



[Exporting decorative knobs to Europe](#)

The popularity of decorative knobs is rising in Europe. Where knobs used to be considered functional hardware, they have now also entered the 'soft' decorative market. This means you can target both the project and consumer markets. For the decorative consumer market, handmade designs and combinations of materials at mid-market prices are most promising. Germany and Denmark are especially interesting focus countries, with a strong market for developing countries.

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1 . Product description

Knobs, handles and hooks are furniture accessories that decorate dressers and drawers. Therefore, they are usually sold in sets of two. They can be industrially produced or handmade/decorated. Knobs come in any shape and style and can be made of various materials. Most commonly, they are made of ceramics, glass or wood.

Many developing countries have a long tradition of processing ceramics. This gives them a competitive advantage in the trade of these products. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on ceramic knobs, while occasionally branching out into other materials. It uses the following codes to indicate trade in decorative knobs:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
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6913.1000		Statuettes and other ornamental ceramic articles of porcelain or china not elsewhere specified
6913.9010		Statuettes and other ornamental articles of common pottery not elsewhere specified
6913.9091		Statuettes and other ornamental articles of stoneware not elsewhere specified
6913.9093		Statuettes and other ornamental articles of earthenware or fine pottery not elsewhere specified
6913.9098		Statuettes and other ornamental ceramic articles, not elsewhere specified (excluding those made of porcelain or china, common pottery, earthenware or fine pottery)
6913.9099		Statuettes and other ornamental ceramic articles not elsewhere specified (excluding those made of porcelain or china, common pottery, stoneware, earthenware or fine pottery)
	2349.1230	Other ceramic articles of porcelain/china including non-refractory firebrick cheeks, parts of stoves/fireplaces, flower-pots, handles and knobs, signs/motifs for shops, radiator humidifiers

Quality

Functionality

Decorative knobs are both decorative and functional. They are primarily used on in-house furniture, such as cabinets and drawers. Their main purpose is to help open or close the door or drawer.

Important properties include:

- size and shape, such as whether the knob can be easily grasped or turned;
- feeling, like texture or a non-slip coating to improve grip and no sharp edges or ridges.

Decorative knobs need to withstand external forces, such as:

- contact with water, dirt and acids;
- high impact, like swinging into a wall;
- regular use.

Material

Ceramic knobs break more easily than, for instance, wooden or metal knobs. However, this varies for different types of ceramics. It is a direct result of:

- crystalline structure
- chemical composition
- baking temperature

Design

Decorative knobs come in a variety of shapes, colours and patterns. The design needs to prevent the knob from breaking. Consider the shape and weight in relation to the strength of the material, for instance. Details that stick out, such as decorative trims, also break more easily. The screw needs to be attached properly to the knob. As a bit of good service, include the mounting hardware

with the knobs.

As decorative accessories, knobs also need to look good. Good ways to make knobs stand out are:

- using special techniques;
- attractive combinations of materials.

Glazing

Glazing strengthens the raw material. It also makes the decorative knobs water, acid and dirt proof. The glazing substance and method need to be of good quality. Common problems include:

- poor substance composition, causing the glaze to eventually peel off;
- differences in temperature between the ceramic and glazing, causing breakage;
- glazing bubbles, causing impurities that collect dirt.

Decoration

To add appeal to knobs, decorate them using:

- colour
- texture
- shape and dimension

In ceramic knobs, decoration can be applied before, during or after glazing:

- Before: 'underglaze' decoration is usually preferred, to guarantee a permanent decoration.
- During: 'inglaze' decoration increases the risk of fading decoration.
- After: 'onglaze' decoration has the greatest risk of fading decoration.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging should correspond with the packing list sent to the importer.
- Labels on the outer box of decorative knobs should include the following:
 - producer
 - consignee
 - material used
 - quantity
 - size
 - volume
 - caution signs
- EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe.
- Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself. For instance logos or 'made in...' information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging

Importer specification

You should pack decorative knobs according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for:

- the use of packing materials;
- the filling of cartons;
- palletisation;
- the stowing of containers.

Always ask for the importer's order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

European legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). For instance, it restricts the use of certain heavy metals.

Europe also has [requirements for wood packaging materials](#) (WPM) used for transport, such as:

- packing cases
- boxes
- crates
- drums
- pallets
- box pallets
- dunnage

Damage prevention

Proper packing minimises the risk of damage caused by shocks. This is important with ceramic knobs, because they can break easily. You should make sure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other.

