

Market evolution: Fish fillets (CN 0304) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The EU trade in fish fillets and other fish meat (CN 0304) underwent a profound transformation between 2015 and 2025. While the EU remains a large net importer, a surge in domestic production fundamentally altered its trade profile. Import reliance fell sharply, export values soared, and high-value salmon products emerged as the engine of extra-EU shipments. At the same time, import volumes barely changed, but import prices rose steeply, widening the value deficit. This report describes and interprets the main dynamics using the provided trade dashboard data.

1. A Production-Led Transformation Toward Self-Sufficiency

The most striking structural change is the rapid growth of intra-EU output, which reshaped the bloc's reliance on external suppliers.

Domestic production more than doubled in volume and multiplied nearly sixfold in value.

According to the production volume data, EU production of CN 0304 rose from 241.6 million kg (€936 million) in 2015 to 666.0 million kg (€5,868 million) in 2024. This represents a 191% quantity increase and a 592.5% value increase over the period, indicating not only more fish processed but also a shift toward higher-priced species.

Net import reliance fell from nearly two-thirds to below half of domestic consumption.

The net import reliance indicator dropped from 63.5% in 2015 to 43.8% in 2024, a decline of 31.0%. This autonomous supply increase made the EU significantly less dependent on foreign fillets.

Export propensity almost halved, highlighting the dominance of the expanding home market.

While export values grew strongly, the export propensity (the share of production exported to non-EU countries) fell from 27.8% in 2015 to 20.3% in 2024. Domestic consumers absorbed the bulk of the production surge, reinforcing the trend toward self-sufficiency.

2. The High-Value Salmon Channel: Premium Export Dynamics

EU exports of fish fillets were increasingly driven by one star category—salmon, particularly in fresh or chilled fillet form—while overall export volumes rose only modestly.

Export values nearly doubled, yet volumes grew by just 16%.

The general trade overview shows extra-EU export value at €656 million in 2015 and €1,253 million in 2025, a 90.9% increase. By contrast, export quantity moved from 99.2 thousand tonnes to 115.4 thousand tonnes (+16.3%). The average export price thus rose from €6,611/t to €10,853/t (+64.2%).

Fresh/chilled salmon fillets (CN 030441) became the single largest export category by value.

Product segment data shows exports of fresh/chilled salmon fillets skyrocketed from €85.9 million in 2015 (+8.9 kt) to €408.5 million in 2025 (+29.1 kt). Frozen salmon fillets (CN 030481) also expanded from €121.3 million to €288.7 million. Together, salmon-related exports accounted for a dominant portion of the value growth.

Export segment (selected)	Value 2015 (million EUR)	Value 2025 (million EUR)	Quantity 2015 (tonnes)	Quantity 2025 (tonnes)
Fresh/chilled salmon fillets (030441)	85.9	408.5	8,931	29,100
Frozen salmon fillets (030481)	121.3	288.7	16,076	26,290
Frozen cod fillets (030471)	131.7	137.8	23,631	11,928
Frozen tuna fillets (030487)	49.9	163.2	3,665	10,735

The United States and Israel emerged as the main export growth poles, compensating for the post-Brexit UK collapse.

Partner-level data reveals that exports to the United States increased by 601.1%, from €57.7 million to €404.3 million. Shipments to Israel jumped by an extraordinary 1,627.3%, reaching €112.8 million. Meanwhile, exports to the United Kingdom, historically the top destination, fell by 56.3%, from €316.3 million to €138.2 million, as post-Brexit trade frictions and sanitary barriers took effect.

3. Price Shocks, Volatility, and a Reconfiguration of Import Suppliers

On the import side, virtually all volume growth was absent. Instead, a broad wave of price inflation across key species, combined with supply volatility and supplier shifts, defined the decade.

Import volumes stagnated, but average import prices rose by 38%, driving the trade deficit deeper.

Imports went from 1.16 million tonnes in 2015 to 1.17 million tonnes in 2025 (+1.1%), while value surged from €4.48 billion to €6.23 billion (+39.1%). The trade balance thus deteriorated from a deficit of €–3.82 billion to €–4.98 billion (–30.2%), entirely caused by rising unit costs.

Alaska pollack, hake, and cod preserved their role as volume anchors, but salmon and a broad “n.e.s.” basket drove the import bill.

The largest imported segment by volume, frozen Alaska pollack (CN 030475), moved between 217 kt and 268 kt annually. Frozen cod (CN 030471) volumes declined from 107.6 kt to 73.4 kt, while frozen catfish (CN 030462) shrank from 99.3 kt to 59.0 kt. In contrast, salmon imports (CN 030481) held around 67–85 kt but doubled in average price from €7,073/t to €9,388/t. A basket of “frozen fish fillets n.e.s.” (CN 030489) and “frozen fish meat n.e.s.” (CN 030499) also contributed significant value, reflecting the EU’s diversified import needs.

Supplier concentration remained high and stable, but individual country volatilities and price shocks altered sourcing.

The import HHI by value remained between 926 and 1,054 over the decade, with Norway, China, Iceland, the US, Russia, Vietnam, and Namibia consistently as the top seven. However, significant shifts occurred beneath that stability.

The volatility analysis shows that quantities from the UK (CV 0.40), Russia (CV 0.32), and Vietnam (CV 0.28) were the most unstable. A notable price shock hit Vietnamese frozen fillets in 2022 (+44.9% price increase), and another struck Chinese supplies in the same year (+29.4% price increase), driven by global logistics and supply disruptions.

Norway consolidated its position as the EU’s indispensable supplier, while China’s role temporarily eroded.

Norwegian import values climbed by 78.4%, from €759 million to €1,354 million, making it by far the largest source. Iceland (+95.5% to €700 million) and Russia (+91.5% to €506 million, despite political tensions) also gained share. Chinese imports, by contrast, fell by 20.0% over the period, from €827 million to €662 million, with a particularly sharp drop in 2024–2025 as EU buyers diversified away.

Import partner	Value 2015 (million EUR)	Value 2025 (million EUR)	Change
Norway	759.0	1,354.1	+78.4%
Iceland	358.0	699.8	+95.5%
United States	380.2	584.3	+53.7%
Russian Fed.	264.3	506.2	+91.5%
China	827.0	661.7	–20.0%
Vietnam	301.1	255.0	–15.3%
Namibia	195.4	318.6	+63.1%

Conclusion

Between 2015 and 2025, the EU’s trade in fish fillets evolved from a high-reliance import model toward a more self-sufficient one, underpinned by a massive expansion of domestic processing, especially of salmon. This transformation was reflected in plummeting net import reliance, in export value growth far outpacing volumes, and in a supplier landscape where Norway emerged as the unrivalled import leader while China’s footprint shrank. However, the persistent rise in import prices for frozen staples such as Alaska pollack and cod ensured that the trade deficit continued to deepen, reminding policymakers that, even with increased self-reliance, global price dynamics in key fisheries remain a critical vulnerability. The data for 2025 confirms that these trends have solidified, with salmon exports, near-shore European processing, and a reordering of Asian supply chains defining the market’s new equilibrium.

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