

Statistical bulletin

International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

Experimental estimated value of exports and imports of goods and services for 2020 for International Territory Levels 1, 2 and 3, and city regions. Includes EU and non-EU split.

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Release date:
5 July 2022

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- In 2020, there was a total UK trade surplus of £6.3 billion with England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland all exporting more than they imported.
- London exported £145.9 billion in trade in services in 2020; this was the biggest contribution to England's total trade surplus of £9.8 billion.
- The value of goods imported by the South East was higher than any English region (£87.0 billion) in 2020, 61.8% of which were by the wholesale and motor trade industry.
- There was a year-on-year fall in total exports and imports across all nations and regions because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with London and the East of England recording the smallest percentage decrease in total exports at 1.9% and 4.3%, respectively.
- The West Midlands saw the highest year-on-year percentage fall in total exports, driven by a 26.5% decrease of trade in goods in the manufacturing industry, and a 77.6% decrease of trade in services in the accommodation and food service activities industry.

2 . Subnational trade analysis

Total trade in goods and services by English region and devolved nation

The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused higher levels of volatility in trade statistics in 2020. As such, it is difficult to assess the extent to which trade movements reflect short-term trade disruption, or longer-term supply chain adjustments. Unless otherwise specified, data within this bulletin are in current prices. This means they have not been adjusted to remove the effects of inflation.

In 2020, each of the four UK nations exported more than they imported, which led to a UK total trade surplus of £6.3 billion. This is a deviation from deficit of £27.6 billion in 2019. Within England, only the North East, the South West and London reported a total trade surplus in both 2019 and 2020. All nations and regions were net exporters of services and only Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and the North East of England were net exporters of goods.

London accounted for the highest proportion of both UK imports and exports in 2020, contributing 20.9% (£126.0 billion) of imports and 29.6% (£180.2 billion) of exports (Table 1). London's total trade balance of £54.2 billion, driven by service exports, is the main driver of the UK's trade surplus.

The South East is the second largest contributor to total imports and exports, accounting for 18.0% (£108.6 billion) and 13.5% (£82.5 billion), respectively. This region has the highest trade deficit of all the English regions, which is driven by the import of goods with a value of £87.0 billion in 2020.

This pattern may be explained by the presence of Folkestone and Dover ports and nearby warehousing in the South East. The onward distribution of goods means that the initial point of entry and dispatch will not necessarily reflect its ultimate destination.

Table 1: London had the highest trade exports of £180.2 billion, which drove the total trade surplus in 2020
Trade in goods, trade in services and total trade imports and exports split by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1
region, 2020

£ billions

Region	Trade in goods - imports	Trade in goods - exports	Trade in services - imports	Trade in services - exports	Total trade - imports	Total trade - exports
North East	11.5	12.9	3.4	5.1	14.8	18.0
North West	36.2	26.2	12.8	19.7	49.0	46.0
Yorkshire and The Humber	24.7	14.2	6.2	10.3	30.9	24.5
East Midlands	28.4	22.8	5.3	6.8	33.7	29.6
West Midlands	31.7	25.2	7.4	11.1	39.0	36.3
East of England	38.1	24.9	14.0	17.9	52.2	42.7
London	58.1	34.3	67.8	145.9	126.0	180.2
South East	87.0	39.8	21.6	42.6	108.6	82.5
South West	19.8	19.5	7.0	11.6	26.7	31.2
England	335.6	219.8	145.5	271.1	481.1	490.9
Wales	13.2	14.7	3.1	5.8	16.4	20.5
Scotland	19.9	28.2	11.4	20.8	31.3	49.1
Northern Ireland	8.3	8.9	1.4	3.1	9.7	12.0
Unknown	61.2	37.2	3.8	0.0	65.0	37.2
UK	438.2	308.8	165.2	300.9	603.4	609.7

Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

Notes

1. Trade in goods plus trade in services may not sum exactly to total trade because of rounding.
2. The Unknown region includes unmatched companies, some offshore oil transactions, non-monetary gold, and government spending in trade in goods, and national imports of gambling in trade in services.

