

Exporting rocking chairs to Europe

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The European market for rocking chairs is growing. Although Chinese manufacturers dominate the market, there are also interesting opportunities for exporters from other developing countries. As eye-catching furniture pieces, rocking chairs are mainly found in the middle market, but can move into the premium segment too. Design and craftsmanship are the main distinguishing features in rocking chairs, but values related to ergonomics and sustainability are also increasingly important.

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1. Product description

Rocking chairs range under indoor furniture and are usually grouped with easy chairs. Sometimes they are also included in garden furniture, if they form part of collections of outdoor seating. Rocking chairs are a specific type of informal or relaxed seating, with curved legs or 'rockers' underneath the chair.

This study uses the following codes to indicate trade in easy chairs:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
9401 51	31001230	Seats made of bamboo or rattan
9401 59	31001230	Seats made of cane, osier or similar materials
9401 61	31001250	Seats with wooden frames, upholstered, not elsewhere specified
9401 69	31001290	Seats with wooden frames, not elsewhere specified

9401 71	31001170	Seats with metal frames, upholstered, not elsewhere specified (excluding medical, surgical, dental or veterinary chairs)
9401 79	31001190	Seats with metal frames, not elsewhere specified (excluding medical, surgical, dental or veterinary chairs)
9401 80	31001300	Seats not elsewhere specified (excluding medical, surgical, dental or veterinary chairs)

Quality

Functionality

Rocking chairs are mainly for relaxing, either actively (such as reading, watching television) or passively (dozing off). The rocking motion, achieved by the horizontally curved legs or 'rockers', creates relaxation. Unlike easy chairs, rocking chairs are not dedicated to extreme comfort through for example upholstery, arm and foot support, or a high and reclining back. However, these features can be added for extra functionality.

Size

Typical dimensions for rocking chairs are similar to those of easy chairs, with some extra height for the rockers. They are usually around 95 cm high x 75 cm wide x 90 cm deep, depending on the design of the chair.

Material

Rocking chairs come in any material, such as wood, metal or synthetic materials. The frame and seat of a rocking chair can be made of metal, wood, synthetic materials, or combinations. The rockers, seat, legs and rockers can be a whole (for example from one mould) or be made of different materials (even with detachable rockers). Rocking chairs for outdoor use must be made of weatherproof materials.

Design

The look of a rocking chair is its main selling point. Rocking chairs are fun items, fun to use and fun to see! Today's designers are therefore making a serious effort to create rocking chairs that are eye-catchers for any room in the home. Design focuses on all design aspects: shape, material use, colour and technical prowess. Using retro styles can also make rocking chairs nostalgic, a central value in mid-market segments.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of chairs should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for rocking chairs 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 chairs 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 chairs 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. Some buyers prefer chairs to be crated, others accept wrapping in corrugated cardboard without an outer carton.

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. Boxes or crates are usually palletised for sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space.

Cost reduction

Chairs can take up much container space. Nesting, stacking or flat-packing them inside the container reduces costs. While packaging 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 packaging materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

Mould prevention

Wooden furniture can mould or crack, so you need to dry the wood properly after production. Condensation inside the container during transport can cause mould because of humid air becoming colder at night and warmer during the day. You need proper air ventilation inside the container to prevent this. Before shipment, you must inspect containers for air holes. You can also place products to reduce humidity amongst the cargo. Make sure to follow the importer's instructions.

Consumer packaging

Consumer packaging for rocking chairs should facilitate transport home from the retailer. It usually comes in the form of a carton, which can be the original export packaging or a box provided by the retailer.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of rocking chairs?

Europe's chair imports are expected to continue increasing, with a substantial share sourced from developing countries. As Europe's main importers of chairs, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands are interesting focus markets. While China is Europe's leading supplier, Eastern European countries like Poland are also becoming strong competitors.

(!) Because no specific trade data are available for rocking chairs, these statistics cover chairs in general.

Where is consumer demand located?

- European demand for chairs increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 1.9%, it reached €12 billion in 2016.
- Demand is highest in the United Kingdom (€2.9 billion), followed by Germany (€2.1 billion) and France (€1.7 billion).