Furthermore, the packing usually consists of inner and outer cardboard boxes. The outer boxes prevent damage to the inner boxes when they are stacked inside the container. The inner boxes are filled with materials to protect the products, such as bubble wrap or paper, depending on the buyer.

Note that weaker types of ceramics need extra careful packing.

Dimensions and weight

Make sure your packing is easy to handle in terms of dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination. The buyer will have to specify them.

Cartons are usually palletised for air or sea transport. Exporters have to optimally utilise the available pallet space.

Cost reduction

Nesting, stacking or flat-packing the items inside the container reduces costs.

Packing has to ensure maximum protection. However, you also have to avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers. You can reduce the amount and diversity of packing materials by:

- partitioning inside the cartons by using folded cardboard;
- matching inner boxes and outer cartons by using standard sizes;
- considering packing and logistical requirements when designing your products;
- asking your buyer for alternatives.

Material

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crates and packing. This is due to their unsustainability and high cost of both the material and the disposal thereof. Economical and sustainable packing materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a requirement.

2 . Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of decorative knobs?

European imports of decorative knobs have recovered strongly from a dip in 2013. Developing countries are Europe's main decorative knob suppliers. Europe's main importers of decorative knobs are:

- Germany
- Denmark
- Italy
- France

Especially Germany and Denmark are interesting focus countries, with a strong market for developing countries.

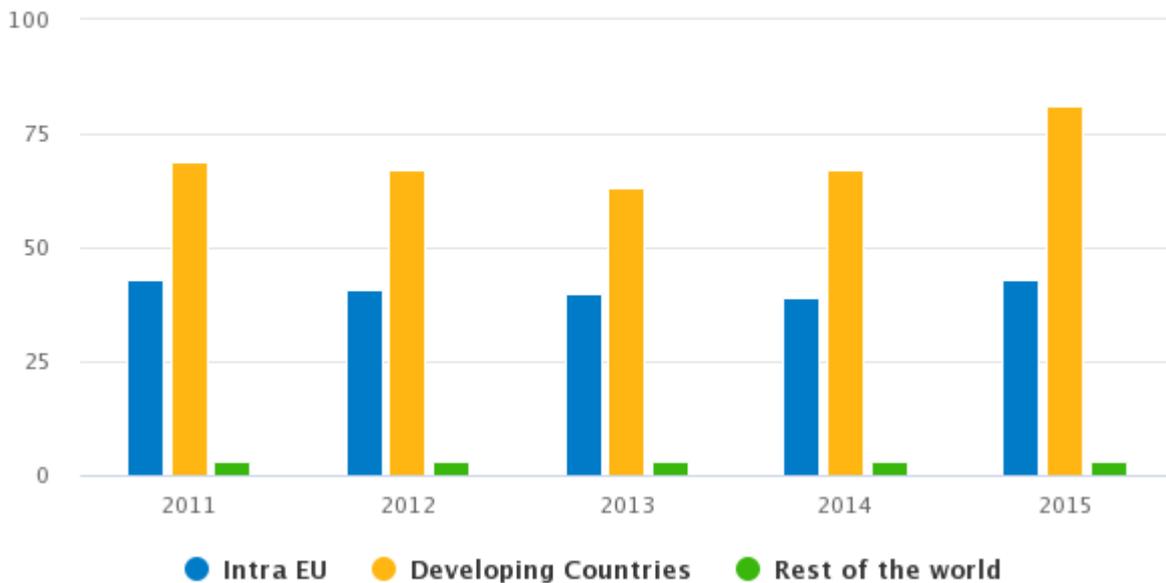
Trade statistics

(!) The following data only gives an indication of trade in decorative ceramic knobs. No specific trade data is available. The figures below cover ceramic statuettes and other ornamental articles. Production and consumption data is somewhat more accurate, covering "other ceramic articles including knobs".

