The French market potential for coffee

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France is a large and mature coffee market with a long tradition of coffee consumption. The country holds an important position in European imports of green coffee, with a well-established coffee roasting industry. Sustainability and certification are major trends on the French coffee market. Given the widespread availability of certified coffee in France, certification may be a key entry requirement for coffee exporters. The specialty coffee market in France is taking shape, offering interesting opportunities to exporters offering high-quality coffees with unique stories.

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1. Product description

Harmonised System (HS) codes are used to classify products and to calculate international trade statistics, such as imports and exports. The focus of this study is on green coffee beans, classified as HS code 090111 (coffee, not roasted, not decaffeinated). The available data do not distinguish between bulk, high-quality or specialty coffees.

Approximately 124 coffee species exist in the wild, of which only a few are commercially relevant. The two most important species on the market are:

- *Coffea Arabica* (Arabica): Referred to as a highland coffee because it grows best at altitudes between 600 and 2,000 metres, Arabica is the most dominant species on the coffee market, representing about 75% of global coffee production. Each coffee tree yields an average of two to four kilos of cherries. Arabica beans are fairly flat and elongated. Arabica coffee beans have a smoother, more aromatic, and more flavourful taste compared to Robusta. Arabica beans have a caffeine content of approximately 1.5%.

The main sub-varieties of Arabica are the Yemen accession, which branches out into Typica and Bourbon coffee lineages, and the Ethiopia/Sudan accession. Examples of the Ethiopian and Sudanese cultivars are Geisha, Java, Sudan Rume and Tafari Kela.

Examples of Typica cultivars are the Hawaiian Kona, Jamaican Blue Mountain, SL14 and Maragogipe. Examples of the Bourbon cultivars that are found mostly in Latin America are Caturra, Villa Sarchi and Pacas. Examples of Bourbon cultivars found in East Africa are Jackson, K7, SL28 and SL34.

- *Coffea Canephora* (Robusta): Robusta coffee can be considered a lowland coffee, as it grows best at altitudes below 600 metres. Robusta accounts for around 20% of global coffee production. Its beans have a caffeine content of approximately 2.7%. Robusta is less susceptible to pests and diseases than Arabica. Its beans are smaller and rounder than Arabica beans. When roasted, Robusta beans generally have a stronger and harsher taste than Arabica, which is often described as bitter. Robusta beans are often used in coffee blends and in instant coffee production.

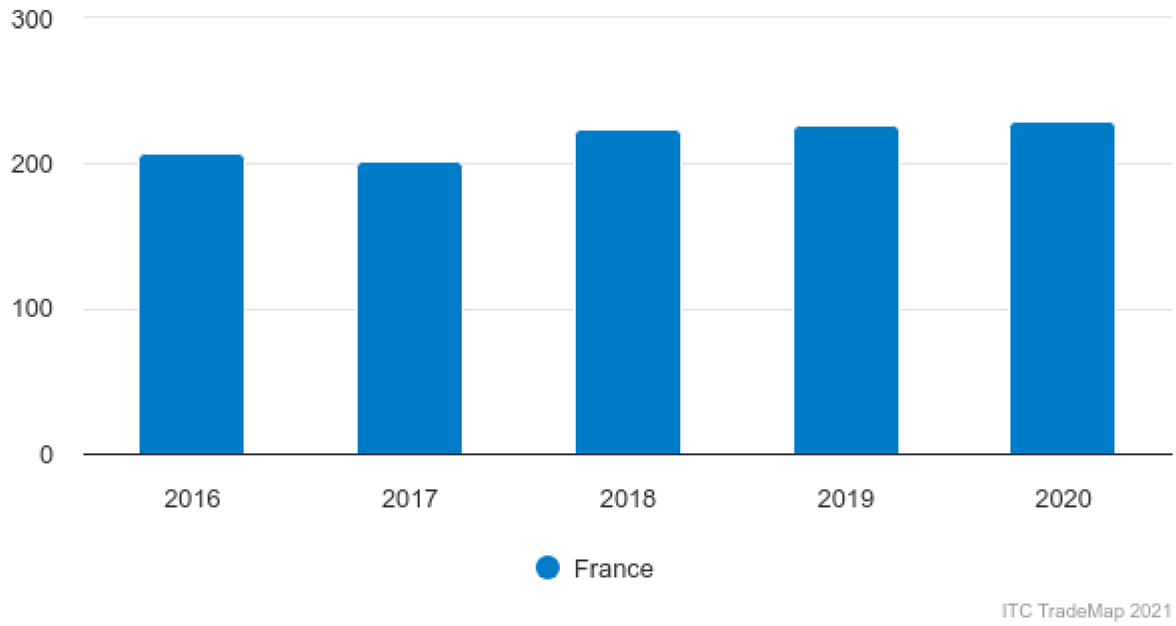
Examples of crossbreeds of the Arabica and Robusta species are Catimor, Castillo (the most commonly grown coffee plant in Colombia), IHCAFE90, Ruiru 11 and Sarchimor.

