

Bulletin Trade in Services

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Abstract

World services exports reached \$7.9 trillion in 2023 and grew by 8% annually. At the regional level, Latin America and the Caribbean recorded the highest annual growth in services exports, at 12%.

The fastest annual rise in services imports was noted in Asia and Europe, in both regions surpassing 10% in 2023.

The top ten services exporting developing economies captured 21% of the global services market in 2023. This represents a rise of 5 percentage points compared to their market share in 2010 and indicates progress in diversifying exports further into tertiary sector international markets. Yet, most of the additional market share was captured by a few leading exporters.

 **Global services exports value in 2023**
+8.3% year-on-year
\$7.9 trillion



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The designations employed and the presentation of material in this work do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Where the designations «economy» or «country or area» appear in texts or tables, they cover regions, countries, territories, cities or areas.

The designations «developing» and «developed» are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process.

This document has not been formally edited.



1. Global services exports

World services exports reached \$7.9 trillion in 2023.

International travel receipts increased by 34% and exceeded the pre-pandemic levels, reaching over \$1.5 trillion. Transport exports suffered 11% decline in 2023, reflecting the slowdown in merchandise trade. Other services – majority of which can be traded digitally – recorded a strong growth of more than 8%.

Table 1 World services exports up 8.3% in 2023.

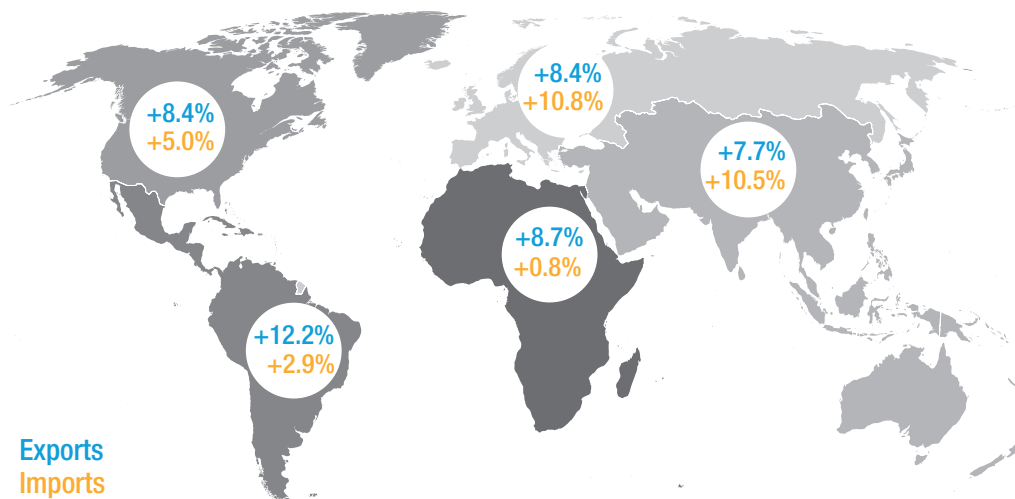
Export value in trillion of dollars, percentage change year-on-year

	Trillions of \$			Annual growth (%)	
	2021	2022	2023	2021-2022	2022-2023
Total services	6.334	7.307	7.913	15.4	8.3
Transport	1.230	1.523	1.352	23.8	-11.2
Travel	0.652	1.136	1.521	74.3	33.9

At the regional level, Latin America and the Caribbean recorded the highest annual growth in services exports, at 12%. It was followed by Africa with nearly 9% and Europe and Northern America, both with more than 8% rise. Asia witnessed an increase of nearly 8%. The fastest annual rise in services imports was noted in Asia and Europe, in both regions surpassing 10% in 2023. African economies recorded imports just 1% higher than in the year before.

Figure 1 Imports grew faster than exports in Asia and Oceania and Europe in 2023.

Percentage change year-on-year by region, 2023



2. Structure of services exports

Since 2020, other business services have overtaken travel as top internationally traded service.

