

Impact of Covid-19 crisis on retail trade

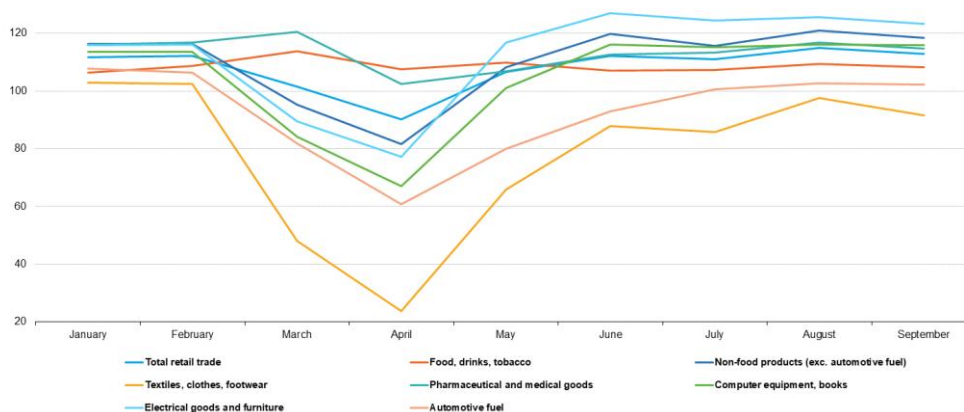
Data from November 2020
Next update: December 2020

Highlights

In September 2020, total EU retail sales decreased by 2.0 % compared with August 2020.

The total sales volume is now equal to 100.7 % of the volume reached in February before the Covid-19 crisis; last month the level had already been 102.5 %.

EU-27, development of retail trade volume according to product groups, January to September 2020



Source: Eurostat (online data code: sts_trtu_m)

eurostat



EU-27, development of retail trade volume according to product groups, January to September 2020, monthly data, seasonally and calendar adjusted (2015=100) - Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](#))

This article is part of an [online publication](#) presenting the development of [short-term business statistics](#) (STS) indicators in the Covid-19 crisis. The results, presented in this article, concern the development of the [retail trade](#) volume indicator. In the following weeks, [Eurostat](#) will continue to update information on industrial production, construction and services in other articles forming the online publication. For the publication of new data see the [STS release calendar](#).

Please also see the monthly [Eurostat News Release 5 November 2020](#).

Full article

Covid-19 containment measures in Europe

Covid-19 containment measures in Europe

The Covid-19 virus hit Europe in January and February, with the first cases confirmed in Spain, France and Italy. To fight the pandemic, EU Member States took a wide variety of measures. As of 17 March, EU Member States imposed temporary restrictions of non-essential travel from third countries into the EU (exceptions were foreseen for nationals of all EU Member States and Schengen Associated States). Most countries also imposed restrictions on the movements between EU Member States (an overview of the measures can be found [here](#)).

Schools were closed in most Member States in the second week of March. Public events were cancelled by almost all Member States and private gatherings (with numbers of persons varying from 2 to 50) were banned. In almost all countries, bars, restaurants and hotels were closed. In addition, most countries closed retail shops with the exception of supermarkets, pharmacies and banks. In Italy and Spain, non-essential production was stopped and several countries imposed regional or even national lockdown measures which further stifled the economic activities in many areas.

The large majority of the prevention measures were taken during mid-March. Most of the prevention measures and restrictions were kept for the whole of April. In May, several of the measures were abandoned or at least reduced in scope and severity. Among other things, many shops could re-open in May and as a consequence retail trade activities picked up again after two months of unprecedented declines. With increasing Covid-19 cases after the summer holidays several countries re-introduced containment measures in October. The effects of these measures is not yet visible in the retail statistics.

Development of retail trade volume in September 2020

In September 2020, the retail volume (price adjusted turnover) in the [EU-27](#) decreased by 1.7 % compared with August 2020 and increased by 2.1 % compared with the previous year. In the [euro-area](#), the decrease in September 2020 compared with August 2020 was 2.0 %, compared with September 2019

there was an increase of 2.2 % (note that these year on year rates are calculated with data that are only calendar adjusted.)

Figure 1 shows the development of the retail trade volume between January and September 2020 for the total and the various product groups (e.g. food, non-food, automotive fuel, etc.).

