Market evolution: Unwrought aluminium (CN 7601) — 2015–2025

Introduction

Unwrought aluminium (CN 7601) – covering both non-alloyed aluminium and aluminium alloys – is a critical material for European industry, feeding sectors from automotive and construction to packaging and aerospace. Between 2015 and 2025 the European Union's external trade in this commodity underwent a deep transformation: import values rose by more than 60 %, the geographic pattern of supply shifted radically, and a series of price shocks re-drew the terms of exchange. This report describes and interprets the main observable dynamics based on the data provided, highlighting the forces behind supplier diversification, export reorientation and the EU's growing structural deficit.

A reshaped import map: diversification away from Russia and the rise of new suppliers

The EU's import bill swells as volumes and unit prices both climb

Over the eleven-year window, the total value of EU imports of unwrought aluminium from non-EU countries grew from €10.1 billion to €16.4 billion, an increase of 62.4 % EU unwrought aluminium trade balance overview. Import *quantity* expanded more modestly (+18.4 %), indicating that the average import price per tonne rose by 37.2 %, largely because of global aluminium market tensions after 2021. The same data show an export-side value increase of 59.6 %, but from a much lower base, so the EU's trade deficit in this product widened from -€9.5 billion to -€15.4 billion.

Norway consolidates its leading role while Russian deliveries plummet by two-thirds

Norway remained the EU's largest external supplier, with annual deliveries growing from €2.41 billion to €3.67 billion (+51.9 %). In contrast, imports from the Russian Federation collapsed from €2.18 billion to just €0.75 billion (–65.4 %), a shift largely driven by sanctions and supply-chain reconfiguration following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The evolution of these two long-established partners is shown in the table below.

Import partner	Value 2015 (€ mn)	Value 2025 (€ mn)	Change (%)
Norway	2 413.4	3 665.3	+51.9
Russia	2 175.5	751.8	–65.4

Source: EU unwrought aluminium trade partners

Iceland, India and Mozambique emerge as pivotal growth engines of supply

Three other suppliers recorded spectacular growth, collectively filling a large part of the gap left by Russia. Icelandic shipments jumped from €0.51 billion to €1.95 billion (+282.3 %), making Iceland the EU's third-largest import source. Deliveries from India surged from €0.10 billion to €0.62 billion (+537.2 %), while Mozambique's exports to the EU rose from €0.81 billion to €1.43 billion (+77.7 %). The United Arab Emirates remained a solid contributor, with an 18.5 % increase over the period.

Import partner	Value 2015 (€ mn)	Value 2025 (€ mn)	Change (%)
Iceland	509.7	1 948.7	+282.3
India	97.8	623.0	+537.2
Mozambique	805.1	1 430.8	+77.7
UAE	1 036.7	1 228.0	+18.5

Source: same as above.

A marked decline in import concentration signals a more resilient, multi-source supply structure

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) for EU imports of unwrought aluminium fell from 1 512 in 2015 to 997 in 2025, a drop of 34.1 % Concentration of EU unwrought aluminium trade. This decline confirms that the import base became substantially more diversified. The reduced reliance on any single supplier, notably Russia, and the broadening of sources toward Iceland, India, Mozambique and others have given the EU a less concentrated – and potentially more shock-resistant – import portfolio.

Export reorientation: from the UK collapse to new growth in Asia and the Americas

The UK's departure from the single market erases a historic export channel

EU exports of unwrought aluminium to the United Kingdom dropped from €140.6 million in 2015 to just €22.8 million in 2025 (–83.8 %), making it one of the most dramatic shifts in the export picture. The post-Brexit customs border and new rules of origin drastically reduced the cross-channel flow, pushing UK buyers to alternative suppliers.

Switzerland remains the top destination, while the United States holds steady

Switzerland has long been the EU's main export market for unwrought aluminium, and its role strengthened further: sales rose from €166.2 million to €361.7 million (+117.6 %). Exports to the United States also increased, from €120.9 million to €151.8 million (+25.6 %), albeit with considerable year-on-year volatility.

