

# Exporting ready-made curtains to Europe

The European market for ready-made curtains is stabilising, with most imports originating from developing countries. The middle and high-end market segments have the most potential. To supply these segments, you need to focus on value-adding techniques and designs, as well as adding a story to your products. Working with sustainable materials and co-creation can give you a competitive edge. Refraining from using child labour is key.

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## 1. Product description

Ready-made curtains are curtains of a standard size and specification.

They can be divided into:

- drapes
- curtains
- blinds

Drapes are full-length, from floor to ceiling, although some models are made to fit window sizes. They are usually made of heavier fabrics, such as velvet, satin, opaque and jacquard. Drapes are often lined, and are fixed to rods with pleated heading types (box, pencil, pinch).

Curtains come in various lengths and widths, often fitted to the window size. They are made of lighter fabrics, such as silk, cotton or linen. Curtains are often unlined and sometimes (semi-) transparent (sheer and voile curtains), but can also be lined. They are fixed to rods with various heading types: rings, grommets (eyelet), pockets (tape), loops (usually of the same material as the curtain) and tabs.

Blinds can be made of various materials. There are three main types of blinds. Roman blinds are vertical flat blinds, drawing up from the bottom in a series of soft folds. Venetian blinds have horizontal slats, one above another. Swiss blinds are vertical blinds drawing up from the bottom, with horizontal patch tunnels for the rods at the rear.

This study uses the following codes to indicate trade in ready-made natural fibre curtains:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
6303 91		Curtains, including drapes, and interior blinds, curtain or bed valances made of cotton
6303 99		Curtains, including drapes, and interior blinds, curtain or bed valances made of other natural materials
	13 92 15 50	Curtains and interior blinds, curtain or bed valances, made of woven materials

## Quality

### Functionality

The functions of curtains and other window coverings on the European market are varied. They can provide privacy, eliminate light, or serve insulation purposes (thermal, acoustic).

### Material

The quality of the material is important. Because sunlight and washing can damage curtains and fade colours, light and washing fastness are key. Common natural materials for ready-made curtains include cotton, silk and linen.

### Size

Curtains are often sold in pairs. 300 cm (height) x 145 cm (width) is a standard size, but this can vary. For example, most sheer curtains are 250x110 cm. The consumer can also adjust lengths.

Standard sizes for blinds in Europe are:

- width: 60/80/100/120/140/160/180/200 cm (Roman), 80/100 cm (Venetian)
- length: 180/195/250 cm (Roman), 130/155/160 cm (Venetian)

Standard sizes for drapes in Europe vary roughly between 115/140/180/225 cm (width) and 140/170/180/230/300 cm (length).

Ask your European buyer what specific sizes they may be looking for in the early stages of collaboration.

## Design

The finishing of your products is of the utmost importance. The finish on the upper borders is one of the most distinguishing design aspects of ready-made curtains. Common types of upper border finishing are loops (to be used with a rod) or clips or hooks (to be used on a rail). Other types include grommets, rings, rod pockets and hidden back tab panels. In addition, there are various common types of pleating for curtains: pinch, pencil and box pleats.

## Labelling

External packaging labels for ready-made curtains should include: producer, consignee, composition, size,

number of pieces, box identification, total number of boxes, and net and gross weight.

The most important information on the product or packing labels of ready-made curtains is: composition, size, origin and care labelling. For more information, refer to the chapter on buyer requirements.

## **Packaging**

You should pack ready-made curtains according to the importer's instructions. Packaging usually consists of plastic wrapping to protect the fabric from water, solar radiation and staining. It should be easily manageable in terms of size and weight and ideally fit together on European pallets. If in doubt, check the dimensions with your buyer.

Ready-made curtains are usually displayed hanging, but often sold in packaged sets of 2 or 4. Consumer packaging can be simple in design, but must be functional: it needs to protect against water and staining.

## **2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of ready-made natural fibre curtains?**

European imports of natural fibre curtains are stabilising. More than half of these imports come from developing countries. Europe's main importers of natural fibre curtains are the United Kingdom, France and Germany. The strong performance of products from developing countries makes the United Kingdom and Germany especially interesting target markets.

(!) The European production and consumption statistics cover woven curtains in general, because the data do not differentiate between natural and synthetic fibres.

## **3. Where is consumer demand located?**

- European demand for woven curtains fluctuated around €1.9 billion between 2012 and 2016, with an average annual growth rate of 1.1%.
- European demand for woven curtains is highest in the United Kingdom at €814 million. Germany follows with €276 million.

## **4. What is the role of European production in supplying European demand?**

- European demand for ready-made curtains is considerably higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market for woven curtains.
- European woven curtain production fluctuated slightly around €1.4 billion between 2012 and 2016, with an average annual decrease of 0.1%.
- The United Kingdom is responsible for 45% of European woven curtain production. Germany follows with 11%.