The global impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be seen in trade in goods and services across all nations and regions, which all experienced a year-on-year decrease in total imports and total exports from 2019 (Figure 1). London and the East of England saw the smallest percentage year-on-year fall in total exports at 1.9% (negative £3.5 billion) and 4.3% (negative £1.9 billion) respectively, compared with a 11.5% fall at the UK level (negative £79.3 billion).

Figure 1: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade can be seen across all nations and regions, which all measured a year on year decrease in total exports and total imports

Year-on-year percentage change in value of total trade imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020.

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Year-on-year percentage change in value of total trade imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020.



Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

The professional, scientific and technical activities industry is a relatively large contributor to trade in the East of England and saw an increase of 22.5% in trade in goods compared with 2019. This region is the location of research institutions in the fields of medicine, pharmaceuticals and biosciences, many of which were active in the response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The largest percentage decrease in total exports was seen in the West Midlands. Exports fell by 25.0% from 2019 here, with a drop seen in both goods and services. The manufacturing industry drove the decrease in the trade in goods, which fell by 26.5%. The accommodation and food service activities industry at 77.6% drove the fall in trade in services. These industries likely reflect the prevalence of car, car part manufacturing and the university sector in this region.

The largest percentage decrease in total imports was seen in Wales, which fell 28.6% from 2019 to 2020, driven by a 33.2% fall in the import of goods in the manufacturing industry.

Geographic and industry analysis of subnational trade in goods

England was the only UK nation with a trade in goods deficit (£115.8 billion) in 2020, with the North East being the only net exporter of goods within the English regions. The South East imported the largest proportion of goods, accounting for 19.9% (£87.0 billion) of the UK's imports of goods. This was driven largely by imports of £53.8 billion in the wholesale and motor trade industry, accounting for 61.8% of goods imports into this area and 12.3% of the UK total.

Table 2: Of all International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 regions, the South East imported and exported the highest value of trade in goods at £87.0 billion and £39.8 billion respectively

Trade in goods imports and exports for EU and non-EU, split by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2020

£ billions

Region	EU goods imports	EU goods exports	Non-EU goods imports	Non-EU goods exports	Total goods imports	Total goods exports
North East	5.6	7.1	5.9	5.8	11.5	12.9
North West	20.3	12.9	15.9	13.4	36.2	26.2
Yorkshire and The Humber	13.5	7.8	11.2	6.3	24.7	14.2
East Midlands	15.1	10.7	13.3	12.1	28.4	22.8
West Midlands	18.7	11.1	13.0	14.1	31.7	25.2
East of England	22.5	10.6	15.7	14.2	38.1	24.9
London	32.0	14.5	26.2	19.8	58.1	34.3
South East	53.2	20.0	33.8	19.8	87.0	39.8
South West	8.1	7.2	11.7	12.3	19.8	19.5
England	189.0	101.9	146.5	117.8	335.6	219.8
Wales	5.5	8.5	7.7	6.2	13.2	14.7
Scotland	10.0	11.6	9.9	16.7	19.9	28.2
Northern Ireland	5.2	5.4	3.1	3.5	8.3	8.9
Unknown	22.9	19.4	38.3	17.8	61.2	37.2
UK	232.7	146.7	205.5	162.1	438.2	308.8

Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

Notes

1. Trade in goods with the EU plus trade in goods with non-EU may not sum to total trade in goods because of rounding.
2. The Unknown region includes unmatched companies, some offshore oil transactions, non-monetary gold, and government spending in trade in goods.

All nations and regions saw a decrease in goods imports and exports from 2019 to 2020 (Figure 2). London was the International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region which saw the largest percentage decrease (26.9% or £21.4 billion) in imports of goods from 2019 to 2020, primarily driven by imports from non-EU countries (Table 2). These large decreases can be seen in the ITL3 regions of Harrow and Hillingdon (£5.5 billion), Camden and City of London (£3.6 billion), and Westminster (£2.4 billion). Collectively, these represent 77.2% of London's decrease in imports from non-EU countries between 2019 and 2020.

