Market evolution: Wine (CN 2204) — 2015–2025

Introduction

The European Union is the world's largest wine exporter, and the 2015–2025 period confirmed a striking transformation in how that value is generated. While total extra-EU export volumes edged lower, unit prices rose sharply, pushing export value to new highs. On the import side, both value and volume contracted even more steeply. The result was a deepening trade surplus, a reshuffling of destination markets, and a product mix that increasingly rewards premium categories. This report uses data on EU trade with non-EU partners for product group 2204 (wine of fresh grapes, including fortified wines and grape must) to identify and explain the main dynamics at play.

Value over Volume: The Premiumisation of EU Wine Exports

Export earnings hit a record high despite shrinking volumes

Between 2015 and 2025, the value of EU wine exports to non-EU countries rose from €12.0 bn to €15.9 bn, an increase of 32.3 %. Over the same period, the exported quantity fell from 3.0 million tonnes to 2.8 million tonnes, a drop of 5.3 %. The entire value advance was therefore driven by a 39.8 % jump in the average export unit price, from €4,023 per tonne to €5,622 per tonne (General Overview). This widening gap between value and volume illustrates a systematic move upmarket: EU exporters are selling less wine, but each litre commands a higher price.

Import contraction reflects shifting sourcing and consumption patterns

EU wine imports from non-EU partners shrank from €1.69 bn to €1.39 bn (–17.8 %) in value, while the imported quantity collapsed from 861 thousand tonnes to 540 thousand tonnes (–37.3 %). Import prices nonetheless rose by 31.2 %, suggesting that the bloc, too, is shifting away from entry-level bulk wine and towards more expensive bottles even as overall import demand falls. The sharp drop in volume points to weaker demand for lower-priced foreign wines and possibly improved domestic supply.

The trade surplus has widened, driven by exceptional price gains

Because exports grew far more in value terms than they declined in volume, and imports contracted in both dimensions, the EU's net trade balance in wine swelled from €10.3 bn to €14.5 bn, a gain of 40.6 %. This surplus is entirely a price-driven phenomenon: without the increase in export unit values, the balance would have eroded in line with falling quantities. The premiumisation trend therefore not only lifted revenues but also reinforced the EU's position as a net exporter.

Geographic Rebalancing: US Dominance and the Fading China Story

The United States solidifies its role as the top destination for EU wines

Exports to the United States grew from €3.1 bn to €4.2 bn (+34.8 %), making it the largest single market throughout the period. By 2024, US-bound exports peaked at €4.9 bn before settling at €4.2 bn in 2025 (Top Partners). The US market exhibits very low volatility (coefficient of variation of 0.08 for export quantities) and a steadily rising price, underscoring its role as a reliable high-value outlet.

China's downturn erodes a once-promising market

Shipments to China collapsed from €813 mn to €423 mn, a decline of 48.0 %. The trajectory was notably volatile (CV 0.52 for export quantities), with a peak of €1.15 bn in 2017 followed by a steep slide that accelerated after 2020 (Volatility). This erosion is one of the most dramatic single-market reversals in the data, removing a major growth engine.

Mature and nearby markets provide stability and growth

Exports to Canada rose 47.3 % to €1.14 bn, while Switzerland grew 30.0 % to €1.15 bn and Japan 25.9 % to €0.94 bn. The United Kingdom, despite Brexit, saw export values climb 23.9 % from €2.57 bn to €3.18 bn, though this was partially a price effect as the UK import price shock in 2021 (abnormality 30.2, shift +125.7 %) played a large role (Shocks). These advanced-economy partners display low volatility and reflect a gradual up-trading rather than a volume boom.

Import sources become more diverse and less concentrated

The Herfindahl-Hirschman Index for extra-EU imports fell from 1,463 to 1,209 (–17.3 %), indicating a more diversified supplier base (Concentration). While Chile, South Africa, Australia and the United States still dominate, their shares have eroded. The most dramatic contraction came from the United Kingdom as a wine supplier: EU imports from the UK fell 70.7 % after the Brexit transition, from €275 mn to €81 mn.

Structure in Transition: From Bulk to Bottles, and the EU's Production Powerhouse

Sparkling wine leads value growth while still wine remains the volume anchor

The two heavyweight export sub-codes are 220421 (still wine in containers ≤ 2 l) and 220410 (sparkling wine). Sparkling wine export value jumped from €3.13 bn to €4.93 bn (+57.5 %), while bottled still wine moved from €8.43 bn to €10.45 bn (+24.0 %) (Product Breakdown). Sparkling wine's unit export price rose from €7,635 per tonne to €8,086 per tonne, consistently above the already high still-wine price of €4,009 to €5,805 per tonne. This twin-growth pattern underscores a dual strategy: expanding premium sparkling while defending high-value still wines.

Bulk wine exports and imports shrink as strategy shifts upmarket

Exports of wine in containers over 10 l (220429) fell in value from €403 mn to €283 mn (–29.8 %), and in volume from 452 kt to 318 kt. Imports of the same category — the backbone of foreign bulk wine — dropped from €440 mn to €267 mn. These reductions align with the broader premiumisation trend: bottling and branding increasingly happen inside the EU or in destination markets, leaving less room for bulk cross-border trade.

Production concentration in France, Italy, and Spain underpins comparative advantage

The four most specialised EU reporters — France, Italy, Portugal and Spain — together accounted for the vast majority of extra-EU export value. France alone had a revealed symmetric comparative advantage (RSCA) of 0.64 and a 35.3 % share of EU wine export value in 2025, while Italy's RSCA stood at 0.59 with a 31.3 % share (Specialisation). EU wine production value more than doubled from €13.7 bn in 2015 to €33.7 bn in 2024 (PRODCOM data), far outpacing export value growth, which caused the export propensity to decline from 33.2 % to 25.5 % (Export Propensity). The EU wine sector thus sells an increasing share of its output domestically or through other channels, even as the export unit value surges.

Conclusion

The decade to 2025 reshaped EU wine trade in three fundamental ways: it became more valuable per litre, more reliant on a few high-income markets (especially the United States), and increasingly tilted toward sparkling and high-end bottled segments at the expense of bulk. China's retreat and the shock of Brexit on UK imports are the two most visible discontinuities, yet overall trade resilience was maintained by the depth of the EU's comparative advantage and the ability to command premium prices across mature markets. The lesson of the data is that the EU wine sector's strength lies less in expanding volumes than in persistently upgrading value, a trajectory that leaves the trade surplus at record levels despite a shrinking physical footprint.

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