Entering the European market for candles

The European market for candles offers opportunities, but the competition is strong. China continues to be a fierce competitor and the influence of Eastern European countries is also increasing. Polish suppliers in particular have shown strong growth in the past few years. These countries are well-known for their large-scale production at low cost. To enter the European market, your products need to comply with mandatory (legal) requirements as imposed by the European Union. Moreover, there are additional requirements that can be demanded by European buyers and which may enhance your chances for success.

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1. What requirements must candles comply with to be allowed on the European market?

What are the mandatory requirements?

When exporting to Europe, you have to comply with the following legal requirements:

- General product safety
- Packaging and packaging waste legislation
- Dangerous products resembling foodstuffs directive

General product safety

Europe's General Product Safety Directive states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use. It provides a framework for all legislation regarding specific products and issues. If there are no specific legal requirements established for your product and its use, the General Product Safety Directive still applies. If specific requirements do apply, the Directive applies in addition to those: it covers other safety aspects which may not have been described specifically.

Unsafe products are rejected at the European border or withdrawn from the market. The European Union has introduced a rapid alert system (RAPEX) to list such products.

Tips:

Read more about the General Product Safety Directive in the EU Trade Helpdesk.

Use your common sense to ensure that normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

Check the RAPEX database for candles for an idea of what issues may arise.

Packaging

Europe has specific packaging and packaging waste legislation. This EU Directive 2015/720 was adopted to harmonise measures concerning the management of packaging and packaging waste and to prevent or reduce its impact on the environment at European level. Buyers may therefore ask you to minimise the use of

packaging materials (paper, carton, plastic) or to use a different kind of (recycled) material.

Europe also has requirements for wood packaging materials (WPM) used for transport, such as:

- packing cases
- boxes
- crates
- drums
- pallets
- box pallets
- dunnage

All wood packaging material and dunnage from non-European Union countries must be:

- either heat treated or fumigated in line with ISPM15 procedures;
- officially marked with the ISPM15 stamp consisting of three codes (country, producer and measure applied) and the IPPC logo;
- debarked.

These requirements do not apply to:

- wood 6mm thick or less;
- wood packaging material made entirely from processed wood produced using glue, heat and pressure, e.g. plywood, oriented strand board and veneer;
- wood packaging material used in trade within the European Union.

The objective of this Directive is to prevent organisms that are harmful to plants or plant products from being introduced into and spreading within the European Union. It also regulates imports from third countries in line with international plant health standards. Keep this in mind when you decide on the packaging of your candles.

Does it look like food?

Some decorative items look so much like food, that consumers could mistake them for real food products (for instance, candles that look like candy canes). The European Union's Council Directive 89/357/EEC on dangerous products resembling foodstuffs bans these items from the European market. Keep this in mind when designing your candles. Make sure that they don't resemble food too closely in:

- appearance
- colour
- size
- form
- labelling
- scent
- packaging
- volume

Picture 1: Example of candles that look like food. These are an absolute no-go in Europe



Tip:

Check 'Food-imitating products' in the RAPEX database for products that resemble food too closely. This gives you an idea of the designs to avoid.

What additional requirements do buyers often have? RAL Quality Mark for Candles

The European Quality Association for Candles has a RAL Quality Mark for Candles. This voluntary Quality Mark has standards for burning duration, raw material and burning behaviour. It also guarantees a limited use of azo dyes in the production process.

Tip:

Study and meet the quality standards according to the RAL Quality Mark for Candles.

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market, and buyers appreciate a good story. Examples include sustainable raw materials and production processes, and the impact your company has on the environment, the well-being of your workers and society as a whole. Nowadays, an

increasing number of European buyers demand the following certification schemes:

- Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company is audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods.

A recent study by the International Trade Centre concluded that, irrespective of the product, retailers in the major European markets are putting more products on their shelves that are environmentally and socially sustainable, simply because consumers are asking for it. According to the survey, 98.5% of retailers consider sustainability as a factor in their product sourcing decisions.

The Association of European Candle Manufacturers also requires its members to respect fundamental Corporate Social Responsibility Principles. This applies to both European manufacturers and their suppliers.

Tips:

Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues relating to initiatives such as BSCI and ETI will give you an idea of what to focus on.

If you can show your sustainability performance, this may give you a competitive advantage. Options for doing so include a self-assessment like the BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers, or a code of conduct such as the ETI base code.