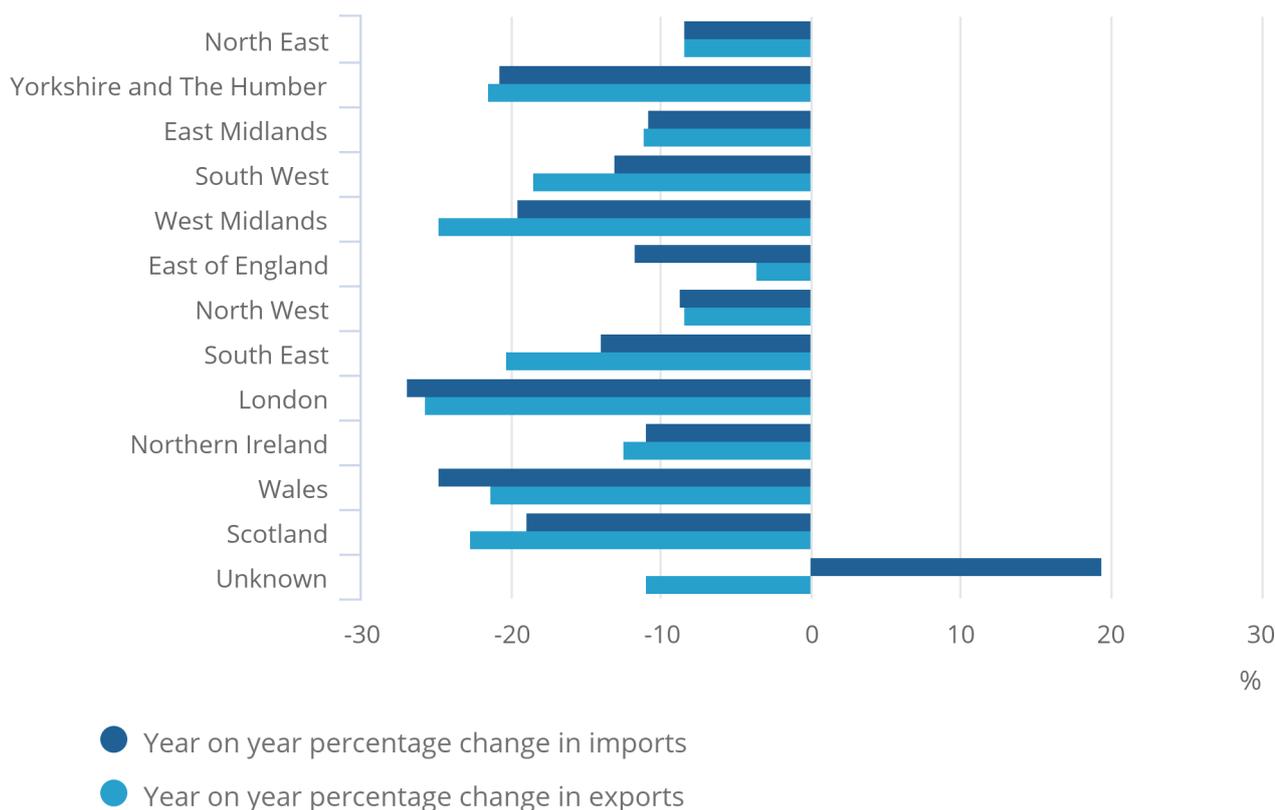
Scotland was a net exporter of goods (£8.3 billion) but saw a 33.4% (£8.4 billion) decrease in exports to non-EU countries from 2019 to 2020, the largest decrease seen across all ITL1 regions. This decrease can be attributed to a £6.8 billion decrease in the transport, storage, accommodation, food services activities, information, and communication sectors from Eastern Scotland. The ITL3 region of Falkirk saw a decrease of £5.5 billion, accounting for two-thirds (66.1%) of Scotland's total decrease in exports to non-EU countries from 2019 to 2020.

Figure 2: All nations and regions measured a year-on-year decrease in total exports and total imports of trade in goods, with London seeing the greatest decrease

Year-on-year percentage change in value of trade in goods imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020

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Year-on-year percentage change in value of trade in goods imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

Geographic and industry analysis of subnational trade in services

In 2020, all nations and regions were net exporters of services, resulting in a UK trade in services surplus of £135.7 billion, compared with £103.3 billion in 2019, and £109.6 billion in 2018. London imported and exported more services than any other region, and accounted for 41.1% (£67.8 billion) of the UK's trade in service imports and 48.5% (£145.9 billion) of exports. The financial and insurance services industry accounted for 33.4% of UK services exports and was the largest contributing industry in 10 of the 12 ITL1 regions.

