

Exporting candles to Europe

Europe is an interesting market for candles, where consumption and imports are steadily increasing. Candles have become decorative accessories, rather than purely functional items. This offers good opportunities for exporters from developing countries, especially within the upper-mid market segment. Retailers of decorative and gift items are promising market channels for this segment. Poland is Europe’s main supplier of candles. To compete with its relatively cheap production, focus on design, branding, material use and handmade candles.

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1. Product description

A candle is a block of wax with an embedded wick. When lighted, it provides light, heat and sometimes scent. Within home decoration, candles are usually categorised as home accessories.

There are three types of candles.

- basic candles: functional candles, usually with a diameter of 2.2 cm, fitting most standard candle holders
- fancy candles: decorative candles with a ‘fancy’ shape or form
- scented candles: both basic and fancy candles with an added scent

Basic candles often come in sets, whereas fancy or scented candles are usually sold individually.

This study uses the following codes to indicate trade in candles:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
3406.0000	3299.5400	Candles, tapers and the like, including night lights fitted with a float (excluding anti-asthmatic candles, wax matches or vestas, sulphur-treated bands, wicks and candles)

Quality Functionality

A candle’s main functions are to provide:

- light

- heat
- (sometimes) scent.

However, in the European market candles are no longer just a functional item. They have become a decorative home accessory, influenced by trends in home decoration. Besides appearance, scent has also become important. Candles can enhance the atmosphere of a room, adding both decoration and scent.

According to the [European Candle Association](#), the characteristics of a good candle are:

- a bright, calm flame
- ideal wick curvature, by which the arch of the candle cord is meant
- no carbon blackening in the home from candles burning
- no dripping
- the asserted burning time is met
- minimum wax remainder.

Material

Most candles are made from paraffin wax. Other raw materials include beeswax, soy and other plant waxes. Palm oil has become popular as a more sustainable, but not uncontroversial, raw material. Gel candles are made from a mixture of mineral oil and a polymer.

Size

Candle sizes are not standardised, but most candlesticks have a diameter of 2.2 cm. Smaller candles (tapers) are 25 cm long with a 1.27 cm base. Thick and cylindrical candles (pillars) have diameters varying from 1.3 cm to 10.1 cm. Size and shape are important design elements in the decorative candle market segment.

Design

Candles for the mid-market segment should match colour trends in interior decoration. Fancy candles need to have imaginative shapes and decorations. Well-designed containers (for example ceramic, glass or metal) can add value to (often scented) candles.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of candles should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for candles 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 the required information on the product labels or on the item itself. For instance logos or 'Made in ...' information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use English for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging

Importer specification

Pack candles according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for:

- packaging materials
- filling boxes

- the use of pallets
- stowing containers.

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

Damage prevention

Properly packaging candles minimises the risk of damage caused by transport. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should ensure that items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the stowing container.

Dimensions and weight

Packaging must have easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination. The buyer must specify them.

Boxes are usually shipped on pallets for air or sea transport. Exporters have to make maximum use of pallet space.

Cost reduction

For candles, flat-packing the items inside the container reduces costs. Consider this when designing your products.

Packaging has to provide maximum protection. However, you also have to avoid using excess materials or wasting space and thus shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers. You can reduce the amount and various types of packing materials by:

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

Consumer packaging

Candles make good gifts. This means attractive consumer packaging can add value. For instance, a scented candle that comes in a refillable cedar-wood container, or sets of candles in a gift box.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of candles?

Between 2011 and 2015, European imports of candles increased from €1.2 billion to €1.5 billion. Developing Countries account for 18% of these imports. Europe's main importers of candles are:

- Germany
- the United Kingdom
- the Netherlands.

Especially the United Kingdom is an interesting focus country, with a strong market for developing countries.

Trade statistics

Where is consumer demand?

- Europe's demand for candles is higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.

