

Exporting poufs and beanbags to Europe

Last updated:

10 October 2018

Pouffes and beanbags are a growing market in Europe. Almost half of these imports come from developing countries. Beanbags are mainly a mid-market product, whereas pouffes can move into higher market segments. Design, flexibility and sustainable materials add value to your pouffes and beanbags. For furniture suppliers, pouffes and beanbags are good additions to an existing product range.

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1. Product description

Both the pouffe and the beanbag are examples of informal seating, used for relaxing. A pouffe is essentially a large hard cushion that may have an internal frame to give it more rigidity. When legs are added to the base for stability, it becomes a (foot)stool. A beanbag is a sealed bag containing synthetic pellets (the 'beans') that users can shape. Retailers classify them under small furniture or cushions and throws (within home textiles).

This study uses the following codes to indicate trade in pouffes and beanbags:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
9404 90	13 92 24 93	Articles of bedding/furnishing, not elsewhere specified, stuffed or internally fitted
9404 90	13 92 24 99	Articles of bedding/furnishing, not elsewhere specified, stuffed or internally fitted

Tip:

- For more information about (foot)stools, see our study on [stools and side tables](#).

Quality

Functionality

Pouffes and beanbags are for relaxing, where the former invites a more active posture and the latter supports any comfortable vertical or horizontal position. The pouffe is usually a more temporary seat, while the beanbag can even invite a short nap. Functionality in terms of ergonomically correct sitting or durability is not the prime aspect of these fun and decorative seats. The pouffe has additional functionality in doubling as a footstool or a side table.

Size

Pouffes can be round or square. Typical dimensions can be 35 cm in height and a diameter of 50 to 60 cm for the most common round type. Beanbags come in many shapes, from bag shapes to rounded shapes. Oversized ones can measure 200x120 cm, allowing fully stretched positions, but the average dimensions are between 70 and 90 cm in diameter.

Material

Pouffes are textile-based (cotton or combinations of natural materials and polyester) or leather-based (real or faux). Beanbag materials range from natural fibres such as cotton or leather to faux leather, furs and synthetic fibres, depending on price and outdoor or indoor use. The fillings of pouffes and beanbags are usually polystyrene beads or polyester, often recycled. Increasingly, other materials such as natural fibres are used for the fillings.

Design

Pouffes and beanbags each have a very different character. Pouffes are cosy, decorative items that blend in well with the rest of the interior. They are more a family buy. Beanbags are expressive, fun and stand out. They are especially suitable for a younger audience.

Right from the start the beanbag has had a rebellious character. It is designed to catch the eye and stand out in the interior. As such, it is large, amorphous and usually brightly coloured. The pouffe can be decorative, but usually matches the interior style. It is often trendy in its use of patterns or techniques. Pouffes can have different shapes, but the round and square forms dominate.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of pouffes and beanbags should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for pouffes and beanbags should include: producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin and 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, such as 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 pouffes and beanbags according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

Damage prevention

Properly packaging pouffes and beanbags minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should make sure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container. Most buyers prefer individual wrapping in paper or plastic bags, and then in cartons. They may also ask for shrink-wrapping to save container space.

Dimensions and weight

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Cartons are usually palletised for air or sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space. Sometimes, pouffes and beanbags are filled at the customer's end.

Cost reduction

Nesting or stacking the items inside the container reduces costs. While packing has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

Material

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

Consumer packaging

Importers don't usually require you to provide consumer packaging for pouffes and beanbags. Consumer packaging for pouffes and beanbags facilitates transport home in case of online buying. It usually comes in the form of a carton, which can be the original export one or a box provided by the retailer. Retailers usually wrap the item in an own (branded) box.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of pouffes and beanbags?

European imports of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing are growing. Nearly half of these imports come from developing countries. Europe's main importers of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing are Germany and the United Kingdom. The strong performance of products from developing countries makes them especially interesting target markets.

(!) Because no specific trade data are available for pouffes and beanbags, these statistics cover stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing.

Where is consumer demand located?

- European demand for stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 3.9%, it reached €2.6 billion in 2016.
- Demand is highest in the United Kingdom (€631 million), followed by France (€427 million) and Germany (€273 million).

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

- Europe's demand for stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing is significantly higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.
- European production of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 3.5%, it reached €2.0 billion in 2016.

- Poland is responsible for 19% of European production of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing, followed by the United Kingdom with 18%.

