



Export to the United Kingdom

Choosing your export market



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1. General information

Political landscape

- With the victory of the Labour Party under the leadership of Keir Starmer fourteen years of Conservative rule came to an end, marking a clear break in political style. The new government seeks to present itself as a stable and pragmatic administration, aiming to repair the economic and social damage of previous years. However, Labour is facing strong economic headwinds and geopolitical uncertainties, making it difficult to deliver tangible improvements quickly.
- Economically, Labour inherited a country plagued by chronic underinvestment, high public debt, and low productivity. To address this, the government is focusing on economic growth and investment, although critics consider its policies inconsistent and lacking overall coherence. On one hand, additional funding is being allocated to the NHS and other public services that have been under pressure for years. On the other hand, targeted tax increases are being introduced that mainly affect non-Labour voters, such as higher employer contributions, VAT on private schools, and a stricter inheritance tax. These measures aim to close acute gaps in public finances without resorting to further cuts or new taxes in the short term.
- Nevertheless, economic growth remains sluggish, increasing political pressure on Starmer. One alternative is targeted deregulation, particularly in the technology and energy sectors, to give businesses more breathing room and attract investment. In doing so, the government seeks to strike a balance between social redistribution and maintaining an attractive investment climate.
- In addition to internal challenges, the economic situation is further complicated by international geopolitical tensions. The threat of a global trade war under a new Trump administration is of particular concern to the UK, which relies heavily on trade with both the US and the EU. Moreover, the ongoing war in Ukraine and the US's reluctance to provide military guarantees increases pressure on Europe—and thus also on the UK—to play a larger role in defence and geopolitical stability. Starmer is attempting to play a bridging role by maintaining close relations with both the US and the EU, hoping to limit economic damage and reposition the UK as a diplomatic heavyweight post-Brexit.
- Another key priority for the government is technological development, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). The UK aims to establish itself as a global leader in AI and is investing heavily in the sector. Labour is trying to strike a middle ground between the US's fully deregulated approach and the EU's focus on strict regulation. By positioning itself as a balanced regulator, the UK hopes to attract foreign investment and benefit from the AI revolution.
- Finally, it is worth noting that the path to "net zero" has been partially abandoned, with sustainable initiatives partially set aside in favour of economic growth.

Economics

- **Exchange Rates:** Continuous changes in the exchange rates between the Euro and the British Pound can directly impact the competitiveness of European exports in the UK market.



- **Trade Agreements:** The UK signed a trade agreement with the EU after Brexit. The deal prevented any tariffs and quotas being introduced, which would have made it more expensive to trade goods between the two partners. As the UK no longer must follow EU rules on product standards, new checks have been introduced. The deal also does not eliminate the possibility of tariffs in future.
- **Competitive Market:** Although outside the EU, the UK is still a very competitive market, especially in the areas of food and drinks, fashion, real estate, financial services, and technology. The capital involved to maintain the competition high is substantial thanks to very lucrative investors that invest millions in products and services and beat the competition. However, with the right business plan and product, the UK market can also be very welcoming, informative, and accessible. Exporters, if established in the UK, can access a variety of grants and incentives which will support the first years of business development.

Legal

- **Regulatory Environment:** The impact of Brexit on the UK regulatory framework has contributed to making the regulatory system more complex than it used to be before Brexit. Industries that require a license to practice services in a country (such as audiovisual, insurance, legal) now must apply for a license if they want to work in the UK.



2. Additional indicators

Economic indicators

Find the main socio-economic indicators for this country, as well as its trade with Brussels and Belgium, in the publication "[Brussels and the world – Country statistics](#)" on analytics.brussels, hub.brussels' online data library.

The "[Brussels and the world - General statistics](#)" publication also provides data on trade between the Brussels-Capital Region and the rest of the world, by continent and by major world region. The same type of data is also available for the various regions of Belgium, as well as for Belgium as a whole.

Social and environmental indicators

If you'd like to know where your country stands in terms of social, environmental and economic issues, access a series of [composite indicators from the European Commission](#), structured according to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals¹ and the European Commission's 6 priority policy areas².