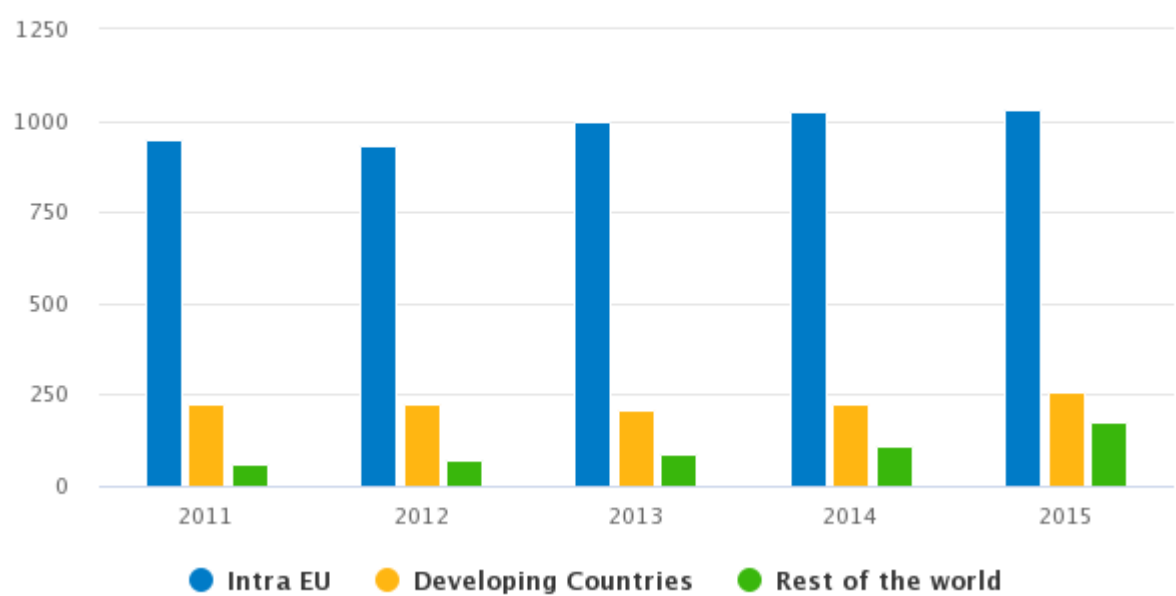
- Between 2010 and 2014, European candle consumption also increased steadily. With an average annual growth rate of 4.9%, consumption increased from €1.4 billion to €1.7 billion.
- European consumption of candles is highest in Germany at €439 million. The United Kingdom follows at €206 million and the Netherlands at €131 million.

What is the role of European production in supplying European demand?

- European production of candles increased from €1.2 billion in 2010 to €1.5 billion in 2014. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 5.8%.
- Poland, Germany and the Netherlands are Europe’s main candle producers. They are responsible for 34%, 17% and 15% of European candle production respectively.

Which countries are most interesting in terms of imports from developing countries?

