

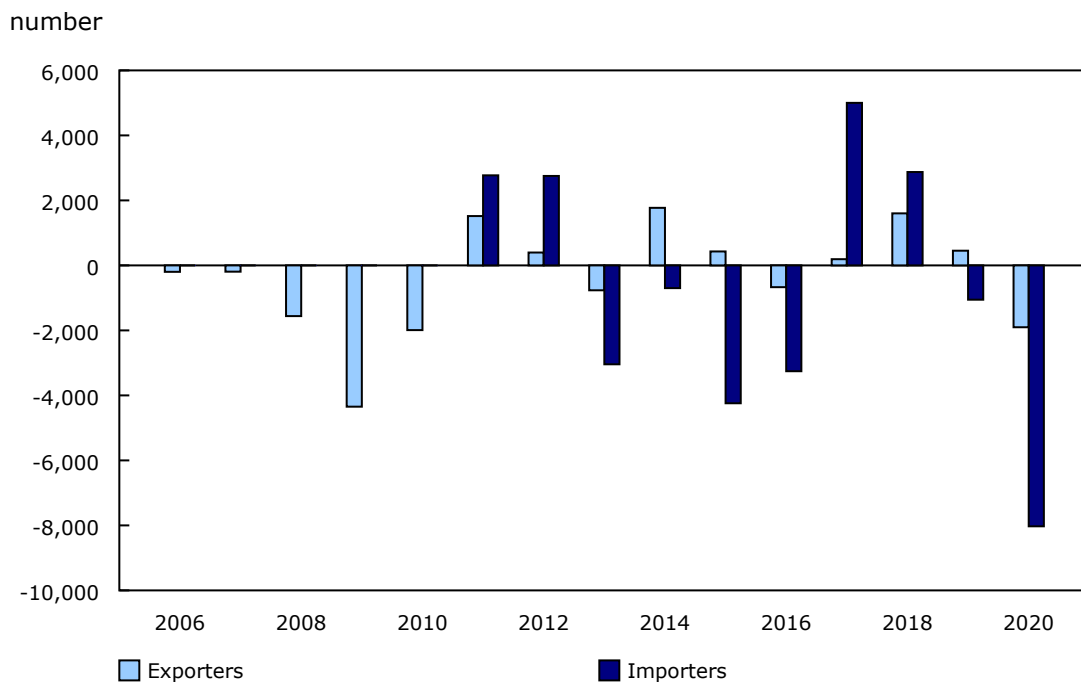
Trade by exporter and importer characteristics: Goods, 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, May 18, 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Canadian businesses involved in international trade in goods activity in 2020. The number of Canadian enterprises exporting goods in 2020 declined by 4.2% compared with 2019, to 43,630. Meanwhile, the number of importing enterprises fell by 4.9% to a record low of 155,470, the largest annual decline since 2010 (the earliest year for which data are available).

The effects of the pandemic on Canadian exporters in 2020 were not as pronounced as those observed in 2009, during the most recent major economic downturn. The decline in the number of exporters was much higher in 2009, at 9.3%, compared with a 4.2% decrease in 2020. The value of exports was also more negatively impacted in 2009 than in 2020.

Chart 1
Year-over-year change in number of exporters and importers



.. not available for a specific reference period

Note(s): Data for the number of importers are not available for the reference years 2005 to 2009.

Source(s): Tables [12-10-0091-01](#) and [12-10-0071-01](#).