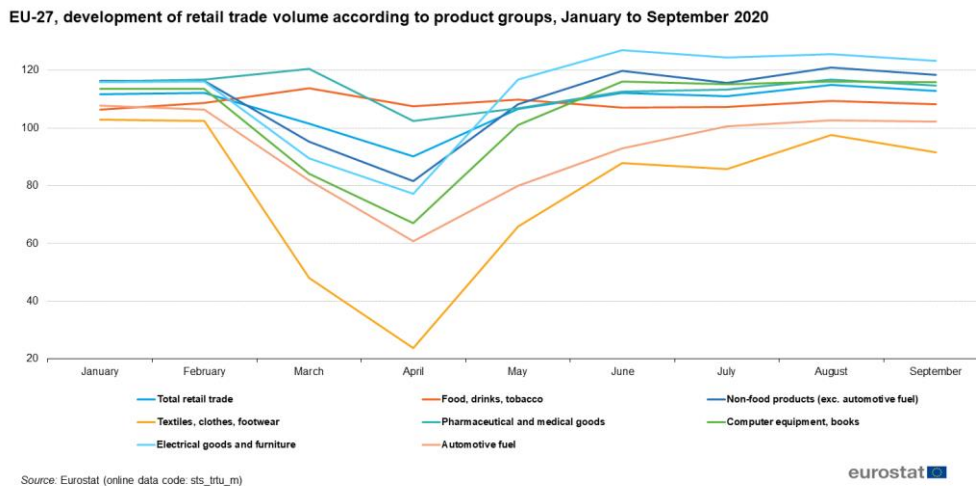


Figure 1: EU-27, development of retail trade volume according to product groups, January to September 2020, monthly data, seasonally and calendar adjusted (2015=100) - Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1))

In March and April, all non-food product groups had shown exceptionally large decreases, in particular the decline for textiles, clothes and footwear was extremely steep (-76.8 % between February and April).

Pharmaceutical products had seen an increase in March but then dropped in April, resulting in a total loss of 12.3 % over the two months. The two months loss for automotive fuel was 42.7 %, for computers, books and similar products it was 40.9 % and for electrical goods and furniture it was 33.5 %.

In May and June, sales for all non-food product groups picked up again and the February levels of sales were regained or in some cases even exceeded for some product groups. This positive trend was, however, not continued in July. The general level of sales dropped slightly and, to some extent, the recovery of sales that had been achieved in May and June was lost again in July. In August however retail sales picked up again in a quite dynamic way. The sales volume of food, drinks and tobacco increased by 2.1 % compared with July, the sales of automotive fuel by 2.1 % and the sales of non-food products by 4.7 %. This positive trend was not continued in September. In particular the sales volume of textiles, clothes and footwear dropped by 6.3 % compared with August.

By and large the retail sales level is not again at the pre-crisis level of February with food purchases slightly below (99.7 %) and non-food purchases (excluding fuel) somewhat above (101.7 %). The structure of non-food purchases has however changed significantly. The sales of electrical goods and furniture is more than 6 % higher than in February, the sales of textiles, clothing and footwear is more than 10 % lower.

Figure 2 indicates the levels of retail trade volume according to different modes of sales, i.e. for supermarkets, department stores and for internet sales (a combined index for sales in all specialised stores is not available). Since supermarkets remained generally open during lock-down measures in March and April, they saw an increase in sales in March. However, sales went back to more normal levels in the following months. Department stores which were closed in many countries experienced a decline which was partly compensated when the Covid measures were eased in May and June but the sales have not yet returned to the former levels. Internet sales had already been on the increase for several years. The Covid-19 crisis further boosted this trend and the sales via this channel increased quite dynamically in April and May. As shops reopened in the European countries, the development of internet sales was somewhat curbed in June and July, the level of sales increased again in August but dropped by 4.4 % in September.

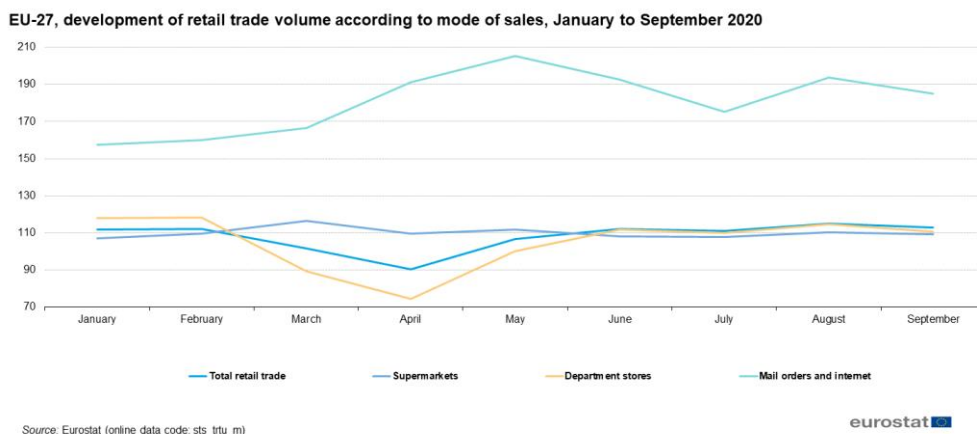


Figure 2: EU-27, development of retail trade volume according to mode of sales, January to September 2020, monthly data, seasonally and calendar adjusted (2015=100) - Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sts_trtu_m))