For more information, see our special study on Sustainability in the Home Sector.

In addition to the requirements mentioned in the section above, please refer to our study about buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles for a general overview of buyer requirements in Europe.

Labelling requirements

The information on the outer packaging of candles should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer. The external packaging labels for candles should include the producer name, consignee name, material used, quantity, size, volume and caution signs. Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself (e.g. logos or 'Made in...' information). This is part of the order specifications. It is common in Europe to use an EAN code or barcode on the product label. Make sure you use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging requirements

You should pack candles according to the importer's instructions. Importers have their own specific requirements for:

- the use of packaging materials
- filling boxes
- the use of pallets
- stowing containers

Properly packaging candles minimises the risk of damage caused by impacts. How an item is packed for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should ensure that the items inside a cardboard box

cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container.

Packaging must be easy to handle in terms of dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination and must be specified by the buyer.

Boxes are usually palletised for air or sea transport. Exporters have to maximise pallet space. For candles, flatpacking the items inside the container reduces costs. Consider this when designing your products.

Packaging must provide maximum protection. However, you should also avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost for buyers. You can reduce the amount and diversity of packing materials by:

- partitioning inside the boxes, using folded cardboard
- matching inner and outer boxes by using standard sizes
- considering packing and logistical requirements when designing your products
- asking the buyer for alternatives.

Tip:

Always ask for the importer's order specifications, packaging and labelling requirements.

Payment terms

The payment term is usually agreed upon with the buyer in the order contract. Payment terms vary from buyer to buyer and are related to the volume and value of the order, the type of distribution partner, whether or not an agent is acting as an intermediary, and what delivery terms apply. In general, the payment term will be 30 or 60 days after receipt of the goods or the date of the invoice.

Occasionally a deposit or advance payment can be agreed upon. This happens, for example, in Fair Trade business relations. Certain sourcing countries have regulations stipulating 100% prepayment before delivery. This can hamper business, as buyers usually shy away from such costs or will negotiate a harder price deal.

A special form of financial security is offered by Letters of Credit. The so-called L/C is often used in first transactions, but it is an expensive system and therefore not preferred by European buyers.

The payment terms are the outcome of your negotiations about the risks involved in export trade, particularly the following:

- financial risk (who funds what part of the production and transport process?)
- transportation risk (if damage or loss occurs, who pays?)
- the transfer of ownership (when do the goods change hands?)

A balanced outcome is in the interest of both the seller and the buyer and is the result of a process of negotiation.

If the payment term is not covered in the contract, you can refer to European Directive 2011/7/EU. This Directive was established to protect SMEs against late payment. Although in principle this Directive does not apply to companies outside the European Union, you can use these terms as covered in the Directive as a guideline:

- If no payment term is agreed to in the contract (or General Terms & Conditions), then 30 calendar days after receipt of the invoice.
- If the date of receipt of the invoice is not determined, then 30 calendar days after receipt of the goods and/or services.
- If the invoice is received before the goods and/or services, then 30 calendar days after receipt of the goods and/or services.
- If a verification or acceptance procedure is agreed to with regard to conformity, then 30 calendar days after the date this procedure is completed.
- A verification or acceptance procedure may not take longer than 30 calendar days.
- Payment terms in Europe that are set in a contract may not be longer than 60 calendar days unless otherwise expressly agreed.

Tips:

Carefully study the payment terms offered by your (potential) buyer, especially the number of days for delayed payment.

Always include the payment term in your negotiations about the price, as an advance payment can justify a lower price. On the other hand, a long credit period can justify a higher price.

Study Directive 2011/7/EU regarding payment terms and late payment regulations in case payment terms are not covered in the contract.

Delivery terms

Delivery terms depend on the type of distribution partner and respective preferences as to physical distribution. Importers will prefer FOB (Free On Board) or FCA (Free Carrier) arrangements. FOB is restricted to goods transported by sea or inland waterway. It means that the seller pays for transportation of the goods to the port of shipment, plus loading costs. The buyer pays the cost of marine freight transport, insurance, unloading and transportation from the arrival port to the final destination. FCA can be used for any transportation mode. It means that the seller fulfils his obligation to deliver when he has handed over the goods, cleared for export, into the charge of the carrier designated by the buyer at the specified place or point.