Table 3: Of all International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 regions, London had the highest value of trade in services for both imports and exports at £67.8 billion and £145.9 billion, respectively

Trade in services imports and exports for EU and non-EU, split by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region
£ billions

Region	EU services imports	EU services exports	Non-EU services imports	Non-EU services exports	Total services imports	Total services exports
North East	[c]	2.4	[c]	2.7	3.4	5.1
North West	6.8	6.4	6.1	13.3	12.8	19.7
Yorkshire and The Humber	3.1	3.7	3.1	6.6	6.2	10.3
East Midlands	[c]	2.6	[c]	4.2	5.3	6.8
West Midlands	[c]	4.0	[c]	7.2	7.4	11.1
East of England	5.5	6.0	8.5	11.9	14	17.9
London	27.2	52.1	40.6	93.8	67.8	145.9
South East	9.1	15.9	12.5	26.7	21.6	42.6
South West	[c]	3.9	[c]	7.7	7	11.6
England	51.8	97.1	70.8	174	145.5	271.1
Wales	1.5	1.9	1.6	3.9	3.1	5.8
Scotland	4.5	6.6	6.8	14.2	11.4	20.8
Northern Ireland	0.8	1.6	0.6	1.5	1.4	3.1
Unknown	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]	3.8	[z]
UK	70.9	107.3	90.6	193.6	165.2	300.9

Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

Notes

1. Trade in services with the EU plus trade in services with non-EU may not sum to total trade in services due to rounding.
2. The Unknown region includes national imports of gambling in trade in services.
3. Some shorthand is used in this table, [c] is for confidential, [z] for not applicable.

Service imports fell in all regions from 2019 to 2020 and exports fell in 10 of the 12 ITL1 regions (Figure 3). Northern Ireland's increase in exports was driven by trade in services in the financial and insurance activities industry, which increased from £498 million in 2019 to £809 million in 2020.

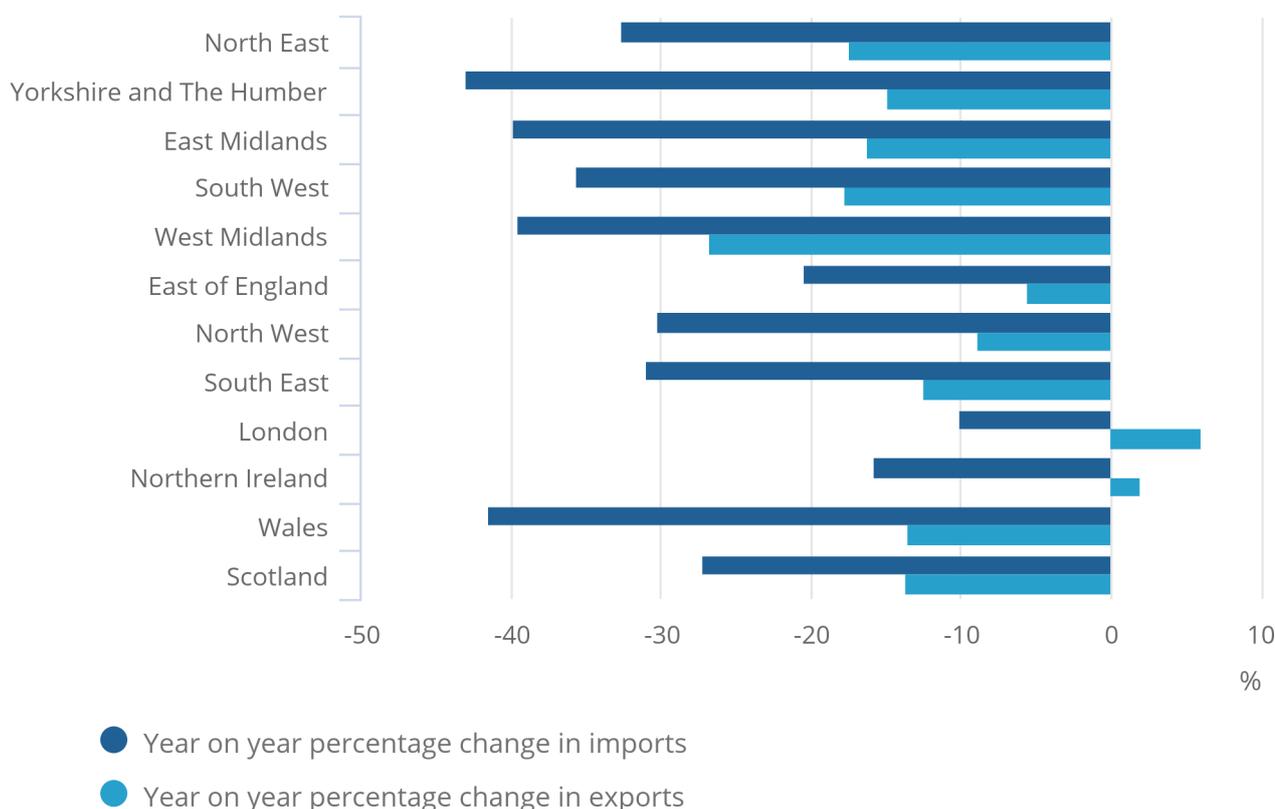
Imports of travel decreased by an average of 71.1% across ITL1 regions because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in 2020. This industry dropped from being the largest contributor to service imports in 2019 to the fourth largest in 2020. Large decreases were seen in exports of services in the accommodation and food service activities industry in London (80.1%), West Midlands (77.6%) and the South East (84.7%), possibly because of lockdowns on university populations in 2020.

