

Article

# Trends in UK imports and exports of fuels

An article examining recent trends in UK imports and exports of fuels.

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Release date:  
29 June 2022

Next release:  
To be announced

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# 1 . Main points

- Imports of fuels from non-EU countries have seen large increases since mid-2021, driven by increasing gas imports, which is linked to rising wholesale gas prices.
- The increase in gas prices at the end of 2021 was because of increased global gas demand following the easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions, lower domestic renewable energy production and higher gas demand in Asia among other factors.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has destabilised existing European gas supply chains, leading to European economies seeking alternatives to Russian gas imports, which has further pushed up gas prices in 2022.
- Russia supplied 24.1% of the UK's refined oil imports in 2021, however, Russia fell to the sixth-largest import source for refined oil in April 2022 as importers seek alternatives following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

## 2 . Recent trends in UK imports and exports of fuels

Imports of fuels from non-EU countries have seen large increases since mid-2021 (Figure 1). In the 12 months to April 2022, imports of fuels from non-EU countries totalled £64.7 billion; an increase of £42.6 billion (193%) compared with 2021, and an increase of £21.8 billion (51%) compared with 2018. This increase was [the main driver of increased imports from non-EU countries](#), which were consistently higher than imports from EU countries throughout 2021.

Exports of fuels to EU countries have also increased in recent months; exceeding £3 billion in a month for the first time in March 2022 (£3.1 billion) since records began in 1997. Exports of fuels to the EU further increased in April 2022 to £3.6 billion.

### Figure 1: Imports of fuels from non-EU countries have rapidly increased since mid-2021

Imports and exports of fuels, EU and non-EU, January 2020 to April 2022

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The increase in imports of fuels from non-EU countries has been driven by increasing gas imports, which became the largest component of non-EU fuel imports in October 2021 (Figure 2). Imports of crude oil and refined oil from non-EU countries have also increased since mid-2021, although more gradually and to a lesser extent.

The increase in exports of fuels to the EU in recent months has been driven by increases in oil (both refined and crude) and gas.

### Figure 2: Increasing imports of oils and gas have driven the rise in imports of fuels from non-EU countries

Imports and exports of fuels by detailed commodity type, EU and non-EU, January 2020 to April 2022

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## 3 . A closer look at gas

The UK imported £19.6 billion of gas in 2021; a notable increase of 312% from £4.8 billion in 2020. The UK exported £3.4 billion of gas in 2021, increasing by 167% from £1.3 billion in 2020.

The trade in gas has been consistently high since the latter half of 2021, as global gas demand increased following the conclusion of many of the strictest coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic restrictions. [Domestic renewable energy production was low in 2021 \(PDF, 4.1MB\)](#) because of less favourable weather conditions, resulting in higher gas demand for electricity generation. Additionally, higher gas demand in Asia as part of a shift away from dirtier fuels such as coal, supply constraints and lower than usual gas storage levels in Europe have also pushed prices up.

[The UK imports around 50% of its gas from the international market](#) and most homes in England and Wales are heated by mains gas supply. Gas is also used to fuel around a third of the UK's electricity generation, so rising gas prices will usually lead to rising electricity prices.

Norway is typically the UK's largest gas supplier. In 2021, the UK imported £14.5 billion of gas from Norway, which accounted for 77% of all gas imports (Figure 3). Other countries the UK imports gas from include Qatar, the United States and Russia. Almost half of the UK's gas exports in 2021 were to Ireland (47.2%), and the Netherlands was also a large export partner (28.2%).

### Figure 3: The UK primarily imports gas from Norway, and exports gas to Ireland

Top five import and export partners, natural gas, 2021

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The UK's gas imports are primarily natural gas, in either a liquefied or gaseous state. Natural gas in gaseous state is imported via pipeline, primarily from Norway, with small amounts from Belgium and the Netherlands. Natural gas has been [Norway's largest exported commodity in 2022](#), and the UK is one of four export destinations, alongside Germany, France and Belgium. The UK's share of Norway's natural gas exports is 25.5%, second only to Germany, which receives 45.5% of Norway's exports.

The value of gas imports has increased substantially in recent months, despite the quantity being comparable with previous years (Figure 4). According to National Grid data, the [seven-day average price for the wholesale price of gas](#) (System Average Price) reached highs of 15.3 pence per kilowatt hour in March 2022, more than nine times higher than the same period the previous year (1.6 pence per kilowatt hour).

