

# EU international trade in transport services

Data extracted in April 2019  
Planned article update: April 2020

## Highlights

**Sea transport was the biggest contributor to EU international trade in transport services between 2010 and 2017, accounting for about half of the total transport services.**

**The United States was the EU's main trading partner in transport services in 2017, accounting for 20 % of EU exports and 17 % of EU imports.**

## EU trade in transport services with extra EU, 2010-2017

2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 (EUR 1 000 million)  
20406080100120140160180 Exports Imports Balance

- Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

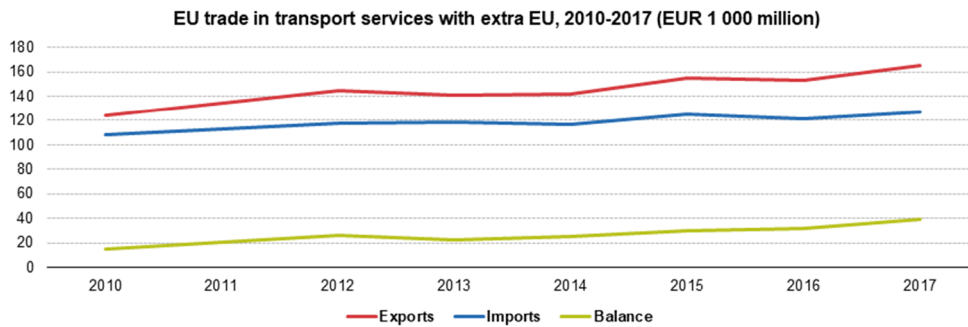
The role of trade in services in [EU](#) international trade has been growing steadily over the last decade and plays a major role in modern economies in an increasingly interlinked and globalised world. [International trade in services](#) flows show the transactions between residents and non-residents according to twelve main service categories of the Extended Balance of Payments Services classification ([EBOPS 2010](#)). Transport services is the second largest of the twelve service categories, accounting for 18 % of total services [exports](#) to [extra-EU](#) and also 18 % of total services [imports](#) from non EU countries in 2017. The largest category is 'other business services', presented in a separate [article](#).

This article focuses on the structure and evolution of the EU's international trade in transport services with extra-EU. The transport services category can be further divided into four sub-categories<sup>11</sup>, namely

sea transport, air transport, other modes of transport as well as postal and courier services. These sub-categories are presented in this article.

## General overview

Figure 1 shows the time series for the evolution of international trade in transport services from 2010 to 2017. Exports of transport services exceeded imports every year, resulting in a constant surplus for the EU. Imports of transport services fluctuated between 2010 and 2017; in 2017 they increased by 5 % after a decrease of 3 % in 2016. Exports also fluctuated; in 2017 an increase of 8 % was recorded after a 2 % decrease in 2016. The trade surplus increased substantially between 2010 and 2012 (70 % in total) and after a decrease of almost 14 % in 2013, started increasing again from 2014 to 2017. The rate of increase reached 8.3 % between 2016 and 2017.



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

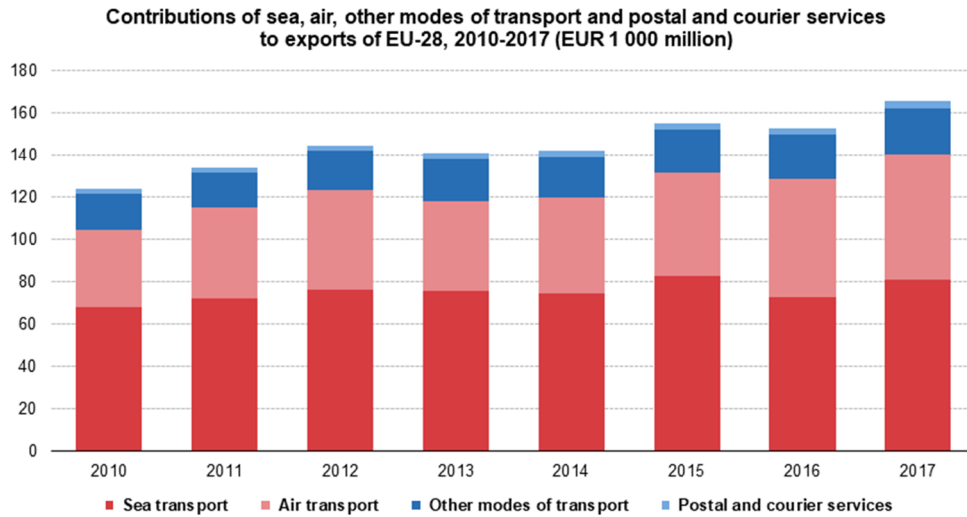
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Figure 1: EU trade in transport services with extra EU, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

Figures 2 and 3 show the contributions of the four sub-categories of transport services to exports and imports for 2010 to 2017. Sea transport provides the biggest contribution to both exports and imports (sea transport accounts for approximately half of the total transport services category) followed by air transport, other modes of transport, and postal and courier services.



