EU TRADE EXPLORER

Market evolution: Steel fasteners (CN 7318) — 2015–2025

Introduction

Steel fasteners—screws, bolts, nuts, washers and similar articles—are a foundational input for machinery, automotive, construction and countless other industries. This report examines the EU's extra-EU trade for the product grouping CN 7318 over the years 2015 to 2025. Using customs data, it highlights how value growth has been divorced from volume, how the geography of trade has shifted, and how a massive increase in domestic production has reshaped the EU's vulnerability profile.

1. Stagnant Tonnes, Soaring Values: The Price-Driven Export Growth Story

Extra-EU export value jumped by 50.2% even as shipped tonnes edged down 1.0%.

Between 2015 and 2025, the value of EU exports of steel fasteners rose from €3 859 million to €5 797 million, an increase of 50.2%. Over the same period, export quantity fell slightly from 553 020 tonnes to 547 552 tonnes (–1.0%). Consequently, the implicit export unit price climbed by 51.7%, from €6 977 to €10 586 per tonne.

Detailed trade figures

Flow	2015 value (€ mn)	2025 value (€ mn)	2015 qty (t)	2025 qty (t)	Value change	Qty change	Unit price change
Exports	3 859	5 797	553 020	547 552	+50.2%	–1.0%	+51.7%
Imports	4 568	6 575	1 391 945	1 831 378	+43.9%	+31.6%	+9.4%

Imports grew in both volume and value, but their unit-price rise was a modest 9.4%.

EU imports expanded considerably, from 1.39 million tonnes to 1.83 million tonnes (+31.6%) and from €4 568 million to €6 575 million (+43.9%). The import unit price increased by only 9.4%, from €3 282 to €3 590 per tonne. This stark contrast with the 51.7% export price surge points to a sharpening quality and specialisation gap between what the EU buys and what it sells.

Export unit values persistently outpace imports, reflecting the EU’s specialisation in high-end fasteners.

A breakdown by sub-category confirms this pattern. In the largest segment, “Threaded screws and bolts” (CN 731815), the 2025 export price stood at €8 146 per tonne, nearly three times the import price of €2 982 per tonne. Similar gaps are visible for nuts, self-tapping screws, washers and non-threaded articles. This pricing premium is consistent with the EU’s revealed comparative advantage, especially in Germany (RSCA 0.27), Italy (RSCA 0.29) and Austria (RSCA 0.17).

Specialisation map

2. Shifting Partner Landscape: The US Export Boom and China’s Deepening Import Grip

Exports to the United States almost doubled, making it the top destination by 2025.

The United States emerged as the star market for EU fasteners. EU exports to the US surged from €596 million in 2015 to €1 154 million in 2025, a rise of 93.7%. By 2025, the US accounted for a 17.5% share of extra-EU exports. Over the same period, exports to China and the United Kingdom grew only modestly (+7.8% and +9.6%) and were overtaken.

Export partner	2015 (€ mn)	2025 (€ mn)	Change
United States	596	1 154	+93.7%
China	664	716	+7.8%
United Kingdom	575	629	+9.6%
Mexico	136	300	+120.0%
Türkiye	204	331	+62.2%

Top export partners

Extra-EU imports became more concentrated as Chinese shipments more than tripled.

China strengthened its position as the dominant supplier. Imports from China jumped from €557 million to €1 691 million (+203.6%), raising its share from 12.2% to 25.7% of total extra-EU imports. The import-side Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) increased by 16.9%, from 1 170 to 1 368, confirming a higher concentration.

Concentration HHI

Emerging suppliers Türkiye and Viet Nam gained share, while UK imports contracted.

Imports from Türkiye rose from €198 million to €516 million (+160.5%) and from Viet Nam from €203 million to €295 million (+45.8%). These gains partly offset the decline in imports from the United Kingdom (€402 million to €372 million, –7.3%). Together, China, Taiwan, Türkiye, Viet Nam and India supplied the bulk of EU fastener imports, illustrating a gradual geographic rebalancing within a still Asia-centric sourcing pattern.

3. Production-Led Resilience: How EU Output Surge Cut Import Reliance to Just 4%

EU domestic production quantity climbed 184% between 2003 and 2024, outstripping trade growth.

EU production of steel fasteners expanded massively over the last two decades. According to Prodcom data, production quantity rose from 813 million units (in 2003) to 2 312 million units in 2024, an increase of 184.2%. Over the same horizon, production value grew from €1 946 million to €10 095 million (+418.9%). This growth in physical output far exceeded the expansion of imports, fundamentally altering the EU's supply-demand balance.

Production volumes

Net import reliance dropped from 18.7% to 4.0%, while export propensity doubled to 57.5%.

The combination of strong production growth and booming exports pushed net import reliance (the share of apparent consumption sourced from outside the EU) down from 18.7% in 2015 to just 4.0% in 2024. At the same time, the export propensity (exports as a share of EU production) jumped from 24.3% to 57.5%, meaning more than half of EU production is now shipped outside the bloc. Trade intensity also rose from 48.6% to 73.7%, revealing an increasingly open and globally engaged sector.

Indicator	2015	2024	Change
Net import reliance	18.7%	4.0%	–78.6%
Export propensity	24.3%	57.5%	+136.9%
Trade intensity	48.6%	73.7%	+51.8%

Net import reliance

Trade intensity rose sharply, signalling a highly integrated but still deficit global value chain.

Despite the impressive reduction in import reliance, the EU remained a net importer in value terms throughout the period (trade balance varying between –€385 million and –€2 700 million). The structural deficit reflects a division of labour in which the EU exports high-value specialised fasteners and imports large volumes of standard-duty articles. The persistently negative balance, however, has been dwarfed by the scale of domestic production, making the sector far less vulnerable than the headline trade figures might suggest.

Conclusion

The EU steel fastener sector has undergone a profound transformation between 2015 and 2025. Export value growth has been lifted almost entirely by higher unit prices, underpinned by the EU's strong competitive position in high-end fasteners. Geographically, the United States has become the pre-eminent export market, while China's dominance on the import side has further intensified, accompanied by the rise of Türkiye and Viet Nam. Most importantly, a huge expansion of EU domestic production has driven net import reliance down to 4% and boosted export propensity to over half of output. The EU fastener industry thus emerges as a highly trade-integrated, resilient player whose vulnerability to external shocks has been substantially reduced, even as it continues to run a trade deficit with the rest of the world.

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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.