



Statistical snapshot: The EU's role in the minerals trade

The EU is a major trading centre. It is the world's largest economy, the world's largest trading block, and home to over 500 million consumers.¹ These statistics reveal the EU's role in the trade of minerals which, if sourced without proper checks from high-risk areas, can fund violent armed groups and other actors that inflict horrific human rights abuses on local communities.

Minerals such as tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold enter the EU as ores and metals—which are traded and used in manufacturing—and as part of a wide range of products, including mobile phones, laptops, games consoles, cars and lightbulbs.

There is currently no law in the EU requiring companies to ensure that these imports are not financing conflict or human rights abuses. It is therefore impossible for EU consumers to tell whether their purchases implicate them in a deadly trade.

EU trade in tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold

- In 2013, the EU was responsible for almost a quarter (€28.5 billion) of the global trade in tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold ores and metals, which was worth over €123 billion.²
- In 2013, the EU imported around €19 million worth of these minerals directly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and its nine bordering countries. The EU also imports gold and tungsten from Colombia. In some parts of these countries, the trade in minerals has been linked to the funding of armed groups.
- These minerals also enter the EU indirectly as part of a wide range of products. In 2013, the EU was the second largest importer of mobile phones and laptops in the world, behind the US.³ The EU imported 240 million mobile phones and over 100 million laptops, worth around €58 billion. Both these products contain tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold.

What's in your mobile phone?

A closer look at the EU trade in mobile phones puts the scale of these indirect imports in perspective. In 2013, the EU imported around **240 million** mobile phones. There is about 6.6g of tin, 0.83g of tungsten, 0.04g of tantalum and 0.63g of gold in a standard mobile phone. That means that an estimated **1,584 tons of tin and 151 tons of gold** entered the EU as part of mobile phones *alone* in 2013.

Source: Data from UN Comtrade and The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), Action and Research Centre's, *The Great Recovery: Redesigning the Future*, June 2013, p.9.
Estimates based on mobile phone weight of 130g.

Following the trade

When minerals sourced from high-risk areas enter the EU as part products, the trade is usually indirect. Companies operating in the EU import these products from countries like China, the US and Switzerland. Those countries, in turn, import huge volumes of minerals directly from countries like Colombia, the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. The trade of minerals in some parts of these countries, some of which play a role as transit markets, can fund conflict and human rights abuses.

- The EU imported around €24 billion in laptops and €17 billion in mobile phones from China last year, amounting to roughly 71% of EU imports of these two products.⁴
- According to the European Commission, the EU imported €40 million worth of electric tantalum capacitors from China, and €2 million in safety glass containing tin from Malaysia in 2011.⁵
- Malaysia and China, in turn, source minerals directly from several high-risk areas where in order to trade responsibly, companies need to check their supply chains carefully. In 2013, China imported over 4,000 tons of tin, tungsten, tantalum and gold ores and concentrates, worth in excess of €107 million, from Colombia, the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi. This is equivalent to the weight of 333 double-decker buses. In 2013, China sourced 23 per cent of its tantalum ores and concentrates (by weight) from these four countries.
- The vast majority of Colombian gold—over 90%—is exported to the US and Switzerland. The US alone imported almost US\$2.2 billion (€1.7 billion) in gold from Colombia last year. In 2013, the EU imported jewellery, including gold jewellery, worth almost €1.7 billion from Switzerland and €388 million from the US.⁶ (See country [breakdown](#) for known links between Colombian gold and FARC)

Country by country⁷

The EU's top five importers of laptops and mobile phones are the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Italy. Both mobile phones and laptops contain tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold.

Germany

- Germany is the third largest importer of laptops and mobile phones in the world, and the largest in the EU. Germany imported 64 million mobile phones and 15 million laptops, worth €14.4bn (US\$18.7bn), in 2013. In 2013, Germany imported €7.6bn (US\$9.8bn), or 52 per cent, of its mobile phones and laptops, from China (see the section on China's imports above).

The UK

- The UK is the fourth largest importer of laptops and mobile phones in the world, and the second largest in the EU. The UK imported 20 million laptops and over 44.5 million mobile phones, worth £11.2bn (US\$18.2bn), in 2013. In 2013, the UK imported £4.4bn (US\$7.2bn), or 40%, of its mobile phones and laptops, from China (see the section on China's imports above).

Netherlands

- The Netherlands is the fifth largest importer of laptops and mobile phones in the world, and the third largest in the EU. The Netherlands imported 14.8 million mobile phones and 20 million laptops, worth €9.5bn (US\$12.3bn), in 2013. In 2013, the Netherlands imported €7.1bn (US\$9.2bn), or 74 per cent of its mobile phones and laptops, from China (see the section on China's imports above).

France

- France is the sixth largest importer of laptops and mobile phones in the world, and the fourth largest in the EU. France imported 16 million laptops and almost 36 million mobile phones, worth €9bn (\$11.6bn), in 2013. In 2013, France imported €6.2bn (US\$8bn), or 69 per cent, of its mobile phones and laptops from China (see the section on China's imports above).

Italy

- Italy is the 11th largest importer of laptops and mobile phones in the world, and the fifth largest in the EU. Italy imported 9.6 million laptops and 28.6 million mobile phones, worth €6.1bn (US\$7.9bn), in 2013. In 2013, Italy imported €1.9bn (US\$2.5bn), or 33 per cent, of its mobile phones and laptops from China (see the section on China's imports above).

¹ European Commission, Website for DG Trade, accessed 15 August 2014

<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/>

² Data from UN Comtrade (<http://comtrade.un.org/>). Data reflects import data of tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold ores, concentrates, and metals as captured by the HS codes listed in the table on p.78 of the Commission's Impact Assessment, available at http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2014/march/tradoc_152229.pdf

³ Data from UN Comtrade (<http://comtrade.un.org/>). Data reflects reported imports of mobile phones (Code 851712) and laptops (Code 847130).

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⁵ European Commission, *Impact Assessment*, p.20, available at:

http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2014/march/tradoc_152229.pdf

⁶ Data from UN Comtrade (<http://comtrade.un.org/>). Data reflects reported imports of jewellery (Code 711319)

⁷ All data from UN Comtrade (<http://comtrade.un.org/>). Data on tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold ores, concentrates, and metals captures EU trade in the HS codes listed in the table on p.78 of the Commission's Impact Assessment, available at:

http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2014/march/tradoc_152229.pdf

Data on mobile phones and laptops reflect EU trade in codes 851712 (mobile phones) and 847130 (laptop computers).