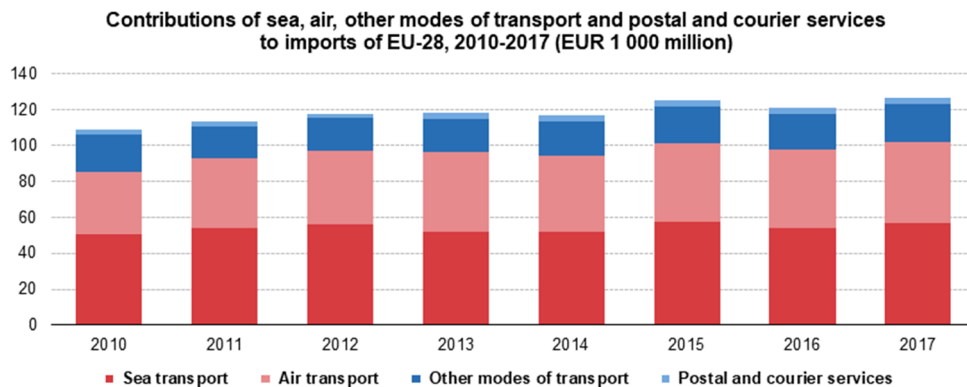
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

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Figure 2: Contributions of sea, air, other modes of transport as well as postal and courier services to exports of EU-28 with extra-EU, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

eurostat



Figure 3: Contributions of sea, air, other modes of transport as well as postal and courier services to imports of EU-28 with extra-EU, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

In 2017, the United States was the EU's main trading partner in transport services exports, accounting for 20 % of EU exports; it was followed by Switzerland with 9 % and China with 7 %. As far as imports are concerned, the United States again has the leading role with 17 %, China comes second with 8 % and Switzerland follows with 6 % (see Figure 4).

