

## Cargo bookings for Asia-Europe ocean trade rise sharply in December



*Asian exports of 21.95 million TEUs to North Europe and the Mediterranean from January through October are up 8.6% year over year. Photo credit: Jonas Weinitschke / Shutterstock.com.*

[Greg Knowler, Senior Editor Europe](#) | Dec 10, 2025, 11:18 AM EST

Robust demand in December is filling ships on the Asia to North Europe and Mediterranean container shipping trades, with the strong volume expected to continue through January as cargo owners lock in bookings ahead of February's Lunar New Year.

Data from container shipment tracker Vizion shows bookings for the three weeks ending Dec. 7 rose 10% compared with the prior three weeks, with 207,000 TEUs booked on Asia-Europe.

Peter Sand, chief analyst at rate benchmarking platform Xeneta, said high demand in December has become a "new normal" on the westbound corridors.

“In 2023 and 2024, and probably also 2025, December is the month of the year with the highest demand,” he said, adding that it was “real demand” with no sign of shippers frontloading orders.

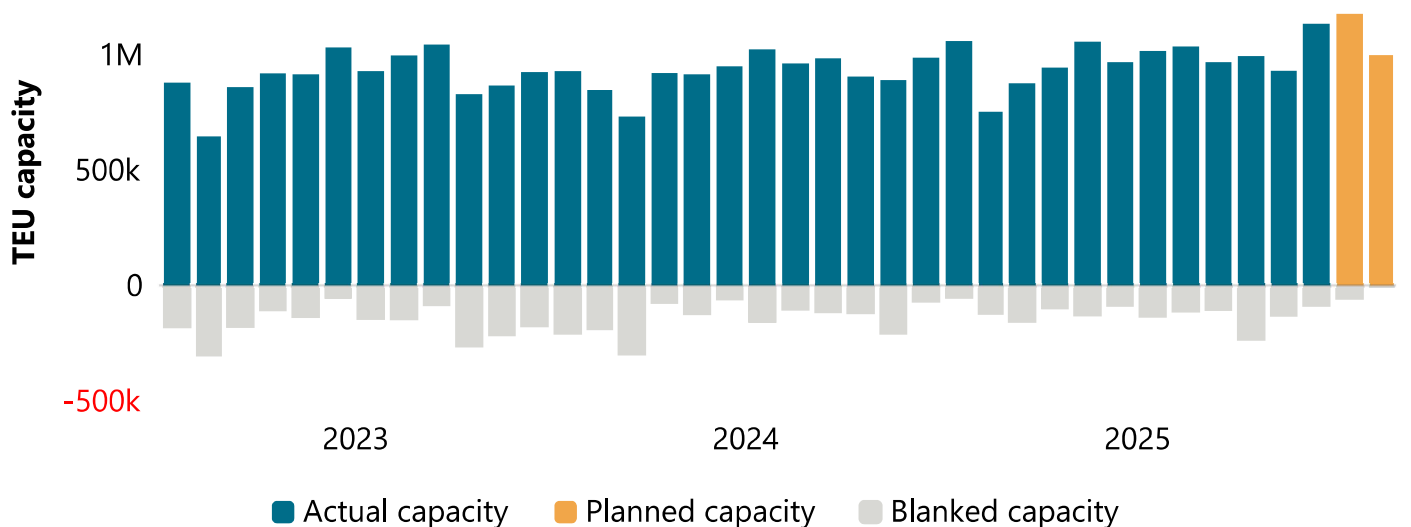
The rise in bookings is driving an increase in the capacity offered by ocean carriers on Asia to North Europe and the Mediterranean that this week reached record levels on both trades.

Data from Xeneta shows carriers are deploying 1.12 million TEUs of capacity in December on Asia-North Europe while blanking 84,000 TEUs, down from 126,000 TEUs blanked in November. Planned capacity for the trade in January is at a record 1.17 million TEUs, while blanks announced so far are at 54,000 TEUs.

Capacity deployed on Asia-Mediterranean in December is at 788,842 TEUs with 69,218 TEUs blanked, compared with November, when 713,489 TEUs were deployed and 98,296 TEUs blanked, Xeneta data shows. A record 849,371 TEUs are planned for January deployment, with blank sailings currently at 39,706 TEUs.

### Carriers increase capacity on Asia-North Europe as demand grows

Container ship capacity deployed from Asia to N.Europe, with historical blanked capacity, planned capacity, and blank sailings already announced.



Source: eeSea

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6M	2Y	YTD	MAX
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A spokesperson for Hapag-Lloyd said regular capacity deployed on the main trade lanes into Europe was increasing to meet the rising demand, while rates “are expected to peak in early January with a gradual slowdown towards February.”

The rising volume through the fourth quarter is being accompanied by a steep increase in spot rates. Asia-North Europe rates reached \$2,350 per FEU as of Dec. 9, up 80% since the beginning of October, according to Platts, a sister company of the *Journal of Commerce* within S&P Global. Asia-Mediterranean rates of \$3,250/FEU this week are just over double where they were on Oct. 1.

Jacob Moe, senior vice president of global FCL (full container load) at DHL Global Forwarding, said Asia-Europe demand leading into the Lunar New Year was “very strong” in December with a “strong booking intake” already being made for January.

“We are for now not seeing extra loaders being put in but are watching the blank sailing program as this seems to be enough to manage the capacity from the carrier side,” Moe told the *Journal of Commerce*.