Retail multiples can ask for CIF (Cost Insurance Freight). That means they will ask you to include the shipping and insurance charges in your quotation. Small retailers may go a step further and ask you to arrange for the goods to be delivered to their doorstep. The delivery terms for DDP (Delivered Duty Paid) may then be negotiated. For importers who consolidate orders in your country, Ex Works terms are often best.

Details about the rights and obligations of the buyer and the seller under the respective terms can be found in the Incoterms 2020.

Tip:

Study the rights and obligations of buyers and sellers for the different **Incoterms** and include these in your negotiations.

What are the requirements for niche markets?

ECOCERT sustainability standard

ECOCERT has a 'Natural origin and organic candles and home fragrances' standard. This voluntary standard applies to both scented and non-scented candles. It promotes the use of natural origin and/or organic ingredients. The standard also guarantees an environmentally friendly production process. ECOCERT certification is especially popular on the French market.

Tips:

For more information, see the ECOCERT 'Natural origin and organic candles and home fragrances' standard.

Use the ECOCERT standard and/or its guidelines in your manufacturing process. Even if you don't apply for certification, being informed about sustainability standards is useful.

Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your candles is labour intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair trade certifications are issued by:

- World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO)
- Fairtrade International
- Fair For Life

Tips:

Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.

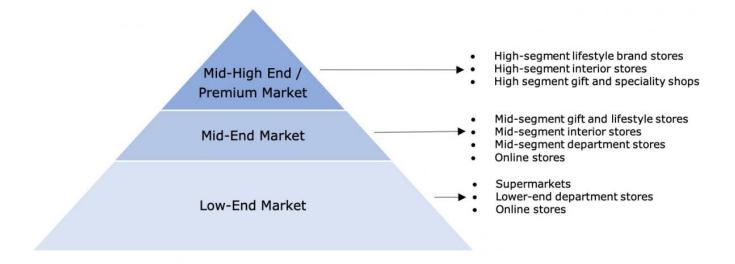
Check the ITC Standards map database for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

2. Through what channels can you get candles on the European market?

How is the end-market segmented?

The candle market is segmented into low-, mid- and high-end segments.

Figure 1: Candle segmentation in Europe



Low-end market

In this segment the focus is on functionality, such as burning hours and a stable flame. The candles often come in sets and at a low price. They are ideal for one-stop shopping through retailers such as:

- supermarkets
- lower-end department stores
- online stores

Mid-end market

This segment follows trends, mainly through decoration and colour. Fancy candles are part of this segment. Prices are reasonable and the candles are often gift-packed. They are mainly sold in:

- mid-segment interior stores
- mid-segment department stores
- mid-segment gift and lifestyle stores
- online stores

Mid- to high-end/premium market

In the mid-high segment, craftsmanship, natural or sustainable values and branding play a role. Candles don't usually exceed this level, where prices remain affordable. Occasionally they move into the premium direction, such as candles in containers/holders produced from precious materials or with superb craftsmanship. In this case the container is often what adds value, rather than the candle inside. The shops where these products are sold include:

- high-segment lifestyle brand stores
- high-segment interior stores
- high-segment gift and speciality shops

Through what channels do candles end up on the end-market?

The channels through which candles are put on the market follow the traditional patterns: import takes place via importers/wholesalers that supply to retailers. Larger retail chains often bypass the importers/wholesalers and import themselves. Online platforms have become increasingly prominent. In some cases, buying agents play a role. Below is an overview of the main actors in the market for candles.

Importers/wholesalers

Importers/wholesalers sell products to retailers in their own country or region, or re-export to the broader European continent. Some European markets are therefore supplied by wholesalers/importers from other European countries (internal European trade). These importers/wholesalers take care of the import procedures. They take ownership of the goods when they buy from an exporter (as opposed to agents), taking on the risk of the onward sale of the home decoration products. Developing a long-term relationship can lead to a high level of cooperation on appropriate designs for the market, new trends, use of materials, type of finishing and quality requirements.

Direct sales

Some retailers, especially the larger chains, are increasingly importing directly from their suppliers in developing countries. Others, mainly the smaller independent stores, order in Europe from wholesalers. Retailers come in many sizes: large and part of a chain, or small and independent. There is a tendency for consolidation in European retail, with large retail brands becoming more widespread in Europe and more 'lifestyle-centred' (offering home decor and textiles as well as fashion accessories and furniture).