Imports

Figure 1: European imports of decorative knobs

By main destination

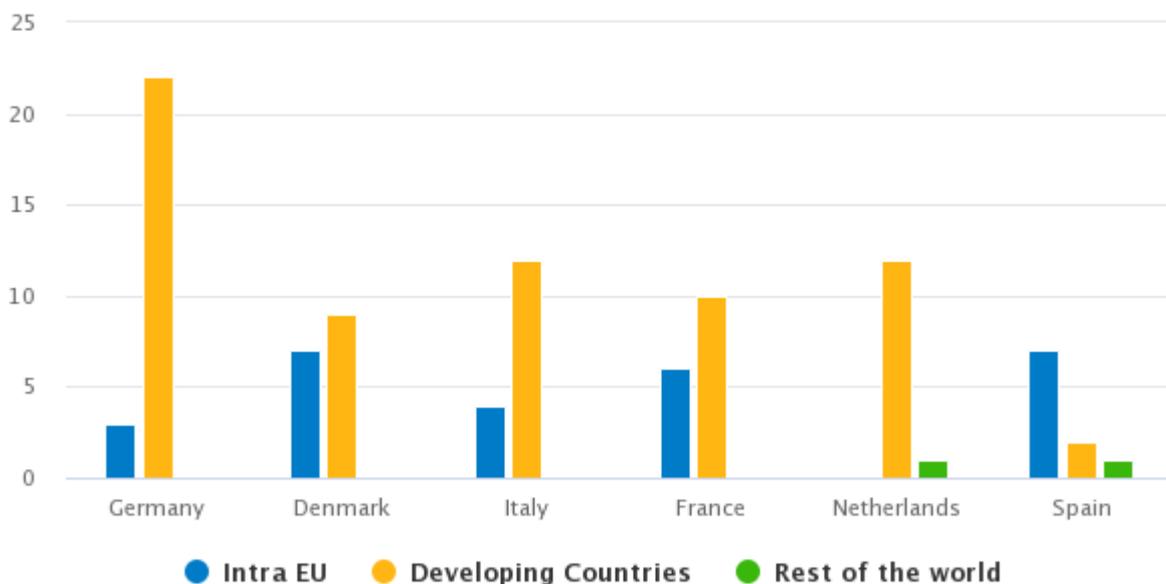


Source: Trademap

*This figure covers ceramic statuettes and other ornamental articles.

Figure 2: Main importers of decorative knobs

2015

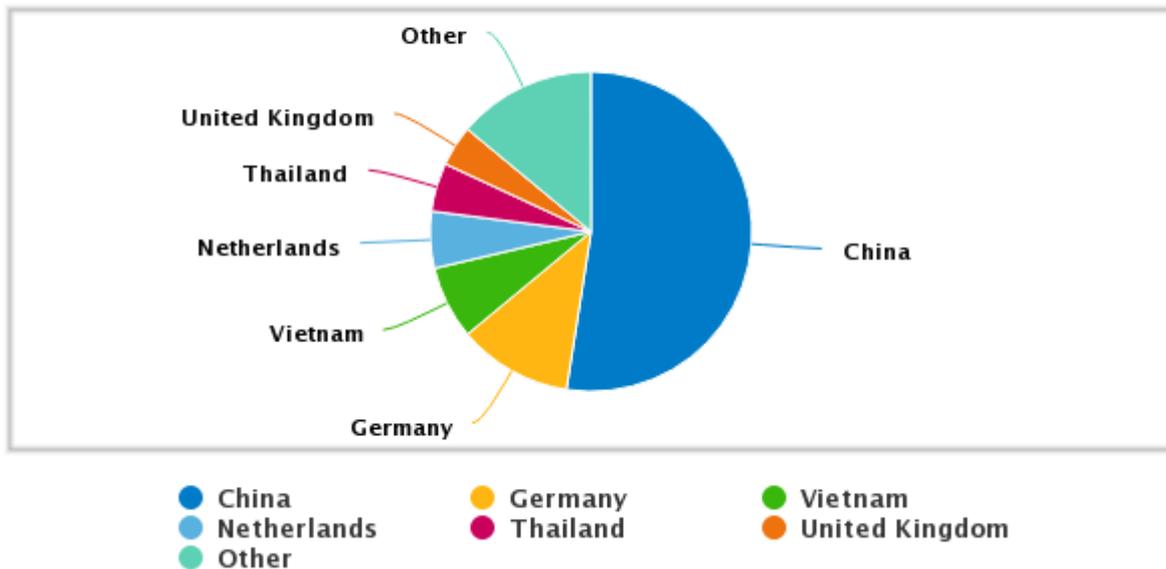


Source: Trademap

*This figure covers ceramic statuettes and other ornamental articles.

