



About this release

This article reports on the number of importers and exporters in the calendar year 2021, who were named on a customs declaration to move goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU), or United Kingdom (UK) and non-EU countries.

[Additional tables are available on www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

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Summary

In 2021, there was a total of 363,000 traders who were named on a customs declaration. Customs declarations are required for movements of goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU), and between the United Kingdom (UK) and non-EU countries:

- 241,000 traders moved goods between GB and EU Member States and 238,000 moved goods between the UK and non-EU countries.
- 125,000 moved goods to/from EU Member States only, whilst 122,000 moved goods to/from non-EU countries only and 116,000 moved goods to/from both.
- 325,000 traders imported goods and 144,000 exported goods.
- 219,000 traders only imported goods, 37,000 only exported goods and 106,000 traders both imported and exported goods.

Notes on this Publication

Users should be aware that this publication succeeds [the UK Importer and Exporter Population](#). The Customs Importer and Exporter Population reports only on traders moving goods in 2021 and draws no comparison to data on previous years. HMRC encourages users to apply caution if making comparisons to the previous UK Importer and Exporter Population. The main changes are summarised in the explanatory notes on pages 5-6.

Definition of trader:

A business or individual using an Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) number to engage with customs procedures in the movement of goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU), or between the United Kingdom (UK) and non-EU countries in 2021.

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Trader Counts by Partner

Table 1: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by partner

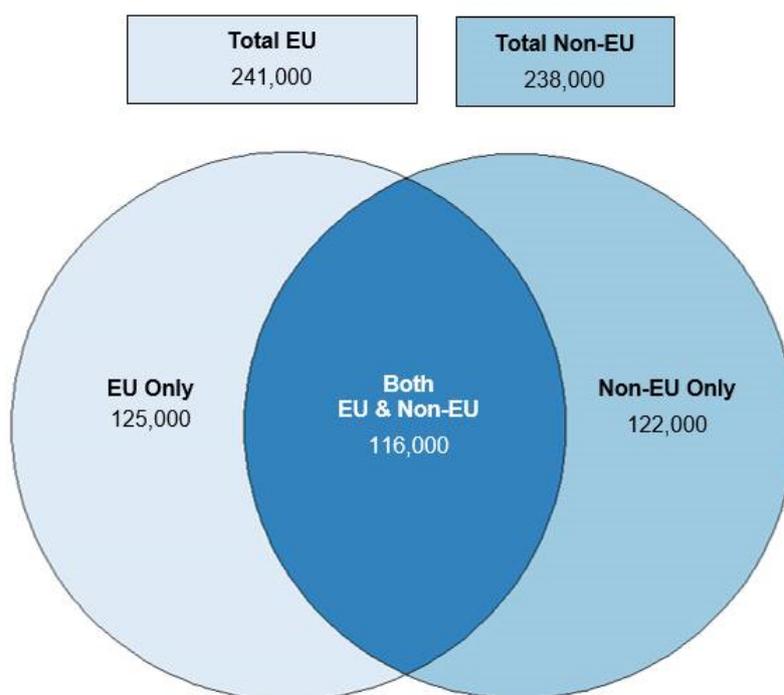
Partner	Number of Traders
EU Member States Only	125,000
Both EU & Non-EU	116,000
Non-EU Countries Only	122,000
Total EU	241,000
Total Non-EU	238,000
Total	363,000

Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

Notes:

1. Due to rounding to the nearest thousand, numbers may not sum to the totals provided.
2. Customs declarations are required for movements of goods between GB and EU, and between UK and non-EU countries.

Figure 1: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by partner



Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

Of the 241,000 traders moving goods to/from EU Member States, 125,000 moved goods to/from EU member states only in the calendar year of 2021.

Of the 238,000 traders moving goods to/from non-EU countries, 122,000 moved goods to / from non-EU countries only in the calendar year of 2021.

There were 116,000 traders who moved goods to/from both EU Member States and non-EU countries and were therefore counted within both the total EU and the total non-EU populations.

The majority of traders (68%) moved goods to/from just one partner (EU countries only or with only non-EU countries only). The remaining traders (32%) moved goods to/from both EU and non-EU countries.

