



## Frequently asked questions

What statistics does Eurostat provide for external trade?	3
How data for EU and euro area aggregates are calculated for past periods?	3
Where can users register for all Eurostat products and services?	3
What's the difference between Extra-EU trade and Intra-EU trade?	4
What's the difference between aggregated and detailed data?	4
What can I find under "Aggregated data"?	5
What can I find under "Detailed data"?	5
What data can I find in each of the datasets in the "Traditional External Trade Database" (Comext)?	6
<b>EXTRA EU27 TRADE SINCE 1999 BY MODE OF TRANSPORT</b>	6
<b>ADJUSTED EU-EXTRA IMPORTS BY TARIFF REGIME</b>	7
<b>EFTA TRADE SINCE 1995</b>	7
<b>EFTA TRADE SINCE 2003</b>	7
<b>EXTERNAL TRADE STATISTICS BY ENTERPRISE CHARACTERISTICS (ETSEC):</b>	7
<b>WEST BALKANS TRADE SINCE 2002 BY CN:</b>	8
<b>PRODUCTION</b>	8
When data are updated?	8
When are external trade data final?	9
Where can I download large amounts of data and historical data?	9
What are the main documents explaining the data and the methodology?	9
Which are the main product classifications used in external trade?	10
How often classifications are revised?	10
Which is the country classification used?	11
What are the main indicators in external trade statistics and how they are computed?	11
<b>Value indicator</b>	11
<b>Net Mass indicator</b>	11
<b>Supplementary quantity indicator</b>	12
<b>Aggregated indicators</b>	12
Are external trade data affected by confidentiality?	12



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**Unit G5: International trade - Production**



► Back to questions Why are there differences between Eurostat data and national statistics or other sources?	13
Why the intra-EU trade balance is not zero?	14
Why are there extra EU statistical discrepancies?	15
What are Tariff data? What is the significance of the eligibility and imports regime dimensions?	15
What is the significance of the statistical regime in EU trade data?	16



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
Unit G5: International trade - Production



## What statistics does Eurostat provide for external trade?

EU external trade statistics, as produced by Eurostat, cover detailed and aggregated statistics on the trade in goods between the Member States (*Intra-EU trade*) and between Member States and all non-EU partner countries (*Extra-EU trade*). The Community Legislation ensures the harmonisation of the concepts and definitions applied by the Member States when sending Community data to Eurostat. In addition, the coherence is strengthened by a harmonised approach implemented at Eurostat level for the data production and dissemination whatever the type of trade – intra or extra-EU trade – and the Member State. The following periods are covered:

- Annual statistics from 1976 to 1987
- Annual and monthly statistics from 1988.

Note: Eurostat data are free of charge since 2004

► [Back to questions](#)

## How data for EU and euro area aggregates are calculated for past periods?

In external trade "fixed" definitions of EU and euro area aggregates are used, and remain stable for the whole time series. This allows making comparisons over time. For example, data for EU27 for periods before 2007 are calculated by summing up data for the 27 Member States. This is possible because, starting from 1999, data for all 27 Member States are available according to a harmonised methodology, including a common classification for products (CN8) and partners (Geonomenclature). The same applies for the calculation of the euro area aggregates according to the previous compositions (ex. EA15).

► [Back to questions](#)

## Where can users register for all Eurostat products and services?

Users can register at <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/registration/reginfo>. This registration is not obligatory but strongly advised as a registered user can download more data.



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The Traditional External Trade Database is Comext. Comext has a separate registration and login procedure at

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb/mainxtnet.do>

► [Back to questions](#)

**What's the difference between Extra-EU trade and Intra-EU trade?**

The **Intra-EU trade** refers to the trade between the Member States of the European Union, while the **Extra-EU trade** refers to the trade between Member States and partner countries that are not members of the European Union. Different legislation applies to statistics based on the Intrastat and Extrastat systems. The former came into operation on 1 January 1993 and it provides for a direct collection of information from trade operators. The latter is linked with customs legislation and it provides for the collection of data from customs declarations.