Free trade agreements

European agreements have a major impact on market accessibility and trade with certain countries. The links below, published by the European Commission, will provide you with all the information you need on free trade agreements and trade barriers. Existing agreements, those that have not yet been ratified and those that are expected to be ratified, can be consulted here:

- [Free trade agreements](#)
- [Trade barriers](#)

Additional information

The World Bank is an international organization that collects statistics on economic and social factors, institutions, and environmental issues in nearly all countries worldwide. These indicators, available from 1960 to the present, provide reliable information on population, development, and sustainability. (Not all data is available up to the most recent year for every country.) The database also allows countries to be compared.

- [World Bank indicators](#)

¹No poverty, Zero hunger, Good health and well-being, Quality education, Gender equality, Clean water and sanitation, Clean and affordable energy, Decent work and economic growth, Industry, innovation and infrastructure, Reduced inequalities, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable consumption and production, Measures to combat climate change, Water life, Land life, Peace, justice and effective institutions, Partnerships to achieve the goals.

² A green pact for Europe, An economy serving people, A Europe fit for the digital age, A stronger Europe on the world stage, Promoting our European way of life, A new impetus for European democracy.



3. On-site: a step-by-step guide

First contacts

Prospecting

- Market access is generally facilitated by our team providing lists of contacts (suppliers, distributors, F&B buyers) depending on the client's requests. Exporters can use these data lists to reach out to their preferred contacts and initiate a first contact.
- Another way to enter the market is for our delegates to attend UK events and exhibit with a stand.
- It is generally advisable to initiate a first contact via email, with an introduction and supporting material. The next step for exporters is then to set up a virtual or face-to-face meeting with the contact and allowing them to select the best time for the meeting.
- Fast email responses are very appreciated in the UK, especially in London. This contributes to the start of an efficient and respectful relationship. Delayed responses, emails not well constructed and without a signature might be perceived as not trustworthy.

Exporting

General situation

Since the UK does is no part of the European customs union anymore, new, and ever-changing export requirements are in place. In sum, export to the UK remains very possible, but the new regulations and requirements to export to the UK augment the administrative burden. To be informed of all procedures and requirements, it's recommended to contact the Brussels Representative in London to discuss the latest developments.

Payments

- With London being one of the World Capital of financial services, payments in the UK are fast, digital and contract terms (although they can require long periods, are very transparent). Generally business contracts information is also available on the business website and provides details on how to manage the process.

Company types

- In the UK most of the companies are limited liability companies, associations or not for profit organisations.

Support and subsidies

- The UK government provides an online platform to select the type of funding by sector, business stage, number of employees and Region. The majority of the grants are available for companies established in the UK.
- The UK does not offer subsidies to international exporters; however, each UK region manages its own exporter support. More often the support is provided in the form of training and market entry information.
- The BLCC (Belgian Luxembourg Chambre of Commerce in Great Britain) can help with a "light" solution to set-up an entity in the UK through their structure to obtain a legal address in the UK. The BLCC can then create your local VAT number and EORI



number. This is normally done in a 6-12 week period. The BLCC can also do your periodic tax returns and -if this ever becomes necessary- payroll for local staff.

- Entities such as Innovate UK, TechUK and London & Partners can accompany established UK companies and UK start-ups to international trade events and help them enter both the UK and international markets.

Discover all subsidies for Brussels businesses on the Brussels Economy and Employment website.

Interesting markets for a first export

Whilst the UK remains an interesting export market for high quality products, it's worth mentioning it's a third country, and customs formalities apply. For a first-time export it's recommended to export to an EU country that does not require any customs formalities.

Important markets

- Food & beverage

Belgium, and Brussels, have high-end products to offer the UK and the luxury London market (chocolate, beer, vegan, organic,...).

- Sustainable construction

Brussels expertise sectors to export.

- Technology

Legal, Finance, Government, Property, Sport,...

Calendar Trade shows

- This website shows Trade Fairs in London, UK (and other locations): www.tradefairdates.com/London-X327-S1-Fairs-London.html
- Overview of 10 major Trade Shows in London for 2025 below (for more information, or personal enquiries about other sectors contact london@hub.brussels). In general, the dates are every year around the same period and location is mostly Excel or Olympia in London.

