

9 tips on how to find buyers in the European honey market

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Europe is an important market for honey, with a steady and significant demand throughout the years. Clearly define your product range, understand its potential, identify your preferred target market and develop an export strategy to profit from the demand in this market. Once you are clear on all of the above, you can start looking for buyers. Here are some practical tips to help you identify and connect with potential buyers.

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1. Define your product range and understand its value

Before you can identify potential buyers, you need to understand and be able to explain what your company offers. This includes a comprehensive description of your product and an understanding of its value proposition. Is your product certified organic? Do you produce and trade your honey under fair trade practices? Does your honey come from specific floral sources? What is the impact you have on communities and nature? These are examples of questions that may define your value proposition. Knowing and defining what makes your honey unique makes it easier to target and attract potential buyers.

It is important to analyse the composition of your honey and understand the physicochemical, sensory and microbiological characteristics that determine its quality. Globally-accepted essential characteristics include the measurement of sugar, moisture, electrical conductivity, free acidity, diastase activity and hydroxymethylfurfural within their acceptable limits. These characteristics need to conform with honey standards for access to your preferred target markets.

Also consider other aspects that set you and your product apart from your competitors. Consider the geographical origin of the honey, the floral sources, whether it is raw, unfiltered, certified, socially and sustainably produced, the processing and blending methods, extraction method, etc.

Once you know what you are selling, it is important to document it well. European honey buyers appreciate well-

structured and well-organised product and company documentation. Buyers use it to make sure you meet their requirements and specifications. Make sure you have a detailed, commercially-oriented Product Data Sheet with product specifications, origin information, price indication, production and processing capacity information, certificates and standards, company information and photos.

When you understand the potential of your honey, you should be able to provide short and clear answers to questions such as: What are the characteristics of your product? How does it differ from other honeys on the market? And does it meet the European Union (EU) quality requirements?

Tips:

Work with accredited laboratories to perform a compositional analysis of your product.

Design your value proposition so that it reflects market demands. A good value proposition lets potential buyers know exactly what they want to know when looking for suppliers.

Highlight those parts of your value proposition that align with potential buyers' interests.

Always have up-to-date and reliable data about your company, your suppliers and your products. This includes up-to-date certifications, information about the number of producers in your network, and production volumes and availability.

2. Do market research to identify your target market

Before starting your search for European buyers, it is important to understand your target market. This includes factors such as the market's demand for honey, its structure and the role of various market players. Be aware that each European country may have different consumption patterns and preferences, such as organic honey, raw honey and specific floral varieties. Researching these preferences will help you tailor your approach and avoid wasting time and money on markets that are not suitable.

The right market should be accessible, meaning that you can overcome trade barriers and meet regulatory requirements. To find out which markets and channels offer the most opportunity for your honey, you should conduct market research. It will help you understand and select the right export markets using a structured approach. It will also help to set specific and realistic sales objectives. Moreover, knowledge of the market is appreciated by potential buyers and can attract buyer interest.

The following questions could guide your market research:

- What is the demand for honey in the market? You do not necessarily need to target the largest market. But it is important to find a market with enough demand to make selling your honey worthwhile. Germany, the UK, France and Spain are amongst the countries with the highest demand for honey, including significant demand for organic and fair trade honey.
- Who are your competitors? Find out who they are, what they sell and to whom they sell. Lots of competition means you will need to work harder to stand out from the crowd, or that the market may be saturated. Little competition can mean you will have to invest more into educating consumers about why they should buy your honey.
- What are the main market channels? Study how your product is sold in Europe. Before it is sold as an end-product to consumers, your ingredient may be traded between an importer, wholesaler, distributor, food industry manufacturer and/or retailer. Discover the most common way of selling your product to select the type of company you will sell to. This will also help you understand your buyer's customers and their

requirements. For organic and fair trade honey, specialty stores and premium retail chains might be key channels.

- Which market segments use honey? Why is honey used? How is it used? Look for trends in product types. If market segments are growing, this may mean there is more demand for raw materials used in those segments.
- Will you make a profit? Study price dynamics. Local sales taxes and cheap prices affect the price you can ask for your honey. Certified honey often comes at a premium price, which could impact your profitability positively if positioned correctly in the market.
- Is it easy to comply with market regulations? Get a clear idea of the requirements. Bureaucratic hurdles, additional certifications and fees add up.

Do local consumer trends favour honey? Think of health and wellness, for example. Or an interest in natural products. Keep up to date with what is' happening with your product.