► [Back to questions](#)

**What's the difference between aggregated and detailed data?**

Aggregated data refer to monthly and annual trade statistics for EU and euro area, with a breakdown by large product categories: 1-digit codes of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) or aggregates (capital goods, consumption goods or intermediate goods) of the Broad Economic Categories (BEC). Data are available for the main EU and euro area partners.

Detailed data refer to monthly trade statistics at the most detailed level of several product nomenclatures: the Combined Nomenclature (CN) which corresponds to the Harmonized System (HS) plus a further breakdown at 8-digit level, the SITC, the BEC, the Classification of Products by Activity (CPA) and the Standard Goods Classification for Transport Statistics/Revised (NST/R). Data are available for all EU partners.

► [Back to questions](#)



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
Unit G5: International trade - Production



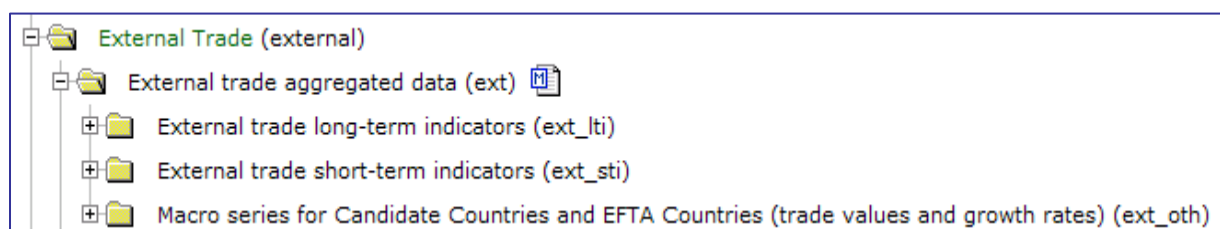
What can I find under "Aggregated data"?

**LONG-TERM INDICATORS:** This dataset contains annual time series for the European Union (EU) and the euro area (EA) as well as for each of the EU Member States starting from 1990 (for the longest series) up to the last year available. It presents gross values (in euros) and indices. Data are given at the 1-digit level of the SITC and by main trading partner/area. Series are available for imports, exports and trade balances.

**SHORT-TERM INDICATORS:** This dataset contains monthly series for the European Union and the euro area as well as for each of the EU Member States from January 1989 (for the longest series) until the latest month available. It presents raw values (in euros), growth rates, indices and the corresponding seasonally adjusted data. Data are given at the 1-digit level of the SITC, by BEC aggregates and by main trading partners. Series are available for imports, exports and trade balances.

**MACRO SERIES FOR CANDIDATE COUNTRIES AND EFTA COUNTRIES:** This dataset contains monthly series for the candidate countries (Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) from January 1999 and for EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) since January 1995. It presents raw values (in euros) and growth rates. Data are given at the 1-digit level of the SITC and by main trading area (EU/non-EU). Series are available for imports, exports and trade balances.

**You can access aggregated data through Eurostat Data Navigation Tree:**



► [Back to questions](#)

What can I find under "Detailed data"?

Detailed data record the monthly trade for EU Member States from 1995 in terms of imports and exports at the most detailed level of several product



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Unit G5: International trade - Production



nomenclatures: the Combined Nomenclature (CN), HS, the SITC and BEC. The following dimensions are provided across databases: reporting country (MSs), trading partner (e.g. EU27, China, US, world,), reference period, trade flow (import, export), product (according to the nomenclatures), indicators (value, quantity).

In addition you can find information on external trade by tariff regime (ADJUSTED TARIFF datasets) for Extra-EU imports; external trade by means of transport (NSTR), external trade for EFTA countries, external trade by enterprise characteristics (ESTEC), external trade for West Balkan countries and annual data on industrial production, imports and exports since 1995 (PRODCOM).

You can access detailed data through the Data Navigation Tree or directly the EasyComext database at

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/newxtweb/mainxtnet.do>.

► [Back to questions](#)

What data can I find in each of the datasets in the "Traditional External Trade Database" (Comext)?

**EU27 TRADE SINCE 1995:** These datasets contain monthly and annual time series for the European Union and the euro area as well as for each EU Member State from January 1999 (for EU15 members from 1995) until the last month available. It presents gross values (in Euro), quantities (in 100 kg) and supplementary quantities (wherever relevant). Data are given according to the different levels of the CN (CN8, HS6, HS4 and HS2), of the SITC and of the BEC and by trading partner (all countries of the **Geonomenclature**). Series are available for imports and exports.