Trader Counts by Direction

Table 2: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by direction

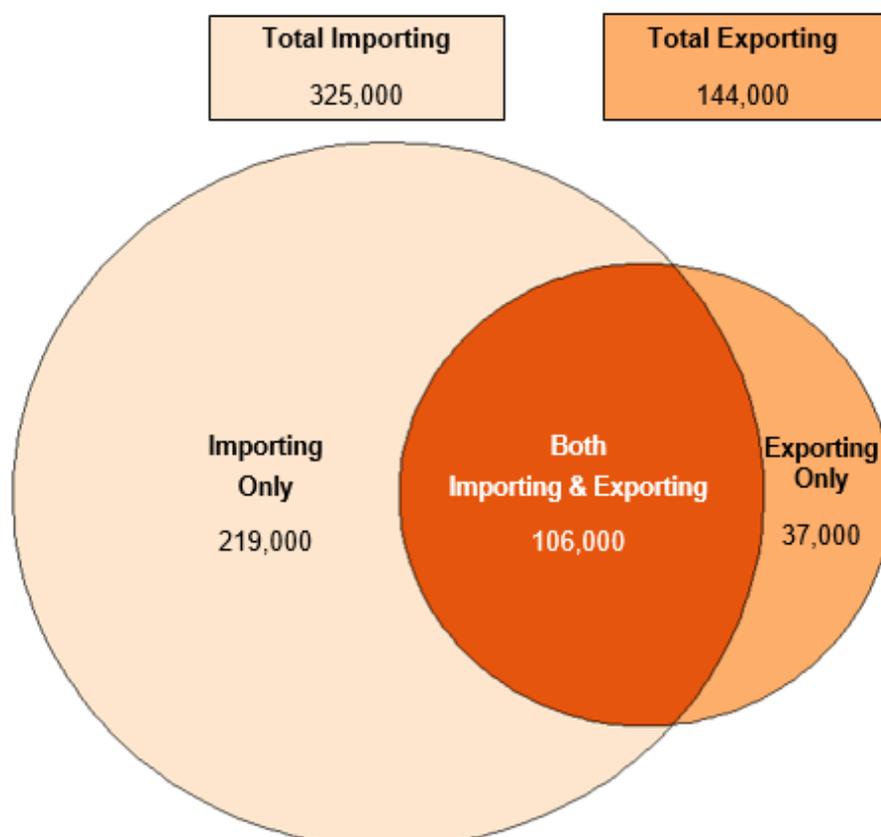
Direction	Number of Traders
Only Importing	219,000
Both Importing and Exporting	106,000
Only Exporting	37,000
Total Importers	325,000
Total Exporters	144,000
Total	363,000

Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

Notes:

1. Due to rounding to the nearest thousand, numbers may not sum to the totals provided.
2. Customs declarations are required for movements of goods between GB and EU, and between UK and non-EU countries.

Figure 2: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by direction



Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

Of the 325,000 importers of goods, 219,000 only imported in the calendar year of 2021

Of the 144,000 exporters of goods, 37,000 only exported in the calendar year of 2021.

There were 106,000 traders who both imported and exported and were therefore counted within both the importing and exporting populations.

The majority of traders (71%) moved goods in just one direction (importing only or exporting only). The remaining traders (29%) both imported and exported goods.

Trader Counts by Partner and Direction

Table 3: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by partner and direction

Partner	Direction	Number of Traders
EU Member States Only	Only Importing	89,000
	Both Importing and Exporting	18,000
	Only Exporting	18,000
Both EU & Non-EU	Only Importing	27,000
	Both Importing and Exporting	84,000
	Only Exporting	5,000
Non-EU Countries Only	Only Importing	104,000
	Both Importing and Exporting	5,000
	Only Exporting	14,000
Total		363,000

Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

Notes:

1. Due to values rounded to nearest thousands, numbers may not sum to the totals provided.
2. Customs declarations are required for movements of goods between GB and EU, and between UK and non-EU countries.
3. Importing refers to imports from both EU and non-EU countries, exporting refers to exports to both EU and non-EU

Figure 3: Customs importer and exporter population for goods movements in 2021 by partner and direction



Source: HMRC Trade Statistics & Customs Analysis

- Where traders traded with both the EU and non-EU, they were more likely to both import and export than those trading with just one partner.
- Where traders traded with one partner (EU only or non-EU only), they were more likely to only import.
- Those trading with only EU member states were more likely to engage in both imports and exports than traders trading with only non-EU countries.

