

Export to Catalonia, Spain



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1. General information

Economics

- Located in the north-east of Spain and with 7,9 million inhabitants, **Catalonia is the region with the second-highest GDP**, after Madrid, accounting for **19% of Spain's total GDP**. GDP: €292,474 M (2023). Superior to Finland or Portugal.
- The **unemployment** rate stands at **9,1% vs Spain at 12.1% (2023)**.
- **Catalan exports grow by 6.1% in 2023**, reaching a new historical record, and exceed 100,000 million euros for the first time (2023 exports of 100.768,6M).
- It is **highly export-oriented**, leading the exports in Spain with 26.2% of the total in 2023. The main export sectors are:
 - The chemical sector remains the main exporting sector: 17.1%.
 - Automotive: 15.9%
 - Food and beverages: 12.5%
 - Pharmaceutical products: 8.6%
 - Machinery and equipment: 5.7%
 - Textile: 5%
- **Number of foreign companies** established in Catalonia (2022): **9.155**. **272 Belgian subsidiaries** are established in Catalonia.
- **Foreign investment in Catalonia has increased by 18.0% in 2023**, up to 4,643.9 million euros, the highest figure since 2016. By sectors, what stands out the most are those corporate investment projects in the **ICT field** (26% of the total), **life sciences** (14%), **automotive-mobility** (12%), **videogames** (11%), and **food** (7%).
- Heading list comes: the **United States** (with 21% of all projects), followed by **France** (13%), and the **United Kingdom** (9%).
- According to ACCIÓ Catalonia Trade & Investment report, **Catalonia's GDP grew by 2.6% in 2023** (2.5% in Spain). Industry leads GDP growth with an increase of 3.5%.
- According to CaixaBank Research report, Catalonia will be one of the most dynamic mainland regions in 2024, although it will be subdued: **we expect GDP to grow by 2.0%**, slightly above the Spanish average (1.9%). The curbing of inflation, wage increases, and job creation will support consumption and we expect an improvement in industrial activity, above all in the motor vehicle industry.

Technology

- Catalonia has a highly diversified production sector, although it is most notable for the relative importance of its **manufacturing industry (16.8% of GDP)**.
- Catalonia leads the **industrial GVA** in the State with 22.3% of the total.
- Catalonia is the fourth region in Europe in high and medium-high technological intensity manufacturing jobs, with 224,000 people (2021).
- **Catalan high-tech exports grow by 8.2% in 2023** and reach 12,221.2 million euros, the highest figure in the historical series. High-tech Catalan exports represent 12.8% of Catalan industrial exports in 2023.

Environment

- Historically a trading nation, its strategic location in the Mediterranean and its transport infrastructures, as well as its entrepreneurial and business-friendly economy, have made it a



top location in the south of Europe. Add to that a capital city, Barcelona is an unbeatable meeting point for international business.

- **A hub for international connections**
 - Port of Barcelona: The 2nd most attractive European port location for logistic investment, only after Rotterdam (Savills, 2020).
 - In 2022, **the Port of Barcelona** registers a historical **record for merchandise traffic of 70.9 million tons** and a year-on-year increase of 6.9%. **Container traffic stands at 3.5 million TEU. The cruise market recovers the first position as the main port in Europe** according to the **number of cruise ship passengers** (2.329.332).
 - **Port of Tarragona**: Southern Europe's largest chemical hub.
 - **Barcelona - El Prat Airport** is the 3rd best airport in the world (with 40/50 million passengers). Skytrax World Airport Awards, 2023.
 - **Southern Europe's largest intermodal logistics hub**. International companies choose Catalonia for their logistic hubs in Europe, such as Amazon, Decathlon, Volkswagen-SEAT, Ikea, ID Logistic and Lidl, among others.
- **Population: 1.635.000, and Barcelona Metropolitan region almost 5M residents.** Representing the **10.4%** proportion of **Spanish population**.
- **23.6% of Barcelona's population are foreign nationals.**
- **Barcelona is the 3rd best European city and the 6th in the world.**
(World's Best cities Resonance Consulting, 2023)
- **Barcelona ranks among the top 10 cities in the world to work abroad.**
(Decoding Global Talent, Onsite and Virtual, Boston Consulting Group, 2021).
- **Barcelona is the 9th most attractive global city.**
(Global Cities Investment Monitor, KPMG 2021).
- **Barcelona is the 2nd most livable city in the world.**
(Institute for Urban Strategies the Mori Memorial Foundation, Global Power City Index, 2022)
- **Barcelona is the 5th European city that captures the most technological Investment** *(Cushman & Wakefield, 2022);*



