

Exporting plastic parts and components to Europe

Global usage of plastics is huge and global production is increasing. After China, Europe is the largest producer of plastic materials. Germany and France are interesting markets for suppliers from developing countries. Recycling of plastics and production of plastics from environmentally friendly materials are becoming more important and popular.

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1. Product description

When this survey refers to 'plastic parts and components' or 'plastic parts', it concerns plastic parts for industrial applications, for example in industrial equipment and machinery, but also in household appliances.

The trade statistics of plastic parts (and components) are based on the following [Harmonised System](#) codes:

- 39259010 – Fittings and mountings of plastics intended for permanent installation
- 39263000 – Fittings of plastics for furniture, coachwork and the like
- 39269097 – Articles of plastics and articles of other materials of heading 3901 to 3914

Note that many plastic parts may be covered under HS codes for machinery parts, which do not specify the material. These HS codes are not covered by the statistical analysis.

Product specification

The quality and quantity of the parts should meet the standards and requirements of the buyer. Further specifications for plastic parts and components, as required by European buyers, are described below.

Material and design

Plastic parts are made of plastic that consists of a mixture of elements such as oxygen and carbon and originally comes from primary chemicals, oil, natural gas or coal. In general, there are two groups of plastics: plastic parts that are made from thermoplastics and plastic parts that are made from thermosets. Thermoplastics are plastics that soften once they are heated and harden when cooled, whilst thermosets are plastics that remain hard in every condition.

Within these two groups, there are several forms of plastics. The material for the final plastic products depends on the application. For instance, polyethylene terephthalate (thermoplastic) is used for the production of beverage bottles, while polyurethane (thermosets) is used for hard plastic parts for the automotive industry.

Depending on the application of plastic materials, plastic parts and components may have a surface finish such as a coating. Surface finishing is mostly applied to visible plastic parts such as bumpers for cars, piano and keyboard keys, et cetera.

The buyer specifies the exact requirements for plastic parts.

Labelling and packaging

Depending on product characteristics and buyer preferences, plastic parts are packed in plastic, carton and/or in

containers. Usually, wooden pallets are packed, wrapped with plastic sheeting and finally packed with strips.

In most cases, the packaging and labelling requirements are included in the buyer's specifications. As a final measure, the packaging must always be marked. This is to ensure that it can be identified during transport, as well as to indicate the quantity, the weight, the actual products and the producer's name.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of plastic parts and components?

Imports

European import of plastic parts and components increased by 7% per year between 2011 and 2015, amounting to €19 billion.

Plastic parts and components were mostly imported from countries within Europe. However, imports from developing countries showed faster growth with 11% per year over four years' time.

In 2015, imports from developing countries represented 15% of all European imports.

Germany is the largest importer of plastic parts and components, followed by France and the United Kingdom. In 2015, the import from developing countries increased to €497 million in Germany, €381 million in France and €400 million in the United Kingdom. The numbers 4 to 6 in terms of imports are the Czech Republic, Poland and Belgium.

In 2015, the United Kingdom showed the highest absolute growth of imports from developing countries (€170 million). Other countries with high absolute growth were Germany (€152 million) and the Netherlands (€125 million).

In the coming years, the increase in European imports of plastic parts and components is expected to continue. Growth is estimated at 3 to 8% per year, depending on economic developments in Europe and the individual country. This growth forecast reflects, among other things, the trend of a greater demand for lightweight products (also refer to the Trends section below).

The major share of the demand for plastic parts and components will continue to be met by local European production. However, the import from low-cost countries, including developing countries, is forecast to show an increase above average.

Tips:

You can improve your chances in the European market if you commit yourself to 100% green production.

Leading suppliers

Germany, China, Italy and France are the leading suppliers. Together, they represented 47% of the total import of plastic parts and components in 2015. Other leading suppliers are the United States and the Netherlands.

Three countries that showed the largest growth from 2011 to 2015 include China, the United States and Poland

(all 12%).

Import from developing countries is dominated by China (€2.1 billion in 2015). Supply from other developing countries is provided by:

- Turkey (€164 million)
- Tunisia (€90 million)
- Vietnam (€88 million)
- India (€59 million)

Tips:

Benchmark your company against your peers from China, India and those from European countries. Several factors should be taken into account, such as market segments served, perceived price and quality level, countries served, et cetera. One source that could be used to find exporters of plastics parts per country is [ITC International Trade Statistics](#) (you have to register first).

