

Northern Ireland Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics: Purchases and Imports Results 2019

Date Published: 7 October 2021
Geographical Area: Northern Ireland
Theme: Economy
Frequency: Annual

NISRA [published](#) its Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) results relating to local businesses' sales in 2019 to markets outside Northern Ireland (NI) in April 2021. This release provides information on the value of goods and services purchased by NI businesses in 2019.

Key points

- Total purchases by companies in Northern Ireland (NI) were estimated to be worth £46.4 billion in 2019, an increase of 0.5% (£0.2 billion) over the year.
- Total purchases of goods represented 79.0% of total purchases in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £36.6 billion. Purchases of goods increased by 3.4% (£1.2 billion) over the year.
- Total purchases of services represented 21.0% of total purchases in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £9.8 billion. Purchases of services decreased by 9.1% over the year (£1.0 billion).
- Imports were estimated to be worth £7.9 billion in 2019, a decrease of 1.8% (£0.1 billion) over the year.
- Imports of goods were estimated to be worth £7.0 billion in 2019, an increase of 1.0% (£0.1 billion). Imports of goods represented 89.3% of all imports.
- Imports of services represented 10.7% of total imports in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £0.8 billion. Imports of services decreased by 20.1% (£0.2 billion) over the year.
- Imports from Ireland (IE) were estimated to be worth £3.0 billion in 2019, an increase of 6.6% (£0.2 billion) over the year.
- Imports from Rest of EU (REU) were estimated to be worth £2.3 billion in 2019, a decrease of 19.3% (£0.5 billion) over the year.
- Imports from Rest of World (ROW) were estimated to be worth £2.6 billion in 2019, an increase of 9.1% (£0.2 billion) over the year.
- Purchases from Great Britain (GB) were estimated to be worth £13.4 billion in 2019, a decrease of 3.4% (£0.5 billion) over the year. Purchases of goods represented 82.6% (£11.1 billion) of these purchases, with services representing 17.4% (£2.3 billion) of GB purchases.

Contents

1 Results Tables: 2019.....	3
2 Index of Tables: 2011 - 2019.....	8
3 Further Information.....	10

1 Results Tables: 2019

Imports from Ireland, the Rest of the EU and the Rest of the World had a combined worth of £7.9 billion in 2019. When combined with purchases from GB (£13.4 billion) and purchases within NI (£25.1 billion), this equates to total purchases by companies in NI estimated to be worth £46.4 billion in 2019.

Table 1: Purchases and Imports from Trade Partners Split by Goods and Services: 2019 (£ millions)

Trade Partner	Total Purchases	Total Purchases of Goods	Total Purchases of Services
Total Purchases	46,353	36,602	9,752
NI Purchases	25,077	18,495	6,582
GB Purchases	13,412	11,084	2,328
IE Imports	2,972	2,593	378
REU Imports	2,275	2,083	192
ROW Imports	2,618	2,346	272
Total Imports	7,865	7,023	842

**Figures may not sum due to rounding.*

[Download Table 1 Data](#)

Total purchases of goods increased by 3.4% (£1.2 billion) over the year and were estimated to be worth £36.6 billion in 2019. This equates to 79.0% of total purchases in 2019.

Total purchases of services decreased by 9.1% over the year (£1.0 billion) and were estimated to be worth £9.8 billion in 2019. This represents 21.0% of total purchases in 2019.

The largest market for purchases of both goods and services is NI, which accounted for 54.1% (£25.1 billion) of all purchases. The next largest market is GB which represents 28.9% (£13.4 billion) of all purchases in 2019.

Purchases of goods within NI (£18.5 billion) represents 50.5% of all purchases of goods with the next largest market being GB representing 30.3% (£11.1 billion) of all goods purchased. Similarly for services, NI is the largest market followed by GB representing 67.5% (£6.6 billion) and 23.9% (£2.3 billion) of total purchases of services.

Imports were estimated to be worth £7.9 billion in 2019, a decrease of 1.8% (£0.1 billion) over the year. Of which, imports of goods were estimated to be worth £7.0 billion in 2019 (89.3% of all imports). Imports of services were estimated to be worth £0.8 billion representing 10.7% of total imports in 2019.

The profile of the total purchases and imports is broken down in Figure 1 overleaf which shows the origin of the purchases of goods and services and how they contribute to the overall purchases value of £46.4 billion in 2019. Figure 2 presents the timeseries of how purchases from the various origins have changed over time, whilst Figure 3 provides details of the timeseries and split of goods and services purchases from NI, GB, IE, REU and ROW.