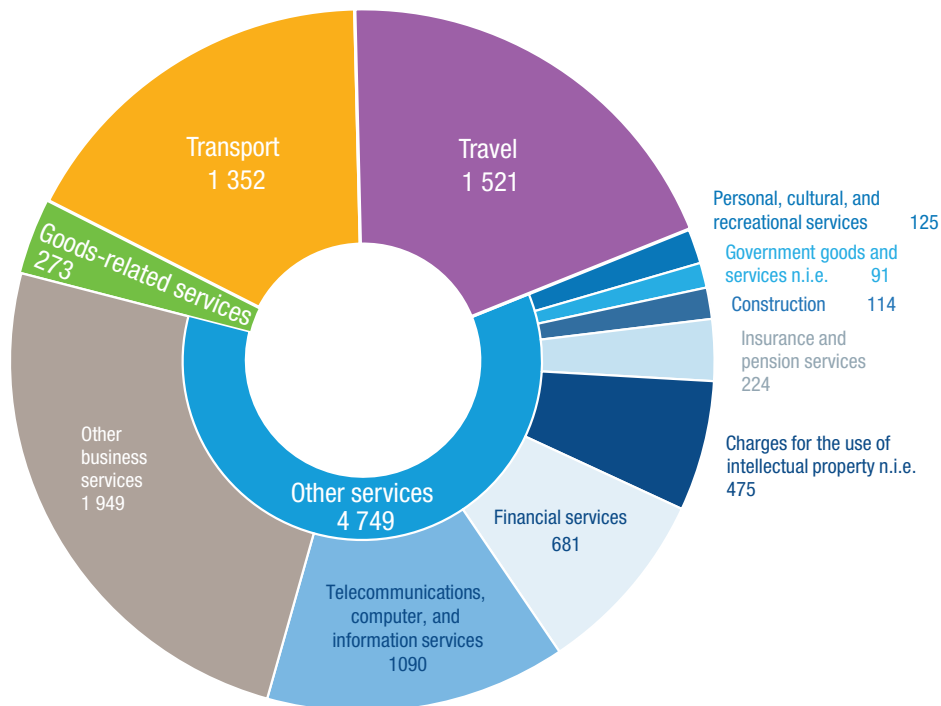
Since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, other business services have been the top internationally traded service category (\$1949 billion in 2023). Travel – previously the most traded – came second in 2023 (\$1521 billion). Transport exports registered \$1352 billion.



Figure 2

The most traded category in 2023, other business services represented one quarter of all services exports.

World services exports structure, 2023, billion of dollars



Notes: Non-allocated services not included.

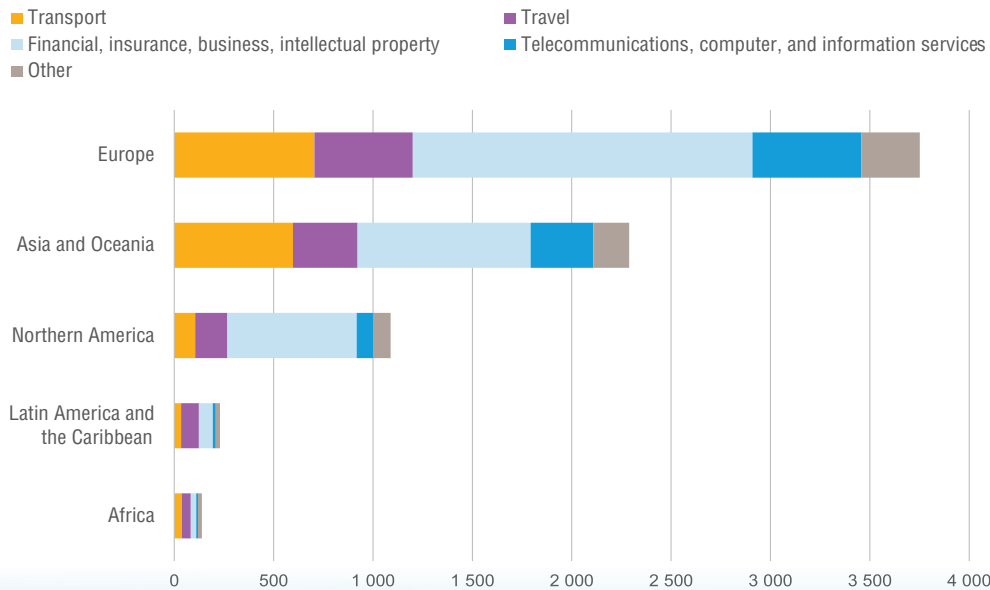


Services exports in Northern America and Europe were dominated by business, financial, insurance, telecommunication, computer, and IP-related services. In Asia and Oceania, those services also surpassed 50% of total services sales. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the most exported category was travel (42%). In Africa, travel accounted for 35% of total services exports.



Figure 3
Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean capture small market shares in international trade in services.