Relevant trade fairs for the plastic parts and components are [PLAST](#) in Italy, and [Fakuma](#) and [K](#) in Germany.

Detailed information on the European plastics industry can be found at [European Plastics Converters](#), [Euromap](#) and [Plastics Europe](#).

Exports

Total European exports of plastic parts and components increased by 6% per year between 2011 and 2015 to €21 billion. Exports of European plastic parts and components were mainly destined for other European countries.

In 2015, European exports to developing countries amounted to €2.9 billion. The share of developing countries in European exports remained stable, representing 13% of the total European export.

Germany was the largest European exporter of plastic parts and components in 2015 (€6.6 billion, 31% of all European exports), followed by Italy (11% share).

Other important exporters were:

- France (9% share)
- Poland (6%)
- the Czech Republic (6%)
- Belgium (5%)

Of these countries, Germany showed the highest absolute growth in export to developing countries (€244 million in four years' time), followed by Italy (€123 million).

Production

The production of plastic parts and components fell to €28 billion in 2012. In the years after, the production grew year by year, reaching €33 billion in 2015.

Germany is the largest plastic parts and components producer in Europe (37% share), followed by France (17%) and Italy (11%).

Other important producers are Spain, the United Kingdom and Poland. Of all these countries, the United Kingdom (+12% per year) showed the highest annual growth between 2011 and 2015.

Tips:

Reliability is of utmost importance to European companies. Focus, among other things, on quality and delivery time.

You could improve your chances by delivering customised plastic parts and components, as the demand for customisation is increasing in the European market.

Websites of sector associations such as [VDMA](#), [GKV](#) (Germany), [La Plasturgie](#), [SYMCA](#) (France), [British Plastics Federation](#) (United Kingdom), [Federplast](#) (Belgium) and [NRK](#) (the Netherlands) offer information on the latest trends and developments. Statistical data and branch analysis can also be found there. You can use [Google Translate](#) to convert the websites to your own language.

Demand

European demand for plastic parts and components decreased by almost 4% in 2012 to €28 billion. However, the demand increased again in the years afterwards, reaching €33 billion in 2015.

Germany, France and Italy are the largest markets for plastic parts and components. Together, they represented 64% of the total European market.

Other countries with high demand are:

- Spain (9%)
- the United Kingdom (7%)
- the Czech Republic (4%)

Of these countries, the United Kingdom showed the highest annual growth on average (+12%) between 2011 and 2015.

Tips:

You can use [EU Export Helpdesk](#), [ITC Market Access Map](#) and [ITC Standards Map](#) for more information related to gaining access to the European market.

[Commisceo Global](#) offers a great deal of information on differences in business cultures and etiquette. You should pay some attention to this aspect before you start exporting to Europe.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for plastic parts and components?

Consumers and governments in Europe increasingly demand sustainable products and practices. Plastics have an important role in that trend, as plastic products offer the benefit of reduced weight, while at the same time plastics are mostly made from non-renewable resources.

Smaller and lighter plastic parts and components

Because of the growing trend of sustainable products with a low carbon footprint, customers' demand for smaller and lighter plastic parts and components is increasing. As a result, thinner plastic parts are being produced. However, the minimum size and thickness of the parts depend greatly on the application of the plastic parts and components.

Importance of recycling

The usage of recycled plastics for new products is increasing. This is also because of the growing environmental awareness among consumers and companies.

The importance of recycling can be seen in large and highly developed markets such as Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.

In Germany, more than 40% of plastics packaging and more than 90% of polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles are recycled every year, while recycled plastics are also increasingly used in plastics parts production for industrial application.

New raw materials for plastics production

Bioplastics are plastics that are made from renewable materials such as biomass, which consists of plant material and animal waste. Bio-based products are more environmentally friendly and reduce the usage of fossil resources. Some examples of bio-based plastics are:

- Polylactic acid (PLA)
- Bio-polyethylene terephthalate (PET)
- Bio-polyamide (PA)

The share of bioplastics in the total plastics industry is less than 1%. However, the usage and production of bioplastics is forecast to increase at rates between 60 to 80% per year in the coming years due to the higher awareness and demand for sustainability.