Figure 1: European imports of candles
By main destination

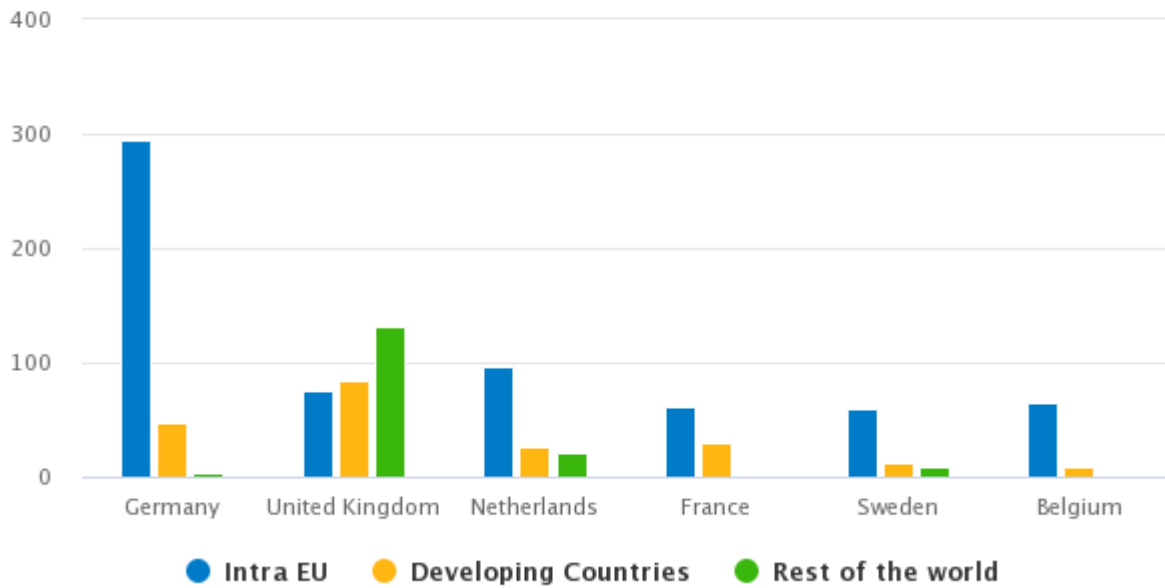


Source: Trademap

Source: Trademap

Figure 2: Main importers of candles

2015

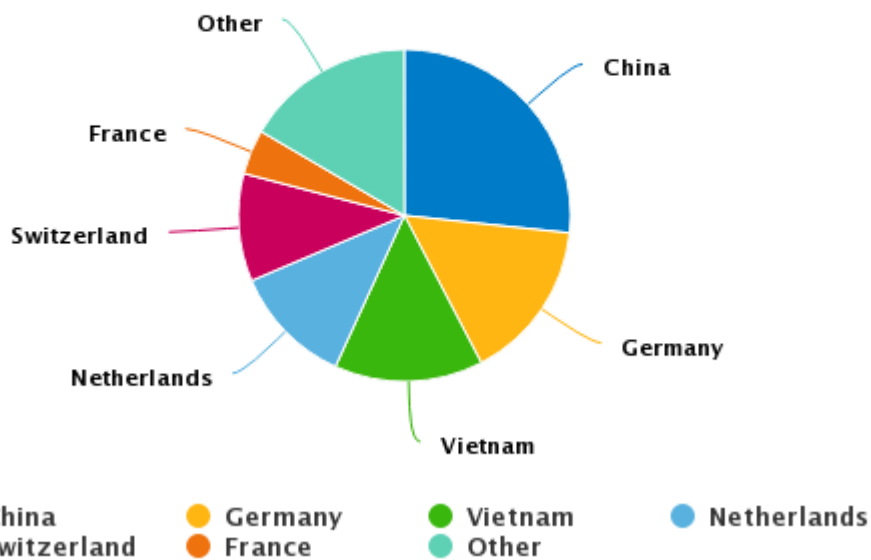


Source: Trademap

Source: Trademap

Figure 3: Leading suppliers of candles

2015



Source: Trademap

Source: Trademap

- Between 2011 and 2015, European imports of candles increased from €1.2 billion to €1.5 billion. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 4.3%.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- Developing countries supply around 18% of European candle imports, amounting to €258 million in 2015.

This share is predicted to increase slightly in the coming years.

- Germany is Europe's leading importer of candles, with €345 million in 2015. The United Kingdom (€292 million) and the Netherlands (€143 million) follow. Together, they account for 53% of total European candle imports.
- When it comes to imports from developing countries, the United Kingdom leads with €84 million. This is 29% of their total candle imports. Germany follows with €47 million.
- In the United Kingdom, imports from developing countries grew strongly by €42 million between 2011 and 2015.
- Poland is Europe's main candle supplier, with 27% of the market in 2015.
- Leading suppliers from developing countries are China (15%) and Vietnam (1.9%).

Tips

Focus on Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Its strong imports from developing countries make the United Kingdom an especially interesting market.