Services exports value by region and service category, 2023, billion of dollars



3. Selected trends

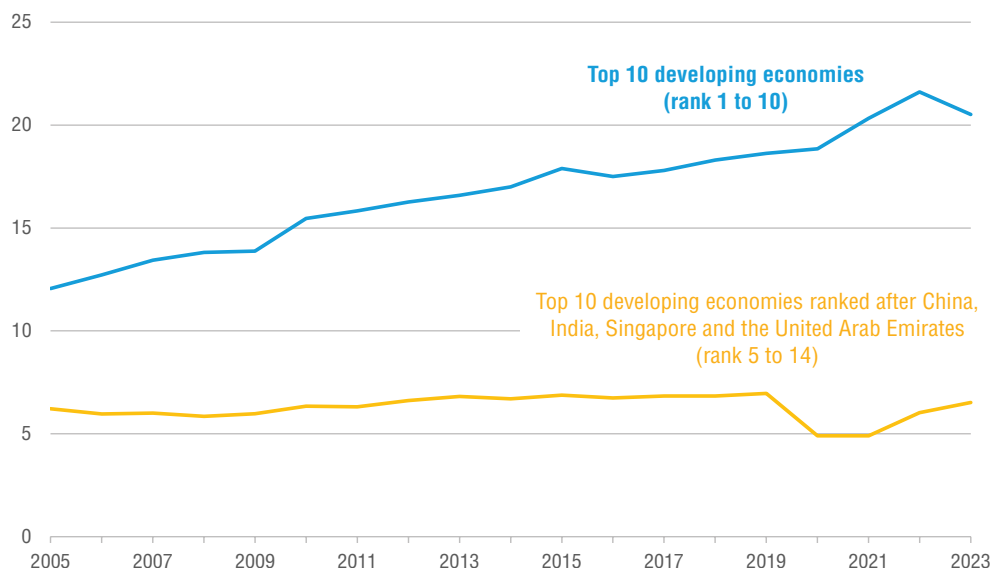
Top ten services exporting developing economies captured 21% of the global services market in 2023.

This represents a rise of 5 percentage points compared to their market share in 2010 and indicates progress in diversifying exports further into tertiary sector international markets. Yet, most of the additional market share was captured by a few leading exporters. China, India, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates excluded, the market share of the ten next ranked developing economies (rank 5 to 14) remained rather flat, with a marked decrease during the pandemic. Developing economies which trade more in the knowledge-intensive services markets have been more successful in advancing their services exports. Bigger losses of market share during the pandemic indicate higher dependency on travel services exports, which plummeted in 2020.



Figure 4
Market share of developing economies is significantly growing for only a few of them.

Percentage share in global services exports



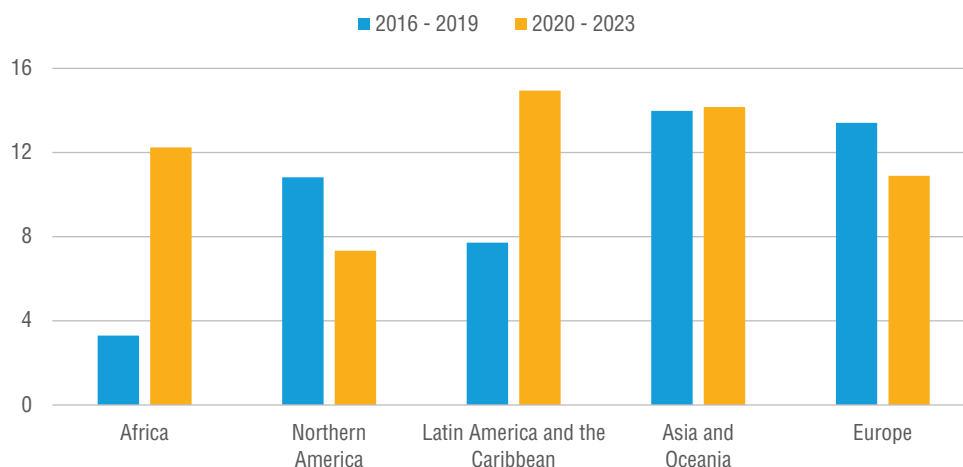
Digitally deliverable services trade did more than resisting the pandemic shock: it surged. Digitally deliverable services offered alternatives for personal travel and transport by enabling improved online connectivity and digital delivery of products. Telecommunications and computer services trade expanded, driven by abruptly rising demand during the closedown periods. Since early 2021, all main regions recorded strong growth in exports of telecommunication, computer and information services. Their international sales surpassed one trillion dollars in 2023, with almost two thirds exported by European countries.