Figure 3: Leading suppliers of decorative knobs

2015



Source: Trademap

**This figure covers ceramic statuettes and other ornamental articles.*

- In 2015, European imports of decorative knobs recovered strongly from a dip in 2013. They reached € 128 million in 2015. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 2.7% between 2011 and 2015.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- Developing countries are Europe's main source of decorative knobs. They supply over 63% of European imports. This amounted to € 81 million in 2015.
- This share is predicted to increase slightly in the coming years.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of decorative knobs, with € 25 million in 2015. Denmark, Italy and France follow with € 16 million each.
- Germany is also leading when it comes to imports from developing countries, with € 22 million. This is 88% of its total decorative knob imports.
- Especially in Germany and Denmark, imports from developing countries grew strongly between 2011 and 2015. With € 4.9 million and € 6.3 million, respectively.
- China dominates European decorative knob imports, with 53% in 2015. Other leading suppliers from developing countries are based in Vietnam and Thailand.

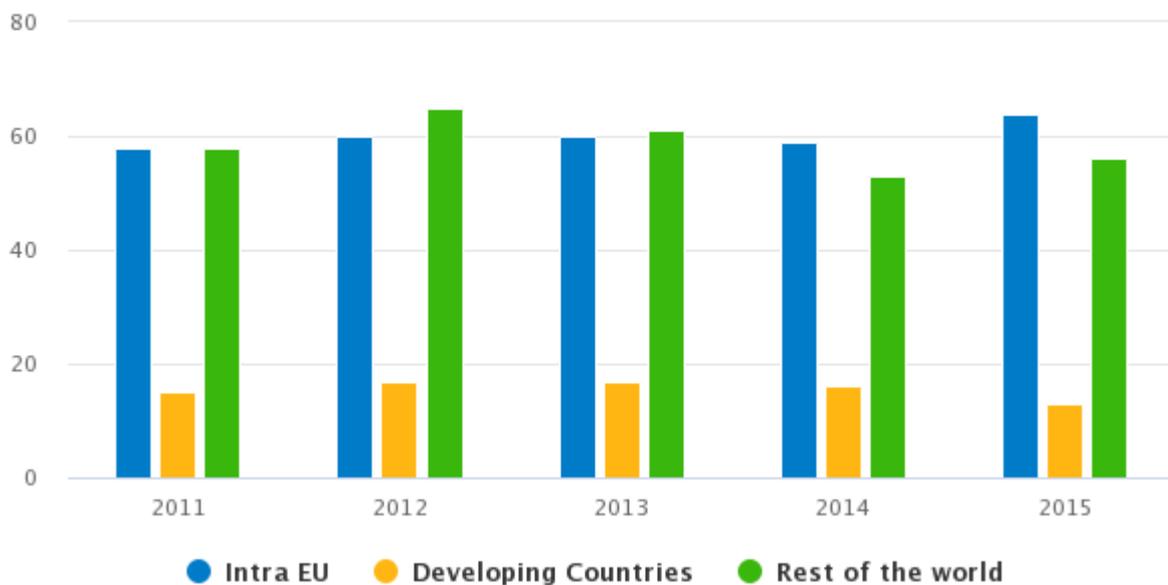
Tips:

- Focus on Germany, Denmark, Italy and France. Their large imports from developing countries make Germany and Denmark especially interesting focus markets.
- Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as Vietnam and Thailand. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare:
 - market segment
 - price
 - quality
 - target countries

Exports

Figure 4: European exports of decorative knobs

By main destination



Source: Trademap

**This figure covers ceramic statuettes and other ornamental articles.*

- European decorative knob exports consist mainly of trade within Europe and with non-developing countries.
- Spain (€ 45 million) and Germany (€ 31 million) are Europe's leading decorative knob exporters.

Production and consumption

(!!) This data covers "other ceramic articles including knobs".

- Europe's production of decorative knobs is slightly higher than its demand. However, Europe's considerable exports create a shortage on the market. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.
- In 2014, European decorative knob production recovered strongly from a dip in 2012 and 2013. It increased from € 20 million to € 40 million in a year. This is close to its 2010 value of € 45 million.
- Similarly, consumption recovered from € 17 million in 2013 to € 37 million in 2014.
- With € 5.7 million, Germany is responsible for 14% of European decorative knob production. Italy and the United Kingdom follow with € 3.3 million each.
- European decorative knob consumption is also highest in Germany, at € 6.1 million. The United Kingdom follows with € 3.3 million.