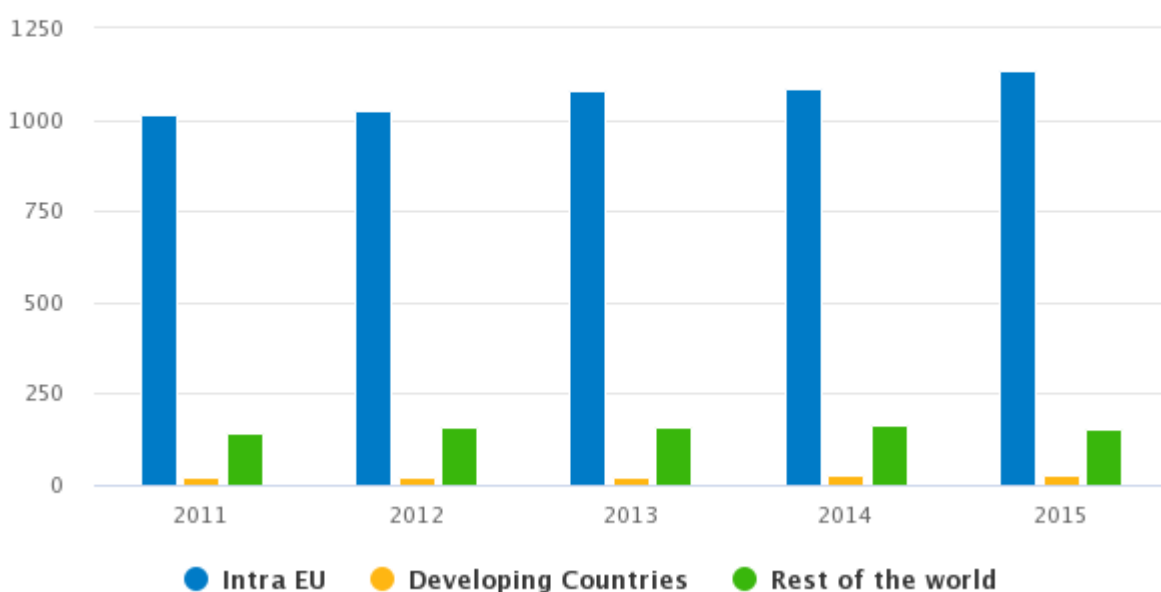
Compare your products and company to the competition from China and Vietnam, as well as Poland. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare by:

- market segment
- price
- quality
- target countries.

What role does export play in supplying European demand?

Figure 4: European exports of candles

By main destination



Source: Trademap

Source: Trademap

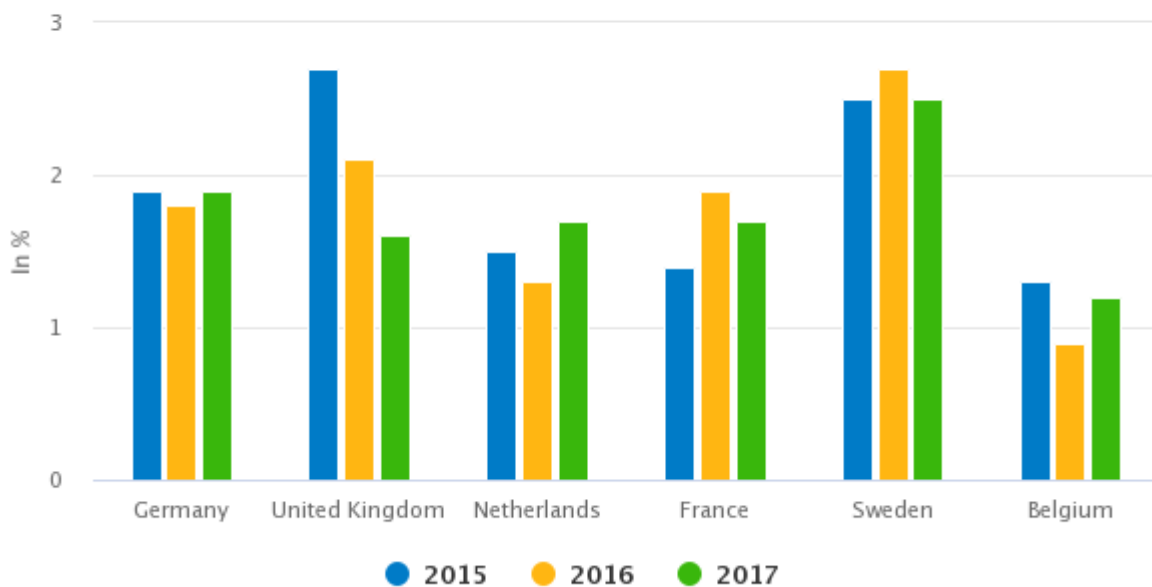
- European exports of candles mainly regard trade within Europe.
- Poland, (€427 million), the Netherlands (€228 million) and Germany (€167 million) are Europe's leading candle exporters.

Macro-economic indicators

Real private consumption expenditure

Figure 5: Real private consumption expenditure growth

Change from previous year



Source: Eurostat

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 items, so growth in their consumption is expected to be moderate.

3. Which trends offer opportunities on the European market for candles?

From functional to emotional

Candles used to be a functional commodity, bringing light and heat into the home. Now, the candle has become a home accessory with emotional appeal. As such, its main benefits include the following.

Atmosphere and mood

With colour, scent and shape, candles can create a romantic atmosphere. They can also have a calming, relaxing or invigorating effect on the consumer. The spiritual segment (including religious, yoga and massage applications) often uses these benefits.

