

PRESS RELEASE

15 June 2021

EU ship traffic fell by 10% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Ship traffic decreased overall during 2020, with the cruise industry particularly affected
- Imports into the EU from non-EU countries declined by 12.2% over the same period
- Share of goods transported by sea in 2020 increased slightly at global level

Nearly one in every five ships worldwide sails under a European Union (EU) Member State flag, and the EU accounts for approximately a fifth of all global maritime trade. However, during 2020, overall EU maritime traffic dropped by 10.2% as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A statistical overview performed by the [European Maritime Safety Agency](#) (EMSA) reveals cruise ship traffic was the most heavily impacted, with an 86% drop in traffic compared to 2019. However, journeys by vessels like bulk carriers, chemical tankers, container ships and oil tankers only decreased by approximately 5%.

In addition, EU seaborne trade dropped by 9.3% in 2020, a larger decrease than the global average of 3.6%, and equivalent to a loss of approximately 226 million tonnes of trade handled by EU ports.

Based on a review of customs data, the most significant decline in maritime trade volumes was in imports into the EU from non-EU countries, which fell by 12.2% in 2020. Shipping trade between EU Member States was also affected by the pandemic, decreasing by 7.1%. Sea-borne exports from the EU to non-EU states experienced a lower decrease of 4.3%.

However, the share of all world trade carried by sea in 2020 increased by three percentage points to 88%, as the effects of the pandemic had a greater impact on other modes of transport like air, road and rail.

The EU Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean said:

COVID-19 has caused profound disruptions for Europe's shippers, charterers, shipowners, crews, onshore staff, ports, as well as our broader trading patterns and supply chains. As we focus our efforts on building back better post-pandemic, it is essential for us to have a full picture of the crisis' impact on strategic industries such as shipping so as to guide our policies and lay the foundations for a full and sustainable recovery.

The Executive Director of EMSA, Maja Markovčić Kostelac, said:

Maritime transport has proved its resilience throughout the course of the pandemic, keeping vital supply lines open while the world went into lockdown. Our report shows for the first

time the impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had on maritime transport in the EU, and we hope it will inform efforts and decisions at policy level to ensure a full recovery for this vital sector.

The report is based on a comprehensive review of available data, including trade volumes and type, cargo freights, maritime traffic data and other shipping indicators.

ABOUT EMSA

The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) is a decentralised agency of the EU, based in Lisbon, Portugal. EMSA serves the EU's maritime interests for a safe, secure, green and competitive maritime sector, delivering value for member states through [support for pollution prevention and response](#), [maritime surveillance](#), [safety and security](#), [digitalisation and the provision of integrated maritime services](#), and [technical assistance](#).

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