

Market evolution: Synthetic rubber (CN 4002) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The EU's external trade in synthetic rubber (CN 4002) underwent profound transformations between 2015 and 2025. While headline trade values appeared relatively resilient, a closer look reveals a story of surging prices, collapsing physical volumes, a dramatic realignment of partner countries, and a steep drop in domestic production. This report dissects the main dynamics using annual trade data up to the final year, 2025. All figures are drawn exclusively from the provided dataset.

1. Price Surge Masks Volume Erosion: The Inflationary Turn and Widening Trade Deficit

Export and import volumes declined sharply over the decade, while unit values jumped by double digits

The EU's synthetic rubber trade experienced a stark divergence between value and quantity. Between 2015 and 2025, the volume of exports fell by 24.1% (from 1.14 million tonnes to 0.87 million tonnes), yet the export value only contracted by 6.9% (from €1.92 billion to €1.79 billion). This was possible because the average export price soared by 22.8%, from €1,685/tonne to €2,069/tonne. Imports followed a similar pattern: quantities dropped by 13.3% (from 1.11 million tonnes to 0.96 million tonnes), but the import bill grew by 12.5% (from €2.08 billion to €2.34 billion) as the average import price rose by 29.8%. Consequently, the trade deficit widened dramatically, from –€152 million in 2015 to –€544 million in 2025, a deterioration of 257.5%. General Overview – Trade

EU production contracted by more than a third, yet production value remained nearly flat, reflecting powerful price inflation

Domestic production volumes in the EU fell by 37.0% over the decade (from 3,993 million tonnes in 2006 to 2,515 million tonnes in 2024, the latest available year). However, the production value dropped by only 2.0%, indicating that EU producers also faced steep internal price increases. The implied unit value of production rose markedly, mirroring the trend in international trade. Production Volume and Value

Net import reliance rose from 8% to nearly 12%, underscoring growing external vulnerability

The EU's net import reliance (the share of apparent consumption met by net imports) climbed from 8.1% in 2015 to 11.7% in 2024, a 44.2% increase. At the same time, export propensity (exports as a share of production) surged from 23.1% to 39.9% (a 72.5% jump), and trade intensity (total trade relative to production) rose from 41.8% to 60.8%. These shifts show the EU's synthetic rubber sector became increasingly embedded in global markets, despite shrinking domestic output. Net Import Reliance Export Propensity

2. Geopolitical Shockwaves: Russia's Exit and the Race toward Supplier Diversification

Russia's share collapsed from the top import spot to marginal importance, driven by sanctions

Russia was the EU's largest import source in 2015, supplying €560 million worth of synthetic rubber. By 2024 it had fallen to €110 million, an 80.4% reduction, and disappeared entirely from the 2025 import data. The coefficient of variation (CV) for Russian import quantities was the highest among major partners (0.37), and a supply shock detection tool identified a 98.8% collapse in EU export quantities to Russia after 2022. This decoupling reflects sanctions and the EU's deliberate supply-chain realignment. Top Partners Volatility & Shocks

The US, South Korea, and China filled the vacuum, with Saudi Arabia emerging from negligible levels

As Russian supply dwindled, other partners stepped up. US imports grew by 8.2% to €604 million, South Korea surged by 87.3% to €315 million, and China skyrocketed by 253% to €220 million. Saudi Arabia, virtually absent in 2015 (€27 thousand), became a significant source at €113 million by 2024. The import Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) fell by 28.9%, signalling a healthier diversification of suppliers. Concentration HHI

EU exporters pivoted toward Türkiye and India, while the UK and Brazil lost ground

On the export side, the US remained the top destination with a small decline (−1.1%), while China stayed almost unchanged (−0.4%). However, Türkiye and India posted strong gains: exports to Türkiye rose by 47.2% (to €180 million) and to India by 67.9% (to €146 million). In contrast, exports to the United Kingdom fell by 18.3%, and to Brazil by 16.5%. Export concentration remained low and stable (HHI up only 0.9%), reflecting a broadly diversified customer base. Top Partners

3. Product-Mix Polarization: SBR Leads While Isoprene Rubber Trade Collapses

Styrene-butadiene rubber (SBR) maintained its position as the largest traded segment, with solid value growth driven by price

Solid SBR (CN 400219) remained the backbone of EU trade. Export volumes of this segment edged down slightly from 437.9 kt to 425.7 kt, but the value increased from €686 million to €839 million, thanks to a price hike from €1,567 to €1,971 per tonne. Imports of solid SBR held steady in volume (283.5 kt to 284.0 kt) but the import value jumped from €483 million to €631 million as the average price climbed to €2,222/tonne. SBR latex (400211) exports, however, suffered a volume decline of 27.7% (from 223.5 kt to 161.4 kt), with value falling by 13.5%. Product Segment Comparison

Butadiene rubber and halo-isobutene-isoprene rubber recorded significant quantity drops, while niche categories suffered extreme disruptions

Imports of butadiene rubber (BR, 400220) shrank by 39.7% in volume (from 275 kt to 166 kt) and 12.2% in value, as the price surged by 45.5%. Exports of BR grew modestly in volume (from 113 kt to 120.7 kt) but soared in value (+50.8%) due to the same price spike. Halo-isobutene-isoprene rubber (CIIR/BIIR, 400239) saw a dramatic export collapse of 85.1% in volume (from 107.2 kt to 16.0 kt) and a value crash of 86.9%, largely because this category had been heavily exported to Russia. Imports of halo-isobutene-isoprene rubber, in contrast, increased slightly in volume (+8.0%) and value (+27.3%). The “other synthetic rubber” category (400299) – a high-value segment – saw import and export values rise even as volumes changed little, with prices consistently above €3,000/tonne. Product Segment Comparison

The isoprene rubber trade collapsed, reflecting the decoupling from Russian supply

Isoprene rubber (IR, 400260) was the segment most severely hit by the break with Russia. Imports plummeted from 137.1 kt to just 15.8 kt, an 88.5% volume drop, and the import value fell 76.3%. The price per tonne more than doubled by 2025 as alternative, scarcer sources took over. Russia had been the dominant supplier of IR, and its exit shattered this trade channel, forcing EU buyers to seek expensive alternatives. Exports of IR, already small, also declined. Volatility & Shocks

Conclusion

The EU's synthetic rubber market between 2015 and 2025 was reshaped by three forces: a broad-based price inflation that masked volume losses, a geopolitical supply shock that forced supplier diversification away from Russia, and a product-mix shift that left some segments (IR, CIIR/BIIR exports) drastically reduced. While the trade value appeared resilient, the underlying physical activity contracted, domestic production shrank, and net import dependence grew. The rapid emergence of South Korea, China, and Saudi Arabia as major import sources, along with stronger export ties to Türkiye and India, demonstrates the sector's ability to pivot under pressure – but the continued decline in production volume and rising unit prices signal lingering structural vulnerabilities.

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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](#).