Special occasions

Candles can brighten up special occasions, such as:

- Christmas, or other moments on the festive calendar
- personal celebrations, such as birthdays or weddings
- new seasons, for instance candles in fresh green tones and a matching scent for spring
- the tea-drinking ritual, which often includes tea lights (in attractive holders).

Throughout the house

Consumers now use candles to create atmosphere in all parts of the house, including relatively new areas like the bathroom and garden.

Tips

As there are various uses for candles, focus on one or more of these market segments.

Study trends in general home decoration, but also regarding specific related product groups and festive occasions like Christmas. Trends for such products also indicate trends for fancy candles. For more information, see for instance our study about [Christmas articles](#).

Home perfumes and soaps have also become a more emotional and gift-related product group, for instance for use in wellness. This makes them competition for candles in this context. You should therefore keep an eye on the developments related to these competitive products.

The ideal gift

As home decoration, candles add value to rooms, moods and occasions. This makes them popular gifts, to family and friends, and oneself.

Tips

Emphasise the gift character of your candles. Ways to do so include highlighting the following aspects.

Origin: use scents or accessories specific to your area, such as bark, seeds, shells or beads.

Choice: provide options in colour or separate accessories, so consumers can put together their favourite candle to match their interior or respond to trends.

Packaging: add a nice box, or supply the candles in a container.

Fun: spice up a gift with fun elements, for instance unusual scents such as bacon, sawdust or campfire.

Style: help consumers to enhance their existing decorative style, such as rustic, nostalgic, baroque or gothic.

In search of nature

Especially urban consumers like to feel they live close to nature, also inside the home, making them feel healthier, more relaxed and less concerned about the environment. They do this for instance by:

- breaking down the barriers between indoors and outdoors
- applying natural materials in furniture or home accessories
- using materials and shapes that are similar to nature (bio-mimicry).

Tips

Design candles that contribute to this desire to embrace nature inside the home. Possible aspects include the following.

- scent
- shape
- colour
- natural ingredients, such as beeswax, soy or palm wax
- natural accessories

For more information on how the garden is turning into a fully decorated living space, see our [special study about the garden](#).

Sustainability and fair trade

Social and environmental sustainability can be related to:

- the use and sourcing of raw materials
- candle processing/manufacturing
- transport
- usage
- waste
- disposal.

Much debate has focused on replacing paraffin with renewable raw materials. Palm wax has been considered an option, but palm oil is not automatically sustainable. The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was created to develop and implement environmental and social standards for the industry. Although still under scrutiny for its effectiveness, their system of certification is acquiring many followers. This is not only in the candle industry, but also, for example, in the food and cosmetics industries.

Candles are also traditionally a popular fair-trade product. They are an ideal product for small-scale producers and suitable for handmade production.

Tips

Add some 'green' elements to your product range, related to social and/or environmental sustainability. Clearly communicate this sustainability.

For more information on sustainability, see our special study about [sustainability in the home sector](#).

If your importer is interested, consider certification. For more information on this, see our study about [buyer requirements for home decoration & home textiles](#).

A broader platform

Now that candles are popular gifts, their marketing platform has become broader, now including

- candle specialists, often European manufacturers
- general home decoration wholesalers
- lifestyle brands, who import a wide range of interior accessories with a specific concept.

More importer-wholesalers adding candles to their collection creates more opportunities for exports. The original brand stories came from European manufacturer brands with great heritage, such as [Cire Trudon](#). Now, lifestyle brands such as Anthropologie tell their stories. These now no longer simply focus on candles, but also on the brand's broader identity. These new lifestyle brand collections are broad, offering choice and variety. This means their order volumes are lower than those of specialised importers.

Yet the production base of candles has also widened, especially through the influx of eastern European manufacturers and the impact of 'buying local' campaigns in western Europe. This means new and additional competition from Europe.

Tips

Adapt your minimum order requirements to your target importer. Be ready to invest in design and sampling.

As a developing country exporter, you may not yet be an established brand on the competitive European market. However, your stories and identity elements are very welcome, even if you supply to an existing, established European brand name. If your [visual brand identity](#) is invisible, your content will add value to the importer's brand. So always remember to clearly communicate your values.

