Market evolution: Furskins and artificial fur (CN 43) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The European Union's trade in furskins, articles of fur and artificial fur (Customs code 43) has undergone a profound reorientation between 2015 and 2025. Once characterised by large export surpluses and concentrated flows through a handful of Asian intermediaries, the sector now reflects a smaller, more diversified geography, a changing product mix and a shift in the EU's own role from dominant exporter to a market that increasingly relies on imports for its apparent consumption. This report draws entirely on the data provided in the Trade Dashboard to describe and interpret these dynamics along three main lines: the collapse of the traditional Far Eastern export channels and the rise of new manufacturing destinations in Southeast Asia, the transformation of the product mix from raw furskins towards fur apparel and artificial fur, and the EU's increasing trade reliance and vulnerability.

A tectonic shift in export geography: from Hong Kong and China to Cambodia and Thailand

The geography of EU fur exports has been completely redrawn. The pivot away from the formerly dominant Chinese and Hong Kong markets is the most striking single feature of the 2015–2025 period, while new manufacturing-oriented destinations in Cambodia and Thailand have absorbed a large part of the remaining flows.

The traditional Asian gateways collapsed as destination markets

Between 2015 and 2025, the value of EU exports to China fell from 743,679,116.714 EUR to 74,424,066.276 EUR, a drop of 90.0 %. The decline of Hong Kong was even more dramatic, from 1,061,102,673.405 EUR to 54,300,354.957 EUR (–94.9 %) (Top Partners). The combined loss of these two outlets alone explains the bulk of the reduction in total extra-EU exports of CN 43, which shrank from 2,816,163,781.869 EUR to 720,638,811.505 EUR (–74.4 %) (General Overview).

Southeast Asian manufacturing hubs replaced the lost demand

In stark contrast, exports to Cambodia surged from 23,355,486.947 EUR to 131,018,223.824 EUR (+461.0 %) and to Thailand from 403,740.14 EUR to 111,305,464.812 EUR. Turkey also recorded a significant increase, from 23,948,817.115 EUR to 31,774,474.289 EUR (+32.7 %). These shifts indicate a relocation of fur garment assembly and finishing activities away from China towards lower-cost manufacturing centres in Southeast Asia, with the EU continuing to supply the intermediate materials (tanned or dressed furskins and raw skins) but now to different factories.

The transformation reduced export concentration while increasing volatility

The overall concentration of EU exports (Herfindahl-Hirschman Index) fell from 2,271.7 in 2015 to 974.1 in 2025 (–57.1 %), reflecting the more dispersed destination pattern (Concentration). However, the new partners exhibit high volatility: the coefficients of variation for export quantities to Cambodia (0.44), Thailand (0.56) and Hong Kong (1.32) are all elevated, and the dashboard identifies a price shock for Thailand (+60.4 % shift in 2021) and for Cambodia (+56.2 % shift in 2021) as well as an earlier shock for the United Kingdom (+182.6 % shift in 2020) (Shocks). The year 2021 emerges as a pivotal moment when pandemic-related disruptions and logistical bottlenecks temporarily pushed up unit values across several key export relationships.

A product segment in transformation: the decline of raw furskins and the quiet rise of artificial fur

The composition of both exports and imports has shifted markedly away from raw furskins (heading 4301) towards fur apparel (4303) and, from a very low base, artificial fur (4304). The table below summarises the changes in EU exports by 4-digit heading.

Heading	Description	2015 value (EUR)	2025 value (EUR)	Change (%)
4301	Raw furskins	2,167,302,253.487	282,650,356.938	–87.0 %
4302	Tanned or dressed furskins	184,333,627.771	79,997,902.321	–56.6 %
4303	Articles of fur apparel	457,636,530.347	346,300,559.392	–24.3 %
4304	Artificial fur and articles	2,925,360.616	11,949,789.854	+308.5 %

Product Segment Comparison

Raw furskin exports evaporated while higher-value articles proved relatively resilient

Exports of raw furskins collapsed from 22,156.283 tonnes in 2015 to 2,201.286 tonnes in 2025 (–90.1 %), with the average unit price rising from 97,818.86 EUR/tonne to 128,402.06 EUR/tonne. Nevertheless, the massive volume contraction drove the value down by 87 %. In contrast, exports of fur clothing and accessories (4303) fell by only 24.3 % in value, and the unit price declined from 469,602.91 EUR/tonne to 383,507.49 EUR/tonne, suggesting a degree of competitive pressure but also a continued demand for finished European fur garments. The artificial fur segment (4304), though still tiny, expanded its export value by over 300 %, hinting at changing fashion preferences and the emergence of a niche synthetic-fur market.