Table 1 shows the month on month growth rates according to product groups and mode of sales for the months from March to September, as well as the rates for the crisis month from February and April and the

rates for the recovery phase between April and September. The last column, entitled “recovery”, indicates the relation between the recent August level of the retail trade volume and its February level (when comparing the recovery levels for different product groups please note that the individual series are seasonally adjusted separately and that therefore the levels do not simply add up to the total.)

EU-27, reduction of retail trade volume during the crisis and recovery

	Rates of change										"Recovery" (%)
	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	Apr./Feb.	Sep./Apr.		
Total retail trade	-9.4	-11.2	18.2	5.3	-1.2	3.6	-1.7	-19.5	25.2	100.7	
Food, drinks, tobacco	4.9	-5.6	2.1	-2.5	0.1	2.1	-1.1	-1.0	0.7	99.7	
Non-food products (exc. automotive fuel)	-18.2	-14.3	32.7	10.5	-3.4	4.7	-2.1	-29.9	45.1	101.7	
Textiles, clothes, footwear	-53.1	-50.5	175.5	33.4	-2.2	13.7	-6.3	-76.8	284.5	89.3	
Pharmaceutical and medical goods	3.3	-15.0	4.4	5.3	0.7	3.0	-1.8	-12.3	12.0	98.3	
Computer equipment, books	-25.9	-20.2	50.7	14.8	-0.8	0.8	-0.2	-40.9	72.7	102.1	
Electrical goods and furniture	-22.9	-13.7	51.3	8.6	-2.0	0.9	-1.8	-33.5	59.7	106.2	
Automotive fuel	-23.0	-25.6	31.2	16.3	8.3	2.1	-0.5	-42.7	67.8	96.1	
Supermarkets	6.2	-5.8	2.1	-3.4	-0.2	2.3	-1.1	0.1	-0.4	99.7	
Department stores	-24.4	-16.7	34.5	11.8	-1.7	4.4	-3.6	-37.0	48.8	93.7	
Mail orders and internet	4.0	14.8	7.4	-6.2	-9.0	10.6	-4.4	19.4	-3.1	115.8	

Source: Eurostat (online data code: sts_trtu_m)

eurostat

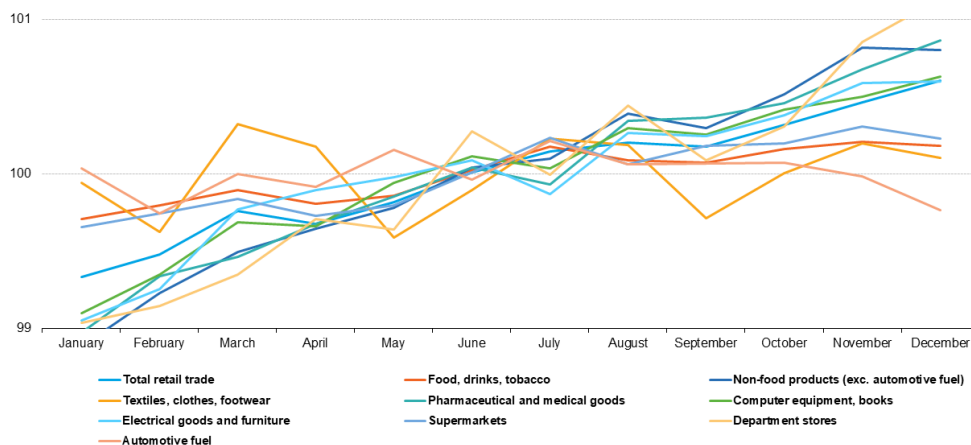


Table 1: EU-27, reduction of retail trade volume during the crisis and recovery, monthly data, seasonally adjusted.

Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table))

For comparison, Figure 3 shows how the various retail trade categories usually developed on average during the years 2010 – 2019 (to make the various index levels comparable, all years have been re-referenced to January to April = 100). Generally, the sales of food products remain relatively stable during the year. For the sale of non-food products there was an average increase recorded during the past years. As Figure 3 indicates, the changes from one month to the next are usually around the size of one index point; the magnitude of the current declines and increases is quite unprecedented.