Two-way traders are responsible for most of the decline in the value of total merchandise trade

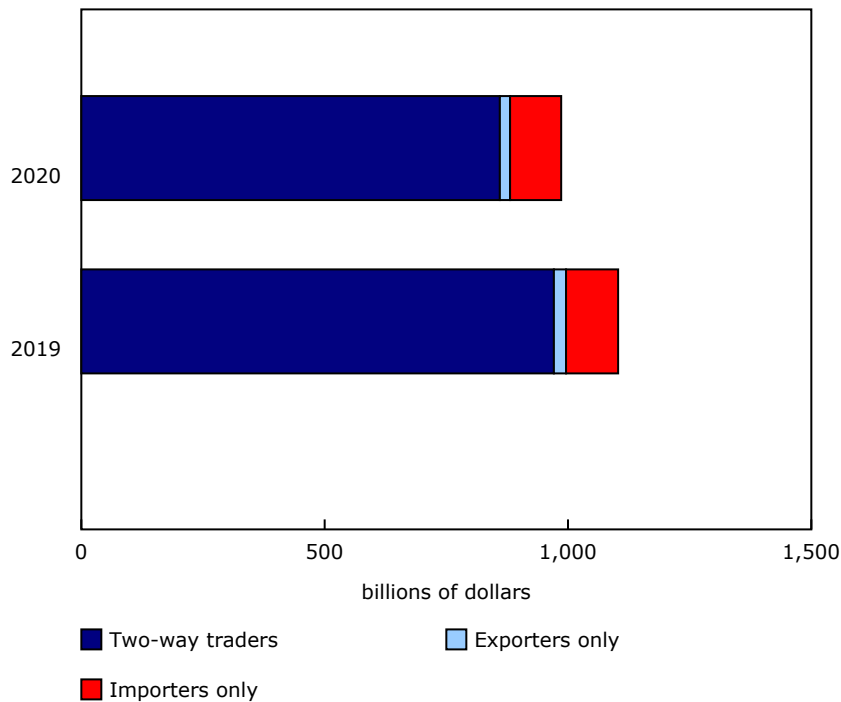
Overall, 170,440 Canadian enterprises traded \$985.4 billion worth of goods with foreign markets in 2020. This represented a decrease of 10.6% in terms of value and 4.6% in terms of the number of traders from 2019. Of all the trading enterprises, 126,810 were importers only, 14,970 were exporters only, and 28,660 were both importers and exporters, or two-way traders. Although similar percentage shares were observed in 2019, all three types of traders saw their number decline in 2020.



Two-way traders, despite accounting for a small share (16.8%) of all traders, contributed to 87.2% of the value of total merchandise trade in 2020. They exported \$450.6 billion and imported \$408.9 billion worth of goods. Nearly 95% of the decline in the value of total merchandise trade (-\$116.6 billion) was attributable to these traders in particular.

In terms of the number of traders, over three-quarters of the overall decrease in the number of traders (-8,282) came from firms engaged in imports only, almost entirely small and medium-sized firms (with fewer than 500 employees).

Chart 2
Value of total merchandise trade by trader type



Note(s): Trader types include two-way traders and one-way traders. Two-way traders are enterprises that engage in both exports and imports. Export-only traders and import-only traders are enterprises that either only export or only import goods.