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

- Europe's demand for chairs is slightly higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.
- European production of chairs also increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 3.3%, it reached €11 billion in 2016.
- Italy and Poland are responsible for 22% of European chair production each.
- While Italian production slightly decreased between 2012 and 2016, Polish production increased at an impressive average annual rate of 12%.
- Because upholstering is traditionally a European speciality, upholstered easy chairs are often still manufactured in Europe.

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

- European imports of chairs increased from €8.8 billion in 2012 to €11 billion in 2016. This corresponds to an average annual growth rate of 4.6%.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- With €2.2 billion, developing countries account for 42% of European chair imports. This share is predicted to stay fairly stable in the coming years.
- In reality, many of the exports of chairs from Western European countries are re-exports of products manufactured in developing countries.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of chairs by far, with €2.7 billion in 2016. France (€1.6 billion) and the United Kingdom (€1.5 billion) follow.
- When it comes to imports from developing countries, however, the United Kingdom leads with €996 million. This is $\frac{2}{3}$ of its total chair imports!
- The strong performance of developing country chair suppliers in the United Kingdom is evidenced further by a €234 million increase between 2012 and 2016. The other main importing countries also increased their chair imports from developing countries, especially Germany (€105 million) and the Netherlands (€68 million).
- Spain and Poland also source about $\frac{2}{3}$ of their chair imports from developing countries. Between 2012 and 2016, they increased these imports by €69 million and €75 million respectively.
- China dominates European chair imports, with 34% in 2016. Other leading developing country suppliers are Vietnam (3.5%) and Indonesia (1.4%).
- Interestingly, Eastern European countries are also performing strongly as suppliers. Poland is Europe's leading chair supplier after China with 18%. Romania and Hungary supply a further 4.1% and 1.7%. Due to their relatively cheap production, these countries are able to compete strongly against you.

Tips:

- Study your options in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Their strong imports of products from developing countries make the United Kingdom and the Netherlands especially interesting markets. Considerable parts of these imports are re-exported to other European destinations, as this is where the big furniture traders are active. In other words: while the Netherlands itself is a small market for furniture, Dutch traders take their stock all over Europe.
- Their growing market for chairs from developing countries also makes Spain and Poland promising.
- Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as Vietnam and Indonesia. 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 chairs consist mainly of trade within Europe.
- Italy (€2.3 billion) is Europe's leading chair exporter, followed by Poland (€2.1 billion).

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 home decoration 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 rocking chairs?

The joy of creating

Right from the start, the rocking chair has been a masterpiece of craftsmanship: bending solid wood into amazing curves. The first commercial rocking chair was handmade from natural materials. This makes the handmade segment your traditional domain.

Craftsmanship has regained its rightful status as a prime form of added value for furniture. Rocking chairs are a focal point in the home, making consumers appreciative of items made with care. Innovative or time-honoured techniques (either industrial or manual, or a combination), visible construction or novel shapes can make your design stand out.

Tips:

- Showcase your craftsmanship in the designs of your rocking chairs.
- Be innovative in your use of materials and techniques.

Consumers want it their own way

A general trend in furniture is that consumers want to participate in the creation of their own product, at the very least by having options to choose from. This way, they can differentiate themselves from 'the mass' and express their identity.

Although rocking chairs aren't suitable for consumers assembling their own product, they can come with options – for example in terms of colour and material, such as different wood types. From a manufacturer's point of view, the rocking chair usually forms part of a collection of easy chairs rather than being a stand-alone product. In this context, manufacturers could give consumers the option of a rocker or a normal chair in one style.

Recent developments have seen the rocking chair treated as a modular system. A limited number of seats can be attached to an endless number of legs, in various styles, materials and sizes.

Tips:

- Offer choice, e.g. different wood types, different colours, or designs with and without arm rests.

- Consider ways to let your end consumer follow the production of their chair, e.g. with visualised track-and-trace options online, or by supplying your importer with pictures of the production process.
- Because a collection of chairs offered by a retailer or wholesaler usually only includes one rocking chair, develop your rocking chair as part of a wider collection of chairs, preferably in a coherent style.

Garden rockers

An ongoing trend is of the garden becoming an extended living room, in terms of style and decoration effort. The rocking chair has also made it outdoors, both in its usual form and in various hanging options resembling giant swings. It offers an additional option for lounging in the garden, next to deck chairs and horizontal loungers. Outdoor rockers are usually quite distinct from indoor ones, due to the use of weather-resistant materials. Some can be used both indoors and outdoors.