Import patterns mirror the raw-to-finished shift

EU imports of raw furskins plummeted from 179,284,172.592 EUR to 18,325,533.124 EUR (–89.8 %). Imports of tanned/dressed skins fell by 45.3 % and articles of fur by 49.5 %. Only artificial fur imports grew, from 15,958,959.426 EUR to 25,540,172.362 EUR (+60.1 %). The EU therefore remains a net importer of artificial fur and a shrinking net exporter of natural fur goods.

EU production stabilised at a lower level, with distinct specialisation in a few Member States

After the drastic decline recorded in the 2000s, EU fur production (quantity) stood at 10,000,000 pieces in 2015 and rose to 21,244,988 pieces in 2024, the latest year with data (Production Volumes). In value terms, production grew from 120,000,000 EUR to 171,637,774 EUR. The activity is highly concentrated: in 2025, Greece (RSCA 0.89, RCA 17.1), Finland (RSCA 0.73), Lithuania (RSCA 0.71) and Italy (RSCA 0.56) remain the most specialised Member States in fur goods, while large economies such as Germany, France and the Netherlands show negative specialisation indices (Specialisation). This durable specialisation helps explain why the EU continues to export finished fur articles even as raw skin flows have dried up.

From dominant exporter to fragile self-sufficiency: growing reliance and volatility

The EU’s position in the global fur economy has shifted from a clear net exporter to one where the domestic market absorbs a larger share of production and import flows, resulting in rising net import reliance and mounting exposure to external shocks.

The trade surplus shrank dramatically and net import reliance turned positive

The EU's trade balance in CN 43 fell from a surplus of 2,248,270,880.953 EUR in 2015 to 482,661,814.496 EUR in 2025 (–78.5 %) (General Overview). Meanwhile, the net import reliance indicator, which measures the ratio of net imports to apparent consumption, moved from –6.1 % in 2015 to +6.2 % in 2024, meaning that the EU changed from a net exporter relative to its consumption to a small net importer (Net Import Reliance). This turnaround, despite a still-positive nominal trade balance, reflects the combined effect of falling exports, relatively resilient imports in the latter part of the period and recovering domestic production.

Trade intensity and export propensity rose, signalling a more outward-oriented but vulnerable sector

Export propensity (exports as a share of production) increased from 7.4 % in 2003 to 16.6 % in 2024, while overall trade intensity ((exports+imports)/production) climbed from 9.0 % to 32.4 % (Trade Intensity). These figures suggest that the EU fur industry, while smaller than in the past, has become more integrated into international value chains. Greater integration, however, has been accompanied by high partner-level volatility: import CVs for Viet Nam (1.43), Argentina (0.62) and the United States (0.51) are among the highest, and export CVs for Hong Kong (1.32), Canada (1.01) and Pakistan (0.65) reflect the uncertainties of the new trade pattern (Volatility).

Supply and price shocks hit key relationships, exposing structural fragilities

The shock detection algorithm flags several disruptions. On the import side, the collapse of Vietnamese furskin volumes in 2019–2022 and a simultaneous spike in the unit price (+323.9 % in 2021) point to a near-complete withdrawal of this supplier. Turkish import prices experienced a sharp temporary drop (–26.5 % in 2021) coinciding with a surge in volume, suggestive of a promotional or liquidation cycle. On the export side, the price shock for the United Kingdom in 2020 (+182.6 %) reflects the trade friction and logistical upheaval following the Brexit transition, while the Cambodia and Thailand price spikes in 2021 align with global shipping cost spikes and capacity constraints (Shocks). These events illustrate how the reoriented supply chains remain susceptible to sudden, policy-driven and pandemic-related disruptions.

Conclusion

Over the decade 2015–2025, EU trade in furskins and artificial fur has undergone a fundamental restructuring. The massive contraction of exports to China and Hong Kong, which formerly accounted for the bulk of the trade, has been partially compensated by the emergence of Cambodia and Thailand as new assembly hubs, creating a more diversified but also more volatile export profile. The product mix has shifted away from raw and semi-processed skins towards finished fur garments and, incipiently, artificial fur, while domestic production has stabilised in a few highly specialised Member States. At the same time, the EU's historical trade surplus has eroded to the point where the bloc now registers a positive net import reliance, and heightened price and volume volatility underscores the sector's exposure to external shocks. The fur trade remains a niche activity, but its trajectory clearly reflects broader trends in global manufacturing relocation, changing consumer preferences and the vulnerabilities of a small, highly concentrated industrial ecosystem.

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