**EXTRA EU27 TRADE SINCE 1999 BY MODE OF TRANSPORT:** These datasets contain monthly and annual time series for the European Union as well as for each EU Member States from January 1999 until the last month available. It presents gross values (in Euro) and quantities (in 100kg and tons). Data are given according to the different levels of the HS (HS6, 4 and 2) and of the NST/R and by extra-EU trading partner. Series are available for imports and exports and by mode of transport (e.g. air, sea, rail).



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**ADJUSTED EU-EXTRA IMPORTS BY TARIFF REGIME:** These datasets contain monthly and annual time series for the European Union as well as for each EU Member State from January 2000. It presents gross values (in euros) and quantities (in 100 kg and tons). Data are given according to the different levels of the CN (CN8, HS6, HS4 and HS2) and by extra-EU trading partner. Series are available for imports only. In addition to the basic information, this dataset provides two more dimensions: eligibility (the tariff status indicated in the TARIC database on the first day of each month) and use (the preference reported in SAD adjusted with the duty rate).

**EFTA TRADE SINCE 1995:** These datasets contain monthly and annual time series for EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) from January 1995 until the last month available. It presents gross values (in euros) and quantities (in 100 kg and tons). Data are given according to the different levels of the SITC and by trading partner (all countries of the Geonomenclature). Series are available for imports and exports.

**EFTA TRADE SINCE 2003:** These datasets contain monthly and annual time series for EFTA countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) from January 2003 until the last month available. It presents gross values (in euros) and quantities (in 100 kg/tons and supplementary units). Data are given according to the most detailed level of the national product nomenclature. Series are available for imports and exports.

**EXTERNAL TRADE STATISTICS BY ENTERPRISE CHARACTERISTICS (ETSEC):** These datasets contain annual data for reference years 2005 and 2006, and are available for 19 EU Member States (Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden) and one EFTA country (Norway). They aim to describe various aspects of the structure of external trade from the viewpoint of the characteristics of enterprises (economic activities; size-class of enterprises; by trade concentration; by geographical diversification; by the products traded). It presents gross values (in 1000 euros) and for three datasets also the number of enterprises. Data are given according to NACE, 2 digit CPA and by main trading partners. Series are available for imports and exports.

*Note: Annual data compilation will become mandatory from reference year 2009 for intra-EU trade and from reference year 2010 for extra-EU trade onwards.*



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Unit G5: International trade - Production



## **WEST BALKANS TRADE SINCE 2002 BY CN:**

This new dataset contains monthly and annual time series for West Balkan Countries (Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Former Yug. Rep of Macedonia and Montenegro) from January 2002 until the last month available. It presents gross values (in 1000 euros) and quantities (in 100 kg, tons and supplementary units-specific for each country). Data are given according to the different levels of the CN and by trading partner (all countries of the Geonomenclature). Series are available for imports, exports and re-exports.

**PRODUCTION:** These datasets complement the external trade database with industrial production statistics collected via a business survey. It provides annual data for the EU Member States, EFTA countries and candidate countries on industrial production, imports and exports since 1995. Moreover, monthly time series for steel are provided from 2003. The products are disseminated according to the PRODCOM nomenclature.

► [Back to questions](#)

When data are updated?

**Aggregated data:** Short-term indicators are updated on a monthly basis at the date of the press release (about 48 days after the end of the reference month). Long-term indicators are updated generally twice a year, once when complete results are available for the last reference year (usually in March of the following year) and once when annual data become more stable (towards the end of the following year).

**Detailed data:** Monthly statistics are updated every month at the date of the press release (about 48 days after the end of the reference month). Data for the latest month are usually available for Extra-EU trade but not always for Intra-EU trade because of a different transmission deadline (40 days for Extra-EU trade and 70 days for Intra-EU trade). You can find the exact schedule for data updates in the **provisional calendar** in the metadata.