Buying agent

Buying agents do not import, but instead represent European buyers in the sourcing country. Sometimes agents have a more limited role, such as checking the quality of the shipments in your warehouse on behalf of a specific importer or checking the codes of conduct that exporters have agreed with the buyer. Agents can work individually or as part of purchasing companies. They mostly operate based on commission. This channel, however, is not very common in the candle trade from developing countries.

Tips:

To find potential buyers of your candles, search the list of exhibitors or visit the main trade fairs in Europe: Ambiente in Frankfurt, Germany (February), Christmasworld in Frankfurt (January), Maison et Objet in Paris, (January and September), Spoga + gafa in Cologne (August), Tendence in Frankfurt (August).

Search the list of members of Candle Associations to find potential buyers: Association of European Candle Makers (member directory here), European Candle Association (member directory here), European Quality Association for Candles (member directory here).

See our Tips for finding buyers on the European market for Home Decoration and Home Textiles.

To help you enter the market, consider working with an agent or representative with a good reputation. You can look for commercial agents on the website of Internationally United Commercial Agents and Brokers (IUCAB).

On the basis of distribution channels to reach the consumer, the European candles market is segmented into speciality or gift shops, department or home decor stores, mass merchandise retailers (discount stores, drugstore chains, etc.), direct sales and the internet. Mass merchandise retailers account for the largest share of the candles market, followed by department and home decor stores and speciality or gift shops.

Speciality and gift shops

Speciality shops and gift shops are smaller stores which focus specifically on one niche, in this case products with a gift element or specific products such as candles.

Department stores and home décor stores

Department stores are large retail establishments that offer a wide variety of items such as clothes, electronics, toys, furniture and home decorations.

Mass merchandise retailers

Mass merchandise retailers are companies that affordably sell large quantities of goods that appeal to a wide variety of consumers. They are not necessarily known for selling durable, high-quality products, but they do meet consumers' needs at reasonable prices.

Direct sales

Large retailers are increasingly importing for themselves instead of through European wholesale importers. The advantages include cutting out the margins of the wholesaler and reducing delivery time to the market.

Online

E-commerce in candles is increasing. It can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online. They shop around and compare prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items such as candles are especially suitable for this.

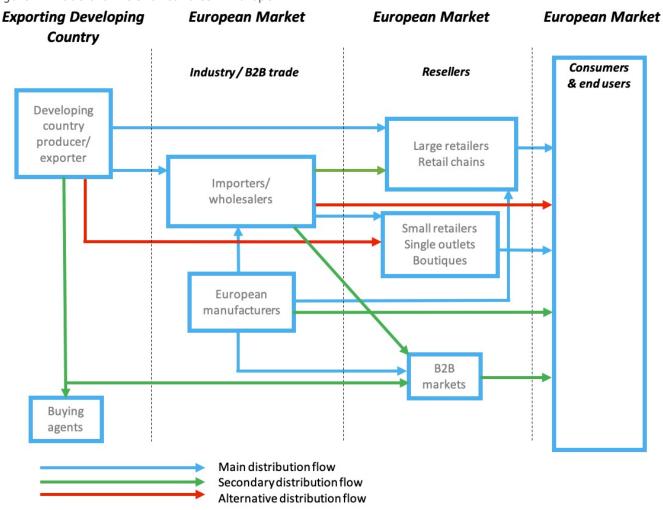


Figure 2: Trade channels for candles in Europe

What is the most interesting channel for you?

Wholesale importers are the main channel between exporters in developing countries and European retailers. They are interesting if you want to develop a long-term relationship and they usually have good knowledge of the European market. They can provide you with valuable information and guidance on European market preferences.

However, as the market is becoming more and more competitive, large retailers are increasingly importing for themselves instead of through European wholesale importers. The obvious advantages include cutting out the

margins of the wholesaler and reducing delivery time to the market. Because of this trend, the self-importing retailers might want to drive a much harder bargain with you.

Smaller, independent European retailers continue to purchase mainly from domestic wholesalers/importers. As in other European market sectors (such as food or clothing), independent retailers in home decor are struggling to compete with retail chains. They need to differentiate on value-added service, as well as specialised offers and authenticity.

These buyers typically prefer orders for small quantities of each item, small total order volumes and delivery to their doorstep, with a limited likelihood of repeat orders. You need to calculate whether such small orders are cost-effective for you.