### Figure 4: The value of gas imports has increased substantially in recent months, while the quantity imported is comparable with previous years

Value (£ billions) and quantity (terajoules) of natural gas imports, gaseous state and liquified, January 2019 to April 2022

## Download the data

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Trade in liquefied natural gas (LNG) has become increasingly important to the UK in late 2021 and early 2022. LNG is imported to the UK via ship and reaches the UK's three LNG terminals in Milford Haven and Medway. In 2022, the [UK has sourced its LNG from 12 different countries](#). The United States has been the largest source of LNG, followed by Qatar, Peru, Angola and Russia. In 2020, [the UK was the second-largest European importer of LNG](#), behind only Spain.

The UK has relatively little capacity to store gas compared with European counterparts, because of the [closure of the Rough gas storage facility in 2017](#). The UK instead re-exports imported LNG, through pipelines to Belgium, Ireland and the Netherlands. The UK has about [a fifth of European capacity to turn LNG back into gas \(PDF, 611KB\)](#) (regasification) at the three import terminals. Once gas is in the UK pipelines it can be moved around the UK or exported to other countries via interconnector pipelines. There has been a growing demand for LNG from European countries since 2021, and the EU has secured [record levels of LNG imports and higher pipeline gas deliveries](#).

European countries have taken advantage of the [discounted price of UK wholesale gas \(NBP\) compared with the European price \(TTF\)](#). This gas is also being used to refill storage facilities ahead of the autumn and winter. This European demand for gas and the UK's regasification infrastructure has contributed to the UK's exports of gas increasing 185% from 2020 to 2021, reaching record levels of exports in April 2022.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has destabilised existing European gas supply chains and prompted European economies to seek alternatives to Russian gas imports. The European Commission presented its [REPowerEU Plan](#) on 18 May 2022 to reduce its dependency on Russia fossil fuels in 2022 and diversify supplies. However the physical infrastructure, which has been geared towards receiving natural gas imports from the east of the continent (primarily from Russia), is currently a constraint to moving sufficient supplies of gas across the continent. There are [plans to expand European capacity to receive and store LNG imports \(PDF, 399KB\)](#)

## 4 . A closer look at oil

The UK imported £30.0 billion of oil in 2021 (£17.6 billion crude oil, £12.4 billion refined oil), and exported £28.3 billion of oil (£17.9 billion crude oil, £10.4 billion refined oil).

Norway was the UK's main crude oil supplier in 2021, with 49.9% (£8.8 billion) of the total crude oil imports coming from Norway (Figure 5). Russia was the primary supplier of refined oil in 2021, with 24.1% (£2.9 billion) of total refined oil imports coming from Russia.

The UK primarily exported crude oil to the Netherlands (£6.2 billion) and China (£3.9 billion). Refined oil was mainly exported to the Netherlands (£2.4 billion) and Belgium (£2.1 billion).

### Figure 5: Half of the UK's crude oil imports in 2021 came from Norway

Top five import and export partners, crude oil and refined oil, 2021

## Download the data

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Russia is typically the UK's largest import partner for refined oil; being one of the top two refined oil suppliers for 48 of the 50 months to April 2022. In April 2022, Russia fell to the sixth-largest import source for refined oil behind the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Belgium, Saudi Arabia and India (Figure 6). This is likely a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent ambition for the [UK to end all imports of Russian coal and oil by the end of 2022](#).

### Figure 6: The United Arab Emirates was the largest supplier of refined oil in April 2022, with Russia falling to sixth largest

Imports of refined oil, selected countries, January 2020 to April 2022

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The UK is not the only country to import a large amount of refined oil from Russia. In 2020, [Russia was also the top refined oil source](#) for a number of countries including Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Turkey.

Similarly, although Russia was only the UK's fourth-largest import partner of crude oil in 2021, and third-largest partner in 2020, it was the leading crude oil source for a number of countries in 2020 including Germany, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Poland.

A number of countries globally have introduced sanctions on imports and exports with Russia, notably the EU which introduced a [complete import ban on all Russian seaborne crude oil and petroleum products](#) in early June 2022. With Russia being an important supplier of refined and crude oil globally, many countries are turning to alternative sources, which in turn is [pushing up prices](#).