► [Back to questions](#)



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
**Unit G5: International trade - Production**



## When are external trade data final?

Data are revised frequently according to national needs and practices. However, Member States should provide Eurostat with quasi final data by October following the reference year. However, revisions to older data are also possible. All the latest revisions transmitted by the Member States are included in the monthly updates.

► [Back to questions](#)

## Where can I download large amounts of data and historical data?

In case of large extractions you can use the Bulk Download on Eurostat website at the following link:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/NavTree\\_prod/everybody/BulkDownloadListing?sort=1&dir=comext](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/NavTree_prod/everybody/BulkDownloadListing?sort=1&dir=comext) . You can access also historical data from 1988.

Furthermore, Eurostat publishes monthly DVDs for the most recent data and different supplement versions for annual and historical data. You can download for free the content of a DVD from the **Bulk Download** or you can buy it from the **EU bookshop** website.

► [Back to questions](#)

## What are the main documents explaining the data and the methodology?

You can find all the information about data definitions, coverage, classifications, methodology, availability of data and quality issues in the [External Trade Metadata](#). There are three main methodology documents that provide an overview of data coverage, main concepts, methodological issues, the quality of the data produced in Eurostat: [User guide](#), [ESMS files](#) and [Quality report](#). For detailed data you have both **DATASET METADATA** and **DIMENSION METADATA** that cover specific documents such as special notes, updates of classifications and legislation regarding external trade methodology.

► [Back to questions](#)



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
Unit G5: International trade - Production



Which are the main product classifications used in external trade?

### **Combined Nomenclature (CN) - Harmonized System (HS)**

**Harmonized System (HS)** is an international classification at 2, 4, 6-digit level which classifies goods taking into account the nature of the commodity. The **Combined Nomenclature (CN8)** corresponds to the Harmonized System (HS) plus a further breakdown at 8-digit level and includes ca. 10 000 eight-digit codes.

The **Standard International Trade Classification (SITC Rev. 4)**, which is managed by the United Nations, adopts the structure of the HS, so that the smallest modules of the SITC Rev. 4 are defined by HS subheadings. Aggregated data on trade are often presented by the one and two digit categories of the SITC. An example of a 1-digit category (section) is "chemical products" and of a 2-digit category (division) "medicinal and pharmaceutical products". A link is available from CN to SITC. The **Classification by Broad Economic Categories (BEC)** permits the conversion of external trade data compiled on the SITC into end-use categories. BEC has 19 basic categories that can be aggregated to approximate the three basic classes of goods (capital goods, intermediate goods and consumption goods). This enables trade statistics to be considered jointly with other sets of general economic statistics - such as national accounts and industrial statistics - for national, regional or global economic analysis.

You can find External Trade nomenclatures and correlation tables on [RAMON](#).

► [Back to questions](#)

How often classifications are revised?

The most detailed results which can be accessed by the public are broken down by sub-headings of the **Combined Nomenclature (CN)**. Some changes of CN (to reflect developing technology and trade exchanges) are made yearly and are valid from January to December. You can find a list with these changes in the METADATA in [NC Successors Predecessors](#) and in [Updates of CN codes until 2010](#).

Harmonized System (HS) is revised every five years. Revisions of SITC are less frequent; the latest revision has been made after nineteen years.

► [Back to questions](#)



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
EUROSTAT

Directorate G: Business Statistics  
**Unit G5: International trade - Production**



Which is the country classification used?

The [Geonomenclature](#) is used for classifying the world countries for external trade purposes. Alpha-2 codes based on ISO are applied, which means that each country is identified with a two-letter alphabetical code. This Geonomenclature is managed by Eurostat and is subject to revision in order to take into account any geopolitical changes.

► [Back to questions](#)

What are the main indicators in external trade statistics and how they are computed?

### ***Value indicator***

The disseminated value is the statistical value, which is the value at the border of the importing/exporting EU Member State. The statistical value is composed of the value of the goods plus transport and insurance costs incurred to deliver the goods from the place of their departure to the border of importing/exporting Member State. However, the statistical value shall not include EU taxes, excise taxes, duties and anti-dumping duties. The values provided by Eurostat are expressed in current prices.