Figure 1: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services by Trade Partner, 2019 (£ billions)

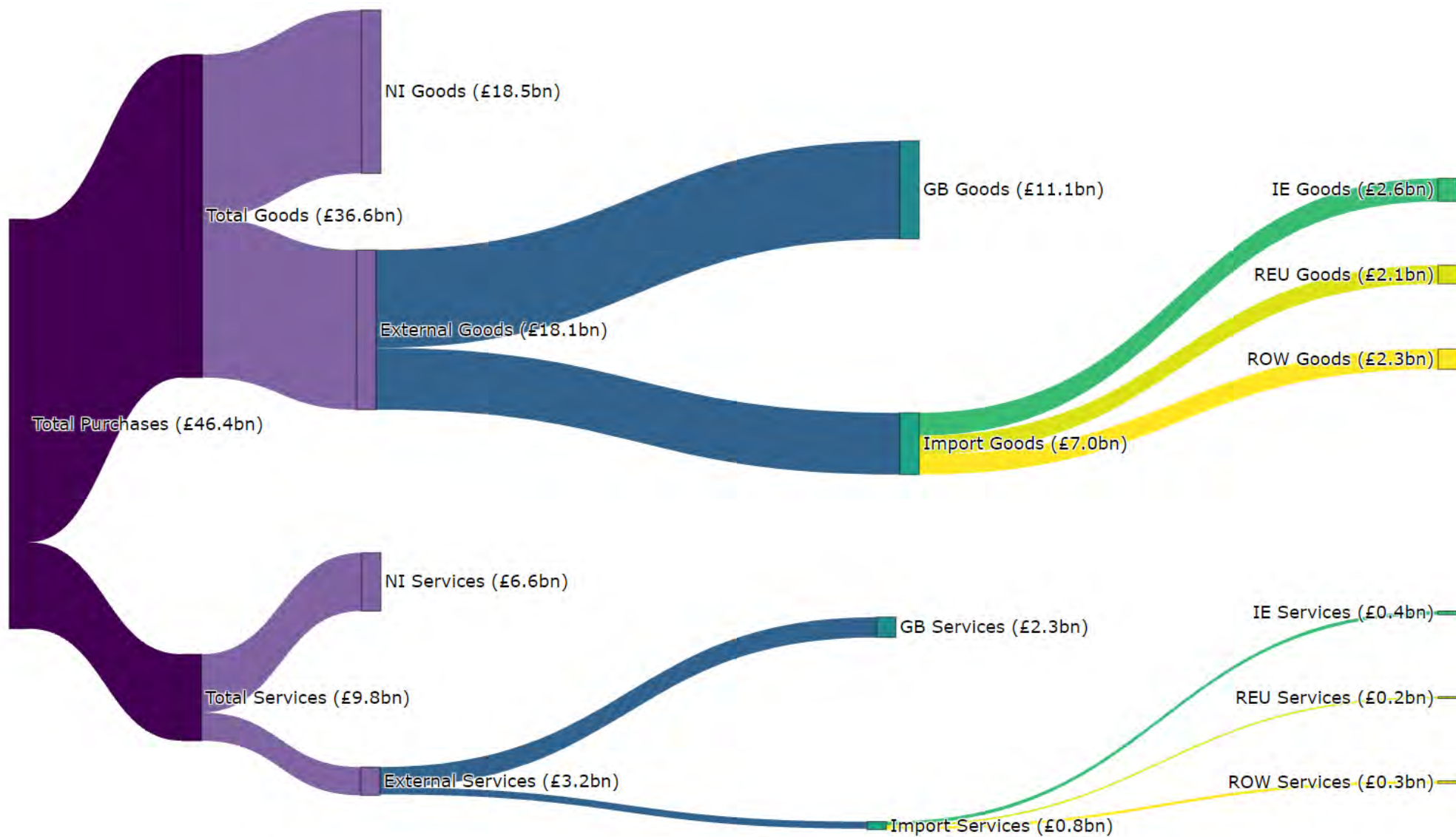
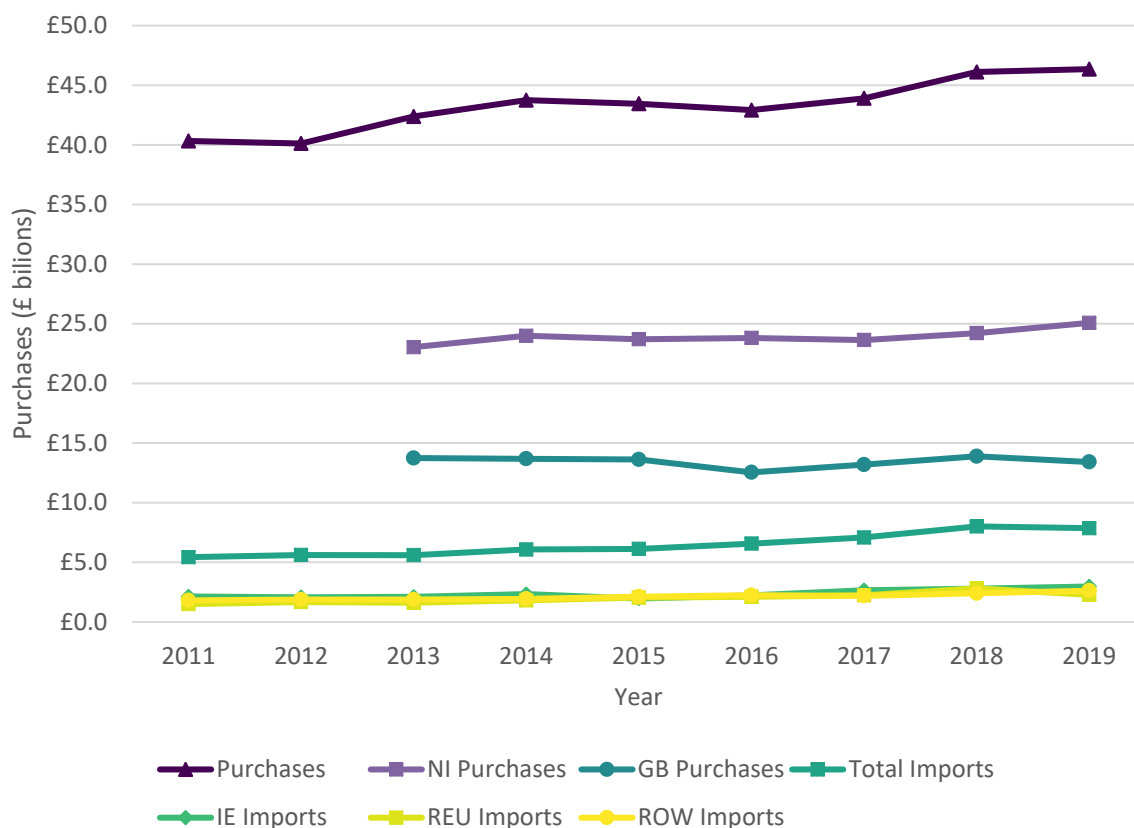