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

- European imports of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing increased from €2.0 billion in 2012 to €2.5 billion in 2016. This corresponds to an average annual growth rate of 5.4%.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- With €1.1 billion, developing countries account for 45% of European stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing imports. This share is predicted to stay fairly stable in the coming years.
- In reality, many of the exports of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing from Western European countries are re-exports of products manufactured in developing countries.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing, with €550 million in 2016. The United Kingdom follows at some distance with €334 million.
- When it comes to imports from developing countries, these countries are also leading – especially the United Kingdom, which sources 76% of its of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing imports from developing countries!
- The strong performance of developing country suppliers in the United Kingdom is evidenced further by a €62 million increase between 2012 and 2016.
- China is Europe's main stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing supplier, with 34% in 2016. Other leading developing country suppliers are India (4.4%), Turkey (1.4%) and Pakistan (1.3%).

Tips:

- Study your options in Germany and the United Kingdom. Their strong imports of products from developing countries make them especially interesting markets.
- Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as India, Turkey and Pakistan. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

What role do exports play in supplying European demand?

- European exports of stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing consist mainly of trade within Europe.
- Poland (€382 million) is Europe's leading stuffed or internally fitted articles of bedding/furnishing exporter, followed at a distance by Germany (€276 million).

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.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for pouffes and beanbags?

Flexibility and the small urban home

A key trend in home decoration is consumers wanting flexible spaces in the home. The kitchen is not only for cooking and eating, but also for studying, watching TV, gaming or just lazing about. Gradually, the rooms in the house are losing their set uses and becoming spaces with several possible functions. Pouffes and beanbags can cater to that need by being portable and functioning as a seat, side table, footstool or floor cushion. This makes them increasingly popular.

In addition, urban homes are small and space is a precious commodity. Side furniture such as beanbags and pouffes is therefore a welcome alternative to chunky chairs or tables.

Tips:

- If your background is in home textiles, with a fabric or leather specialisation, you can add pouffes or beanbags to your offer. Focus on pouffes without inner frames and consider filling them with leftover fabrics.
- If you are from a furniture background, especially with a specialisation in upholstery, you can extend your range with foam-filled pouffes.
- Offer buyers choice in beanbags and pouffes. If you specialise in just one of these items, offer choice in terms of colour, decoration, dimension and/or shape.
- To add multi-functionality, offer pouffes with inner storage space or pouffes that can fold out as seats for two or mattresses.

Fun

When it comes to interior products, one of the most powerful emotions in European consumer buying behaviour is humour. Pouffes and (especially) beanbags are fun items. They offer informal, decorative seating and as such represent a counterpoint to serious, functional furniture such as dining chairs or tables.

Consider the following:

- Odd or unexpected shapes (for example balls or twisted shapes)
- Figurative designs (such as a jigsaw puzzle, pebble or rugby ball)
- Trompe l'oeil effects
- Exaggeration (for instance a luxury beanbag or a pouffe with gold foil)

Tip:

- Add humour to your pouffes and beanbags.

The natural and the handmade

Today's consumers have lost touch with nature and with crafts, leading them to appreciate natural materials and authentic techniques. They take pride in knowing how the product was made. As such, information about

your techniques and materials adds value.

Materials other than textiles or leather are considered attractive alternatives. Pouffes are increasingly made of materials like cork, water hyacinth, cane, rattan, or (faux) fur. Techniques such as knitting, crocheting, felting, leather padding, embroidering, cross-stitching and tie-dyeing illustrate the popularity of hand-made.

Tips:

- Apply special techniques and materials.
- Communicate this through the design and in your marketing communication.

People and planet

Pouffes and beanbags lend themselves well for socially and environmentally friendly concepts. Although their foam and pellet fillings may not contribute to a clean planet, alternatives are being developed when it comes to recycling, reuse and use of leftover materials, both of the inner and outer materials.

Fair trade concepts have traditionally been strong in side furniture such as pouffes, especially concepts with a textile-based background. Ethnic influences on pouffes in the form of patterns or fabrics, typically used in fair trade production, also make good highlights.

Tips:

- Use materials that are local, eco-friendly, or recycled. Produce effectively and cleanly, pack well to reduce transport space, and help the consumer dispose of your product sustainably.
- Make your pouffes and beanbags last longer by adding removable covers. This makes them washable and allows consumers to keep the inner core when they want new colours or designs.
- Consider fair trade certification or take other people-friendly measures.
- For more information, see our special study about [sustainability](#).

Ever-segmenting markets

The pouffe fits every consumer in the low, mid and higher segments, whilst the beanbag mostly appeals to the young (at heart). Other available consumer types include children (bedroom decoration), [pets \(a booming market in home decoration\)](#) and students. The corporate market has also opened up for beanbags and pouffes. Such side furniture is ideal for waiting areas in offices, hotels, hospitals, for instance.