Tips:

Review the CBI study [What is the demand for honey on the European market?](#) for information on EU markets with high potential for honey.

Read about trends in the European honey market [on our website](#) for more information on developments in the sector.

Read the [international honey market reports](#) published by Apiservices for detailed information on prices, demand, developments, setbacks, etc. in the global honey market, focusing on the most relevant countries.

3. Target the right buyers through selection criteria

Once you know what you are selling and what the market looks like, you can start identifying your ideal buyer profile. This means you must find out as much as possible about buyers to select the most promising ones.

Look for buyers in online databases

Start looking for potential clients in online databases or marketplaces. Online trade databases have functions that make it easier to search for buyers of a specific product or from a specific country. While some of these databases can be accessed for free, many require payment. Keep in mind that every database is incomplete, even the paid ones. Therefore, it is not guaranteed that you will find the buyers you target in every database.

Popular databases include:

- [Europages](#) is a directory of European companies. It allows users to search by sector and enter key search terms (for example, 'honey'). You can filter results by selecting the company type you are interested in (e.g. 'agent', 'wholesaler' or 'distributor').
- [WLW](#) is the leading German [B2B](#) online company database. You can search for companies and filter results according to your specifications. Search in English and German to find more potential buyers.
- [Kompass](#) is a large database of companies worldwide. You can use it for free by entering a product name or category and filtering results based on location or company type. To access more advanced features, you need to get a paid subscription.
- [GreenTrade.net](#) is a marketplace for organic products. The marketplace has two directories where companies can buy or sell products in specific categories. In addition to looking for buyers, you can also

register your company in the seller's directory. If you deal in certified organic honey, be sure to check it out.

You can also use online trade fair exhibitor databases, which often contain links to exhibitors' company profiles, contact details and information on the products they are interested in. Check out, for example, the [BIOFACH exhibitors](#) page or the [FI Europe exhibitor list](#).

Another way of finding potential buyers is through the customers/members/operators databases of certification bodies like [FairWild](#), [UEBT](#) (a non-profit association that promotes ethical sourcing of natural ingredients) and [Fair for Life](#).

Filter potential clients that match your buyer profile

As you consult databases, visit the buyers' websites to find information on:

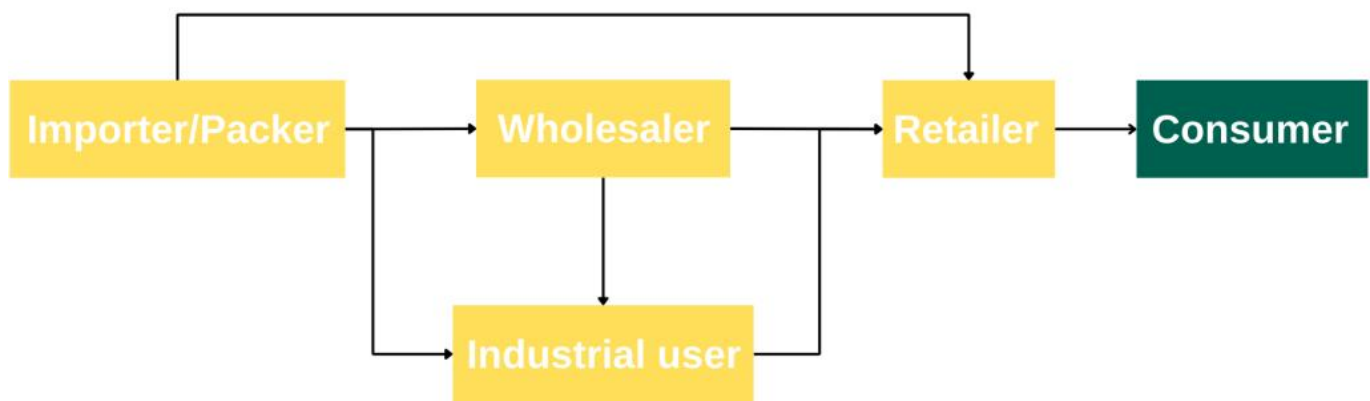
- Type of buyer: are they an importer, packer, distributor, final product manufacturer or retailer?
- Location and market: see which countries the company operates in, which markets it supplies, and where it sources from.
- Size and scope: know that large companies often trade large volumes, while smaller companies trade in niche markets and low volumes.
- Product range: is the buyer specialised in bee products, or does it deal with a wide range of products?
- Philosophy, values and mission: learn about their interest in social fairness or biodiversity and see if this matches your business philosophy.
- Standards and certification requirements: understand what certification standards are used and what specific requirements are listed.

