42.4%) and Finland (35.9%) were newspapers, journals and periodicals. ‘Works of art’, the second largest export category of cultural goods at the European Union level, was not the main products’ group in any of the Member States.
Jewellery and video game consoles were the most imported products

In 2018, the main categories of cultural goods that were imported into the EU-27 included jewellery (34.9 % of extra-EU imports), video game consoles (24.4 %), books (9.4 %), works of art (8.9 %) and musical instruments (6.0 %). These five categories together accounted for 83.7 % of the cultural goods imported into the EU-27 from non-member countries (see Table 4).

Among the individual EU Member States (and therefore taking account of both intra- and extra-EU trade), eight countries imported more jewellery (in value terms) than any other type of cultural goods (Estonia, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta and Portugal). For a further eight Member States (Denmark, Germany, Spain, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Finland and Sweden), the value of imports of video game consoles was higher than for any other type of cultural goods in 2018, while books were the most common type of cultural imports in four more (Belgium, Austria, Slovenia and Slovakia). Craft articles accounted for the highest share of imports of cultural goods in Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary, and recorded media in Czechia and Romania. Works of art was the main product category in import only in one country — Luxembourg.
Switzerland and the United Kingdom were the leading markets for EU-27 exports of cultural goods.

Comparing 2013 and 2018, the European Union increased its exports of cultural goods to Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Hong Kong (which was the fifth largest market for EU-27 exports of cultural goods in 2013) overtook the United Arab Emirates to become fourth largest partner by 2018. Between 2013 and 2018, the cumulative share of the EU-27’s top 10 export partners slightly increased from 79.7 % to 80.4 %.
China was the principal origin of EU-27 imports of cultural goods

In 2018, China accounted for the largest share of EU-27 imports of cultural goods. China was the origin of more than quarter (26.1 %) of the cultural goods imported into the EU-27 in 2018, which was a slightly lower share than in 2013 (27.0 %) — see Figure 8. Switzerland was the second largest origin of EU-27 imports of cultural goods in 2018; its share rose from 18.8 % in 2013 to 21.8 %. There was a reduction in the relative importance of the United Kingdom: its share of imports of cultural products by EU-27 fell from 19.8 % in 2013 to 15.3 % in 2018. The list of other largest partners importing cultural goods has not changed, although it is worth noting that Japan has doubled its share in imports to the European Union (from 2.5 % in 2013 to 5.1 % in 2018). The top 10 trade partners for imports of cultural goods into the EU-27 accounted for 94.3 % of all imports of cultural goods in 2018.

Figure 7: Top 10 main partners for extra EU-27 exports of cultural goods, EU-27, 2013 and 2018(%) Source: Eurostat (online data code: cult_trd_prt)
Figure 8: Top 10 main partners for extra EU-27 imports of cultural goods, EU-27, 2013 and 2018(%) Source: Eurostat (cult_trd_prt)
An ESSnet-Culture final report (2012) established a list of internationally traded cultural goods using CN codes. The process for selecting cultural goods was based upon identifying a list of 8-digit codes within 10 cultural domains. For the sake of consistency and in order to facilitate the analysis of developments over time, the various product codes were aggregated into 12 types of cultural products. The list of cultural aggregates and detailed information on their composition can be found in Annex 2 of the metadata on international trade in cultural goods.

Identification of cultural goods

![Image of cultural goods according to cultural domains](Source: Eurostat (Guide to Eurostat culture statistics — 2018 edition))

The ESSnet-Culture final report (2012) created a framework for culture statistics on the basis of cultural activities, which relate to the intersection between 10 cultural domains and six economic functions. Trade is an important aspect of the dissemination of culture statistics and one of the six economic functions (together with creation, production/publishing, preservation, education, and management/regulation).

Eurostat analysed the 10 cultural domains from a product perspective in order to establish a list of internationally traded cultural goods. Initially, the analysis focused on artistic creation, with the goal of covering products that convey and encompass symbolic, aesthetic, artistic and spiritual values (for example, works of art or crafts). The scope was later extended to various products that did not meet the criteria for artistic creation, but were considered to enable artistic expression or access to cultural content (for example, musical instruments, CDs, DVDs and Blu-ray discs). Cultural equipment in a wider sense (for example, television sets, CD players, or cameras) was excluded.

On the basis of these criteria, cultural goods and products were identified in seven domains (see Figure 9). The initial list of cultural goods (proposed in 2015) was revised in 2016, with the aim of better harmonising
the EU’s methodological framework with that proposed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). As a result, Eurostat’s culture statistics working group agreed to add jewellery (of precious and semi-precious metals and stones), some hand-made ornamental articles and some goods with audio-visual content to the list of cultural goods.