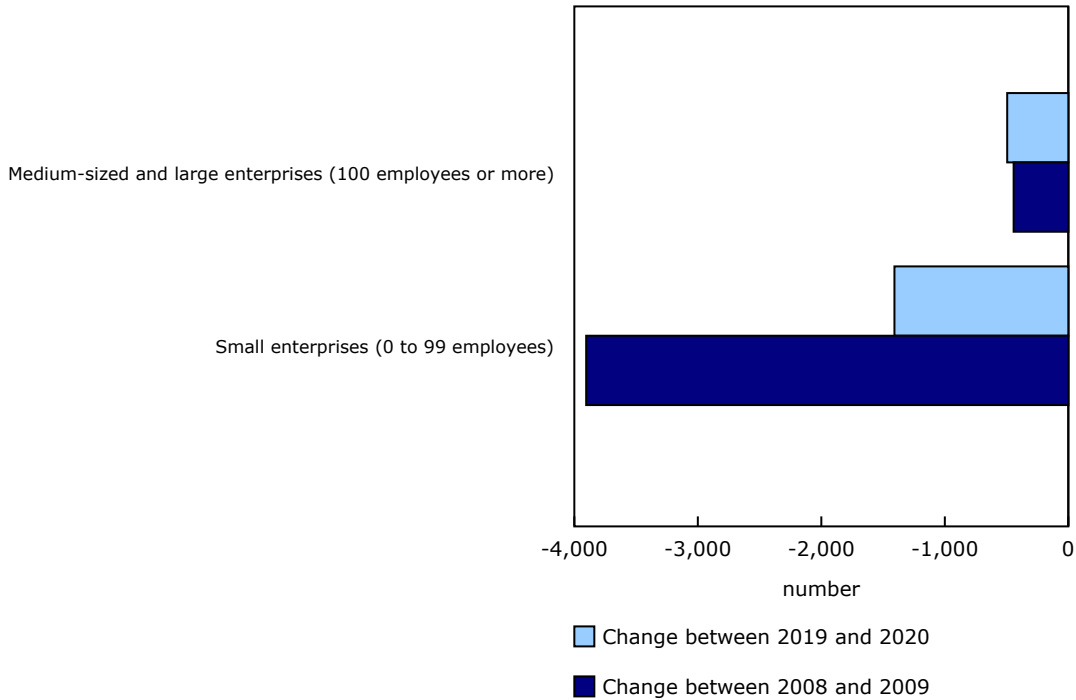
Source(s): Trade by Exporter Characteristics – Goods database (5124); Trade by Importer Characteristics – Goods database (5237).

Small exporting firms are the most impacted during the pandemic

By enterprise employment size, small exporting firms (with fewer than 100 employees) accounted for nearly three-quarters of the total decline (-1,903) in the number of exporters in 2020. These firms were also responsible for the bulk of the decrease in the number of exporters in 2009, during the most recent major economic downturn. They accounted for almost 90% of the overall decline in exporters in 2009 (-4,347), reflecting the vulnerability of these firms amid significant economic and financial turbulence. For both periods, small firms exporting to only one partner country saw the largest declines.

Chart 3

Annual change in the number of exporters by enterprise employment size, 2009, during the most recent major economic downturn, compared with 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic



Source(s): Table: 12-10-0091-01.

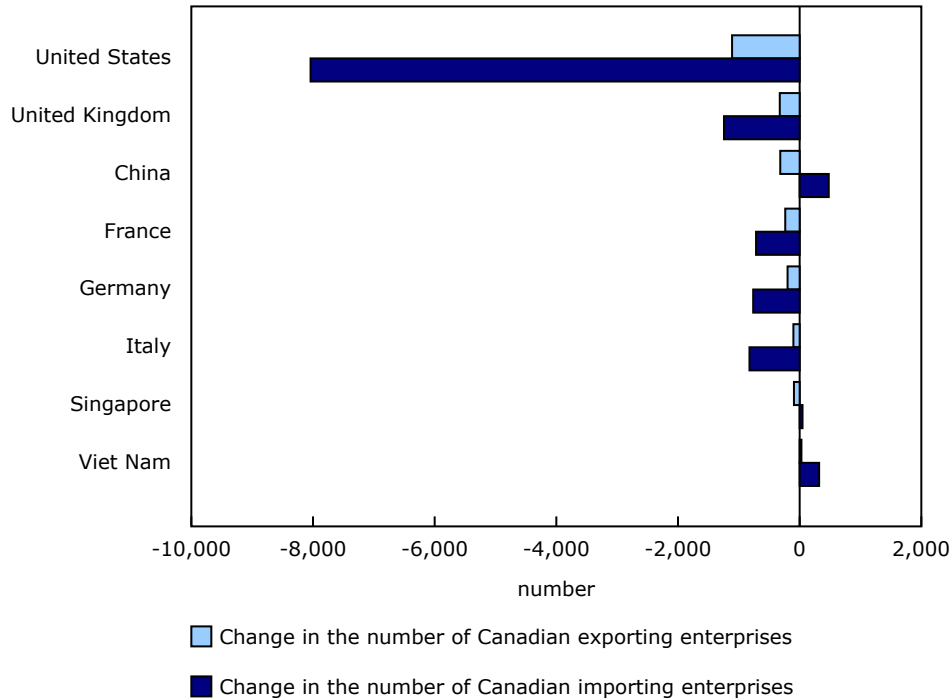
Significant decline in the number of Canadian traders with the United States

On a geographical basis, the number of Canadian exporters declined for nearly two-thirds of all countries of destination during the pandemic.