In addition, health claims being made about the positive impact on posture and the prevention of lower back pain, relieving stress. The pouffe is already widely embraced in spiritual contexts (such as yoga), so a wellness market may also be available for this product group. Finally, there is an outdoor segment available, with pouffes and beanbags both coming in weatherproof versions.

Tips:

- Consider your current end consumer base and see if any other consumer types may match yours enough to incorporate these products into your offer.
- Communicate the specific benefits of your products well, to help your distribution partners provide a convincing offer downstream. Don't make claims that cannot be supported.

- Consider entering the project (or corporate) market. It has a different cycle and demands a specific marketing mix, but it is booming, also for side furniture.

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

4. What requirements should pouffes and beanbags 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 pouffes and beanbags. 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.

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](#).

Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of arsenic and creosotes as wood preservatives.

Tip:

- 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](#).

Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Timber Regulation

The [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) restrict the international trade in specimens of wild animals, plants and derived wildlife products. This is the European Union's strict implementation of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES). According to the [Timber Regulation](#), you must prove any timber used was harvested legally. This also applies to any wooden structuring inside pouffes. Products with a [FLEGT](#) or [CITES](#) license comply with the Timber Regulation.

Tips:

- For more information, see the [Reference Guide to the Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Timber Regulation](#).
- For more information on CITES permits, you can contact your [National CITES Management Authority](#).
- For more information about [FLEGT licensing](#), see the [FLEGT licence information point](#).

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](#).

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 pouffes and beanbags 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.

FSC certification

[FSC](#) (Forest Stewardship Council) certification is the most common label for sustainable wooden products, including wooden frames. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular in Western European markets.

Tip:

- For more information, see the [three steps towards FSC certification](#).

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

5. What competition do you face on the European pouffes and beanbags market?

The competition for pouffes and beanbags does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

6. Through what channels can you put pouffes and beanbags on the European market?

The market channels and segments for pouffes and beanbags do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

Market channels

Although pouffes are carried by more distributors than beanbags, almost any type of reseller can carry them. This ranges from Do-It-Yourself outlets and garden centres to furniture specialists, department stores and boutiques. This type of informal furniture has also become 'lifestyle', meaning it is no longer merely the domain of furniture specialists. It now also forms part of concepts that bring almost anything in the home under one brand, one roof, one style.

This has increased the significance of importer-wholesalers, who create and import coherent home collections for their network of retailers. It makes pouffes in particular one of the most intensively distributed and competitive items in the home decoration sector.

E-commerce

E-commerce in home decoration 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 decoration items. Relatively lightweight items like pouffes and beanbags are especially suitable for this. 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.

- [AMUSF](#): Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers
- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [EFIC](#): European Furniture Industries Confederation
- [FENA](#): European Federation for Furniture Retailers
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main) and September
- [Tendance](#), Frankfurt, August
- [UEA](#): European Furniture Manufacturers Federation

Market segments

The market for pouffes and beanbags can be segmented according to type of use (including in corporate settings), type of consumer (even pets) and space (indoor/outdoor). Beanbags are essentially a mid-market product without much of a top end, whereas pouffes can span the entire width of low, middle and premium.

A pouffe generally blends in with the interior decoration style and moves around the house as a convenient functional and decorative accessory. It hardly ever becomes an eye-catcher in itself.

A pouffe moves to premium when luxury materials are used and when it becomes part of a range of top-end, branded furniture pieces with a clear designer signature. Since pouffes have a much wider reach on the market, they are your best bet. Mid-mid to mid-high offers good opportunities.

Beanbags remain firmly mid-end, although with some brands playing a role, they can move to mid-high. They are for the young, and disposable incomes reserved for interior decoration usually are not that high yet in this target group. Beanbags are a much harder group for you to enter, due to the dominance of a few strong brands and the more limited spread on the market.

7. What are the end-market prices for pouffes and beanbags?

In the lower and middle segments, pouffes and beanbags are kept affordable and within the same price bracket because they are in the same product category (relaxed, informal seating). Because beanbags cater to a younger customer, they don't have a premium end that is 'designer' or extremely exclusive, whereas pouffes do. Therefore, prices diverge at this level: pouffes can be sold for around €1,000 when made of premium

materials, by renowned designers for premium brands.

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

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of pouffes and beanbags

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
Pouffes	Under €60	€60-€150	Up to €1,000
Beanbags	Under €60	€60-€150	Up to €350

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price.

Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your pouffes and beanbags. Wholesalers account for a further 100% mark-up. Finally, retailers may add another 100-150% to the price.


Tips:

- The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your pouffes and beanbags 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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