Export partner	Value 2015 (€ mn)	Value 2025 (€ mn)	Change (%)
Switzerland	166.2	361.7	+117.6
United Kingdom	140.6	22.8	–83.8
United States	120.9	151.8	+25.6
Japan	9.6	62.5	+552.9
Serbia	24.7	106.6	+331.7
Türkiye	22.2	76.2	+243.9

Source: EU unwrought aluminium trade partners

Dynamic expansion to Japan, Serbia and Türkiye reveals strong new pockets of demand

Three destinations stand out for their rapid growth. Exports to Japan shot from €9.6 million to €62.5 million (+552.9 %), driven by a combination of price competitiveness and industrial demand. Sales to Serbia multiplied more than four-fold (+331.7 %), and shipments to Türkiye more than tripled (+243.9 %). These flows partly compensated for the lost UK market and reflect the EU's ability to pivot toward economies with expanding aluminium processing capacities.

Price upheavals, deepening deficits and the limits of domestic production

A structural trade deficit widens as import values outpace exports

Despite the export gains, the value of imports grew faster and from a far larger base. The overall EU trade deficit in unwrought aluminium doubled from €9.5 billion to €15.4 billion between 2015 and 2025. The quantity of imports (6.33 million tonnes in 2025) was almost 18 times larger than that of exports (0.35 million tonnes), underscoring the EU's profound dependence on foreign primary aluminium and alloys.

Sharp price shocks in 2021-2022 expose the EU's exposure to global aluminium markets

The years 2021 and 2022 recorded a cascade of price anomalies that hit several major trade corridors. On the import side, unit prices from Mozambique jumped by 66.0 % in 2022 compared to the baseline, those from the United Arab Emirates by 64.1 %, and those from Bahrain by 69.5 % Price shocks in EU unwrought aluminium trade. Export prices also spiked: Brazilian shipments saw a 50.9 % price increase in 2021, Norwegian exports a 25.7 % jump, and Japanese exports a 42.9 % surge during the same episode. These shocks were rooted in a combination of post-pandemic supply-chain bottlenecks, energy price hikes (affecting energy-intensive aluminium smelting) and geopolitical uncertainty.

Rising net import reliance, despite a modest recovery in domestic output, highlights persistent vulnerability

EU domestic production of unwrought aluminium recovered slowly from a low of 5.70 billion kg in 2020 to an estimated 6.30 billion kg in 2024 EU production of unwrought aluminium. However, this modest increase has not kept pace with consumption. The net import reliance rate – the share of apparent consumption met by net imports – rose from 47.9 % in 2015 to 53.6 % in 2024 EU net import reliance in unwrought aluminium. In other words, more than half of the EU's needs are now satisfied by third-country suppliers, up from less than half a decade earlier. Even though the supply sources have become more diversified, this rising structural reliance leaves the EU sensitive to global price cycles and trade disruptions.

Conclusion

EU trade in unwrought aluminium from 2015 to 2025 was shaped by four intertwined dynamics. First, a deliberate and far-reaching diversification of import partners displaced Russian supplies in favour of Norwegian, Icelandic, Indian and Mozambican material, sharply reducing import concentration. Second, export flows were forcefully reoriented: the historic UK channel collapsed after Brexit, while Switzerland consolidated its top position and new markets in Asia and the Western Balkans expanded rapidly. Third, the commodity experienced intense price volatility, with import and export unit values jumping by more than half in several key relationships during 2021-2022. Fourth, the EU's structural deficit deepened and net import reliance crossed the 50 % threshold, demonstrating that domestic production growth has not matched demand. The net result is a more diversified but increasingly import-dependent supply architecture, one that offers greater resilience against individual supplier shocks but simultaneously heightens the EU’s sensitivity to worldwide aluminium price movements.

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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.