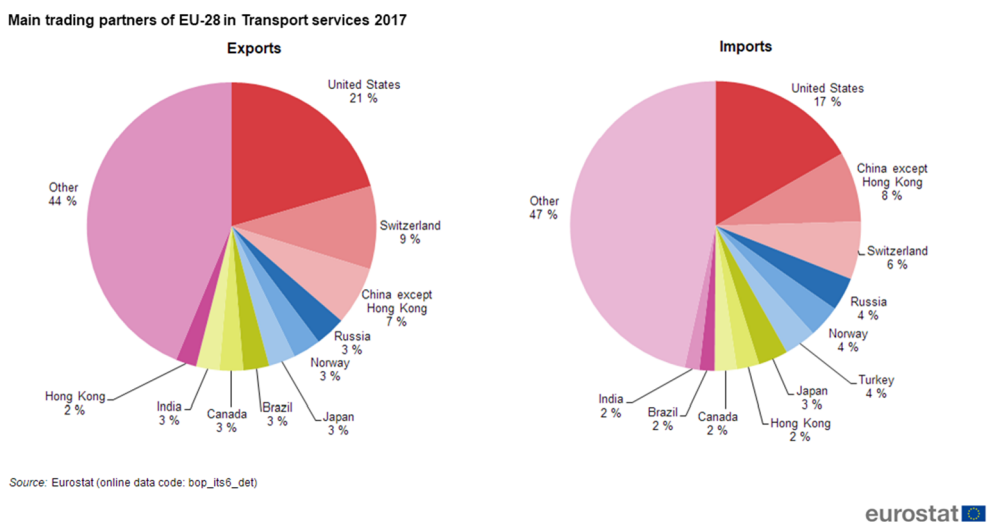


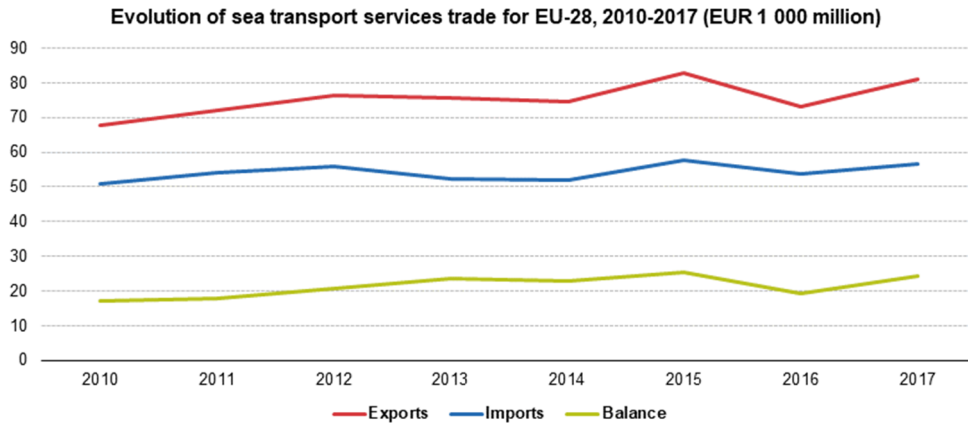
Figure 4: Main trading partners' share of EU exports and imports of transport services, 2017

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

## Sea transport

Sea transport<sup>[2]</sup> covers all international freight and passenger transport services undertaken by seagoing vessels, except cruise fares (included in travel). It does not include transport by underwater pipelines (included in pipeline transport).

The evolution of the time series for sea transport services is shown in Figure 5. Exports of sea transport have been higher than imports since 2010, resulting in a continuous trade surplus. From 2010 to 2016 both exports and imports fluctuated. An increase of 11 % in exports and 5 % in imports is recorded for 2017.



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

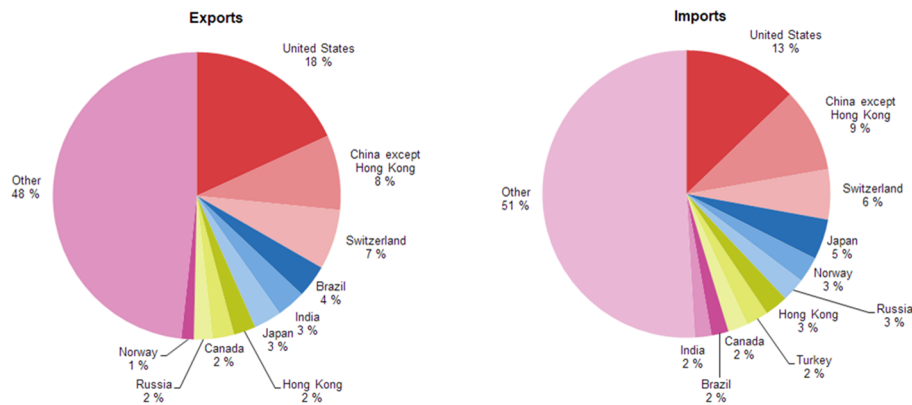


Figure 5: Evolution of sea transport services trade for EU-28, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

In 2017, the EU's largest trade partner for sea transport services was again the United States with 18 % of exports and 13 % of imports. China came second for exports with 9 %, followed by Switzerland with 7 %, and for imports China also came second with 9 % and Switzerland again followed with 6 % (see Figure 6).

Main trading partners of EU-28 in Sea Transport services 2017



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)



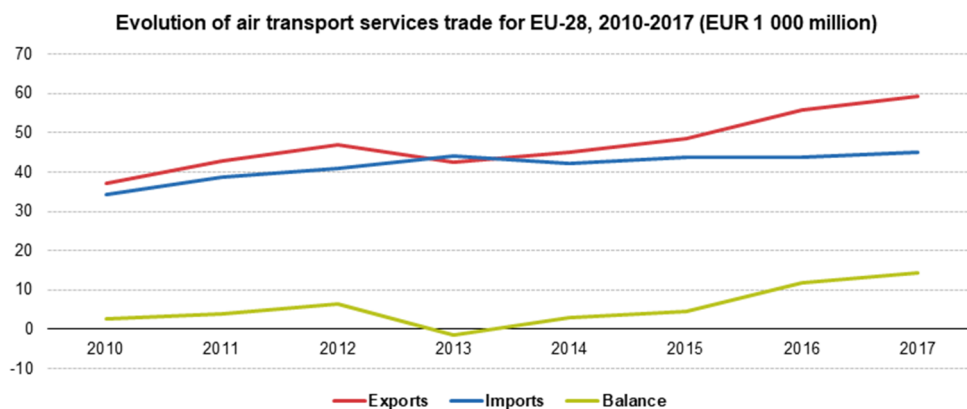
Figure 6: Main trading partners' share of EU exports and imports of sea transport services, 2017

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

## Air transport

Air transport<sup>[3]</sup> covers all international freight and passenger transport services provided by aircraft.

