EU TRADE EXPLORER

Market evolution: Fresh fish (CN 0302) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The EU's external trade in fresh or chilled fish (excluding fillets and fish meat of heading 0304) underwent profound structural changes between 2015 and 2025. This report analyses the main developments in imports, exports, partner composition, specialisation, volatility and vulnerability, using annual data from the EU Trade Dashboard. All figures cited are drawn exclusively from the underlying dataset.

From net exporter to net importer: the EU's deepening reliance on external fresh fish supply

The trade deficit widened by 83 % as import growth far outpaced exports

Over the observation period the EU moved from a net exporter of fresh fish to a net importer. Net import reliance flipped from **-36.9 %** in 2015 to **+21.0 %** in 2025, a swing of 156.9 %. This was driven by a massive rise in imports.

Indicator	2015	2025	Change
Exports (EUR)	916.7 M	859.2 M	–6.3 %
Export quantity (t)	212 743	153 631	–27.8 %
Imports (EUR)	4 710.0 M	7 816.1 M	+65.9 %
Import quantity (t)	1 079 289	1 341 933	+24.3 %
Trade balance (EUR)	–3 793.2 M	–6 956.9 M	–83.4 %

Source: Overview of EU fresh fish trade

While export values shrank only modestly, export volumes fell almost 28 %, meaning higher unit prices cushioned the drop. Imports, however, surged in both value (+65.9 %) and volume (+24.3 %), pushing the external deficit to nearly **€7 billion**.

Import dependency remains concentrated in salmon and a handful of suppliers

Despite a moderate drop in the import concentration index (HHI from 6 412 to 5 383, –16.1 %), the supply base is highly skewed.

Import partner	2015 (EUR)	2025 (EUR)	Change %
Norway	3 734.0 M	5 656.4 M	+51.5
Faroe Islands	17.5 M	443.7 M	+2 436.6
Iceland	28.4 M	371.5 M	+1 209.8
Türkiye	173.4 M	383.6 M	+121.2
United Kingdom	492.7 M	630.8 M	+28.0

Source: Main trading partners

Norway alone accounted for **72 % of extra-EU fresh fish imports in 2025**, and its deliveries grew steadily. The most dramatic increases came from the Faroe Islands and Iceland, whose combined share rose from less than 1 % to over 10 %, signalling a broadening but still very concentrated supplier base.

EU production growth masked a shrinking export propensity

The export propensity of the fresh fish sector collapsed from **164.6 %** in 2003 to just **12.5 %** in 2024, indicating that the vast majority of EU production was absorbed domestically while imports increasingly satisfied consumption. The reported EU production quantity rose from 410 193 t in 2015 to 430 000 000 t in 2024 (data coverage improved markedly after 2018), mirroring the shift from export orientation towards a predominantly domestic market.

Brexit and the reshaping of EU fresh fish trade flows

The collapse of EU exports to the United Kingdom was the single largest trade shock

EU exports to the United Kingdom plummeted from **€531.9 M** in 2015 to **€72.6 M** in 2025, a drop of **86.4 %**. The export price shock detected in 2021-2022 shows a **24 % price decline** and an almost complete evacuation of quantities: from an average of 101 000 t per year before the shock to barely 16 000 t during the shock period.

- Before Brexit, the UK absorbed roughly half of all extra-EU exports by value.
- After the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, customs and sanitary barriers wiped out the previous seamless trade.

Export reorientation towards the US, Israel and other markets partially offset UK losses

While the UK shrank, other destinations grew rapidly:

Export partner	2015 (EUR)	2025 (EUR)	Change %
United States	47.5 M	155.5 M	+227.5
Israel	20.9 M	107.3 M	+413.9
Switzerland	97.8 M	144.3 M	+47.6
Norway	29.3 M	75.4 M	+156.9
Faroe Islands	4.3 M	29.8 M	+588.2

Source: Main trading partners

This diversification is reflected in the export HHI, which fell from **3 631** to **1 042** (–71.3 %), indicating a much more even distribution of export volumes across partners.

Import sources diversified at the margin while Norway remained dominant

The import side also saw new suppliers appear, notably Greenland (from €0.14 M to €6.3 M, +4 525 %) and the Faroe Islands, but the market concentration remained high. The import HHI fell by only 16 %, signalling that the diversification was limited to a few fast-growing fringe suppliers.

Salmon dominance and price dynamics at the heart of the market

Atlantic salmon is the engine of EU fresh fish imports, driving both volume and price trends

Product-level data show that fresh or chilled Atlantic salmon (CN 030214) is by far the most imported item:

CN code	2015 quantity (t)	2025 quantity (t)	2015 value (EUR)	2025 value (EUR)
030214 (salmon)	749 353	911 769	3 622 M	6 211 M
030251 (cod)	61 613	46 406	203 M	301 M
030285 (sea bream)	23 108	44 483	124 M	287 M

Salmon imports accounted for roughly **68 % of the import volume** in 2025 and an even larger share of value, given its high unit price. The average import price of salmon rose from **4 834 €/t** to **6 812 €/t** (+40.9 %).

The 2022 Norwegian price shock illustrates the vulnerability of the dominant supply chain

The price shock detected on imports from Norway centred on 2022: the import price jumped **46.1 %** above the pre-shock baseline, reaching **7 098 €/t**, with an abnormality score of **6.9**. Even after the shock, the price remained elevated (≈7 154 €/t in 2023-24), indicating a structural shift in the cost of salmon imports. This price surge, combined with volume growth, is the main reason for the doubling of the import bill from Norway.

Export prices soared, reflecting a premiumised and reconfigured export basket

On the export side, unit values increased sharply across the board. The overall export price rose from **4 309 €/t** to **5 593 €/t** (+29.8 %). For salmon exports, despite a volume collapse (–93 % to just 5 426 t), the unit price soared from **5 325 €/t** to **9 908 €/t** (+86 %). This suggests that the remaining EU exports are high-value products destined for niche markets (Switzerland, the US, Israel) where price sensitivity is lower. Other species such as sea bass (CN 030284, price up 36 %) and bluefin tuna (CN 030235, consistently above 15 000 €/t) also contributed to the high unit values.

Conclusion

The EU's fresh fish trade between 2015 and 2025 was defined by three intertwined dynamics: a structural shift from net exporter to net importer, the disruptive reordering of trade flows triggered by Brexit, and the overwhelming dominance of salmon in the import basket, where a sharp price increase elevated the import bill. While export markets were successfully diversified after the UK collapse, import dependency deepened and concentrated around Norway and a few new aquaculture suppliers (Faroe Islands, Iceland). The record-high net import reliance and the still-elevated salmon import price underline the sector's growing exposure to external supply shocks and underscore the importance of robust trade partnerships and the continued development of domestic aquaculture capacity.

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