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](#)

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.



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

First contacts

Prospecting

- Identify technological partnerships, conclude distribution agreements, operate through an agent or a commission, establish a franchise or have a license agreement.

Depending on the products and sectors concerned, working the market either via an agent who maintains the distribution network; either via one or more distributors who cover each region. Be careful about granting exclusivity on the entire market.

Commercial agent's database: *Colegio Oficial de Agentes Comerciales de Barcelona* and the commercial Jobs https://www.coacb.com/en_GB/comercial-jobs

- Finally, in many cases, the best option will be to hire someone independent on site or to create a small company. This ensures you have someone who works for you and wants to make it work. Furthermore, it is also an excellent solution for the Spanish language and culture.

Exporting

Spanish regionalism must be considered. Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities (CA) which are very different in their mentality and their type of contribution to the country's economy.

Choose a priority region first, depending on the product. It is recommended, as part of any establishment, to be present at least in Madrid and Barcelona. When choosing a distributor, you must ensure that they have a representative office in these two cities.

Spanish or Castilian is the official language throughout Spain. The country's other languages are official, but only in their respective regions. This is the case of Basque in the Basque Country, of Catalan in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands (Balear) and in the Valencian Community (Valenciano), of Galician in Galicia.

Payments

- It is advisable to find out as much as possible about the buyer to know his solvency. Too many commercial relations are established without the Belgian exporter taking the necessary precautions. The defaults in Spain affect every year approximately 70% of the Spanish entrepreneurial fabric, and lead to around 1 in 4 bankruptcies, especially among SMEs.
- The delivery time desired by the local partner is sometimes short: it is not rare to require delivery terms of 1 to 2 weeks, assuming the flexibility of our exporters. The payment period is on average fixed at 60 days, 90 and sometimes 120 days, particularly in the case of public orders. It is, however, very rarely granted for 30 days.

Company types

- **The formation of a company with shares-capital** is the most common form of investment in Catalonia and can adopt different legal forms, including the public limited liability company (S.A.) and the private limited liability company (S.L.). The new company must appoint a representative, who must have a Spanish national identity card number. If the representative is a foreigner, he/she must apply for the foreigner identification number (NIE).



- **The branch** is a permanent establishment with certain self-management powers through which the parent company operates in Catalonia. Although it is managed by its parent company, the branch must have a legal representative in Catalonia duly authorized to exercise these functions. In general, the requirements, formalities, procedures, and costs associated with establishing a branch are very similar to those of a subsidiary, with a few differences.
- **The representative office** cannot trade, and its activities are mainly prospecting, promotion, coordination, assistance, etc. It does not have a permanent establishment or legal personality, because it is subject to the status of its parent company, which also has responsibility for the debts of its representative office. Although it is managed by its parent company, the representative office must have a legal representative in Catalonia duly authorized to carry out these functions.
- Registration as a **self-employed person** is a way of working for a person who regularly carries out a for-profit economic activity without being subject to an employment contract. The self-employed worker can open a work center and register as an employer with social security to employ workers.
- **Joint Ventures:** this involves joining forces with local shareholders or other companies already established in Catalonia and thus obtaining Joint Ventures.

Support and subsidies

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

Interesting markets for a first export

A diversified industry, the backbone of the Catalan economy.