Figure 3: Most regions measured a year on year decrease in exports and imports of trade in services, with London the main exception

Year-on-year percentage change in value of trade in services imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020.

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Year-on-year percentage change in value of trade in services imports and exports by International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region, 2019 to 2020.



Source: Office for National Statistics – International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2020

In 2020, only Northern Ireland exported a larger percentage of services to EU countries than non-EU countries (Table 3), which remains consistent with 2019 services exports.

After Northern Ireland, the North East had the second highest percentage of its exports with the EU which reflects the high proportion of trade that Tees Valley and Durham exports to Netherlands and Ireland compared with other ITL2 regions (Figure 4) at 24.2% and 21.4%, respectively. Tees Valley and Durham also saw a high percentage of service imports from Japan at 23.7%. More than half of service imports and exports in this region are by the manufacturing industry.

The United States accounts for the highest proportion of trade in services within non-EU countries. At the ITL2 level, Cheshire has the highest proportion of service exports to the United States at 34.3%, while Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire imported 39.9% of their services from here.

Figure 4. Trade in services with the United States, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands and France combined accounted for 45.4% of service imports and 48.3% of service exports

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

3 . Explore UK international trade by International Territorial Levels (ITL) for 2020

Explore the 2020 trade data using our interactive tool. Our data breakdown UK trade by International Territorial Levels (ITL) 1, 2 and 3. Select a certain region by using the drop-down menu or hovering over it.

4 . International trade in services and goods by subnational areas of the UK data

[Subnational trade in services](#)

Dataset | Released 5 July 2022

Experimental estimated value of exports, imports, and balance of services for 2020 for International Territorial Levels (ITLs) 1, 2 and 3, and city regions, including industry and partner country.

[Subnational trade in goods](#)

Dataset | Released 5 July 2022

Experimental estimated value of exports, imports and balance of goods for 2020 for International Territorial Levels (ITLs) 1, 2 and 3, and city regions, including industry and partner country.

5 . Glossary

ITL

The International Territorial Levels (ITL) is a hierarchical classification of administrative areas used for statistical purposes. ITL1 are major socio-economic regions, while ITL2 and ITL3 are progressively smaller regions. In the context of the UK, the ITL1 areas are Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the nine regions of England.