Figure 5

The growth of telecommunication and computer services exports during the COVID-19 pandemic was higher in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean than in other regions.

Annual average growth rate, percentage



Regions hosting more developed economies were already main exporters of telecommunication and computer services. Asia, Europe, and Northern America recorded higher average growth than other regions in sales of these services over the four years before the pandemic (2016 – 2019). With the pandemic, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean increased their exports of telecommunications and computer services, recording much higher growth between 2020 and 2023 than over four previous years. The exports growth pace was different for Europe and Northern America: the increase of telecommunication and computer services exports – although strong after the pandemic started - was higher before 2020. The growth in Asia and Oceania remained strong in both periods (close to 14%).



4. Leading exporters and importers in 2023

 **Table 2**
Leading exporters in 2023

Development status	Top 10 exporters	Billion of \$	Annual growth (%) YoY
Developing economies	China	381	-10.1
	India	338	9.1
	Singapore	328	-2.5
	United Arab Emirates	166	7.6
	Türkiye	102	9.3
	China, Hong Kong SAR	98	17.5
	Thailand	57	45.7
	China, Taiwan Province of	54	-5.5
	Mexico	52	8.7
	Saudi Arabia	49	39.9
Developed economies	United States	1027	8.2
	United Kingdom	584	15.3
	Germany	439	2.2
	Ireland	398	11.2
	France	360	4.6
	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	312	9.4
	Japan	207	22
	Spain	198	19
	Switzerland	169	11.2
	Luxembourg	149	2.7

The **10 leading exporters** represent more than **55%** of world total services exports.

 **Table 3**
Leading importers in 2023

Development status	Top 10 importers	Billion of \$	Annual growth (%) YoY
Developing economies	China	552	18.7
	Singapore	295	0.2
	India	246	-1.2
	United Arab Emirates	110	13.1
	Saudi Arabia	96	16.7
	Brazil	83	3.6
	China, Hong Kong SAR	79	25.3
	Mexico	72	13.7
	Thailand	65	3
	China, Taiwan Province of	64	43.8
Developed economies	United States	748	4.8
	Germany	502	8.7
	United Kingdom	394	22.5
	Ireland	389	8.8
	France	320	10.6
	Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	296	7.7
	Japan	226	6.9
	Switzerland	192	19.6
	Italy	156	11.2
	Belgium	153	10.1

The **10 leading importers** represent more than **54%** of world total services imports.



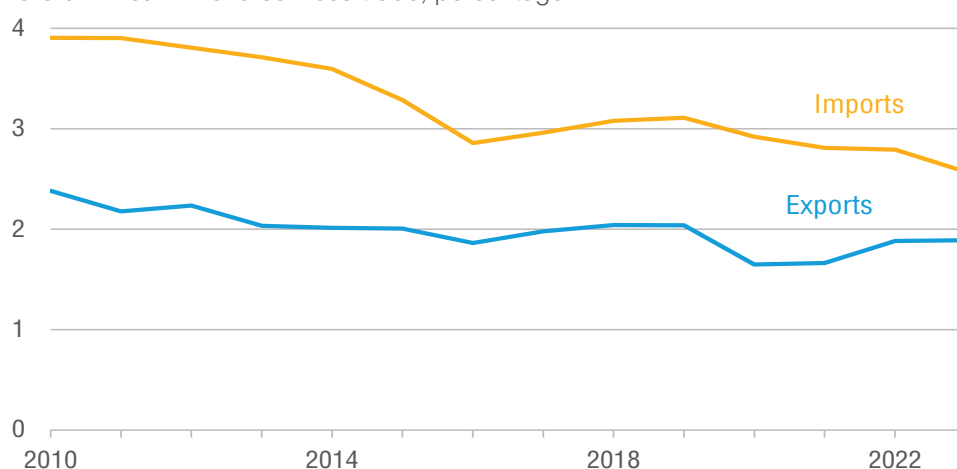
5. Africa

After 2016, Africa’s low share in world services trade increased modestly up to 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed African market shares to the lowest in 12 years.



Figure 6
Africa’s market share in services trade on the decline; imports dropping faster than exports.