Use the information you find to make a list, selecting buyers that match your criteria and are likely interested in your product. For example, if you offer a high-quality product and a reliable supply of large quantities, you might want to target large and diverse companies. Be aware that such buyers may have additional requirements (such as audits and certifications) for their suppliers. If you are a smaller supplier and have organic or fair trade certifications, trading with specialised importers may be more easily accessible. These buyers look for high quality but smaller quantities and tend to develop long-term partnerships focused on ethical trade and organic certification.

Another option is to sell directly to retail or end-product manufacturers, but this requires perfect company and product documentation, consistent quality and quantity, well-organised logistics, being able to deliver on short notice and a strong value proposition to convince manufacturers to choose you and your product over existing suppliers.

Figure 1: Trade flows between buyer types

Buyer Types



Source: [ProFound](#), 2024

When selecting buyers based on type, importers are often your best option, as they trade in a broad range of products and honey varieties. Depending on your range, they may be large conventional importers or specialised importers. Be aware that these companies vary in size and product range. If the type of buyer does is not a good match for what you offer, you can take them off your list.

Regardless of who you sell to, always be aware of regular European requirements before contacting buyers. The general buyer requirements are the regulations that products and processes must comply with throughout Europe. European buyers will not be interested in your product if you cannot meet these basic requirements. Source: [ProFound](#), 2024

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Tips:

Spend time selecting potential buyers who are a good match for your range to optimise time investment. You should only start contacting buyers after making a selection. When contacting a buyer, identify a contact person, keep your email short, relevant and concise, while also giving complete and accurate information.

Search through databases in both English and the language of your target market to find more relevant buyers.

Check the reliability of databases before using them. Some fraudulent companies are selling fake databases. When receiving database offers through email, determine whether [emails are legitimate or sent by fraudulent companies](#). This can be done by, for example, checking a company's online presence, impersonal greetings, poor presentation, spelling and grammar.

Only contact companies suitable for you. Identify the right contact person and introduce your company. Make your message specific to the company you are contacting; for example, add something you observed about the company or their product range.

Familiarise yourself with legal and additional requirements that European buyers often have. Refer to the [CBI study on requirements for honey on the European market](#) for more information.

4. Use your existing network to increase the chances of finding buyers

When it comes to finding European buyers for honey, your existing network can be a valuable asset. The key advantage to using your network is that you can build on existing relationships and trust, thus increasing your chances of finding suitable European buyers and developing solid, long-term business relationships.

Make your existing clients your number one priority. Often, your existing customers will open up new opportunities for finding new ones and expanding your business. How does this happen? Satisfied customers may bring you new customers by recommending your business to others interested in buying similar products. A potential new customer will always check your past activity and reviews before contacting you. Some of them may also contact your previous customers for more information before deciding to contact you. This is a way of losing or gaining customers before you are even aware of them.

Start by contacting your current network, including former customers, suppliers and colleagues in the beekeeping industry. Let them know about your expansion into the European market and ask if they have any particular contacts or recommendations.

Don't hesitate to ask your current contacts for introductions or referrals to other European buyers they may know. Personal recommendations are often very important in business. Your contacts may be willing to endorse you or put you in touch with relevant business contacts, such as honey importers, distributors specialising in bee products, or food manufacturers using honey as a key ingredient.

Tips:

Be clear and specific when reaching out to your existing contacts. Communicate your intention to expand into the European market and the type of buyers you are looking for. Provide specific details about your products and the value you offer to potential European buyers.

Show appreciation for your contacts' assistance. You could do so by thanking them, sharing industry insights, giving referrals to their business or offering discounts on future purchases. This will strengthen your relationship.

5. Contact associations to expand your network

You can contact associations, trade groups and other industry networks. Associations at national and European level provide honey suppliers with access to valuable contacts. Many European buyers are members of trade associations, and most association websites have directories of members who may be potential buyers as well as their contact details.

In addition, these websites are a valuable source of information as they often provide updates on market developments, legislative news and other information relevant to honey. Industry associations play an important

role in EU regulation and legislation and are actively involved in research and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes.

Join these networks, attend events, participate in discussions and browse the online platforms offered by these associations to network with European honey buyers and gain valuable information on European market trends and much more.

Table 1 shows national associations for the honey sector in the selected European countries. Some of the listed websites are only in the associations’ national language. You can use the translate function of your web browser for translation.