Tip:

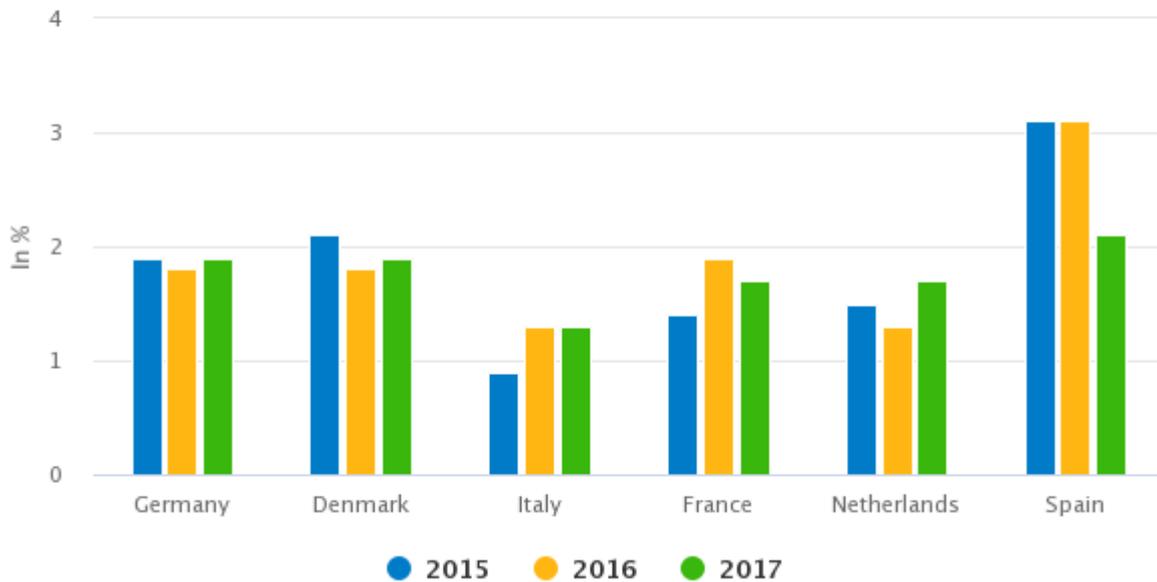
- Add uniqueness to your product to compete with European producers.

Macro-economic indicators

Real private consumption expenditure

Figure 5: Real private consumption expenditure growth

Change from previous year



Source: Eurostat

- Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income.
- Between 2015 and 2017, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of luxury and decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on these products. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on luxury, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

3 . What trends offer opportunities on the European market for decorative knobs?

From Hard to Soft

Knobs used to be considered 'hardware'. They were standard functional accessories for furniture, such as a chest of drawers or cabinet. This made them a 'business-to-business' item intended for furniture manufacturers. They entered the Home market as mass-produced hardware, mainly at Do-It-Yourself stores.

Now that decorative knobs have become 'soft' consumer products, their popularity is rising. They have their own designs, in which taste, style and trends are important. Brands and wholesalers are adding decorative knobs to their lifestyle collections. Retailers display their knobs as an important element of the shop's concept and style. The consumer selects the right type of knob for their furniture. This development has also made the knob a gift item.

The small but growing product group of decorative knobs offers interesting opportunities. You can easily add them to your existing home collection.

Tips:

- Develop series of decorative knobs if you already use appropriate materials and

techniques.

- Add decorative knobs to your assortment if you already manufacture neighbouring product groups or categories. Think of jewellery, buttons for garments, coasters, fridge magnets, door handles, coat hooks or paperweights. With these as a base, developing knobs should be relatively easy.
- Make your knobs into consumer gifts by offering:
 - attractive packaging;
 - complete series with various options;
 - background information on production
- Study consumer needs, trends and developments in the furniture and home decoration markets. These have an effect on furniture accessories such as decorative knobs too.

My Home is me

European consumers like to express who they are through the items in their home. Details matter, including the accessories on a piece of furniture. Such attention to detail shows the consumer's good taste. Knobs are now becoming accessories in their own right. Consumers can use them to add a personal touch to their cupboards. And as such, to the look and feel of their living spaces.

Tips:

- Offer choice, variety, different price points and (contemporary) styles. Distribution-wise, this means you must be able to supply a broad range of products in low volumes. This way, your reseller can appeal to a wide range of consumers.
- Like with many other kinds of home accessories, fair trade and sustainable varieties of knobs are slowly becoming available too. The consumer that wants to be seen as tasteful and broadminded, and increasingly gains status from these values. For more information, see our [special study about sustainability](#).

Craftsmanship is luxury

Modern consumers enjoy detailed designs. They like to surround themselves with well-made items that have style. This luxury segment has the potential for growth, as consumers increasingly like customisation and a personal style. Handmade items with interesting combinations of materials are especially promising. Think of:

- semi-precious stones wrapped in metal
- batik wood
- inlaid shell patterns

As knobs continue to be mainly industrially manufactured, the handmade segment offers opportunities for design-led suppliers.