EU-27, average monthly development of retail trade volume, 2010 - 2019



Source: Eurostat (online data code: sts_trtu_m)

eurostat



Figure 3: EU-27, average monthly development of retail trade volume, 2010 - 2019, monthly data, seasonally adjusted.

Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](#))

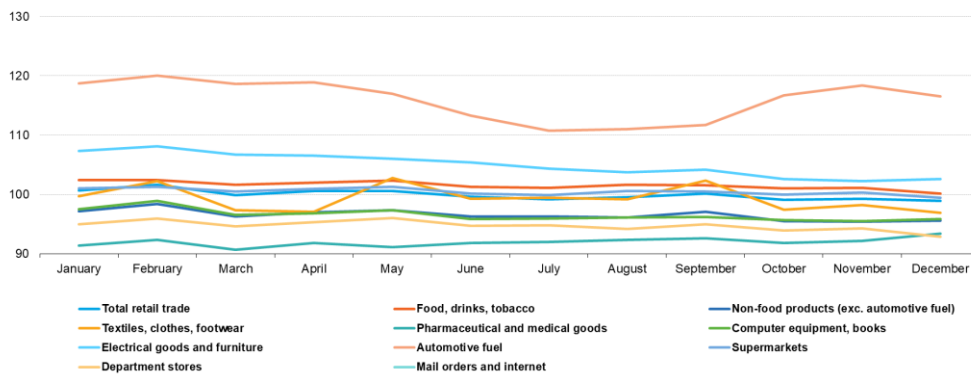
Comparison with 2008

The global financial crisis in 2008 had dramatic effects on the production in industry and construction (for a detailed analysis of the 2008 crisis on STS indicators see [here](#); its effects on retail trade were comparatively modest, however (see Figure 4).

Between January 2008 and December 2008, the total retail volume index for the EU-27 dropped by 1.7 index points, compared with a drop of 21.9 points in March and April 2020. The strongest decline in 2008 was measured for electrical goods, books, and furniture (-5.2 points), the index for automotive fuel dropped by 2.0 points and the index for textiles by 2.9 points. The mail orders and internet volume dropped by only half an index point.

Declines in 2020 were much steeper. In April 2020 compared with two months earlier, the index for the sales volume of textiles dropped by almost 80 points, the index for automotive fuel by 45.4 points and the indices for computer equipment, books and for electrical appliances and furniture by 46.4 and 38.9 points respectively. At the same time, the mail orders and internet volume increased by 31.1 index points.

EU-27, development of retail trade volume during the global financial crisis 2008



Source: Eurostat (online data code: sts_trtu_m)

eurostat



Figure 4: EU-27, development of retail trade volume during the global financial crisis 2008, monthly data, seasonally adjusted (2015=100).

Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1&code=sts_trtu_m))

Development by country

Since the Covid-19 containment measures differed between countries as to timing and strictness, it was to be expected that the effects on retail trade would also vary. Table 2 shows the monthly rates of change between March and September, as well as the rates between February and April (the months of the crisis) and April and September (the months of recovery). The table also includes the ratio between the September index levels and the February levels ("recovery").

More than half of the countries for which data are available have by now regained or almost regained the sales level of February. Some countries (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, and France) have even clearly surpassed the pre-crisis levels. The countries with the lowest recovery levels are Bulgaria (85.3 %), Portugal (90.0 %), and Malta (90.3 %).

Retail trade volume, rates of change and degree of normalisation ("recovery")
(%)