Figure 2 shows that the increase in total purchases over the year of 0.5% (£0.2 billion) was driven by the increase in purchases within NI of £0.9 billion and the increase of imports from IE (£0.2 billion) and imports from ROW (£0.2 billion). These increases were partially offset by decreases in purchases from GB (£0.5 billion) and a decrease in imports from the REU (£0.5 billion) over the year.

Figure 2: Purchases and Imports from Trade Partners: 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)*



[Download Figure 2 Data](#)

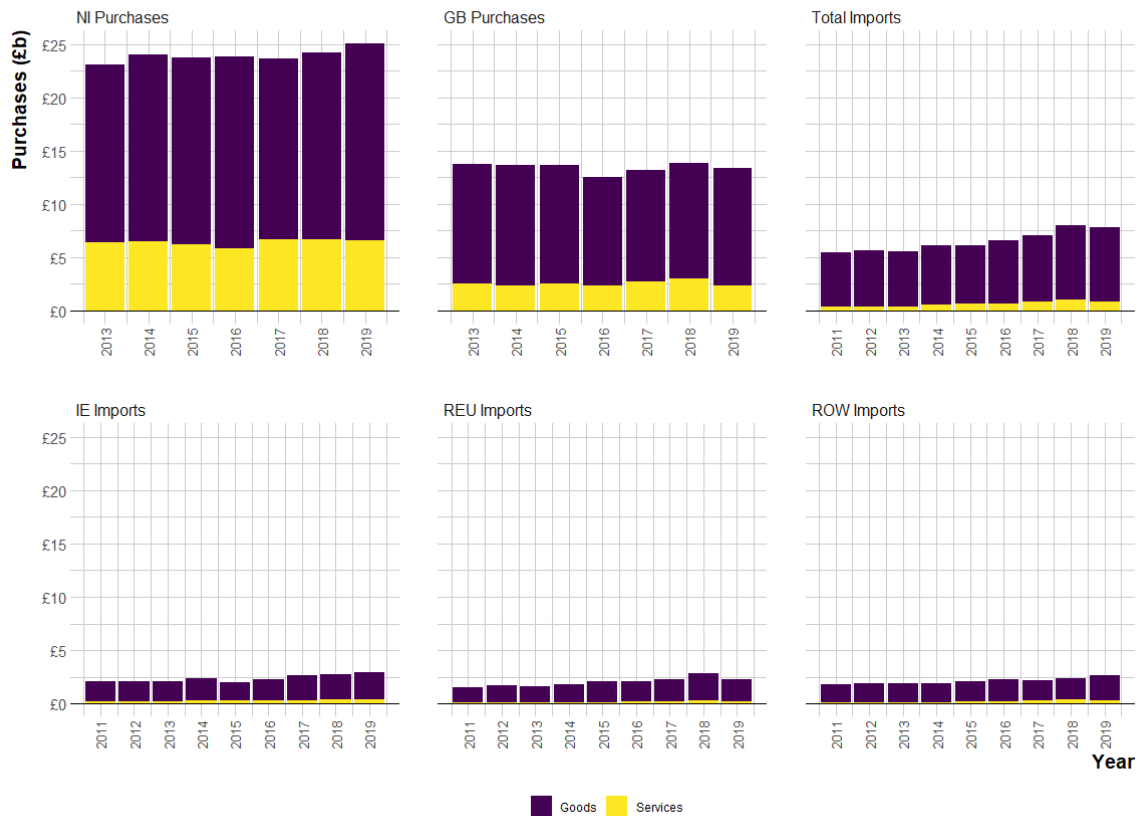
* Data for NI and GB purchases are only available from survey year 2013 onwards