EU exports of air transport services has generally exceeded imports since 2010, except in 2013 when a decrease of 10 % in the exports of air transport services and an increase of 7 % in the imports caused a negative balance. Exports of air transport services continued to increase after 2013 while imports, after some fluctuations, returned to the levels of 2013 values. This also caused a high increasing rate for the surplus (20 % only between 2016 and 2017) (see Figure 7).



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

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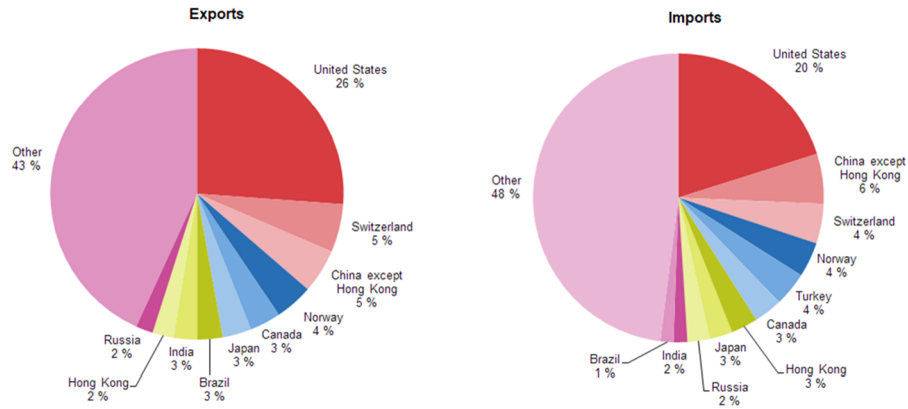


Figure 7: Evolution of air transport services trade for EU-28, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

In 2017, the United States was again the largest partner for air transport services, accounting for 26 % of EU exports and 21 % of imports. Switzerland came second for exports with 5 % (together with China) but was third for imports with 4 %. China came second for imports with 6 % (see Figure 8).

Main trading partners of EU-28 in Air Transport services 2017



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)



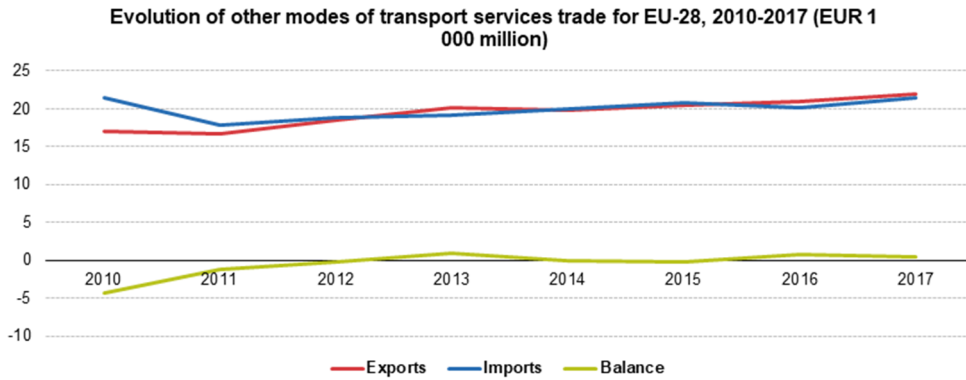
Figure 8: Main trading partners' share of EU exports and imports of air transport services, 2017

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

## Other modes of transport

Other modes of transport services include all other modes of transport besides sea and air. They can be disaggregated to: space transport, rail transport, road transport, inland waterway transport, pipeline transport, electricity transmission and other supporting and auxiliary transport services (i.e. all other transport services that cannot be allocated to any of the components of transport services previously described).

The time series for trade in other modes of transport since 2010 is shown in Figure 9. Imports and exports have fluctuated but not substantially, especially after 2013 when smaller changes were recorded keeping their values on the same levels. In 2017, an increase of 5 % in exports and 7 % in imports was recorded. Imports exceeded exports in all years except 2013 , 2016 and 2017, when the situation was reversed and a surplus was recorded (EUR 445 million in 2017).