Table 1: Examples of national associations in the honey sector in Europe

Country	Association	Summary	Member list
Germany	Honig-Verband e.V	Represents honey importers and packers, and campaigns for free and fair trade. It also deals with food and customs issues.	https://www.honig-verband.de/mitglieder
France	Syndicat Français des Miels	The interface between honey processors, public authorities and organisations linked to the beekeeping profession. Aims to support the development of beekeeping in France.	https://www.syndicatfrancaisdesmiels.fr/qui-sommes-nous/adherents-les-entreprises-du-syndicat-francais-des-miels/
United Kingdom	British Honey Importers & Packers Association	Represents companies involved in the importing and packaging of honey in the UK. Plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and growth of the national honey industry.	https://www.honeyassociation.com/members
Spain	Asociación Española de Comerciantes y Envasadores de Miel	Represents, manages and defends the interests of Spanish honey traders and packers at both national and European level.	http://www.ase miel.org/quienes-somos/listado-de-miembros/

Tips:

Do not be discouraged by a lack of response. Be persistent and follow up with your contacts regularly.

Check association websites regularly for updates on sector trends, regulations and innovations in the health products industry.

6. Attend sector trade fairs and events

Participating in trade fairs and industry events is an excellent way of meeting and networking with potential buyers. They are also a great way of learning about industry trends, developments and competition. Another benefit of attending trade fairs is that you get direct feedback from others about your company and products.

In Europe, there are multiple trade shows and events related to the food industry, some of which focus specifically on honey and natural products. Major honey trade fairs in Europe include:

- [BIOFACH in Germany](#) - the world's leading trade fair for the organic food industry. It takes place every year in February. If you are an organic honey supplier, attending this fair can be a great opportunity to meet specialised importers and buyers.
- [Anuga in Germany](#) - leading trade fair for the global food and beverage industry. The fair is held every two years in October.
- [SIAL in France](#) - the world's largest food innovation exhibition. The fair is held every two years in October.
- [Eurobee in Germany](#) - trade fair for honey and bee products, organised by the German Association of Professional and Commercial Beekeepers (DBIB), with over 120 national and international exhibitors. The next one will be held in November 2024.

Exhibiting at international trade fairs is an excellent opportunity to meet potential buyers and showcase your honey to a wide audience. Many large importers attend these events, in some cases also as exhibitors. Participating as an exhibitor allows you to set up displays, presentations or demonstrations to attract visitors to the fair. However, participating in a trade fair can require a significant investment.

If you do not have the budget to exhibit at a trade fair or if you do not yet feel ready to participate, you can choose to simply attend as a visitor. When you visit a trade fair you can explore and gather information about the market. You can visit various stands to learn about new products, trends and developments, and you can present your company and try to create new business opportunities. Visiting trade fairs is also important for [price benchmarking, establishing quality requirements and looking at what 'extras' your competitors offer](#).

Figure 2: Pros and cons of attending a trade fair as a visitor or exhibitor

	Costs	Flexibility	Visibility	Logistics
Visitor	Lower costs Ticket, travel, accomodation	Very flexible Free to explore different booths and seminars	Low visibility Hard to be recognised in the crowd	Simple No need to bring anything
Exhibitor	Higher costs Booth rental, promotional materials, staffing	Limited flexibility Required to stay at booth most of the time	Higher visibility Promotional material can attract visitors	More complex Need to prepare and bring booth materials

Source: [ProFound](#), 2024

Whether you are exhibiting or visiting, proper preparation is crucial when attending a trade fair. Start by selecting the right trade fair, determining your budget and planning your trip. Develop a sales and marketing strategy, set strategic goals and choose the right products to showcase. Bring all relevant product and company documentation and be ready to explain how your products differ from the competition. You should also set up meetings with potential buyers beforehand to increase your chances of making sales. Be aware that if you decide to exhibit at a trade fair, you need to spend significant time on practicalities, stand design and logistics.

During the trade fair, dress appropriately, be professional, and engage actively with visitors and exhibitors. Take notes, attend relevant seminars, and join study tours to gain industry insights and meet potential business contacts. After the trade fair, remember to follow up on leads by sending additional information or arranging meetings. Maintain connections with new contacts to foster future business opportunities.

In addition to trade fairs, there are other types of events that can help you to better understand the market and get in touch with potential buyers of your products. Examples include conferences and scientific events that honey importers attend to keep up to date with trends and innovations in beekeeping, processing and testing. One of the most important events in the world of bees and honey is the biennial congress of the [International Federation of Beekeepers' Associations](#) APIMONDIA. Recent congresses have been held in Canada (2019), Turkey (2022), Chile (2023) and the [next one will take place in Denmark \(2025\)](#). The event brings together honey buyers and sellers from many countries, as well as specialist symposia and trade association meetings.