Tips:

- Consider the garden as a target market. Be aware that demands on the durability of your chairs are higher for outdoor use.
- Explore the possibility to cross over between indoor and outdoor furniture. A single product may have a dual purpose and appeal to both segments at once, either as is or with slight adaptations.
- Develop weather-resistant options, or use materials that can be used both inside and outside the home.
- For more information, see our special study on the [home decoration](#) for gardens.

Rock yourself healthy

There is a widespread drive among European consumers to improve themselves. This is reflected in a desire for better health, greater knowledge and the development of new skills. The hazards of sitting down all day on office jobs have resulted in various solutions. One involves a rocking chair that rocks while you sit on it, unless you actively use your lower torso muscles to keep straight. This ensures better posture. This trend is predicted to grow, especially in office furniture.

Most of the furniture in this segment is minimalist and lacks 'flavour'. Adding authenticity and warmth with the help of solutions and styles from your culture may give you a competitive advantage.

Tips:

- Study your options in the health-driven (office) furniture segment.
- Add touches from your culture to make your chairs stand out.

Sustainable solutions

In line with this trend to live a better life, consumers are developing greater awareness of and care for people and the planet. They are increasingly making 'green' solutions a reason for buying. This has led to an increased use of sustainable materials, clean processes, as well as recycling, re-use and fair trade options.

Being socially and environmentally friendly has become a source of differentiation and status for the modern consumer. Especially for an identity purchase such as the rocking chair, green values add value.

Tips:

- Manufacture your rockers from sustainable wood types, i.e. wood that is traceable and preferably certified.
- Avoid unsustainable processes in your upholstery and finishing.
- Clearly communicate your chairs' sustainable properties to achieve differentiation.
- For more information, see our special study about [sustainability](#).

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

4. What requirements should rocking chairs 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 rocking chairs. 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 wooden chairs. 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 chairs 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 chairs. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular on 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 rocking chairs market?

The competition for easy chairs 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 rocking chairs on the European market?

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

Market channels

Rocking chairs are now more broadly distributed in Europe than ever. Specialist furniture retailers have traditionally dominated the trade. This is changing because furniture is becoming more associated with lifestyle. The rocking chair is becoming part of a wider collection of (usually branded) home decoration in one style. This increases the significance of importer-wholesalers, who create coherent collections for retailers. To keep pace with this development, rocking chairs can play a role in any home collection as stand-alone items.

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. Rocking chairs form no exception, despite their bulky size and the fact that they are usually not flat-packed.

When product specifications are clear (see above), visual information is attractive, and service levels are high enough, European consumers are not afraid to purchase their rocking chair online. However, thus far they have usually done so from a national retail brand rather than from across the border. 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
- [AMUSF](#), Association of Master Upholsterers & Soft Furnishers
- [EFIC](#), European Furniture Industries Confederation
- [FENA](#), European Federation of Furniture Retailers
- [ICFA](#), International Casual Furnishings Association
- [IMM](#), Cologne, January
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main) and September
- [UEA](#), European Furniture Manufacturers Federation

Market segments

The market for rocking chairs can be segmented according to type of use (including wellness, applications in office settings), type of consumer, and space (indoor/outdoor).

Rocking chairs are stand-alone items and eye-catchers in the indoor and outdoor environment. They are found particularly in the middle to higher segments; the lower end is rather thin. Mid-market rocking chairs are generally playful, accessible and trendy, both indoor and outdoor. They can go truly 'statement' when craftsmanship and design are matched with brand stories. This takes the rocking chair to premium segments, both indoor and outdoor.

Your best opportunities are in the middle and higher segments of the mid-market, to support the positioning of your broader furniture collection.

7. What are the end-market prices for rocking chairs?

The prices for rocking chairs depend on a combination of material and design. Indoor rocking chairs are generally somewhat less price-sensitive than outdoor ones, where consumers are less used to spending much on furniture.

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

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of easy chairs

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
Rocking chairs	Up to €200	€200-€1,000	€1,000 onwards

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 chairs. 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 chairs 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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