Market evolution: Malt extract (CN 1901) — 2015–2025

Introduction

EU trade in CN 1901 – a bundled heading covering malt extract, cereal-based and milk-based food preparations, including infant formulae and bakers' mixes – underwent profound structural change between 2015 and 2025. Total exports rose strongly in both value and volume, while imports stagnated in quantity even as unit prices climbed. The result was a widening trade surplus, a reorientation of export geography, and a deepening of production specialisation inside the Union. This report draws exclusively on the harmonised trade and production figures provided by the EU Trade Dashboard, examining headline flows, partner shifts, product composition, specialisation and volatility.

Export Dominance Deepens as Surplus Reaches Historic Highs

The value of EU exports grew by nearly half, outpacing volume expansions

Over the decade, EU exports of CN 1901 climbed from €6.10 billion in 2015 to €8.98 billion in 2025, a rise of 47.1 % Overview of EU trade in CN 1901. Export volumes increased by 24.4 %, from 1.58 million tonnes to 1.97 million tonnes, indicating that roughly half the value gain came from higher unit prices. The average export price moved from €3 857 /t to €4 561 /t (+18.3 %), reflecting both product upgrading and a favourable pricing environment.

Imports shrank in volume while import prices surged, reinforcing the trade surplus

Imports followed a different trajectory. Their value edged up only 10.3 % (€412 million to €455 million) over the period, while import volumes contracted by 20.1 % (223 011 t to 178 227 t) Overview. Import prices jumped 38.0 %, from €1 849 /t to €2 551 /t. Because exports vastly exceed imports, the trade balance widened from €5.69 billion to €8.52 billion (+49.8 %). The EU's net-import reliance therefore turned increasingly negative, dropping from –27.8 % to –131.2 %, underscoring the bloc's position as a structural net exporter Net Import Reliance.

A Tale of Three Markets: China’s Rise, Russia’s Fall, and Africa’s Emergence

China and the United Kingdom cemented their role as the dominant destinations

Demand from China, already the largest single buyer, expanded by 95.2 %, from €1.26 billion in 2015 to €2.47 billion in 2025 Top Partners. The United Kingdom, once the EU’s top intra-Community market and still the top partner among non-EU countries in the data, absorbed €1.02 billion (+73.1 %). The United Arab Emirates (+75.1 % to €200 million) and Senegal (+181.2 % to €228 million) posted the fastest relative growth among major partners.

Partner	2015 export (€ m)	2025 export (€ m)	Change (%)
China	1 264	2 467	+95.2
United Kingdom	592	1 024	+73.1
Saudi Arabia	470	419	–11.0
Senegal	81	228	+181.2
United Arab Emirates	114	200	+75.1
Nigeria	216	158	–26.9
Russian Federation	209	130	–37.6

Sanctions and geopolitical ruptures reshaped the export map

Exports to the Russian Federation fell from €209 million to €130 million (–37.6 %), the bulk of the decline occurring after 2022. Flows to Hong Kong, historically a major re-export hub for infant formula, collapsed from €783 million in 2015 to €226 million in 2025, leading to a high volatility coefficient (CV 0.58) Volatility. Meanwhile, trade with West Africa grew robustly, partly compensating the Russian and Hong Kong losses.

Import sources remained concentrated but experienced large swings

On the import side, the United Kingdom (€233 million in 2025) and Switzerland (€87 million) supplied the largest values, though Swiss deliveries halved (–49.2 %). The most dramatic shift occurred with Singapore, where imports swung from €30 million to a peak of €340 million in 2019 before collapsing back to €9 million, producing the highest import volatility (CV 1.25) Volatility. Growing small-scale suppliers like Türkiye, Serbia and China gained ground, yet import concentration remained moderate.

Industrial Upscaling and Specialisation Propel Competitiveness

France, Ireland and Greece exhibited the highest export specialisation

In 2025, Ireland held a revealed comparative advantage (RCA) of 3.10, with Greece (2.80) and France (2.55) close behind Specialisation. These member states concentrate a disproportionate share of their export baskets on CN 1901, notably in infant preparations (CN 190110) and other high-value formulations. By contrast, Malta and Cyprus showed practically no specialisation in this sector.

Domestic production more than doubled over the long term

EU-wide production of CN 1901 goods expanded substantially. Production quantity grew from 2.26 billion kg (2003) to 4.78 billion kg in the latest available year (+111.6 %), while production value rose from €3.94 billion to €14.43 billion (+266.7 %) Production Volumes. This massive capacity expansion underpinned a high and rising export propensity, which averaged around 60 % throughout the decade and peaked at 70.4 % in 2019 Export Propensity.

Price shocks and volatility reveal pockets of vulnerability

The dataset identifies several price-shock events on the export side. In 2022, for example, prices charged to Egypt jumped by 20.2 %, to Oman by 23.8 %, and to the UAE by 32.5 %, all during a period of global food commodity pressure Supply & Price Shocks. These incidents, together with the highly unstable Singapore imports, highlight that while the overall market is robust, certain bilateral flows remain sensitive to disruptions in logistics, regulatory changes, or global input costs.

Conclusion

EU trade in malt extracts and cereal-dairy preparations has been defined by a strong export expansion, a shrinking import volume, and a deepening of productive specialisation in a handful of member states. The geography of exports shifted markedly: China and the UK consolidated their top positions, Russia and Hong Kong retreated, and Africa gained share. Domestic production upscaling allowed the bloc to meet rising world demand while keeping import dependence minimal. Occasional price shocks and high volatility in a few partners remind that the market is not without risk, but the overall picture is one of a mature, export-oriented industrial sector that has substantially reinforced its global footprint over the decade.

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Auto-generated report: it accelerates, and sometimes misleads, human analysis. It cannot replace it in full.

If you need advice on European trade policy, or representation for your interests in Brussels, feel free to contact me at support@tradedashboard.eu. You can find my CV at this address.