Total oil exports (crude and refined) to the EU were at record levels in March (£2.3 billion) and April 2022 (£2.4 billion), primarily as a result of this increase in oil prices.

## 5 . Explore UK trade in goods country-by-commodity data for 2021

Explore the 2021 trade in goods data using our interactive tools. Our data break down UK trade in goods with 234 countries by 125 commodities.

Use our interactive charts to explore the 2021 trade in goods data by commodity, such as gas imports from non-EU countries and crude oil exports to the EU. Select a commodity from the drop-down menu or click through the levels to explore the data.

### Download the data

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### Download the data

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You can also use our interactive map to get a better understanding of what goods the UK traded with a country. Select a country by hovering over it or using the drop-down menu.

### Download the data

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## 6 . UK trade data

### [Trade in goods: country-by-commodity exports](#)

Dataset | Released 13 June 2022

Monthly export country-by-commodity data on the UK's trade in goods, including trade by all countries and selected commodities, non-seasonally adjusted.

### [Trade in goods: country-by-commodity imports](#)

Dataset | Released 13 June 2022

Monthly import country-by-commodity data on the UK's trade in goods, including trade by all countries and selected commodities, non-seasonally adjusted.

### [Other related trade data](#)

Dataset web page | Released 13 June 2022

Other UK trade data related to this publication. These include trade in goods for all countries with the UK, monthly export and import country-by-commodity trade in goods data, and revisions triangles for monthly trade data.

## 7 . Glossary

### Exports

Goods or services sold to other countries, the opposite of imports.

### Imports

Purchases of foreign goods and services, the opposite of exports.

### Total trade

The value of total trade between two trading partners (that is, exports plus imports).

### 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.

### Precious metals and non-monetary gold

Precious metals include precious metals, silver, platinum and palladium, and it forms part of the commodity group "unspecified goods". Non-monetary gold comprises the majority of this group and is the technical term for gold bullion not owned by central banks.

## 8 . Data sources and quality

Unless otherwise specified, data within this bulletin are in current prices. This means they have not been adjusted to remove the effects of inflation. Chained volume measures data, which have had the effect of inflation removed, can be found in our [UK trade publication tables](#) and [UK trade time series](#).

The UK leaving the EU and the subsequent transition period, along with the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, global recession and supply chain disruption, have caused higher levels of volatility in trade statistics in the past two years. Comparing 2022 with equivalent 2018 data provides comparisons of recent UK trade estimates with our most recent "stable" period. We also compare 2022 levels with 2021.

## Data sources

Trade is measured through both exports and imports of goods and services. Data are supplied by over 30 sources including several administrative sources. Data from the quarterly International Trade in Services (ITIS) Survey make up over 50% of trade in services data and data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS) are the main source for travel services, making up around 8% of total trade. Data from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) make up over 90% of trade in goods value and are the main source. View the [UK trade Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#) for more detail on data sources and methods.

## Methods

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [UK trade QMI](#).

For more information about our methods and how we compile these statistics, please see [Trade in goods, country-by-commodity experimental data: 2011 to 2016](#). Users should note that the data published alongside this release are no longer experimental.

These data are our best estimate of these bilateral UK trade flows. Users should note that alternative estimates are available, in some cases, via the statistical agencies for bilateral countries or through central databases such as [UN Comtrade](#).

The interactive charts in [Section 5](#) denote country boundaries in accordance with statistical classifications set out within Appendix 4 of the [Balance of Payments \(BoP\) Vademecum \(PDF, 1.1MB\)](#) and does not represent the UK policy on disputed territories.

## 9 . Related links

### [UK trade: April 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 13 June 2022

Total value of UK exports and imports of goods and services in current prices, chained volume measures and implied deflators.

### [Focus on UK trade](#)

Article series | Latest release 1 June 2022

A series of articles taking a closer look at emerging themes in UK trade statistics.

### [UK trade in goods, year in review: 2021](#)

Article | Released 1 March 2022

An analysis of UK trade in goods in 2021 in the context of the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the end of the EU transition period on 31 December 2020.

### [World trade explorer](#)

Interactive | Updated 1 June 2022

Use our interactive to understand how the UK trades with the rest of the world.