## **5. Which countries are most interesting in terms of imports from developing countries?**

- European imports of natural fibre curtains are fluctuating, reaching €295 million in 2016.
- The relatively high imports in 2012 resulted in a negative average annual growth rate of -4.8% between 2012 and 2016. Between 2014 and 2016, however, imports were more stable around €300 million.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to stabilise further.
- Developing countries are Europe's main source of natural fibre curtain imports. They supply 53%, amounting

to €156 million in 2016. This share is predicted to stay stable in the coming years.

- In reality, many of the natural fibre curtain exports from Western European countries are re-exports of products manufactured in developing countries.
- The United Kingdom is Europe's leading importer of natural fibre curtains, with €64 million in 2016. France and Germany follow with €50 million and €43 million respectively.
- These countries are also leading when it comes to imports from developing countries – especially the United Kingdom and Germany, which source 91% and 68% of their respective natural fibre curtain imports from developing countries!
- Imports from developing countries also fluctuated between 2012 and 2016, but less strongly than those from within Europe.
- China and India are Europe's main suppliers of ready-made curtains, with 20% and 15% respectively in 2016. Other leading developing country suppliers are Pakistan (7.1%), Turkey (3.7%), Indonesia (2.6%) and Bangladesh (2.0%).

### **Tips:**

Study your options in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Their strong imports of products from developing countries make the United Kingdom and Germany especially interesting markets.

The upcoming [Brexit](#) (Great Britain leaving the European Union) has decreased the value of the British Pound. As a result more British buyers have started importing directly from developing countries, rather than buying from European importers. However as the situation is still fluid and insecure, you should keep a close watch on the developments.

Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China and India, as well as Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia and Bangladesh. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

## **6. What role do exports play in supplying European demand?**

- European natural fibre curtain exports consist mainly of trade within Europe and with developed countries.
- Germany (€40 million) is Europe's leading natural fibre curtain exporter by far, followed by the United Kingdom and France (€14 million each).

## **7. What is the effect of real private consumption expenditure on European demand?**

- 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 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

## **8. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for ready-made natural fibre curtains?**

### **Innovation and tradition**

There is a growing demand for high-tech concepts, like curtains that block sunlight or remote-controlled

curtains. At the same time, traditional craftsmanship is increasingly appreciated on the curtain market. The traditional production methods and designs of your culture give your curtains a 'story'. Technocraft, a combination of technology and craftsmanship, is also a future winner.

### **Tips:**

Promote your culture's traditional production methods and design, adding a background story to your product. Make sure that this comes across clearly to the consumer, for example by including a card describing the product's unique story.

Study your possibilities to develop high-tech concepts and/or combine them with your craftsmanship.

## **Co-creation**

European buyers are increasingly trying to distinguish themselves from their competitors. To do so, they focus on their own image and design. They look for producers they can cooperate with to develop their own products, so-called 'co-creation'. This makes it extra important to showcase your special skills, production techniques and the variety of raw materials you work with. Co-creation can also help you meet the demand for high-tech concepts through joint product development.

### **Tips:**

Make sure your collection showcases the different materials and production techniques you have to offer.

Emphasise the story behind your product in your promotion strategy.

Consider a co-creation strategy to develop innovative products.

Consider working together with producers of complementary home textile products to create a more coherent collection.

If the type of fabric you use allows for it, consider developing a range of cushion covers to match your curtains.

## **Back to nature**

The feeling of wanting to escape to nature, combined with a lack of time in busy city life, inspires designers to merge outdoor imagery with indoor decoration. Using natural fibres is a good fit with this trend. Organic cotton adds value to your product. Alternative natural materials like bamboo, ramie, flax, banana fibre, palm leaf fibre or cane hemp may also offer you interesting opportunities.

Light from outside also brings nature into the home, making the choice of material extra important. Curtains need to protect people's privacy, but at the same time let enough light into the room.

### **Tips:**

Use organic cotton or cotton with another certification to add more value to your product.

Consider alternative natural materials to make your products stand out.

Make sure that buyers are aware of the materials you use.

## Sustainability

Consumers and designers are shifting their preferences towards more sustainable choices, especially in the mid-high market segment. There is an increasing concern and awareness of the negative impacts of production and consumption. This is driving the popularity of sustainability labels and commitments in the textile industry. Using natural materials or recycled fibres as your main raw material is a good way to benefit from this trend.

### Tips:

Promote the sustainable aspects of your curtains as a premium.

For more information, see our special study on [sustainability](#).

## Smaller quantities and shorter lead times

European buyers change their collection at an increasing pace. As a result, they are looking for shorter lead times and smaller minimum orders. This is a distinct advantage for small to medium-sized producers like you, since you are more flexible and can generally supply smaller quantities than bigger producers.