Explanatory notes

- 1. Impact of the Coronavirus and European Union (EU) exit on 2021:** International trade experienced a unique combination of factors throughout 2021. These included, but are not limited to, COVID-19 lockdowns across the UK and in many of our international trading partner countries, alongside changes in the trading relationship with Europe. It is impossible to say what impact each of these factors had in isolation on the 2021 customs population make up.
- 2. Previous Publications:** HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) published the [UK Importer and Exporter Population](#) publication for each calendar year from 2016 to 2020, providing an annual count of importing and exporting businesses trading with European Union member states and with non-EU countries.
- 3. Summary of Changes:** On 1 January 2021, the UK officially left the European Customs Union; this led to [changes in the way HMRC collects statistical data](#). It follows that a methodology change was needed to accurately represent the trading population post 2021, this included changes to:
 - Data sources
 - Definition of a Trader
 - Geographic area covered
 - Inclusion of non-VAT registered traders trading with the EU and Low Value traders

This means the figures contained in this release will not be comparable to those in previous releases.

4. Detailed Changes

a. Data sources

The source data for the Customs Importer and Exporter Population is the customs declarations data submitted to CHIEF (Customs Handling of Import and Export Freight) and CDS (Customs Declaration Service). The publication therefore reports on the number of traders engaging in the movement of goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU), or the United Kingdom (UK) and non-EU countries in 2021.

A change in data source was necessitated due to core methodology changes in [how HMRC collects the trade in goods statistics](#) since leaving the EU in January 2021.

Previously, the UK Importer and Exporter Population used the published Overseas Trade Statistics (OTS) as its source. This was presented on a special trade basis which excludes movements entering Customs warehouses and free zones / freeports.

b. Definition of a Trader

The Customs Importer and Exporter Population defines a trader as a business or individual using an Economic Operators Registration and Identification (EORI) number to engage with customs procedures in the movement of goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU), or between the United Kingdom (UK) and non-EU countries in 2021.

Previously, the UK Importer and Exporter Population counted unique VAT numbers per trade flow and trade partner, as the primary means of collecting data on trade between the UK and the EU before January 2021. Trade with non-EU was aggregated to the VAT level as part of the OTS methodology to ensure all UK trade was reported on a consistent basis. As it is possible for multiple EORI numbers to share the same overarching VAT number; counts in the new Customs Importer and Exporter Population are therefore more granular than those seen in previous publications. A

consequence of this one-to-many relationship between VRN and EORI is that the count of individual traders may be subject to an increase.

c. Geographic area covered

The unique count for the Customs Importer and Exporter Population is produced from customs declarations data for movements of goods between Great Britain (GB) and the European Union (EU) and between the UK (United Kingdom) and non-EU countries.

Customs declarations are not required for movements between Northern Ireland (NI) and the EU, therefore are excluded from this publication as they are not part of the customs process.

Previously, the unique trader count for the UK Importer and Exporter Population was produced from both Intrastat and VAT data for movements of goods between the UK and the EU, and customs data for movements of goods between the UK and non-EU countries.

The geographical areas are different between the data pre 2021 and post 2021, so comparisons of these populations should not be undertaken.

d. Inclusion of non-VAT registered traders moving goods between GB and EU

Since January 2021, GB movements to and from the EU have been reported using customs declarations, which are required for all traders regardless of VAT registration status. The Customs Importer and Exporter Population therefore contains non-VAT registered traders moving goods between GB and EU, alongside traders moving goods between the UK and non-EU countries.

For trade in goods data before 2021, the UK Importer and Exporter publication was unable to include non-VAT registered businesses trading with the EU as these businesses were not required to submit this information to HMRC.

e. Inclusion of non-EU business trading exclusively below the Low Value Thresholds

For trade in goods data before 2021, the UK Importer and Exporter used the OTS as its data source. A limitation of this data was that all items of trade with both a weight and value less than the annual low value thresholds set, were rolled up into one aggregated group. As a result, traders who only moved goods of this nature were not counted.

The changes to the source data used in the Customs Importer and Exporter Population have removed this limitation. Using customs declarations data allows for sight of traders moving goods between the UK and non-EU countries who trade exclusively within this low value group, before any aggregation has been carried out.

5. This data is provisional and may be subject to change.

Next release: 2023

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