Trade balance

The trade balance is the difference between exports and imports or exports minus imports. When the value of exports is greater than the value of imports, the trade balance is in surplus. When the value of imports is greater than the value of exports, the trade balance is in deficit. The balance is sometimes referred to as "net exports".

A full [Glossary of economic terms](#) is available.

6 . Strengths and limitations

All figures presented are experimental, derived from a methodology that is subject to change based on feedback and that should be used with caution.

This bulletin presents estimates of the value of imports and exports of goods and services in 2020 to and from subnational areas of the UK. This is the second of its kind following the first outputs for subnational trade in both goods and services published in 2021, and yearly comparisons can only be made against 2019. The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused higher levels of volatility in trade statistics in 2020. As such, it is difficult to assess the extent to which trade movements reflect short-term trade disruption or longer-term supply chain adjustments.

The Unknown region includes unmatched companies, some offshore oil activity, non-monetary gold, and government spending in trade in goods, and national imports of gambling in trade in services. Precious metals (which are high-value, low-volume products) are allocated to the Unknown region as they can skew figures in regions such as London.

Gambling

There is an addition of gambling imports in 2020 to trade in service estimates that we have not been able to allocate to a specific region. These are included in the unknown region at the national level only.

Travel Estimates

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) was suspended from 16 March 2020 to 18 January 2021 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We have worked with the ONS Data Science Campus to create estimates for travel using alternative data sources for the 2020 reference year. The data sources that have been used include the Civil Aviation Authority, Eurotunnel, the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH), airline stock figures and aggregated and anonymised foreign-issued card spend processed through Barclays point-of-sale (POS) and "card-not present" channels.

7 . Revisions

Previous data years have not been revised and only include new data for 2020.

HM Revenue and Customs unscheduled correction

Following the previous publication of subnational trade in goods for 2019, an error was identified in the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) overseas trade data used to compile the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) subnational trade statistics.

Revisions for data from before 2020 will be incorporated in the annual Blue Book publication in October 2022 and will feed into future iterations of this output.

We have published an article providing users with an [indicative estimate of the likely scale and impact of these corrections on the ONS trade statistics](#) before their publication in the August 2022 UK trade statistics, which are due to be published in October 2022.

8 . Related links

[International trade with UK nations, regions and cities QMI](#)

Dataset | Released 5 July 2022

Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report for our Subnational trade estimates release, detailing the strengths and limitations of the data, methods used, and data uses and users.

[International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2019](#)

Dataset | Released 5 November 2021

Experimental estimated value of exports and imports of goods and services for 2019 for International Territory Levels 1, 2 and 3, and 16 city regions. Includes industry and EU and non-EU split.

[International trade in services by subnational areas of the UK: 2018](#)

Dataset | Released on 10 September 2020

Experimental estimated value of exports and imports of services for 2018 for NUTS1, NUTS2, NUTS3 and 15 city regions, including industry and non-EU and EU split.

[International exports of services from subnational areas of the UK: 2017](#)

Article | Released 11 September 2019

Experimental estimated value of exports of services for 2017 for NUTS1, NUTS2, NUTS3 and 15 joint authorities, including industry and non-EU and EU split.

[International imports of services to subnational areas of the UK: 2017](#)

Article | Released 28 April 2020

Experimental estimated values of imports of services for 2017 for NUTS1, NUTS2, NUTS3 and 15 city regions, including by industry and non-EU and EU split.

[HM Revenue and Customs \(HMRC\) Regional Trade Statistics](#)

Web page | Released 11 June 2020

Breakdown of the flows of imports and exports between regions of the UK and other countries.

[UK trade in goods by industry, country and commodity, exports](#)

Dataset | Released on 28 May 2021

Experimental dataset providing a breakdown of UK trade in goods by industry, country, and commodity on a balance of payments basis. Data are subject to disclosure control, which means some data have been suppressed to protect confidentiality of individual traders.

[UK trade in goods by industry, country and commodity, imports](#)

Dataset | Released on 28 May 2021

Experimental dataset providing a breakdown of UK trade in goods by industry, country, and commodity on a balance of payments basis. Data are subject to disclosure control, which means some data have been suppressed to protect confidentiality of individual traders.