### Tip:

If you are flexible in production and can supply smaller quantities, emphasise this in your promotion.

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

## 9. What requirements should ready-made natural fibre curtains comply with to be allowed on the European market?

### 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 curtains. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

### Tips:

Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

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 similar 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 example, REACH restricts the use of azodyes and certain flame retardants in textile products.

### Tips:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the [information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#) and the [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

Follow new developments in the field of flame retardants, as new alternatives are being developed. You can do so, for instance, through the [European Flame Retardants Association](#) (EFRA).

## Textile Regulation

According to the European Union's [Textile Regulation](#), textile products should be labelled or marked to indicate their fibre composition. These labels should be durable and tear-resistant, securely attached, easily legible, visible and accessible.

### Tip:

For more information, see the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Textile Regulation](#).

## Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). Among other things, 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, (box) pallets and dunnage.

### Tip:

Read more in the [overview of EU rules on wood packaging material](#).

## 10. 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 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](#) 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 value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. You can do this, 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](#).

## **11. 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. Especially when the production of your curtains is labour-intensive, for example hand-knotting, 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.

### **Sustainable textile certification**

Across the home sector, sustainability is gaining ground. Although the actual use of certification is still not widespread in home textiles, there is an increasing interest from buyers.

The [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#) ensures environmental and social responsibility throughout the production chain. To qualify, textile products must contain >70% organic fibres.



[OEKO-TEX](#) Standard 100 certification guarantees no hazardous chemicals were used during production.

The [EU Ecolabel](#) for textiles focuses on minimising environmental impact at the manufacturing stage.

### Tips:

Read more on [GOTS](#), [OEKO-TEX](#) and the [EU Ecolabel](#) in the ITC Standards Map.

Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

## Woolmark

[Woolmark](#) certification provides consumers with guaranteed wool fibre content and an assurance of quality. It contains specific standards for several product groups, including curtains.

### Tip:

If you supply woollen products, study [how to become a Woolmark licensee](#) and the Woolmark specifications for [furnishing fabrics](#).

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

## 12. What competition do you face on the European ready-made natural fibre curtains market?

The competition for ready-made natural fibre curtains does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

## 13. Through what channels can you put ready-made natural fibre curtains on the European market?

The market channels and segments for ready-made natural fibre curtains do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

### Market channels

Ready-made curtains can be found in a wide variety of shops, ranging from low-end discounters to high-end boutiques. In the low-end segment, department stores and even some Do-It-Yourself stores offer ready-made curtains.

The channels through which ready-made curtains are put on the market follow the traditional patterns. Import occurs via importers/wholesalers that supply to retailers, and larger retail chains that import themselves. More and more smaller retailers start buying directly from the supplier, especially when it concerns the more high-end curtains.

### Tip:

For more information about trading directly with smaller retailers, see our special study about [alternative distribution channels](#).

## E-commerce

E-commerce in home textiles is increasing and 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 textile items. To supply e-commerce you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

### 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
- [EURATEX](#), European Apparel and Textile Confederation
- [Heimtextil](#), Frankfurt, January
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January and September

## Market segments

Ready-made curtains are mainly marketed within the lower and middle market segments of the European market. In the higher segment, most of the curtains are tailor-made. Ready-made curtains for the low-end market are the preserve of high-volume suppliers with low prices and margins, resulting in simple designs. Ready-made curtains for the middle market are fashionable products (mid-low) or added value products (mid-high).

Chinese and Indian high-volume suppliers dominate the lower end of the market. The middle market offers you the most opportunities, especially if you use special natural fibres such as organic cotton, bamboo or linen. Innovation by combining materials and/or value-adding techniques (embroidery, printing, embellishments etc.) is the way to develop premium lines in a predominantly mid-end market.

## 14. What are the end-market prices for ready-made natural fibre curtains?

Table 2 gives an overview of the indicative prices of ready-made natural fibre curtains in the low, middle and high market segments. 'Indicative' is key here, since prices for curtains vary depending on manufacturing technique, material, size, design, brand and other ways of value addition. Size, is especially relevant here, since the differences in size directly influence the price.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of ready-made natural fibre curtains

	Low-end	Middle-end	High-end
Ready-made natural fibre curtains, per pair	€20-€50	€75-€200	€250 onwards

The European consumer price of your curtains is around 4-6.5 times your selling price. Shipping, import and handling add 15-20%. Wholesalers account for a further 50-90% mark-up. Retailers may add another 90-150% to the price. Finally, European VAT percentages range from 18% in Malta to 27% in Sweden.

Your original selling price depends heavily on the availability and cost of raw materials. For example, the average prices of cotton have fluctuated considerably in recent years. Occasional increases in the price of raw materials are not directly passed on to the consumer, but do put pressure on exporters, importers and retailers' margins.


### Tips:


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


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

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