Tips:

Plan to set aside the money required to attend trade fairs at least one year in advance. Attending trade fairs is expensive, especially for small to medium-sized suppliers in emerging market economies.

Make sure you can be found on the online platform of the trade fair. After COVID-19, many European trade fairs set up online versions of their trade fairs where you can find and connect with other exhibitors.

Ensure your promotional materials and company and product documentation are up to date and presentable before attending a trade show. This helps you create an excellent first impression.

Contact export-promoting agencies in your country to help you participate in trade fairs; their support can be financial and/or technical.

7. Invest in online marketing

Building a strong online presence is crucial to attracting potential buyers, increasing your visibility and winning more business in the long run. Investing in a professional website and active social media presence is essential to promoting your honey and gaining the trust of buyers. It is especially important for promoting organic and fair trade honey, as specialised buyers often seek detailed information about certifications and sustainable practices.

Online platforms and digital marketing strategies make it easy for customers to find your company. This allows you to reach out to and connect with potential buyers around the world. Investing in your online brand awareness is a worthwhile investment, especially if you are planning to enter foreign markets.

Your digital platforms should contain clear and important information about your business, such as contact details and offers for your potential buyers. Be sure to highlight your unique selling points, certifications and

production processes. Remember that your customers should be able to find everything they need on your website, as it serves as your business card.

Website

Websites are an essential part of your product marketing. Buyers associate high-quality websites with modern and professional organisations. Poorly managed websites can harm your business prospects.

In general, a good website should contain:

- A company profile with contact details and a [mission statement](#).
- A well-presented product range – ideally with product descriptions, specifications and pictures.
- A competitive advantage statement (e.g. quality specification, certifications or delivery reliability).
- Information on production, processing and facilities.
- Information on certifications and quality management systems.
- Information on sustainability practices and [Corporate Social Responsibility](#).

Content needs to be concise, well-structured and grammatically correct. Professional photographs of products, your team and production facilities can add a sense of credibility. Another great option is to add a video of the company and the products you supply. You can also include brochures, presentations and product catalogues on your website.

Also consider investing in a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) campaign to reach more of your target audience through the content of your website. SEO is a strategy that helps you to attract organic traffic. By using keywords and links strategically, you can end up in the top search engines and [improve your position in the search results lists](#).

If you have certified honey, make sure you are marketing it. Visit the website of [Zambezi Gold](#), a Zambian company owned by Forest Frutis Ltd, for an example of a professional-looking website for an organic honey exporter. This company is Africa's largest exporter of honey and has extensive experience in international markets, including Europe. The website clearly outlines the company's commitments, its product range, production methods and social efforts with communities. There is also an eye-catching video, 'From Hive to Table', which shows the journey of the honey produced, from harvesting to processing, in a transparent way. All this helps the company to gain the trust of potential buyers and position itself effectively.

Social Media

Social media is another way to connect with buyers. Social media provide a useful platform for posting company activity updates. European buyers may use online social networks to communicate with potential suppliers.

You need to be reachable and communicate professionally to attract and retain buyers' interest through social networks. Moreover, it is essential to have a professional profile that highlights your unique selling points and reliability. Being active by sharing relevant and engaging content, joining discussions, and showing a good understanding of the sector's needs can increase your visibility and attract potential buyers.

The most used social media in Europe include:

- [LinkedIn](#): European companies use LinkedIn to connect with potential suppliers, research their backgrounds and communicate. LinkedIn also serves as a platform for sharing industry insights and staying updated on market trends.
- [Facebook](#): European companies occasionally use Facebook for networking and finding new suppliers, but much less so than through LinkedIn.
- [Instagram](#): Buyers use Instagram similarly to Facebook; both platforms are more commonly used for Business-to-consumer promotion.

Tips:

Learn about [search engine optimisation](#) (SEO) to generate more traffic to your website. You can find helpful information on various [blogs](#) and websites. You can also find online courses on platforms such as [Udemy](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

If you do not have the resources in-house to improve your website, use websites like [Fiverr](#) and [Upwork](#) to hire this expertise at affordable rates.

Determine which social media platform you want to use, based, for example, on which platform(s) your (potential) buyers use. Create and regularly update social media accounts on platforms such as LinkedIn. You can also use social media to keep in touch with existing buyers and find out what your business partners or competitors are doing.