There were 1,111 fewer Canadian exporters to the United States in 2020 than in 2019. Other countries showing significant declines in the number of Canadian exporters were the United Kingdom (-327) and China (-319).

Similarly, the number of Canadian importers by country of export declined for nearly two-thirds of all countries, with the largest decreases recorded for the United States (-8,040) and the United Kingdom (-1,244). By contrast, more firms imported from countries such as China (+478) and Viet Nam (+320). Amid strong demand for sanitary products in the pandemic context, the number of firms that imported face masks from China (4,759) and Viet Nam (351) more than doubled from 2019.

Chart 4
Change in the number of Canadian importing and exporting enterprises by selected partner country, 2019 and 2020



Source(s): Tables [12-10-0095-01](#) and [12-10-0109-01](#).

The number of exporting and importing establishments is down across most provinces

An enterprise can have multiple establishments located in different provinces or territories operating in various industries.

Most provinces posted a year-over-year decline in the number of exporting establishments in 2020, with the largest declines observed in Ontario (-881), Quebec (-640) and British Columbia (-312). The census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of Toronto and Montréal accounted for approximately 75% and 60% of the declines in their respective provinces. The number of exporters in Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island exceeded levels in 2019, mainly because of strong global demand for farm and food-related products.

In contrast, all provinces posted much larger declines in the number of importers in 2020, led by Ontario (-2,780), British Columbia (-1,533) and Alberta (-1,341). Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary were the CMAs with the largest decrease in their respective provinces.

Table 1
Number of exporting and importing establishments, by province and territory, 2019 and 2020

	Exporters			Importers		
	2019	2020	2019 to 2020	2019	2020	2019 to 2020
	number		change in number	number		change in number
Canada	50,542	48,325	-2,217	166,941	158,854	-8,087
Newfoundland and Labrador	321	285	-36	1,324	1,195	-129
Prince Edward Island	234	235	1	662	624	-38
Nova Scotia	1,037	972	-65	3,206	2,975	-231
New Brunswick	777	772	-5	3,040	2,656	-384
Quebec	10,984	10,344	-640	30,723	29,543	-1,180
Ontario	21,459	20,578	-881	67,123	64,343	-2,780
Manitoba	1,821	1,696	-125	5,930	5,665	-265
Saskatchewan	1,346	1,348	2	4,525	4,337	-188
Alberta	5,305	5,149	-156	20,592	19,251	-1,341
British Columbia	7,192	6,880	-312	29,406	27,873	-1,533
Territories	66	66	0	410	392	-18

Source(s): Tables [12-10-0103-01](#) and [12-10-0113-01](#).

Note to readers

The Trade by Exporter Characteristics: Goods and Trade by Importer Characteristics: Goods programs are an initiative at Statistics Canada undertaken to analyze the business characteristics of exporters and importers in Canada. These estimates are formed by linking customs trade data records to business entities in Statistics Canada's Business Register.

Data on exports to the United States are collected by the US Census Bureau and transmitted to Statistics Canada as part of the Canada-US data exchange, while data on exports to the rest of the world are collected jointly by Statistics Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency.

Customs import data are collected jointly by Statistics Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency.

The Business Register contains the complete operating and legal structure of enterprises operating in Canada, as well as their key characteristics, such as employment, and North American Industry Classification System code.