The trend of direct sourcing is expected to continue in the future and may create more opportunities for you. The pool of buyers may increase if more retailers become importers, possibly resulting in an improvement of your bargaining position. Importing retailers order for their own shops and can therefore place orders much more quickly than importers/wholesalers, who first need to show samples to their retailers before exporters receive their orders.

Tips:

Consider targeting retailers directly to improve your bargaining position and increase your chances of closing deals faster.

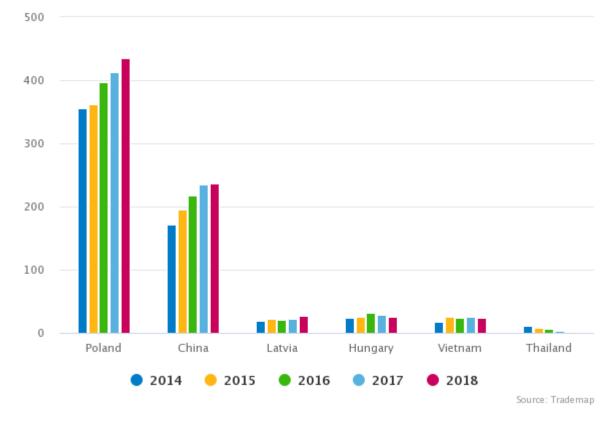
Communicate your offer and terms to the targeted retailer (large/small). Ask your existing buyers how they operate if you are unsure. The more informed you are about this aspect, the better you will be able to set prices

Offer suitable services such as fast delivery and after-sales support to build a relationship based on mutual benefits.

When you participate in international trade fairs, especially within Europe, make sure that you have a policy for small, independent retailers coming to your booth. If you choose to sell to them, you must have appropriate terms of trading (such as low minimum order quantities, delivery to the doorstep of the retailer and pre-stocking).

3. What competition do you face on the European candle market?

As seen in Figure 3, Poland is by far the main candle supplier to Europe, followed by China. Latvia, Hungary, Vietnam and Thailand are next on the list, but there is a significant gap in import value compared to Poland and China.



Which countries are you competing with? Poland is the main competitor

Poland is Europe's main candle producer. In 2018, Poland's supply of candles to Europe was almost 28% of the overall supply to Europe. The country's total supply grew from €356 million in 2014 to €435 million in 2018. This makes Poland the largest competitor for exporters.

The country's strength is its geographical proximity to the European market, giving suppliers the opportunity to offer short delivery times. Polish suppliers also have a good understanding of the European consumer and have well-established, efficient production lines. To compete with Poland's relatively cheap production, you should focus on design, branding, material use and handmade candles. Moreover, ensure that you offer a high level of service to build strong relationships.

China for bulk and low-cost production

Second in line when it comes to supplying to Europe is China. Similar to Poland, China is a relatively cheap producer. The Chinese are also constantly improving their technology, which strengthens their position compared to their competitors. China accounts for 15% of the total European supply of candles. Chinese suppliers are well-known for producing large volumes of candles. Product development and creativity are not their core strengths. To compete with Chinese suppliers, you should differentiate and move away from mass-produced candles. Focus more on products with high emotional value, sustainability and the story behind the product.

Latvia, Hungary, Vietnam and Thailand

Latvia, Hungary, Vietnam and Thailand are relatively small producers compared to the two largest suppliers (Poland and China).

Latvian producers focus on high-quality candles featuring Scandinavian design and customisation. The country accounted for 1.7% of the total supply to Europe, reaching a total of ≤ 26 million in 2018.

A merger between two smaller companies, one from Latvia and one from Denmark, created a large manufacturer in Latvia (Baltic Candles LTD) which is responsible for a significant share of the supply of candles from Latvia to Europe.

Hungary is responsible for a similar share (1.6%) of the total supply of candles to Europe, which amounts to ≤ 25 million (2018). The country's strength is its geographical proximity to the European market and well-developed infrastructure. Like Polish manufacturers, Hungarian suppliers also have a good understanding of the European consumer and market trends. An example of one of the few candle producers in Hungary is Gyertya Aruhaz.

Vietnamese suppliers of candles are in the same range as Latvia and Hungary, reaching a value of almost €24 million in 2018. Their European market share is 1.5%. One strength of the Vietnamese producers is that they are very productive and can produce at a low cost, like the Chinese. They may also potentially benefit from the United States - China trade war. A weakness is the lack of creativity when it comes to new concepts and designs. They also have shortcomings in understanding European culture and consumers.