2. What makes France an interesting market for coffee?

France holds an important position in European imports of green coffee. The largest share of French imports is directly sourced from producing countries, offering interesting opportunities to coffee exporters. Besides being a large importer, France also has a large coffee-roasting industry. Roasted coffee exports have increased much over the years, indicating a constant demand for green coffees. Besides large multinational roasters, France also houses many small and medium-sized roasters, often with a focus on ethical value chains.

Figure 1: Total coffee imports to France

in 1000 tonnes



France is the fifth-largest green coffee importer in Europe

In 2020, green coffee imports to France amounted to 229,000 tonnes, approximately 6.4% of total European imports. Between 2016 and 2020, green coffee imports to France increased at an average annual rate of 6.4%.

Examples of coffee trading companies in France are Maison P Jobin & Cie (part of the Neumann Kaffee Gruppe), Olivier Langlois (part of Group Sopex), Volcafe France (part of ED&F Man), Touton S.A. and the specialty coffee importer BELCO. The Port of Le Havre is the main entry point for green coffee in France.

About 77% of total green coffee imports are imported directly from coffee-producing countries. The largest suppliers to France are Brazil, Vietnam and Honduras, with green coffee volumes of 56,000 tonnes, 30,000 tonnes and 22,000 tonnes respectively. Read more about the countries supplying coffee to France in the section ‘What competition do you face on the French coffee market?’

The role of France as a trade hub in Europe is limited

France is the eight-largest re-exporter of green coffee beans in Europe. In 2020, France accounted for only 1.0% of European re-exports, amounting to 5,500 tonnes. Between 2016 and 2020, the re-exported volumes of green coffee registered a year-to-year growth of 3.4%. As such, most French imports are used by its domestic coffee-roasting industry.

Most green coffee exports from France were destined for its neighbouring countries Belgium and Spain, which imported 1,200 tonnes and 1,100 tonnes respectively.

Maturing coffee roasting industry in France

France has a strong coffee-roasting industry. In 2019, France was the fifth-largest coffee-roasting country in Europe, with a total of 133,000 tonnes of roasted coffee. According to Prodcom data, larger coffee roasting countries were Germany with 572,000 tonnes of roasted coffee in 2019, followed by Italy with 508,000 tonnes, Spain with 143,000 tonnes and the Netherlands with 136,000 tonnes.

France is the sixth-largest roasted coffee exporter in Europe. In 2020, roasted coffee exports amounted to 56,000 tonnes. Between 2016 and 2020, roasted coffee exports increased at an average annual rate of nearly 20%. The French industry continues to grow due to an increase in product differentiation through taste profiles and packaging. Also, market leaders have increasingly introduced products with higher added value. The largest roasted coffee importers from France were Germany, Spain and the Netherlands, each importing between 7,000 and 8,000 tonnes from France.

The largest coffee roasters in France are large multinationals like Nestlé France, Jacobs Douwe Egberts, Lavazza and Segafredo Zanetti.

Tips:

- Activate the “Translation” function of your browser to make the studies available in your native language.
- Access EU Access2Markets to analyse European and French trade dynamics yourself and to build your export strategy. By selecting France as your reporting country, you will be able to follow developments such as trade flows with established suppliers, the emergence of new suppliers and changing patterns in direct and indirect imports.
- See our study of trade statistics for coffee for more detailed information about the European trade in green coffee beans.
- See the website of the French Coffee Union for more information about the coffee industry in France.

3. Which trends offer opportunities on the French market?

Coffee consumers in France increasingly look for higher-quality coffees as well as sustainably produced coffees. As a result, the specialty market in France has grown steadily over the years. There is a growing number of small roasters active on the French market. Sustainability has become key on the French coffee market, making certification an increasingly important entry requirement for coffee exporters.

A growing specialty market in France

The share of specialty coffees in France has increased steadily over the past years, from 1–2% of the French coffee market in 2017 to about 4% in 2020. Still representing a niche market, specialty coffees have great potential for growth, especially by mimicking the well-established wine sector in the country, with attention to elements such as origin, *terroir*, production and preparation methods. Growth estimations point at an increase in the share of specialty coffee in France to about 10% of the total French coffee market by 2025.

Artisanal roasters, coffee enthusiasts and coffee festivals, such as Paris Café Festival and the Paris Coffee Show, play an important role in promoting specialty coffees and in expanding this segment in France. Artisanal roasters and specialty coffee importers often use online blogs to tell the stories behind their specialty coffees and educate consumers about coffee origins. An example is the series of blogs posted by importer Belco. The focus on origin increasingly requires exporters to highlight the uniqueness of their coffees in terms of quality and origin.