	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	Apr./Feb.	Sep./Apr.	"Recovery"
EU-27	-9.4	-11.2	18.2	5.3	-1.2	3.6	-1.7	-19.5	25.2	102.5
EA-19	-10.1	-11.8	20.2	5.7	-1.7	4.2	-2.0	-20.7	27.6	103.2
Belgium	-8.1	-9.6	19.9	4.5	-3.3	9.6	-7.4	-17.0	22.8	110.1
Bulgaria	-20.1	-2.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	4.6	2.8	-21.7	12.0	85.3
Czechia	-10.6	-1.8	10.5	...	...	...	...	-12.2	...	...
Denmark	-2.3	-0.6	9.4	1.1	-1.1	-1.2	-1.1	-2.9	6.9	105.0
Germany	-1.4	-6.2	13.1	-1.5	0.3	1.8	-2.2	-7.5	11.2	105.1
Estonia	-2.9	-15.1	15.9	3.1	-1.4	1.1	0.9	-17.5	20.3	98.3
Ireland	0.1	-22.0	13.4	20.7	0.8	0.9	1.1	-22.0	40.7	108.6
Greece	-0.4	-24.6	29.0	...	...	...	...	-24.9	...	...
Spain	-14.4	-19.3	18.4	16.6	1.1	1.2	-0.4	-30.9	40.7	97.6
France	-15.9	-17.8	36.9	8.6	-3.3	7.1	-4.5	-30.9	46.9	106.4
Croatia	-8.6	-20.2	24.6	0.7	-0.2	-0.8	1.0	-27.0	25.6	90.7
Italy	-22.6	-12.4	25.1	14.1	-7.7	11.0	...	-32.1	...	99.2
Cyprus	-3.0	-30.4	32.6	...	...	...	...	-32.4	...	...
Latvia	-5.2	-7.5	7.9	4.5	-1.1	0.9	0.4	-12.3	13.0	98.7
Lithuania	-9.9	-9.0	17.0	6.0	1.2	0.1	-0.4	-18.0	25.2	103.1
Luxembourg	-18.9	-23.2	38.5	17.4	-0.6	1.2	0.3	-37.7	63.9	101.8
Hungary	-1.1	-13.2	5.7	3.4	2.3	1.3	1.0	-14.2	14.4	97.2
Malta	-2.9	-22.8	8.6	6.4	1.7	2.6	0.0	-25.1	20.5	90.3
Netherlands	-1.4	-5.8	9.7	1.5	-0.2	1.3	-1.5	-7.1	10.8	104.5
Austria	-13.4	-5.3	24.9	-2.4	2.1	-0.5	-0.1	-18.0	23.7	101.5
Poland	-7.1	-8.9	10.8	4.4	1.7	1.8	-0.9	-15.3	18.7	101.4
Portugal	-12.6	-17.4	14.8	5.5	4.1	-1.1	1.9	-27.8	27.0	90.0
Romania	-3.4	-21.9	17.2	6.1	4.2	-1.4	1.7	-24.6	30.1	96.4
Slovenia	-12.6	-8.1	16.0	3.2	1.1	-2.0	-0.1	-19.7	18.5	95.2
Slovakia	-6.0	-9.5	4.6	9.6	2.0	0.9	1.5	-14.9	19.7	100.4
Finland	-1.4	-0.3	3.9	1.2	-1.7	1.4	-1.6	-1.7	3.1	103.0
Sweden	-1.8	-2.5	1.9	1.6	0.6	0.1	0.5	-4.3	4.7	99.7
United Kingdom	-3.6	-17.2	10.8	12.4	2.7	0.9	1.2	-20.1	30.6	99.7
Norway	-1.1	4.8	2.8	5.7	0.6	-4.8	0.3	3.7	4.4	107.9
Switzerland	-7.1	-13.4	31.6	-2.3	0.3	-0.8	-3.5	-19.5	23.5	103.0
Montenegro	-0.7	-29.3	8.6	-3.2	-11.2	-7.7	18.7	-29.8	2.2	60.5
North Macedonia	-5.6	-7.3	2.7	...	...	...	...	-12.5	...	...
Albania	-17.1	...	15.5	9.4	...	...	...	...	...	...
Serbia	-2.9	-22.2	28.9	6.7	-6.3	2.5	0.5	-24.5	32.7	99.6
Turkey	-7.9	-22.1	6.4	...	...	...	...	-28.3	...	...
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-12.9	-29.0	31.4	8.1	-5.6	-2.5	8.7	-38.2	42.1	80.8

... not available
Source: Eurostat (online data code: sts_trtu_m)

Table 2: Retail trade volume, rates of change and degree of normalisation (recovery) (%)

Source: Eurostat ([sts_trtu_m](#))

Source data for tables and graphs

-  [Impact of Covid-19 crisis on short-term business statistics: tables and figures](#)

Data sources

The latest results for the development of retail trade are published in monthly [news releases](#) by Eurostat.

According to the [STS-Regulation](#) the retail trade volume index is published only 30 days after its reference months. At this early stage it is normal that no complete coverage of data can be ensured by National Statistical Institutes and that data have to be estimated to some degree. As a consequence, revisions occur during the publications that follow.

The Covid-19 crisis posed additional problems for data collections, since for example closed shops could not be reached or did not supply any data. Moreover, it was not clear if missing data might not be due to businesses being permanently closed. As a consequence, it may be expected that [revisions](#) of the first retail volume data could be subject to greater revisions than is usually the case.

The data in this article are, for several Member States, based on fewer statistical observations than usual or alternative sources. For missing data, imputation and estimation methods were applied. Information on the compilation of short-term business statistics during the COVID-19 crisis can be found [here](#) and (specifically for STS) [here](#)