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

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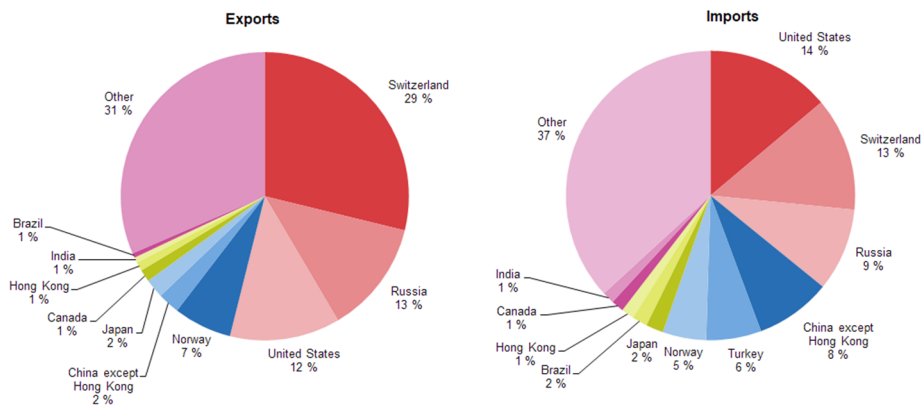


Figure 9: Evolution of other modes of transport services trade for EU-28, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

Regarding the EU's main trading partners for other modes of transport in 2017, the situation is slightly different from the previous two subcategories. Switzerland accounted for the largest share of exports with 29 %, followed by Russia (13 %), the United States (12 %) and Norway (7 %). On the imports side, the United States was the main trading partner with 14 %, followed by Switzerland (13 %) and Russia and China (9 %), while Turkey came after with 6 % (see Figure 10).

Main trading partners of EU-28 in Other modes of transport services 2017



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

eurostat





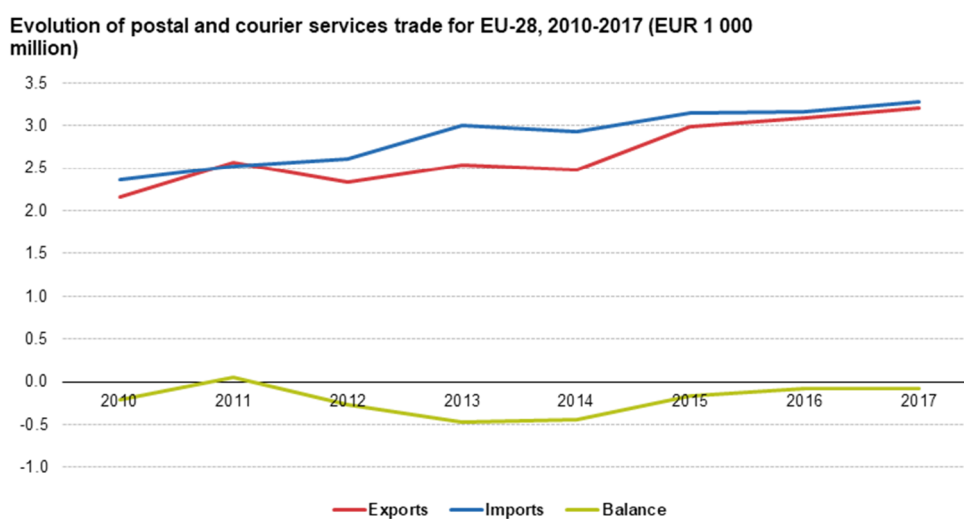
Figure 10: Main trading partners' share of EU exports and imports of other modes of transport services, 2017

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

## Postal and courier services

Postal and courier services<sup>[4]</sup> cover the pick-up, transport and delivery of letters, newspapers, periodicals, brochures, other printed matter, parcels, and packages, including post office courier and mailbox rental services.

Figure 11 shows the evolution of postal and courier services for 2010 to 2017. Imports of these services increased from 2010 to 2013, then decreased for one year, before returning to increasing values with 3 % in 2017. Exports have been increasing since 2013, after a decrease of 9 % in 2012, with the highest increase recorded in 2015 (21 %). The balance of postal and courier services was negative from 2012 until 2017.