The time-series shows that total purchases have increased by 14.9%, from £40.3 billion in 2011 to £46.4 billion in 2019. Despite the long-term pattern of growth, there have been periodic annual decreases in total purchases in 2012 (0.5%), 2015 (0.7%) and 2016 (1.2%).

Figure 3 below shows that the vast majority of purchases are purchases of goods, no matter the trade partner. Total purchases of goods represented 79.0% of total purchases in 2019 and were estimated to be worth £36.6 billion.

Larger amounts of services tend to be bought from partners closer to NI compared to more distant partners, with the largest value of services actually bought from within NI.

Figure 3: Purchases and Imports split by goods and services: 2011 – 2019 (£ billions)*



[Download Figure 3 Data](#)

* Data for NI and GB purchases are only available from survey year 2013 onwards

Points to note:

The questionnaire used to collect this data captures the value of a transaction and the location (country) of the seller. In interpreting the results readers should be aware that BESES captures no information relating to:

- the business making the sale;
- the product or service purchased;
- whether any goods purchased are final products or are intermediate goods to be used in a further production process;
- transport/shipping routes; and
- the country of origin of any goods purchased. For example, a business might report that they have purchased goods from a business in GB and this is recorded as a GB purchase. However we do not know where the product was actually produced. Even if the GB seller originally bought the good from outside of the UK (IE, REU or ROW) BESES still captures this as a GB purchase. Therefore, goods purchased from GB could have been produced outside of the UK and so supply of certain goods purchased from GB could be impacted post-BREXIT – research is currently underway to gain a better understanding of the situation.

For example:

- NI business A purchases £50m of goods from company B in Germany - BESES data will show £50m purchases from REU (no matter the shipping route).
- NI business A purchases £100m of goods from company C in England who originally bought the goods from company B in Germany for £50m – BESES data will show £100m purchases from GB (the £100m from transaction C→A is the only money flowing from the NI economy).

Reference Tables

To support this release a set of reference tables with further sectoral breakdowns are available on the [NISRA website](#).

2 Index of Tables: 2011 - 2019

Table 1.1	Annual Series Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners and annual change, 2011 - 2019 (£m)
Table 1.2	Annual Series Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 - 2019 (£m)
Table 1.3	Annual Series Imports of goods and services by industry sector, 2011 - 2019 (£m)

The tables below include annual estimates with associated quality indicators (confidence intervals and coefficient of variation)

Table 2.1	2019	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 2.2	2019	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 2.3	2019	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 3.1	2018	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 3.2	2018	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 3.3	2018	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 4.1	2017	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 4.2	2017	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 4.3	2017	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 5.1	2016	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 5.2	2016	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 5.3	2016	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 6.1	2015	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 6.2	2015	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 6.3	2015	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 7.1	2014	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 7.2	2014	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 7.3	2014	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 8.1	2013	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 8.2	2013	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 8.3	2013	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 9.1	2012	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 9.2	2012	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 9.3	2012	Imports of goods and services by industry sector
Table 10.1	2011	Purchases & imports of goods and services from trade partners
Table 10.2	2011	Total purchases of goods and services by industry sector
Table 10.3	2011	Imports of goods and services by industry sector



[BESES: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services Tables – 2019 \(Microsoft Excel\)](#)



[BESES: Purchases and Imports of Goods and Services Tables – 2019 \(Open Document Spreadsheet\)](#)

3 Further Information

Delay in Publication

This BESES publication, originally scheduled for release in May 2021, was delayed until October 2021, as it was necessary to extend the data collection period in light of the economic climate and pressures being faced by local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Users should refer to the [COVID-19 and the production of statistics](#) page for more information.

