

What is a critical import?

The government defines critical imports as those goods imported into the UK which are critical to the UK security and prosperity. This primarily refers to goods which are essential for the operation of the UK's designated Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) sectors and / or to the success of the government's five growth sectors.

Critical goods

Government considers a good critical to these sectors to be one where if supply disruption were to occur, there would be a high likelihood of a moderate to catastrophic detrimental impact within the UK on: (a) essential services; (b) life, including medicines and delivery of patient care; (c) the economy; a strategic economic sector or the economy as a whole, including those sectors critical for reaching net zero; or (d) national security, including the functioning of the state and public order.

This strategy does not cover the import of services, of which the UK is a net exporter with a £38.3 billion services trade surplus in the third quarter of 2023.⁶ Given the nature of services, their trade tends to be less susceptible to short to medium-term disruption.

CNI sectors

Government defines CNI as the critical elements of infrastructure (namely assets, facilities, systems, networks or processes and the essential workers that operate and facilitate them), the loss or compromise of which could result in:

- major detrimental impact on the availability, integrity or delivery of essential services taking into account significant economic or social impacts; and/or
- significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state.

CNI sectors		Growth sectors
The sectors this currently encompasses are ⁷ :		The Chancellor set out the UK's growth sectors in January 2023 as:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chemicals Civil Nuclear Communications Defence Emergency Services Energy Finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Government Health Space Transport Water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative Industries Digital Technology Green Industries Life Sciences Advanced Manufacturing (including automotive and aerospace).

Why do we need a strategy and why now?

To address recent supply chain shocks and long-term trends impacting sectors, the government has undertaken work and published a series of plans to increase the resilience of the supply chains critical to specific sectors and technologies, including semiconductors and critical minerals. Given the common challenges and opportunities facing many critical imports and supply chains, it is important that these plans hang together in a coherent overarching, cross-government approach to building resilience across the UK economy.

This strategy addresses that need by providing an overview across our critical imports, bringing together work on critical supply chains from across government, and sharing our plans for building resilience across sectors to maintain supply of critical goods. This strategy sets out the UK government's priorities for building supply chain resilience for importing businesses, while signalling our intention for increased collaboration with international partners to enhance global resilience.

In doing so, this strategy responds to the action in the 2023 IR refresh, which committed to set out a strategy to support specific government and business action to strengthen our resilience in critical sectors. Through this strategy we will address this gap.

⁶ ONS, (August 2023), UK Trade,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book/trade-and-investment-core-statistics-book#trade-balance>

⁷ NPSA, (2023), CNI Sectors as of November 2023. CNI sectors may be subject to change in the future. For the latest definition see:

<https://www.npsa.gov.uk/critical-national-infrastructure-0>