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

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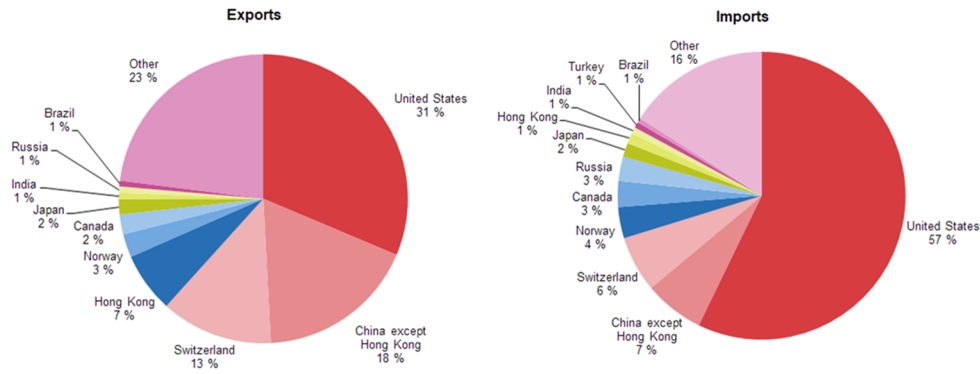


Figure 11: Evolution of postal and courier services trade for EU-28, 2010-2017 (EUR 1 000 million)

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

For postal and courier services the EU's main trading partner was the United States, with 31 % of exports and 57 % of imports in 2017. China followed with 18 % of exports and 7 % of imports, then came Switzerland with 12 % of exports and 6 % of imports (see Figure 12).

Main trading partners of EU-28 in Postal and courier services 2017



Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop\_its6\_det)

eurostat



Figure 12: Main trading partners' share of EU exports and imports of postal and courier services, 2017

Source: Eurostat ([bop\\_its6\\_det](#))

## Data sources

EU data on transport services trade come from the Eurostat reference database on international trade in services and are prepared in accordance with BPM6, the current balance of payments methodology. The data are updated annually. They are available since 2010 for EU aggregates, all EU Member States and non-EU countries ([EFTA](#), [candidate countries](#) and other countries). Pre-2010 data are also available in the Eurostat reference database but are prepared in accordance with the previous balance of payments methodology (BPM5). Statistics on EU trade with extra-EU are calculated as the sum of trade conducted by the 28 Member States and the European Union institutions (except the [European Central Bank](#) and European Stability Mechanism) with the countries outside the EU (no flows within the EU are taken into account).

Transport<sup>[6]</sup> is the process of carriage of people and objects from one location to another as well as related supporting and auxiliary services.

Transport can be classified according to:

- (i) [mode of transport](#) and
- (ii) what is carried. The transport services category can be further divided into four sub-categories<sup>[6]</sup>, namely:

Sea transport  
Air transport  
Other modes of transport  
Postal and courier services.

For instance, in the case of passenger transport, international trade in transport services covers all services provided to non-residents by resident carriers and to residents by [non-resident](#) carriers. Nevertheless, the transport of travellers (non-residents) is not included in transport. In international services trade it is classified under travel services. In the case of freight, transport services include all the international transport of the economy's exports and imports of goods. Moreover, it includes freight services provided by resident operators on the compiling economy's imports inside the customs frontier of the exporting economy (exports of freight services). Accordingly it also comprises transport services provided by non-resident operators of the compiling economy, inside the customs frontier of the compiling economy, on the compiling economy exports (imports of freight services).

## Context

International trade in services makes up part of the current account of the balance of payments and covers the transactions between the residents and non-residents of a country during a given period. International trade in services follows the BPM6 methodology, which uses 12 main service categories, one of which is transport services. EU trade in services with the non EU countries has been on an increasing trend from 2010 to 2015 for both imports and exports. In 2017, it increased to 912 billion in exports and to 721 billion in imports. Nevertheless, exports of total services exceed imports, creating a trade surplus which contributes positively to the current account. It is worth noting that the balance of total services which has been decreasing since 2013, increased in 2017 reaching 191bn.

## Notes

1. [Jump up](#) As defined by the [Balance of Payments Manual 6 \(BPM6\) par. 10.74](#)
2. [Jump up](#) According to [MSITS](#) par. 3.83
3. [Jump up](#) According to [MSITS](#) par. 3.84

4. [Jump up](#) According to the [Balance of Payments Manual 6 \(BPM6\) par. 10.82](#)
5. [Jump up](#) As defined by the [Balance of Payments Manual 6 \(BPM6\) par. 10.74](#)
6. [Jump up](#) As defined by the [Balance of Payments Manual 6 \(BPM6\) par. 10.74](#)