The industry in Barcelona-Catalonia is highly diversified, with the main branches being **chemicals and plastics** (BASF, Dow, Kao, Covestro, Puig, and Repsol), **food and beverage** (Nestlé, Danone, Unilever, Kellogg's, Haribo, and Griffith Foods), **motor vehicles** (SEAT), and **life sciences** (Teladoc Health, AstraZeneca, Sanofi, Novartis, Roche).

Industry 4.0

- Barcelona and its area are working to develop industry 4.0 based on elements such as the rise of **big data**, the growing number of companies and organizations in initiatives related to **3D printing**. In 2022, the province of Barcelona will have more than 534,000 jobs in activities potentially associated with the industry.

ICT + information and communications sector

- Jobs in ICT activities in Barcelona 2022: 21,956.
- Evolution 2012-2022 --> there has been an increase of 145.4%.
- The first edition of the digital cities index 2022 ranking, prepared by Economist Impact (from The Economist group), places Barcelona as the 6th digital city in Europe and 13th in the world.

Green, circular and blue economy

- **Jobs linked to the green economy** in Barcelona 59,830 and **186,540** in Catalonia.
- 38.8% of Catalan companies have invested in green transformation in 2022. and 40.8% plan to invest in green transformation in 2023.



- Barcelona will host the BlueTechPort, an innovation hub that will use the port of Barcelona as a sandbox. It should be noted that the city is positioned as the 10th best in Europe for the Blue Economy for emerging companies according to The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2022 by Startup Genome.
- 37th America's Sailing Cup 2024 takes place in Barcelona.

Health and biotechnology

- The **BioRegion of Catalonia**, the Catalan ecosystem of life and health sciences, includes **more than 1,350 companies and 91 research entities that represent 8.7% of the GDP and 7% of employment in Catalonia.**
- Investments by foreign companies in the BioRegion between 2018 - 2022 have amounted to a total of 689 million euros of direct investment.

Social Economy

- 1,122 cooperatives distributed throughout the city of Barcelona. Between 2016 - 2022, 402 new cooperatives have been established in Barcelona.
- Barcelona's commerce, with 150,000 jobs, is one of the main economic drivers of the city.

Tourism

- Barcelona is a leading urban destination on a global scale, clearly specialized in international tourism: in 2022, 79.2% of tourists were international and the United States was the first tourist emitting market, followed by France and the United Kingdom.
- Barcelona has been in the top 5 cities in the world in organizing international conferences for 21 years.
- More than 250 held at Fira Barcelona with more than 30,000 exhibitors and 2.5 million visitors, with an economic impact of 4.7 billion euros and contributing to the creation of more than 35,000 jobs.
- Barcelona has a quality tourist accommodation supply base, almost 70% of hotel beds are four stars or more.

Markets and sub-markets with potential to the exporting companies:

- Food sector

- o Organic products
- o gluten-free
- o gourmet

- ICT sector - Smart City & Smart mobility:

- o Connected vehicles and autonomous driving
- o Drones
- o e-commerce
- o Smart Cities

- Industry 4.0

- o 3D printing
- o IoT
- o Big Data & Data Analytics
- o Robotics
- o Cyber security
- o Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Machine Learning



- o Video Games
- o Blockchain
- o Intelligent materials and advanced technologies
- **Green and sustainable economy**
 - o Sustainable and circular materials (construction)
 - o Electric mobility
- **Life sciences – Medtech / Biotech, genome, neuroscience, pharmacogenetics:**
 - o AI
 - o VR & AR
 - o IOT
 - o Robotics
 - o 3D
 - o Nanotech
 - o Quantum sciences

International trade fairs and conferences in Barcelona:

- Fira Barcelona Calendar 2024
- CCIB

Barcelona, a city of major international trade fairs and conferences: Barcelona has once again claimed the top spot in the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) rankings (2022), **solidifying its position as the world's premier destination for conference attendees**. According to ICCA, the Catalan capital also ranks 4th globally in the list of best cities based on the number of congresses hosted, behind only Vienna, Lisbon, and Paris.

It hosts some of the most important international technology events, including the **Mobile World Congress**. As the world's leading event for mobile-related industries, it makes Barcelona the permanent global center for mobile technologies.