## Year of high demand growth

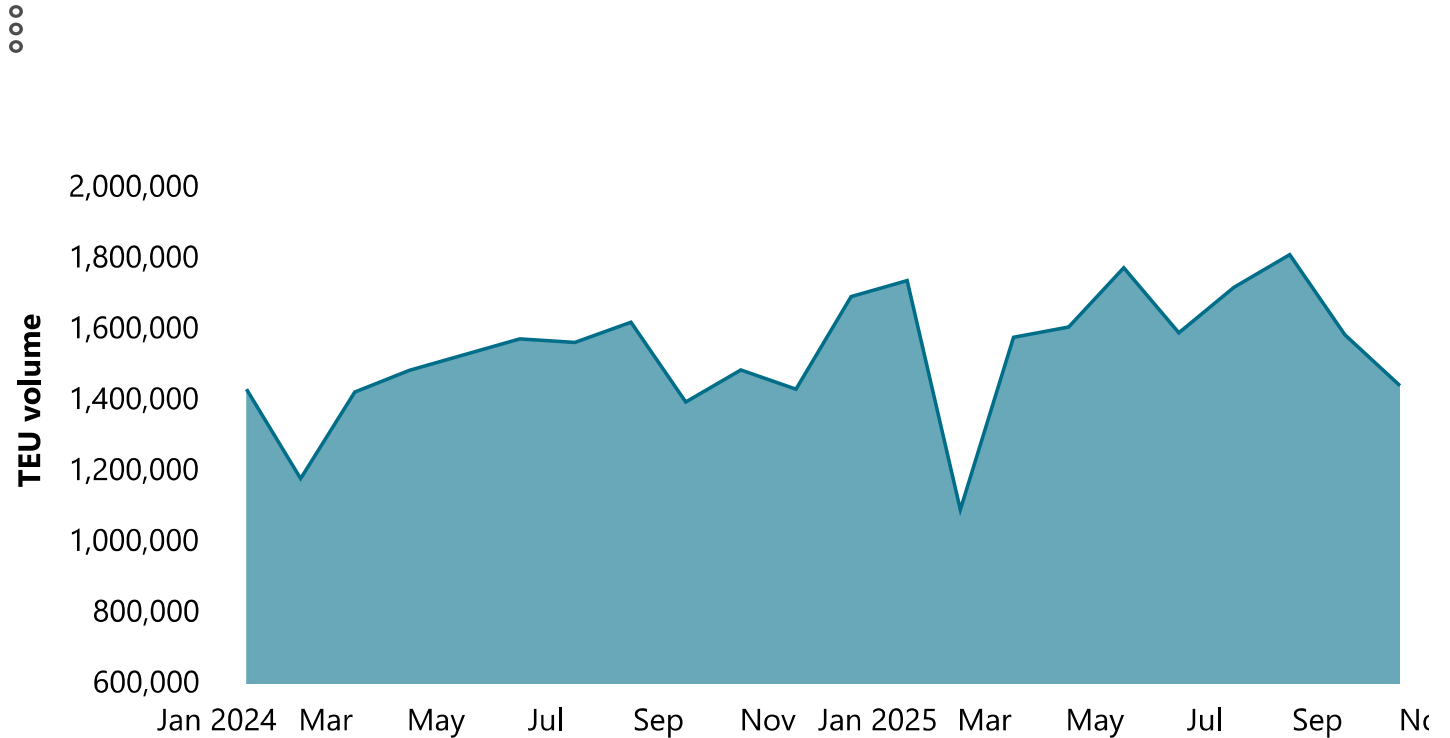
Demand growth in Asia-Europe this year is up between 10% and 14%, depending on the market vertical, according to Michael Aldwell, executive vice president of sea logistics at Kuehne + Nagel.

“We haven’t seen growth like that on the Far East westbound trade since before the global financial crisis,” Aldwell told the *Journal of Commerce* in a recent interview.

Total Asian exports to North Europe and the Mediterranean of 21.95 million TEUs from January through October are up 8.6% year over year, with almost 2 million more boxes this year than last, according to Container Trades Statistics (CTS).

## Strong Asia-North Europe volume eases through October

Monthly containerized imports from Asia to Europe, with year-over-year change



Source: Container Trades Statistics

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6M	1Y	YTD	MAX
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One explanation for the solid growth in European import volumes into December is that shippers are building inventory as a buffer to counter the disruption that is likely to occur should widespread Red Sea transits resume, with the later-than-usual Lunar New Year that starts on Feb. 17 giving shippers more time to stock up.

But Andy Gillespie, senior logistics advisor at supply chain managers WOWL, said shippers trying to plan orders three or four months out while factoring in a potential return to the Red Sea was virtually impossible.

“[Reducing] inventories and replenishment planning with some orders suddenly transiting two weeks faster while others are taking the Cape of Good Hope routing is unplannable for those supply chain managers that are placing orders 90 to 120 days in advance of when they think they need the products at destination [distribution centers] or with customers,” he told the *Journal of Commerce*.

Gillespie said logistics service providers will have to pick up the slack in Europe, adding that yards or warehouses with capacity at 80% or higher “will be slammed” as ships diverting around southern Africa and those transiting the Red Sea converge.

“For shippers and the routing of cargo, we won’t know which services are going which way exactly or where the feeders will hook up on which service, so the logistics people will deal with the chaos,” he said. “In the end, though, back to Suez safely is a great thing.”

Despite some carriers moving capacity through the Suez, there remains no clarity on when large-scale mainline Asia-Europe services will resume voyages through the critical waterway. Carriers are assessing the risk profile of returning to the Red Sea, which they say revolves around the safety of the crew, ship and cargo.

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