For more information, see our study about [trends for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

4. With which requirements should candles comply to be allowed on the European market?

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

With which legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply?

General product safety

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including candles. 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](#).

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 candles for an idea of what issues may arise.

European legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). It for instance 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.

Does it look like food?

Some decorative items look so much like food that consumers could mistake them for real food products, for instance, candles that look like candy canes. The European Union's Council Directive 89/357/EEC on [dangerous products resembling foodstuffs](#) bans these items from the European market. Keep this in mind when designing your candles. Make sure that they don't resemble food too closely in:

- appearance
- colour
- size
- form
- labelling
- scent
- packaging
- volume.

Tip

Check 'Food-imitating products' in the [RAPEX database](#) for products that resemble food too closely. This will give you an idea of the designs to avoid.

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. This could, for example, concern 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 has been 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](#) 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. This could concern, for instance, a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) or the [ETI base code](#).

For more information, see our special study on [Sustainability in the Home Sector](#).

What are the requirements for niche markets?

RAL Quality Mark for Candles

The [European Quality Association for Candles](#) has a RAL Quality Mark for Candles. This voluntary quality mark has strict standards for burning duration, raw material and burning behaviour. It also guarantees a limited use of [azo dyes](#) in the production process.

Tip

For more information, see the [RAL Quality Mark for Candles](#).

ECOCERT sustainability standard

[ECOCERT](#) has a 'Natural origin and organic candles and home fragrances' standard. This voluntary standard applies to both scented and non-scented candles. It promotes the use of natural origin and/or organic ingredients. The standard also guarantees an environmentally friendly production process. ECOCERT certification is especially popular on the French market.

Tips

For more information, see the ECOCERT '[Natural origin and organic candles and home fragrances' standard](#).

Use the ECOCERT standard and/or its guidelines in your manufacturing process. Even if you do not apply for certification, being informed about sustainability standards is useful.

Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your candles 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.

5. What competition will you be facing on the European candle market?

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

6. Which channels can you use to put candles on the European market?

The market channels and segments for candles 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

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 retail channels. Consumers research and purchase products online. They shop around and compare prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items such as candles are especially suitable for this.

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

- individual packing
- individual labelling
- limited minimum orders.

Tips

See our special study about [E-commerce in the Home Sector](#) for more information.

Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.

Trade associations and fairs

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

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [Association of European Candle Makers](#), with a [member directory](#)
- [Christmasworld](#), Frankfurt, January
- [European Candle Association](#), with a [member directory](#)
- [European Quality Association for Candles](#), with a [member directory](#)
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main) and September
- [Spoga + gafa](#), Cologne, August (specifically for the garden)
- [Tendence](#), Frankfurt, August

Market segments

The candle market is segmented into low, mid and high-end segments.

Low-end market

In this segment the focus is on functionality, such as burning hours and a stable flame. The candles often come in sets and at a low price. They are ideal for one-stop shopping through retailers, such as

- supermarkets
- lower-end department stores
- online stores.

Mid-end market

This segment follows trends, mainly regarding decoration and colour. Fancy candles are part of this segment. Prices are reasonable and the candles are often gift-packed. They are mainly sold in:

- general interior stores
- mid-segment department stores
- lifestyle brands' online stores.

Mid-high-end/premium market

In the mid-high segment, craftsmanship, natural or sustainable values and branding play a role. Candles will not usually exceed this level, where prices remain affordable. Occasionally they will move in the premium direction; for instance candles in containers/holders, produced from precious materials or with superb craftsmanship. In this case the container is often what adds value, rather than the candle inside.

7. What are the end market prices for candles?

Table 2 gives an overview of the prices of candles in the low, middle and high-end market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of candles

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
Basic candle	€0.20–0.65	€0.50–0.70	€0.80–2.30
Fancy candle	€1.00–4.00	€4.50–10.00	€11.00–30.00
Scented candle	€3.00–7.00	€6.00–10.00	€10.00–16.00

Consumer prices depend on the value perception of your product in a particular segment. Your marketing mix influences this with regard to such aspects as

- product benefits
- promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits)
- points of sale (reseller positioning)
- price.

Tips

The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. Your candles' quality and price must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment. Adjust your price accordingly.

Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position in the market.

The following figure gives an indication of a price breakdown for candles in the supply chain.

Figure 6: Indicative price breakdown for candles, mark-ups in %



Source: ProFound, 2014

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