Clusters Network of Catalonia:

ACCIÓ has established 26 clusters that already include more than 2,700 companies and partners with a turnover of over 70,000 million euros.



4. Business culture

Communication

- Never be direct. The personal relationship takes precedence and can lead to meetings during which more than just business is discussed. “Personal” does not mean “friendly.” The Spaniard is a good negotiator, sometimes very tough. He/She often acts as a fine negotiation strategist.

How to prepare a visit

- Eye contact is essential: education and status matter a lot. Being introduced by people who hold decision-making power is important.
- Appointment times and deadlines are quite flexible.
- Knowing Spanish promotes a close relationship. Communications are more verbal than written, less adapted to the Spanish language (have brochures translated into Spanish).
- Commercial contracts sometimes resemble agreements of intent. In this way, they are comparable to road traffic lights. They therefore only have an orientation value, the form of the contract often being implicit.

What are the public holidays?

- Working hours are not quite the same as in the rest of Europe (9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. in general). Large stores (shopping centers, supermarkets) are open from 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday to Saturday.
- Summer vacations are usually taken in August. Many companies therefore close during two full weeks. The period between Christmas, New Year and the Epiphany is also characterized by reduced activity.
- [Calendar official holidays in Catalonia](#)
- [Calendar official holidays in Barcelona City](#)



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.

Brussels House in Barcelona

Welcome to Brussels... in Barcelona !

<https://hub.brussels/en/brussels-house-barcelona/>

Get ready to immerse yourself in the vibrant and captivating experience of Brussels.

Here, we invite you to embrace the essence of our city, where living the Brussels experience means embracing the bold, independent, and ethical nature of our creations.

In our Brussels House, you'll encounter a world of extraordinary designs and artistic expressions that embody our city's unique character.



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Key addresses

- [Consulate of Belgium in Barcelona](#)
- [Community and Regional Representations](#)
- [Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Barcelona](#)
- [hub.brussels economic and commercial Advisors](#)
- [Representation Flanders Investment and Trade in Barcelona](#)
- [Representation AWEX in Barcelona](#)
- [Wallonie-Bruxelles International](#)
- [Vlamingen in de wereld](#)
- [Catalonia Trade and investment in Brussels](#)
- [Invest in Catalonia](#)
- [Barcelona ACTIVA](#)
- [Union Francophone des Belges a l'Étranger](#)



Useful websites to delve into

- **Foreign Trade Agency - Catalonia Trade & Investment:** <https://catalonia.com/>
- **Barcelona Chamber of Commerce:** <https://www.cambrabcn.org/en/web/cambrabcn-english/home>
- **Statistics National Institute from Spain:** <https://www.ine.es/index.htm>
- **Institute of Statistics of Catalonia:** <https://www.idescat.cat/?lang=en>
- **Spanish open data:** <https://datos.gob.es/en>
- **Catalan tourism Agency:** <https://act.gencat.cat/barcelona-ranks-as-the-worlds-1st-city-with-most-conference-participants/?lang=en>
- **Clusters Network of Catalonia:** <https://www.accio.gencat.cat/en/serveis/clusters/>

Reports :

- **CaixaBank Research:** <https://www.caixabankresearch.com/en/publications/autonomous-community-profiles/catalonia>
- **BBVA RESEARCH 2023 CATALUNYA**
<https://www.bbva.com/en/publicaciones/spain-catalonia-economic-outlook-second-half-2023/>
- **Acció:**
 - **Flaix empresarial 2023** <https://www.accio.gencat.cat/ca/serveis/banc-coneixement/cercador/BancConeixement/eic-flaix-empresarial-de-catalunya-2023>
 - **Barcelona Catalonia Facts & Figures report:** <https://catalonia.com/why-catalonia/barcelona-catalonia-facts-and-figures>
- **Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, Quarterly report on the situation in Catalonia - February 2024:** <https://www.cambrabcn.org/es/que-te-ofrecemos/estudios-economicos-infraestructuras/informes-coyuntura-catalana>