8. Consider international certifications and standards

If you want to export honey to Europe, it is very important to follow standards. It might also be beneficial to become certified. European buyers are very concerned about quality, safety and sustainability. Obtaining relevant certifications, such as organic, fair trade or other quality certifications, can increase the attractiveness of your honey and greatly improve your chances of success in the European market.

Certifications can help to differentiate your honey, especially in a crowded market such as Europe. Demonstrating that your honey meets international standards can attract buyers concerned about quality and sustainability. Many European buyers are concerned about the environment and ethical sourcing. Certifications such as organic, Fairtrade and Demeter show that your honey is produced in an environmentally and socially responsible way.

In addition, Europe has strict standards for ensuring food safety. Some well-known certifications such as FSC22000 show that your honey meets strict food safety and quality standards. Certifications can build confidence by showing buyers that you are a reliable supplier who can meet European requirements. This confidence is important because European buyers want to be sure about the products they buy. It is important to familiarise yourself with EU food safety and honey import regulations to ensure compliance and to obtain the most relevant certifications.

Figure 3: Common certifications for honey



Source: Various, 2024

However, certification can be costly, especially for small and medium-sized exporters. Thus, it might not be the best option for all suppliers. You can try to work with other exporters or local industry associations to apply for certification together and reduce costs. If certification is not an option for you, you can still adopt good beekeeping practices as defined in various international norms or standards.

Tip:

Look for grants, subsidies or financial assistance programmes available from government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international bodies. Many countries have programmes specifically designed to help small exporters.

9. Reach out to trade promotion organisations

Trade promotion agencies, embassies and chambers of commerce can be a valuable source of support and information when seeking buyers in Europe. These institutions offer many tools to help you access the European market, such as connecting you with potential buyers or supporting your participation in trade fairs. Signing up with in these agencies and participating in their programmes can help you gain valuable knowledge and information on how to access the European market and find buyers.

Today, there are multiple agencies and organisations that promote exports from developing countries; both European organisations and institutions from your own country. These agencies often offer market research, coaching programmes, training courses for exporters, and advice on buyer requirements, quality issues, legislative frameworks, certification and market trends, amongst other things. This information can be useful when choosing which buyers to target and how to approach them.

Moreover, these organisations offer valuable programmes and resources to exporters who want to connect with international buyers. Notice that they primarily target small and medium-sized enterprises. Trade promotion organisations often organise events to promote import and export, such as matchmaking programmes and trade missions where exporters can participate to connect with potential customers in target markets. At these events, you can identify importers and buyers that will become your future international trading partners and change the course of your business altogether! Since the import-export process is often associated with the good reputation of a country’s economy, authorities are likely to do their best to facilitate these processes and connect exporters with trusted importers.

Table 2: Examples of organisations with helpful export support programmes

Europe	Developing countries
Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI) - the Netherlands	Uganda Export Promotion Board (EUPB) - Uganda
Import Promotion Desk (IPD) - Germany	Argentine Investment and International Trade Agency - Argentina
Open Trade Gate Sweden (OTGS) - Sweden	New Zealand Trade and Enterprise NZTE - New Zealand
Swiss Import Promotion Programme (SIPPO) - Switzerland	Vietnam Trade Promotion Agency - Vietnam
International Trade Centre (ITC) - multilateral agency, headquartered in Switzerland	Tanzania Trade Development Authority - Tanzania
Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) - headquartered in the United Kingdom	Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (APEX-Brasil) - Brazil

Source: ProFound, 2024

Participating in export assistance programmes will not only help you navigate the complexities of exporting honey to Europe, but it will also allow you to expand your network, connect with other exporters and potential clients. Sometimes, the export assistance programmes may even offer financial support for companies. Be sure to check out the official websites of these institutions to identify and take advantage of all the opportunities they offer. You might be amazed to discover that there are plenty of events for import-export business that you can participate in.

Tips:

Visit events organised by trade development associations and meet with other exporters. Learn from their experience. Discuss and share experiences on trading channels, legislative requirements, buyer

requirements and logistics.

Connect with business support organisations and trade promotion associations in your home country or region.

Visit the [Eurochambres](#) website for a complete list of chambers of commerce in Europe. You must check the solvency of your potential customers through the Chambers of Commerce websites.

Check whether your country has an [EEN local point of contact](#). They can help you with advice, support and opportunities for international partnerships.

[ProFound – Advisers in Development](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

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