### ***Net Mass indicator***

The net mass is the mass of the goods without any packaging. Starting from January 2006, in Intra-Community trade the legal provisions enable Member States to make optional the reporting of the net mass for products with supplementary units (pieces, pairs, etc.). You can find the **list of products with supplementary units** in the metadata. However, starting from January 2010 with the adoption of a new Commission Regulation, Member States applying the simplification are obliged to estimate the missing net mass data. In 2010 the net mass will be fully collected by 15 Member States. The remaining 12 Member States will need to make estimations of the net mass.

In order to facilitate the task of the Member States, Eurostat has established European average conversion factors for all the CN codes with a supplementary unit. Member States are free either to use the Eurostat provided list of conversion factors or any other estimation method they deem to be more fit. The conversion factors are available on the Eurostat website in the metadata:



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
Unit G5: International trade - Production



## [Nota Bene for Intrastat net mass since 2006 and conversion factors for net mass estimation](#)

### ***Supplementary quantity indicator***

Supplementary units are units other than the net mass, for example, litres, number of pieces or square metres. They are indicated for certain goods where they are deemed useful and more meaningful than the net mass. The appropriate supplementary unit is given, where relevant, in the published version of the Combined Nomenclature. In the metadata you can find the **complete list of supplementary units**.

### ***Aggregated indicators***

**The short term indicators** are disseminated according to the high levels of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC Rev. 4) and the Broad Economic Categories (BEC): gross and seasonally adjusted trade value (in million Euro); unit-value indices, gross and seasonally adjusted volume indices, growth rates of trade values and indices.

**The long term indicators** are disseminated according to major SITC groups: trade value (in billion Euro), shares of Member States in EU and world trade, shares of main trading partners in EU trade, volume indices.

**Unit value indices** are calculated by Eurostat to approximate the import and export price movements. Value-indices are calculated as the percentage change between the trade value of the current month and the average monthly trade value of the previous year. These value indices are used to derive volume indices as follows: value index = unit-value index x volume index. The growth rates of unit-value and volume indices enable the user to decompose value changes into price and volume components. For more details regarding the methodology used for computing indices please consult the User Guide.

► [Back to questions](#)

Are external trade data affected by confidentiality?

There are three types of confidentiality that are used in EU external trade data:

- **Partner Confidentiality**: in order to conceal the destination or the source or origin of a product, the code of the partner country is replaced by a



‘secret country code’. You can find the trade with confidential partners, by using the "Secret-Extra" or "Secret-Intra" codes for partner country.

- **Product confidentiality**: in order to suppress the nature of the commodity involved, the trade is allocated to confidential product codes. They are usually hidden under special alphanumeric codes containing the letter "S". You can find the products for which MSs applied confidentiality in the **Confidentiality notes** in the Metadata.
- **Product and Partner Confidentiality**: the two preceding types are applied at the same time; therefore both the partner and the product are hidden. You can find also these situations in the metadata in **Confidentiality notes**.

For goods falling under military secrecy Member States may transmit only data on the total monthly statistical value of the imports and exports.

Confidentiality can lead to asymmetries and underestimation of aggregates. There are also situations in which the trade with a specific partner is underestimated due to partner confidentiality. However, you can identify the **total trade with a specific partner** as Eurostat provides an aggregate "TOTAL" that contains all the CN8 products, including all the confidential trade with the respective partner.

► [Back to questions](#) Why are there differences between Eurostat data and national statistics or other sources?

Discrepancies may exist between Eurostat data and national data due to the use of a different concept for the data provided to Eurostat (that has to be harmonized according to the Community concept). These reasons can refer to:

- **Country of origin vs. country of consignment**: *For example, Austria may use the country of origin as the partner country while for community statistics the Member State of consignment is used in intra-EU trade.*
- **Treatment of goods in 'quasi' transit**: *Some Member States (e.g. Belgium and Netherlands) do not record in their national figures goods, which they consider to be ‘in transit’. These flows are included in the Community statistics under intra- or extra-EU trade, as appropriate. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the ‘Rotterdam effect’;*
- **Different trade system for compilation of statistics**: *applying the general trade system at national level rather than the special trade system used for Eurostat data.*



More information on these issues is found in the [User guide](#), [ESMS files](#) and [Quality report](#).