Share of Africa in world services trade, percentage

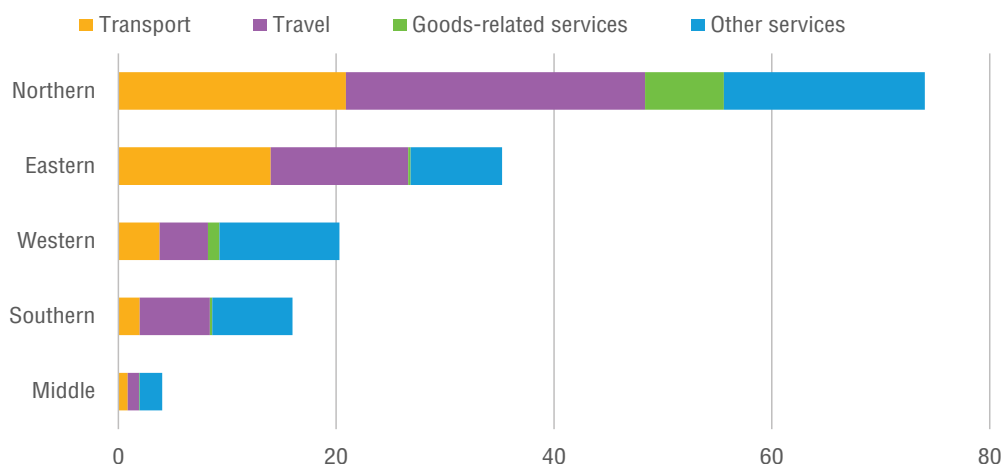


Long-distance international travel, transport and related services represent a substantial part in African services exports. As these services trade was hampered in 2020 and 2021, Africa’s total services exports recovered only in 2022, to reach US\$150 billion in 2023. Recorded at \$52 billion, international travel receipts of 2023 equaled the 2019 levels for the continent. Just over a half of the travel exports amount was exported by Northern Africa.



Figure 7
In 2023, Sub-Saharan Africa’s share in African services exports dropped to some 50%, from 60% in 2016 and 2017.

Services exports in Africa by sub-region and service category, 2023, billions of dollars



6. Least Developed Countries

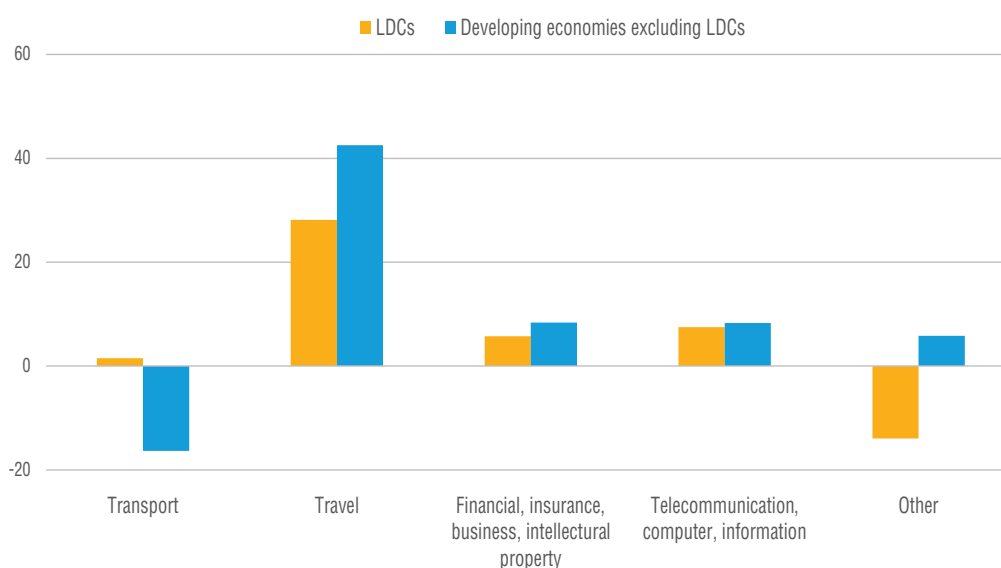
In 2023, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) exported \$48 billion worth of services and recorded solid growth rates in main service categories. Transport exports reached \$14.5 billion, marking 1.5% increase. Exports of travel services grew by 28% annually, bringing over \$16 billion in travel receipts to LDCs. This is still 20% less than the travel receipts recorded in 2019. Except for transport, LDCs registered lower growth rates for exports of main service categories than other developing economies. In 2023, negative growth rates were registered in construction and in charges for the use of intellectual property.



Figure 8

Except in transport, LDCs registered lower growth in main service categories' exports than other developing economies in 2023.