Survey definitions

*This release contains information at both the enterprise and establishment levels. An **enterprise** is defined as the statistical unit that directs and controls the allocation of resources relating to its domestic operations, and for which consolidated financial statements are maintained. An **establishment** is the smallest statistical unit within an enterprise structure and better reflects the primary industrial activity and the province of the exporter and importer. The two measures generate a different number of exporting and importing units, as well as a different industry allocation of these units.*

***Small enterprises** have fewer than 100 employees, including those that did not report any employment. **Medium-sized enterprises** have 100 to 499 employees, while **large enterprises** have 500 or more employees.*

***Country of origin** is the country of production or the country in which the final stage of production or manufacture occurs.*

***Country of export** is the country from which the goods were exported or sold to Canada. The country of export is different from the country or place of transshipment. Many goods that are shipped to Canada may stop at some place along their route to either change carriers or be consolidated or deconsolidated to make shipping easier. This type of stoppage is considered a transshipment point, but it will not change the country of export.*

*A **census metropolitan area (CMA)** is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities clustered around a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more must live in the core, based on adjusted data from the Census of Population Program. There are 35 CMAs in Canada.*

*A **non-CMA** is an area not part of the 35 CMAs. The sum of CMA and non-CMA data represents Canada. Therefore, adding the trade values of CMAs and non-CMAs produces the national total. The same concept applies for the number of traders.*

In this release, data disseminated at the provincial level are conceptually different from customs-based merchandise export and import data. Provincial data for the *Trade by Exporter Characteristics: Goods* and *Trade by Importer Characteristics: Goods* programs are based on the province where the exporter and the importer are located. Goods can be shipped to other provinces for final consumption or can be shipped from other provinces when leaving Canada. Customs-based merchandise imports are based on the province of clearance; this is the province where the goods are cleared at customs, but this may not always be the province in which the importer is located. Customs-based merchandise exports are based on the province of origin; this is the province where the goods are grown, produced, extracted or manufactured.

Detailed information on concepts and methodology relating to this release is available on the [Trade by Exporter Characteristics: Goods](#) survey page and the [Trade by Importer Characteristics: Goods](#) survey page.

Survey coverage

In this release, the total value of exports and imports refers to the part of the annual domestic export and import value (customs basis) that can be linked to specific entities in the Business Register each year. Annual domestic export and import values (customs basis) can be obtained from the [Canadian International Merchandise Trade Database](#) and Table 12-10-0119-01. Additional information and definitions related to domestic merchandise exports and imports are available on the survey page for [Canadian International Merchandise Trade \(Customs Basis\)](#).

Export data are available for the reference period from 2005 to 2020, and import data are available for the reference period from 2010 to 2020. Each year from 2010 to 2020, the total number of identified exporting and importing enterprises accounted for 96% and 98% of the total domestic export and import value, respectively. Throughout this release, the percentage share of export sales and import purchases corresponds to the share of the annual domestic export and import value for which there was an identified exporter and importer. The number of exporters and importers corresponds to the number of exporters and importers identified within the Business Register by the *Trade by Exporter Characteristics: Goods* and *Trade by Importer Characteristics: Goods* programs.

Available tables: [12-10-0071-01](#), [12-10-0091-01](#) to [12-10-0098-01](#) , [12-10-0103-01](#) to [12-10-0115-01](#) , [12-10-0131-01](#) and [12-10-0137-01](#) to [12-10-0139-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [5124](#) and [5237](#).

The data visualization product "[Trade in Goods by Exporter and Importer Characteristics: Interactive Tool](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada – Data Visualization Products* ([71-607-X](#)), is now available.

The *Methodological Guide: Canadian System of Macroeconomic Accounts* ([13-607-X](#)) is available.

The *User Guide: Canadian System of Macroeconomic Accounts* ([13-606-G](#)) is also available. This publication will be regularly updated to maintain its relevance.

The updated *Canada and the World Statistics Hub* ([13-609-X](#)) is available online. This product illustrates the nature and extent of Canada's economic and financial relationship with the world using interactive graphs and tables. This product provides easy access to information on trade, investment, employment and travel between Canada and a number of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Mexico, China and Japan.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca).

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