Thailand is responsible for only 0.01% of the total supply of candles to Europe. Besides being the smallest of the top six suppliers, Thailand has also experienced a decline in growth between 2014 and 2018. While 2014 showed an export value of \leq 11 million, in 2018 this value decreased to \leq 2 million. Since imports have shown five consecutive years of declining export value, this trend is likely to continue in the years ahead.

The strength of Thailand's candle manufacturers is their long-standing tradition and experience in the international marketplace. A weakness is that production costs have increased over the last decade.

Which companies are you competing with?

Companies from Poland

Poland is by far Europe's main supplier of candles. Companies from this country will be your main competitors. They can offer the products at a relatively low price. Proximity to the end-market (mainly Northern European traders), the ability to make just-in-time arrangements and easy communication are additional competitive advantages. On top of that, Polish companies generally have access to technology and co-investment opportunities with EU buyers. Like companies from China, they are able to mass-produce.

Some weaknesses of Polish candle manufacturers include an inability to do shorter runs. They are sizeable, capital-intensive set-ups that need volume. Also, there is limited interest in developing fancy candles and concepts for the high-end segment, as that requires a more complex design component, shorter runs and more intensive distribution (more and different buyers).

There are many large candle manufacturers in Poland, such as:

- KCB Candle Company
- Dalian Talent
- Korona Candles SP. Zo.o.
- Olynk

Companies from China

China is the second largest supplier of candles. Just like Poland, they are strong competitors because they can offer candles at relatively low prices and in high volumes. Chinese exporters typically export large quantities of basic candles.

Some examples of Chinese exporters are:

- Hebei Ruitou Imp&Exp Co.,Ltd.
- Qingdao Art Fortune

• T&H Candle

Companies from Vietnam and Thailand

Far less significant than the competition from Poland and China are companies from Vietnam and Thailand. While Thai companies generally operate at higher production costs, Vietnamese companies are able to produce at low costs, comparable to China.

Examples of Vietnamese producers are:

- Creative Lights Vietnam Co.
- Fleming International
- Aroma Bay Candles

Examples of Thai producers are:

- Wasila Candle
- Lucky Candles

Which products are you competing with?

As candles become decorative accessories in their own right, they are competing more and more with other decorative accessories made of other materials (wood, metal, synthetics, glass etc.).

Candles are also competing with smart lighting concepts like the Philips Hue. The light in this lamp can be adjusted according to the ambiance that the consumer wants to create. The lamp can also be operated using an application on mobile phones.

In the same way, scented candles are competing with a more industrial variety: diffusers and liquid-based room fragrances. The main advantage of candles is that they fit better with the trend of wellness, spirituality and getting closer to nature.

Tips:

Compare your products and company to the competition from Poland and China. You can use the ITC Trademap to find exporters per country and compare based on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

To differentiate from your main competitors, focus on design, quality, branding and handmade candles.

Keep track of global trends in urbanisation and social design to anticipate future structural changes in your sector. An interesting resource to monitor is **Trendwatching.com**

4. What are the prices for candles on the European market?

Table 1 gives an overview of the prices of candles in the low-, mid- and high-end market segments.

Table 1: Indicative consumer prices of candles in Europe

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
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Basic candle	€0.30-1.00	€0.50-1.50	€0.80-2.50
Fancy candle	€1.00-4.00	€4.50-10.00	€11.00-30.00
Scented candle	€1.50-7.00	€6.00-15.00	€20.00-35.00

Consumer prices depend on the value perception of your product in a particular segment. Your marketing mix influences this:

- product benefits
- promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits)
- points of sale (reseller positioning)
- price

The following percentages give an indication of a price breakdown for candles in the supply chain.

- Shipping, import, handling costs: +25%
- Wholesaler: +100%
- Retail: +100-150%

A few examples of candle prices across Europe are the following:

- Luxury scented candle, Rituals (The Netherlands), price range between €20.00 and €35.00
- Rustic candle, Kerzen Welt (Germany), price range between €1.80 and €10.90
- Candle in Jar with scent, Yankee Candle (the United Kingdom), price range between €11.90 and €29.90 depending on the size

Tips:

The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. Your candles' quality and price must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your cost accordingly.

Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position in the market.

This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by Globally Cool B.V. in collaboration with GO! GoodOpportunity.

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