More recently, the list underwent another revision to take into account changes brought about by a revision of the CN classification in 2017. In particular, this revision affected the codes related to support for audio-visual content by removing the distinction between support for sound (music) on the one hand and for sound and vision (film, video and video games) on the other hand. Henceforth, one aggregate is presented for the support of all audio-visual content — music, films, videos and video games — under the broad heading of recorded media (covering the previous headings for music in manuscript, gramophone records, recorded magnetic tapes and optical media (CDs) and audio-visual and interactive media). The classification of video game consoles (previously under the heading of audio-visual and interactive media), could be split from the other codes and hence maintained as a separate product type.

Due to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union, the current article ‘Statistics Explained – International trade in cultural goods’ presents the UK as a third country. From the Eurobase source tables indicated below tables and figures, it is possible to find the EU-28 aggregate, related to the EU composition of 28 Member States (from 2013 to 31.01.2020), for the entire time series.

The impact of quasi-transit (the ’Rotterdam effect’)

The trade flows of EU Member States may be overvalued because of quasi-transit trade. A country’s trade balance is not impacted, as quasi-transit trade should increase by the same amount as intra- and extra-EU trade flows (extra-EU imports are followed by dispatches to another EU Member State, while arrivals from one EU Member State are then followed by extra-EU exports to the final destination). Quasi-transit trade principally impacts the Member States with large ports that trade in goods at the external EU border; this phenomenon is particularly prominent in the Netherlands (hence it is known as the ’Rotterdam effect’), Belgium and the United Kingdom. For example (and in line with EU rules), the Netherlands records goods arriving in Dutch ports that are destined for other Member States as extra-EU imports and (when goods are then released for free circulation) as intra-EU dispatches (exports) from the Netherlands to other Member States.

Quasi-transit trade is known to affect imports more than exports, although exports are also affected. In some cases, customs clearance occurs not in the original EU Member State from which the exports originate but rather the Member State from which the goods leave the EU’s customs territory.

Context

Culture is one of Europe’s greatest assets: it is a source of values, identity and a sense of belonging; it also contributes towards well-being, social cohesion and inclusion. The cultural and creative sectors may also provide a stimulus for economic growth, job creation and international trade.

That is why culture is becoming increasingly important within the EU. In accordance with Article 167 of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common heritage to the fore.

The EU supports these objectives through the Creative Europe programme, as well as a number of policy actions set out in the Work Plan for Culture (2015-2018) and the Work Plan for Culture (2019-2022). The latter, adopted by EU culture ministers in November 2018, sets out the main priorities for European cooperation in cultural policymaking: sustainability in cultural heritage; cohesion and well-being; an ecosystem supporting artists, cultural and creative professionals and European content; gender equality; and international cultural relations.

The production of reliable, comparable and up-to-date cultural statistics, which provide a basis for sound cultural policymaking, is a cross-sectorial priority in the latest work plan. Eurostat compiles culture statistics...
from several different data collections to provide policymakers and other users with information on the main developments in the field of culture, covering issues such as education, employment, business, international trade, participation and consumption patterns.

Statistics on international trade in cultural goods provide an assessment of the value of cultural goods traded between EU Member States (intra-EU trade) and between the EU and non-member countries (extra-EU trade).

Notes

Other articles

- Culture (articles on culture)
- International trade in goods

Publications

- Culture statistics — 2019 edition
- Culture statistics — 2016 edition
- User guide on European statistics on international trade in goods — 2016 edition

Database

- Culture (cult), see:
  - International trade in cultural goods (cult_trd)
  - Intra and extra-EU trade in cultural goods by product (cult_trd_prd)
  - Intra and extra-EU trade in cultural goods by product and partner (cult_trd_prt)

Dedicated section

- Culture

Methodology

- European statistical system network on culture (ESSnet-Culture final report (2012)
- User guide on European statistics on international trade in goods — 2016 edition
- International trade in cultural goods (ESMS metadata file — cult_trd_go_esms)
- International trade in goods (ESMS metadata file — ext_go_agg_esms)
Legislation

- Summaries of EU Legislation: Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020)
- Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world (COM(2007) 242)
- European legislation applicable to statistics relating to trade in goods

Visualisations

- Cultural statistics illustrated

External links

- European Commission — Culture for growth and jobs
- Creative Europe