Examples of specialty coffee roasters in France are GramGram Café, Kawa Coffee, KB Coffee Roasters, Mana Coffee and Loutsa. Other coffee chain actors with a strong focus on specialty coffees include the brand Alter Eco, which imports fair trade and ethical coffees, and trader BELCO, which focuses on high-quality coffees.

Out-of-home segment important in France

Out-of-home coffee consumption is embedded in French culture. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 35% of consumers said they visit a coffee shop at least 4–5 times a week. During the pandemic these numbers decreased significantly due to lockdowns and other social distancing measures. Many coffee shops and cafés had to close their doors; it is estimated that French coffee establishments together lost about 40% in revenue over 2020 compared to 2019.

Despite the general revenue loss, the branded coffee shop market registered a growth of 2.5% in 2020, and reached a number of 3,639 outlets in that year. The largest coffee shops on the French market are McCafé, Starbucks and Columbus Café & Co.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the share of consumers buying coffees to-go increased from 22% to 34% during 2020. Also, coffee retail volume sales increased by 24% during 2020, which was in part driven by the unavailability of out-of-home coffees.

About 68% of coffee consumers in France indicate that coffees prepared out-of-home by baristas add value to their purchase. Coffee quality is one of the most important out-of-home buying criteria in France. About 43% of consumers is willing to pay more for higher quality coffees.

Given the strong out-of-home culture in France, it is expected that coffee consumption in bars, restaurants and shops will return to pre-pandemic levels in the long term.

Coffee pods and capsules dominate the French market and whole beans gain popularity

European demand for single-serve coffee, such as coffee pods and capsules, has been growing strongly for the past 10 years. France is one of the leading countries in coffee pod and capsule consumption. In 2019, coffee pods represented over 50% of the total coffee market value in France. Over 70% of French consumers had a coffee capsule machine at home that year.

The market leader in the coffee pod segment in France is Nespresso, part of Nestlé. All other large roasters also have their assortment of coffee pods and capsules available in French supermarkets, such as Tassimo from Jacobs Douwe Egberts and Blue from Lavazza. Note that it is generally not viable to export roasted coffee (in capsules or pods). Instead, it is recommended to build a relation with roasters who manufacture this type of coffees and learn about their requirements.

The growth of coffee capsules and pods in France came at the expense of ground coffee and instant coffee. The sales market share of ground coffee decreased by -3.7% between 2017 and 2019, and for instant coffee this was -1.5% over the same period. Whole coffee beans, on the other hand, are steadily gaining popularity in France, and are expected to continue this growth. More and more French consumers have coffee machines with grinders at home. In 2019, about 7.3% of French households used whole beans, an increase of almost 400,000 households since 2016.

Sustainability certification is a major trend in France

Over the years, sustainability labels such as Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance/UTZ and organic have gained a lot of importance in France. Consumers increasingly demand sustainable coffees, which has resulted in a large and diverse offer of certified coffees in supermarkets as well as in the out-of-home segment. Coffee roaster Segafredo, serving both the out-of-home segments as well as supermarkets, registered increased sales of certified coffees in France by 20% in recent years.

Fair trade is a very popular label among French consumers. According to the latest figures from 2018, fair trade sales increased by 22% in 2018 alone. This increase is largely driven by supermarkets, which offer a growing assortment of fair trade products. Some retailers have also committed to certifying their private label products with Fairtrade, such as retailer Carrefour which has a range of Fairtrade and organic private label coffee products.

Organic-certified coffees are also gaining in popularity on the French market. In 2019, about 3% of total coffee sales was organic. This relatively low number underlines the growth potential for organic coffee, as tea and infusions hold much larger organic shares, with 12% and 33% respectively. About 16% of French households bought organic coffee in 2018. Popular French brands offering organic coffee include Alter Eco, Ethiquable, Malongo and MEO. Note that these brands offer coffee that is both organic and fair trade-certified.

In 2020, about 73% of French consumers indicated they want to consume more responsibly. As such, the general expectation is that the popularity of sustainable and/or certified coffees in France will continue to grow.

Tips:

- See our study on trends for coffee to learn more about current trends on the European market.
- See the national chapter of France of the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) for more information about the French specialty coffee market.
- Promote the sustainable and ethical aspects of your production process and support these claims with certification. See our study on doing business with European coffee buyers for more tips on marketing and promoting your coffee.
- Consult the website of the Global Coffee Platform to learn more about global sustainability efforts.
- Thinking about certifying your coffee? Before engaging in a certification programme, make sure to check that the label has sufficient demand in your target market and whether it will be cost-beneficial for your product, always in consultation with your potential buyer.
- Find potential business partners in France by checking the lists of Fairtrade-certified operators, French Rainforest Alliance-certified coffee brands, UTZ-certified coffee supply chain actors and French organic coffee importers.

ProFound – Advisers In Development carried out this study on behalf of CBI.