Experimental Status

The Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics (BESES) is an experimental annual measure of local businesses' sales to markets outside Northern Ireland (NI).

BESES data is gathered through the Northern Ireland Annual Business Inquiry and has been running since 2011. The ABI surveys all businesses with 50 or more employees; all multi-site businesses with 20-49 employees; all manufacturing businesses with more than 5 employees; and a representative sample of other smaller businesses. In all, the ABI samples about 20% of the eligible business population each year.

Ongoing development of the methodology (as outlined in the associated published [methodology paper](#) of March 2015) will be informed by user feedback, both in terms of the usefulness and reliability of the estimates and their comparability with other sources and the statistics will remain experimental until user feedback indicates that they are useful and credible.

These statistics are currently undergoing review by the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#) with a view to attaining [National Statistics](#) accreditation.

NISRA has engaged extensively throughout the evolution of this output with expert users of NI economic statistics whose views have already helped to inform the current approach. Users include DfE, DoF, and DAERA economists, the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre and a number of NI economic commentators and ONS. NISRA will continue to consult on any further methodological changes which may improve the quality and value of the statistics.

Users should refer to the [Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics Development Plan 2021](#) for further information on the progress made by NISRA in developing Northern Ireland trade statistics over the last 5 years alongside an overview of the plans for the next 2 years.

Status of figures in current bulletin

The most recent figures relate to survey year 2019. These figures are provisional and are subject to revision in the next reporting period.

It is normal practice to revise the data from the previous year based on ongoing data validation and clarification of responses from individual businesses. In line with this, previously published provisional BESES estimates for 2018 have been revised throughout this publication. Users can refer to the [BESES Revision Policy and comparisons of provisional and revised data](#).

Sales and exports values are reported in £ billion unless otherwise specified.

Percentages are reported to one decimal place.

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

All values are in **current** prices.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted on the collection and validation of business data gathered throughout the majority of 2020. The collection period for the survey data for the 2019 reference year was from March 2020 – March 2021. During this time many businesses were either closed or working on a much reduced scale. Thus the achieved response rate of 52% is somewhat lower than the rate normally achieved (approximately 70%).

As a result, estimates for 2019 contain a larger number of imputations (estimates) than previous years and may be subject to higher revisions than normal next year.

That said, imputation methods for the survey are robust and well-established, and the coefficients of variation for the headline figures for Total Purchases, Total Purchases of Goods and Total Purchases of Services are 1.0%, 1.1% and 1.6% respectively, indicating a strong level of precision for the estimates. These coefficients are in line with previous years estimates.

Background Notes

For further information regarding survey background and coverage, users should refer to the [background notes](#).

Relevance to users

For further information regarding survey relevance to users, users should refer to the [Summary of usage documentation](#).

Methodological improvements

For further information regarding survey methodological improvements, users should refer to the [BESES Development Plan](#).

Interactive mapping tool

NISRA has developed an interactive trade in goods map to allow users to explore official trade in goods data by country and world region using data from HMRC's Regional Trade Statistics. The tool was developed by NISRA based on the existing [UN Comtrade](#) tool developed by [DIT \(Department for International Trade\)](#) and [BEIS \(Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy\)](#) and can be found below.

- [UK Regions Imports and Exports of Goods by Country and World Region](#)

Reference Tables

To support this release a set of reference tables with further sectoral and geographic breakdowns are available on the [NISRA website](#).

User Engagement

We welcome any feedback you might have in relation to this report, and would be particularly interested in knowing how you make use of these data to inform your work. Please contact us at economicstats@nisra.gov.uk.

Next Publication

Imports data for survey year 2020 will be published in Summer 2022.

The next exports bulletin, with results for survey year 2020, will be published in December 2021.

All publications will be available on the [NISRA website](#).

For Further Information

Further information on the BESES can be accessed on the [NISRA website](#).

Issued by:

Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch,
Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency
Department of Finance
Email: economicstats@nisra.gov.uk

Statistics Contact:

Damian Buchanan
Email: damian.buchanan@nisra.gov.uk
Tel: 028 9052 9648