Tip:

- Knobs are mainly mid-market (see Market Segments). As a new entrant, the challenge

remains to offer craftsmanship at mid-market prices.

Kids market

The market for children's bedroom decoration seems to have potential. Especially when it comes to knobs with fun designs. Here too, however, pricing is an important factor, despite the possibility of (less price-driven) grandparents acting as givers.

Tip:

- Add decorative knobs to your assortment if you manufacture products for children or young adults.

4 . What requirements should decorative knobs comply with to be allowed on the European market?

See our study about [buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for the requirements applying to decorative knobs.

What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

General product safety

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including decorative knobs. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

Tips:

- Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive in the EU Export Helpdesk](#).
- Also use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.
- The [RAPEX database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border, or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for knobs or other ceramic products for an idea of what issues may arise.

Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For ceramic decorative knobs, this includes:

- certain substances used in the manufacturing of ceramics;
- certain paints and enamel used for decoration.

For instance, REACH restricts the use of lead in the paints and glazing.

Tip:

- The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance:
 - [REACH Annex XVII](#), a list of all restricted chemicals;
 - [Information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#);
 - [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes:

- [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company is audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

Tips:

- Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.
- Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you considered your company's performance, this may be a competitive advantage. For instance with a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) and the [ETI base code](#).
- For more information, see our special study on [Sustainability in the Home Sector](#).

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. For ceramic decorative knobs, a lot of labour goes into decorating the knobs (by hand). Especially when the production of your knobs is labour intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair trade certifications are from:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation](#) (WFTO)

- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair For Life](#)

Tips:

- Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.
- Check the [ITC Standards map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

Crystalline Silica

[Respirable Crystalline Silica](#) (RCS) can cause lung cancer through inhalation. The ceramics industry mostly uses crystalline silica in the form of quartz and cristobalite. Although European legislation cannot regulate working conditions in non-European countries, European buyers care about worker safety. They may demand good handling of crystalline silica during production.

Tip:

- For more information in various languages, see the [European Network on Silica](#). For instance:
 - the [Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing it](#);
 - a [Good Practice Guide on working with crystalline silica](#);
 - European national [Occupational Exposure Limits](#).

5 . What competition do you face on the European decorative knobs market?

The competition for decorative knobs does not differ significantly from the sector in general. See our study about [competition for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for a general overview. Also refer to our [top 10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

6 . Through which channels can you get decorative knobs on the European market?

The market channels and segments for decorative knobs do not differ significantly from the sector in general. See our study about [market channels and segments for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for a general overview.

Market channels

In Europe, decorative knobs are commonly distributed:

- through general home decor retailers;
- through DIY outlets;
- as part of an interior decoration project.

E-commerce

E-commerce in home decoration is increasing. It can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items such as decorative objects are especially suitable for this.

To supply e-commerce, you have to be able to work with:

- individual packing
- individual labelling
- limited order quantities

Tips:

- See our special study about [E-commerce in Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for more information.
- Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.

Trade associations and fairs

These trade associations and fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe.

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [EFIC](#), European Furniture Industries Confederation
- [FENA](#), European Federation of Furniture Retailers
- [IMM](#), Cologne, January
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main) and September
- [Tendance](#), Frankfurt, August
- [UEA](#), European Federation of Furniture Manufacturers

Market segments

Decorative knobs as furniture accessories are mainly a mid-market product. The value perception of the knobs is still more important than the actual materials used. Knobs can have a more precious or a more common 'look and feel'. In the industrial mass segments, this is based on surface decoration only. In the new handmade segments, it is based on the actual quality and intricateness of the craftsmanship and materials used.

As mentioned above, knobs started off as functional furniture accessories at DIY and hardware distributors. Now, general home decoration brands are embracing the design value of knobs. This has made new segments available, which are much more central in the lifestyle domain. In the project market, interior decorators also use knobs as value-added design features. This has pushed their perceived value up.

7 . What are the end market prices for decorative knobs?

As decorative knobs are mainly within the mid-market, prices do not vary greatly. Table 2 gives an overview of the prices for this product.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices for decorative knobs

Lower-mid	Mid-mid and mid-high
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Up to € 5

€ 5-10

Tip:

- Keep your price consumer friendly, within the mid-market range. You need to take into account that pieces of furniture often need several knobs.

The following figure gives an indication of a price breakdown for decorative knobs.

Figure 6: Indicative price markups for decorative knobs in %



Source: ProFound, 2014

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).