*4-6 MARCH 2025 @ Excel London – **Future Build** – Sector Construction – [website](#)*

*12-13 MARCH 2025 @ Excel London – **Tech Show** – Sector Technology – [website](#)*

*29-30 APRIL 2025 @ Olympia London – **Innovation Zero** – ALL Sectors (Infrastructure, Energy, Transport, Agriculture, Finance, BioTech,...) – [Website](#)*

*4 12-13 MAY 2025 @ Excel London – **NOPEX** (Natural Organic Products Expo) – Sector Beauty & Food – [Website](#)*

*7-9 MAY 2025 @ Excel London – **UK construction week** – Sector Construction – [Website](#)*

*9-13 JUNE 2025 @ Olympia London – **London Tech Week** – Sector Technology – [Website](#)*

*18-19 JUNE 2025 @ Excel London – **MOVE** – Sector Mobility Transport – [Website](#)*

*9-10 SEPTEMBER 2025 @ Olympia London – **Speciality & Fine Food Fair** – Sector Food – [Website](#)*

*24-25 SEPTEMBER 2025 @ Excel London - **Lunch!2024 + Casual Dining 2024** – Sector Food - [Website](#)*

*15-16 OCTOBER 2025 @ Excel London - **London Packaging Week** – Sector Food – [Website](#)*



4. Business culture

Communication

- As mentioned previously, emails and digital first contact are very much appreciated in the UK. Calls and in person approach are often rushed and not well formulated to take the time to discuss the concept of the product that the company wishes to sell. Through emails, businesses have the time to consult the content of the email, read through the supporting material provided and take the right time for them to respond. It is very likely that the first contact will guarantee a response from the business, but exporters should follow up and show genuine interest in having a conversation with the party involved.
- British like to be always polite, in both writing and personal communication. The ideal email should be well constructed, from a cordial introduction to an elegant closure. Being concise and clear is advisable as often they do not have a lot of time to read emails from new contacts. Suggesting a follow up meeting is very helpful and allows businesses to get to know the exporter better and verify credibility of the product or service that the exporter wants to sell. British are generally responsive to emails, even if they have to decline the offer, they will always reply politely.

Attire

- Dress code is generally smart-casual.

Negotiating

- Contacts with a Manager title and above are generally the ones that can make decisions or influence decisions for the business. The business hierarchy varies depending on the type of company, however it is generally more horizontally oriented rather than vertically oriented, compared to countries like Italy and Spain. This is also very advantageous as it means that more people in the business can be involved in making decisions or suggesting decisions to the CEO or Head of department and therefore the exporters can make different attempts to reach out to the company.
- Local partners can be very helpful intermediaries to enter the market and connect exporters with the correct network of contacts.

What are the public holidays?

- School holidays are the only times where British businesses might be slow in responding, summer holidays are not generally a business impediment and conversation can easily happen in August (which is often the month when most European businesses are not easily reachable). Christmas and New Year also reduced business activity but it is generally a 2 week max break.



5. What can we do for you?

Local contact points

The General delegates and local representatives employed by hub.brussels are official representatives of the Brussels Government abroad, they support Brussels companies that want to export, and search and prospect for new investors.

They have the information, expertise and in-depth knowledge about the specifics of different foreign markets. Based on that knowledge, they help to refine and fine-tune your export plans, with advice on regulations, competition, market entry conditions, permits, etc. Furthermore, they can support you with your questions regarding exports, certain sectors within the jurisdiction, contacts with intermediaries, business culture, and much more.



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Key addresses

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Useful websites to delve into

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/business/finance-support>
<https://www.gov.uk/business-finance-support>
<https://www.gov.uk/corporation-tax>
<https://www.gov.uk/capital-allowances>
<https://www.gov.uk/browse/business/setting-up>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/bulletins/uktrade/February202>

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<https://www.scottish-enterprise.com/support-for-businesses/exports-and-international-markets>
<https://www.investni.com/support-for-business/thinking-about-exporting>
<https://businesswales.gov.wales/export/overseas-events>
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