► [Back to questions](#)

### Why the intra-EU trade balance is not zero?

As data for all 27 Member States are available according to a harmonised methodology, in theory the intra-EU balance should be 0. However, bilateral comparisons have revealed persistent discrepancies in the mutual Member States' intra-EU trade, called asymmetries. For example, this means that, for a given period and a specific product X, exports from France to Austria do not equal to imports of Austria from France. The main reasons are:

- **The system of thresholds** - *This system makes it possible to exempt ca. 80% of operators from statistical formalities. For a given transaction, therefore a company might be required to provide statistical information in one Member State, whereas its supplier or customer in another Member State is exempted.*
- **Late or non-response** *by certain companies;*
- **Statistical confidentiality** - *different national practices for the application of confidentiality*
- **Misapplication of the rules and delays**
- **Valuation of transactions** - *the use of different methods for calculating the statistical value of dispatches (FOB value) and arrivals (CIF value);*
- **Triangular trade** - *In the intra-EU context triangular trade is said to exist in the case of a company in Member State A which sells goods to a company in Member State B, which in turn sells them to a company in Member State C, although the goods are "physically" forwarded only once - from A to C. In cases such as this, intra-Community trade statistics should record a dispatch from A bound for C, and an arrival in C of goods from A. There is, however, a considerable risk that A or C will regard Member State B as its trading partner.*

► [Back to questions](#)



## Why are there extra EU statistical discrepancies?

A comparison of the statistics on extra-EU trade with the figures published by non-member countries for the same trade flows inevitably shows some discrepancies. These exist whether national or Community sources are used. Many of these differences can be largely explained by the following factors:

- **Definition of partner country** - *Goods exported from country of consignment are presented in importing country according to country of origin which may differ from the country of consignment.*
- **Different trade systems for compilation of statistics** - *Applying the general trade rather than the special trade system used for Eurostat data.*
- **Different valuations of transactions** - *The use of different methods for calculating the statistical value of dispatches (FOB value) and arrivals (CIF value)*
- **Time lag** - *The same operation can be recorded under a different reference period because of transport times or also because of processing delays;*
- **Statistical confidentiality** - *different practices;*
- **Different practices in the treatment of revisions;**
- **Problems of currency conversion.**

► [Back to questions](#)

What are Tariff data? What is the significance of the eligibility and imports regime dimensions?

For extra-EU imports, EasyComext users also have at their disposal information on tariff preferences with, in particular, a distinction between MFN tariffs (erga omnes) and preferential ones. Eligibility refers to the theoretical classification of the specific trade for MFN, GSP and other preferences. Imports regime refers to the actual regime under which the goods were imported. For various reasons such as lack of certificates eligibility and import regimes can differ.

► [Back to questions](#)



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Directorate G: Business Statistics  
Unit G5: International trade - Production



What is the significance of the statistical regime in EU trade data?

The statistical regime derives from the **customs procedures** that are converted into statistical procedures. There are broadly two approaches, closely linked with customs procedures, used for the compilation of external trade in goods: **general trade system** and the **special trade system**.

The **general trade system** is the wider concept and under it the recorded aggregates include all goods entering or leaving the economic territory of a country with the exception of simple transit trade.

In particular, all goods which are received into customs warehouses are recorded as imports at that stage whether or not they subsequently go into free circulation in the Member State of receipt. Similarly, outgoing goods from customs warehouses are included in the general trade aggregates at the time they leave the Member State.

The **special trade system**, on the other hand, is a narrower concept. Goods from a foreign country which are received into customs warehouses are not recorded in the special trade aggregates unless they subsequently go into free circulation in the country of receipt (or are placed under the customs procedures for inward processing or processing under customs control). Similarly, outgoing goods from customs warehouses are not recorded as exports.

Statistics on extra-EU trade are compiled on a **special trade basis** but without including the industrial free zones.

► [Back to questions](#)

*For any further question regarding data availability, technical or methodological issues please send your request to: [ESTAT-USER-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu](mailto:ESTAT-USER-SUPPORT@ec.europa.eu). You will be able, at any time, to consult the status of your request at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/xtnetassist/>.*

► [Back to questions](#)