Annual growth rate of exports, by service category, 2023, percentage



Over the last 15 years, LDCs' share in global services exports stood between 0.6 and 0.8%. Their share in imports hovered around 1.6% until 2015, when it started decreasing towards 1.1%, measured for 2023.



7. Services trade by partner

Table 4
Selected economies and exports to top 5 partners, 2022

Economies	Exports to	Billion of \$	Annual growth (%) YoY
Singapore	World	337	100
	United States	45	13.4
	European Union (2020 ...)	44	13.0
	Japan	30	8.9
	Australia	29	8.5
	China	24	7.2
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	World	285	100
	European Union (2020 ...)	154	54.1
	Germany	41	14.2
	United States	31	10.8
	United Kingdom	30	10.7
	Ireland	23	8.1

Table 5
Selected economies and imports from top 5 partners, 2022

Economies	Imports from	Billion of \$	Annual growth (%) YoY
Singapore	World	295	100
	United States	67	22.7
	European Union (2020 ...)	28	9.4
	China	26	8.7
	China, Hong Kong SAR	14	4.8
	Japan	14	4.6
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	World	275	100
	European Union (2020 ...)	140	50.8
	United States	50	18.0
	United Kingdom	32	11.5
	Germany	30	11.1
	Ireland	21	7.5

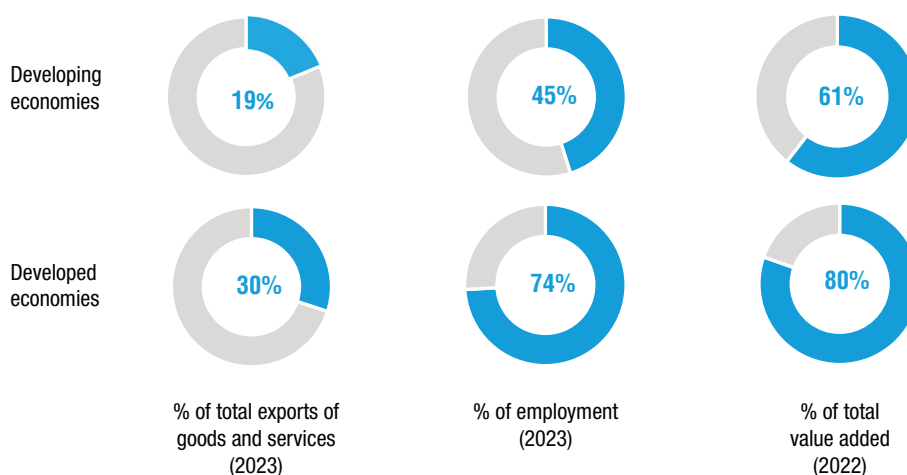
8. Why are services important?

For most economies, regardless their development status, services became long ago the sector bringing most economic value added to the society. In developing economies, in 2022, services sector accounted for 61% of total value added. In developed economies, it represented a huge 80%. Services activities not only serve other sectors - like transport and financial services serve agriculture and industry - but are directly imbedded in many products: a car for example. Services sector is often the biggest employer in a society. In developing economies, it accounted for some 45% of total employment in 2023. In developed economies, 74% of the employees worked in services sector. International trade would not be possible without the support of services that are internationally sold. In 2023, services represented about 19% of total exports of developing economies. For developed economies, they accounted for 30% of total exports of both goods and services.



Figure 9
In developing economies, some 45% of employees work in services sector, generating 61% of total value added.

Contribution of the services sector to economy, percentage



Sources: UN Trade and Development (trade), UN Trade and Development calculations based on ILO data (employment) and UNSD (value added)

Notes: Employment figures for 2023 cover 81 economies.





Notes

The definition of services follows the IMF *Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, Sixth Edition (BPM6)* classification. It reads as follows: “Services are the result of a production activity that changes the conditions of the consuming units or facilitates the exchange of products or financial assets. Services are not generally separate items over which ownership rights can be established and cannot generally be separated from their production.”

The BPM6 services include 12 main sub-categories: manufacturing services; maintenance and repair; transport; travel; construction; insurance and pension services; financial services; intellectual property charges; telecommunications, computer and information; other business services; personal, cultural and recreational services; and government goods and services n.i.e. For this presentation, some categories have been grouped.

Goods-related services consist of manufacturing services on physical inputs owned by others, and of maintenance and repair services.

Unless otherwise specified, the figures are sourced from the joint UNCTAD-WTO dataset on international trade in services.

YoY: year-on-year

Source: UNCTAD and WTO

Find the underlying data on [UNCTADstat](#).



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