Tips:

You can improve your chances by supplying lighter plastic parts and easily recyclable plastic parts.

You can learn more about bioplastics in Europe at [European Bioplastics](#).

If you can show that you are able to make plastic parts of adequate quality at very competitive prices, you definitely have an advantage in supplying producers (or their suppliers) which manufacture lower-priced plastic parts.

4. What requirements should plastic parts and components comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Requirements can be divided into: (1) legal requirements which you must meet in order to enter the market and (2) non-legal requirements which most competitors have implemented, and which should be met in order to keep up with the market. The requirements that apply specifically to plastic parts and components are given below.

Legal requirements

No specific legal requirements apply to plastic parts in general. This also means that there are no specific legal

requirements for plastic parts which are exported to Europe.

Packaging and liability

Note that there is no product-specific legislation on [packaging](#) and [liability](#) which applies to all goods marketed in the European Union.

Import duties

For plastic parts and components, a 6.5% duty is levied on European imports from countries outside Europe, including China. Several countries benefit from a preferential 0% tariff under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP), for example Turkey and South Africa.

The TARIC database shows more details for Chapters [3925](#) and [3926](#). Note that it is only possible to claim a preferential tariff treatment with a Certificate of Origin.

Tips:

You can use the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) for more information on import duties and regulatory requirements.

Non-legal requirements

Public standards

[ISO TC61](#) contains a list of ISO standards applicable to several plastics items and characteristics. Many of these deal with the determination of specific characteristics such as the density and hardness of plastics. Your European buyer will be aware of relevant ISO standards and, if relevant, his specification of parts will also be based on these ISO standards.

Buyer's specifications

The most important buyer requirements relate to the parts themselves. Materials, dimensions and finishing must meet the buyer's specifications. This includes not only the plastic but also the coating used for finishing.

These issues are essential in the sample phase. Once the buyer has accepted the samples and all other conditions have been agreed upon, the contract can be signed. From that point, the main challenge for the supplier is to deliver the products according to the agreed-upon specifications, delivery times and volumes.

Tips:

If you are already a reliable supplier to other producers (not only within but also outside Europe), you should use these references to inform potential buyers. This helps to show them your capabilities in the plastic industry.

If you are a parts producer with strong references in a certain industry (such as plastic car parts, plastic machinery parts or plastic household equipment parts), you should ensure that prospects can easily find, recognise and evaluate your reference list.

You should not underestimate the importance of buyer satisfaction. Although buyers obviously consider a good quality of the products important, they also attach a great deal of value to compliance with delivery times and delivery volumes.

Be informed about the buyers' needs and requirements before exporting, as buyers' demands differ from one to another.

In practice, the producer will strictly manage the quality of the plastic parts used. He will ask you for test reports for certain parts, following certain ISO TC61 standards.

See our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers of metal and plastic parts and components](#) and our [10 tips for finding buyers in the metal parts and components sector](#). The above tips also offer more information on which topics are decisive for European buyers when searching for (new) suppliers.

5. Through which channels can you find plastic parts and components on the European market?

Manufacturers of plastic parts and components from developing countries should focus on supplying large European manufacturers directly. Another option would be to supply European producers of plastic parts.

A few examples of plastic parts producers in Europe are:

- [Quadrant, Helvoet](#) (Worldwide)
- [Aquatec inform, Roechling, Hubner Group, Schaefer, Mueller Technik](#) (Germany)
- [Milplast, Plast Moulding, Millet Forestier](#) (France)
- [Coda-Plastics, LVS Small Plastic Parts, S&S Plastics](#) (United Kingdom)
- [Letoplast, IPG, Daiho](#) (Czech Republic)
- [Hanplast, Rosti Bianor, Pareo Polska](#) (Poland)
- [Esinplast, Meccanica Generale Group, Sef](#) (Italy)
- [Aarts Plastics, NP Plastics, Orange Plastics, Zuiderplastics](#) (Netherlands)

Examples of competitors from China and India in the European market are:


- [Forwa, Acomold, Topworks Plastic](#) (China)
- [Samvardhana Motherson, Lifelong, Oriyon Molding](#) (India)


Tips:


See also our study [Channels and Segments in the Subcontracting, Metal Parts, and Components industry](#).

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