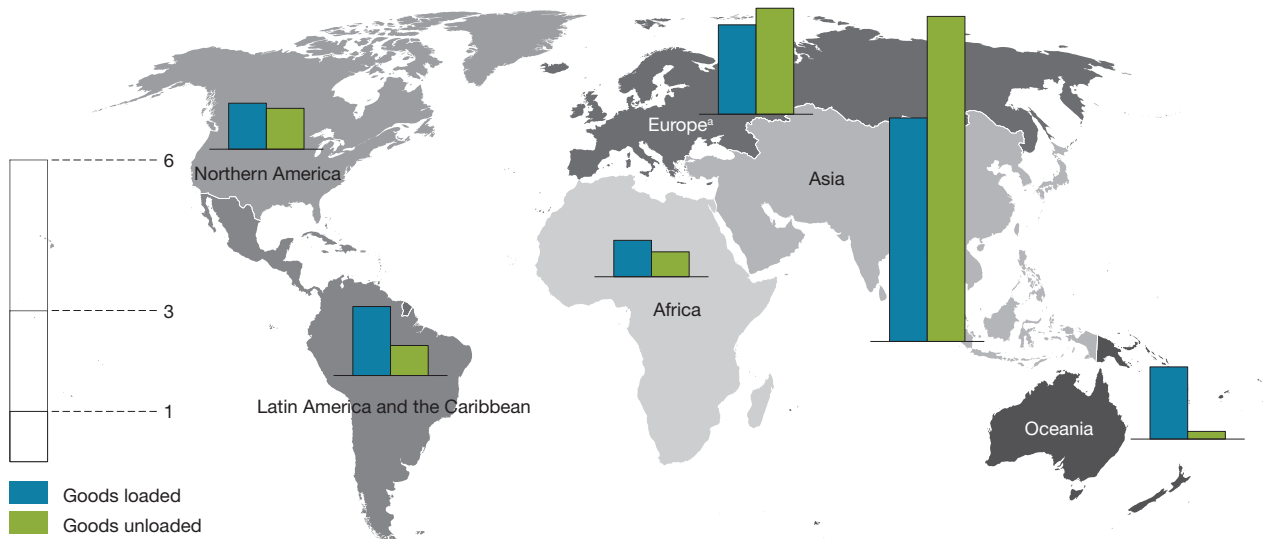




# Fact sheet #13: World seaborne trade

**Map 1** | Tonnage loaded and unloaded, 2017  
(Billions of tons)



<sup>a</sup> Incl. the Russian Federation and the French overseas departments.

## Concepts and definitions

The figures on seaborne trade in this section measure the volumes, in metric tons, of goods loaded and unloaded in the world's seaports for international shipment. Cabotage and transshipments are not included.

The data have been compiled from various sources including country reports as well as port industry and other specialist websites.

Surpluses or deficits in volume terms are not necessarily related to commercial balances of payments, as different types of cargo may have different monetary value per metric ton.

Goods loaded for international shipment are assumed to be exports, while goods unloaded from ships are assumed to be imports.

The seaborne trade balance measures the difference between the volumes of loaded and unloaded goods.

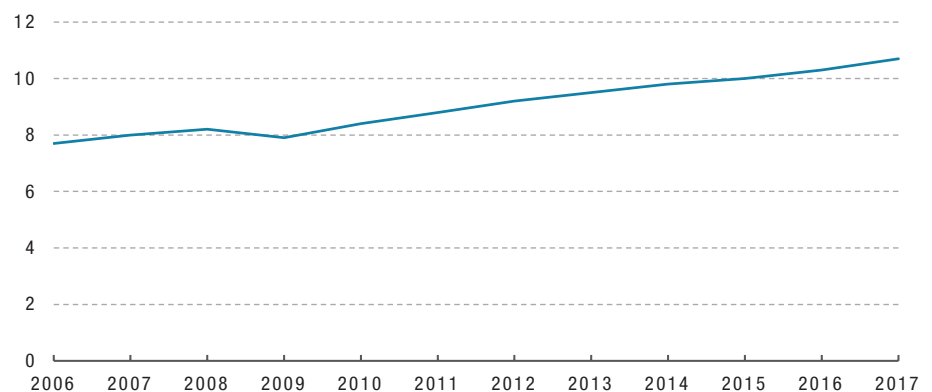
## Trends and geography of world seaborne trade

International seaborne trade gathered momentum in 2017, with volumes expanding by 4.0 per cent. This was the fastest growth in the last five years.

In 2017, 10.7 billion tons of goods were loaded worldwide; 1.5 billion tons more than in 2012. Loading of dry cargo alone increased by 1.2 billion tons; crude oil, petroleum products and gas contributed the remaining 305 million tons to the overall increase.

Asia was by far the largest trading region. In 2017, 4.4 billion tons of goods were loaded, and 6.5 billion tons unloaded, in Asian seaports. The other continents registered less than half of these amounts. The volumes of goods delivered to ports in Oceania were, at less than 200 million tons, particularly small.

**Figure 1** | Goods loaded worldwide  
(Billions of tons)

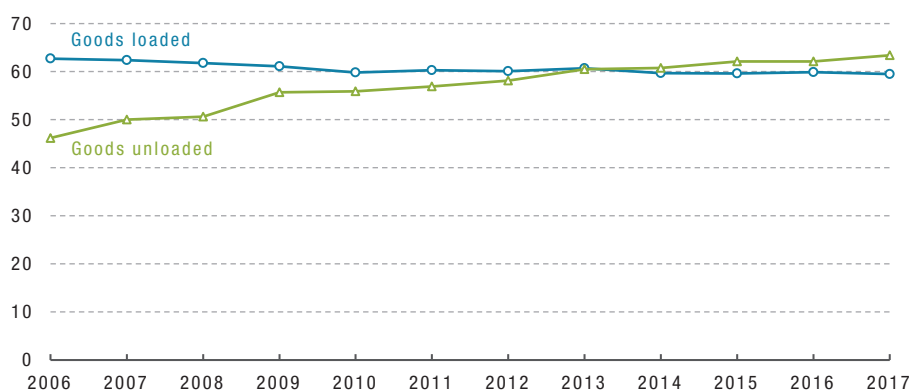




### Contribution of developing economies

Developing economies continue to make a major contribution to global seaborne trade. They account for almost two thirds of goods loaded and unloaded worldwide. Their share in seaborne trade imports, as measured by goods unloaded, has steadily increased over the last ten years, to reach 63 per cent in 2017. This trend has been driven strongly by developing economies in Asia. In developing economies of Asia and Oceania, about one quarter more goods were unloaded in 2017 than in 2012.

**Figure 2** | Seaborne trade of developing economies  
(Percentage of corresponding world tonnage)



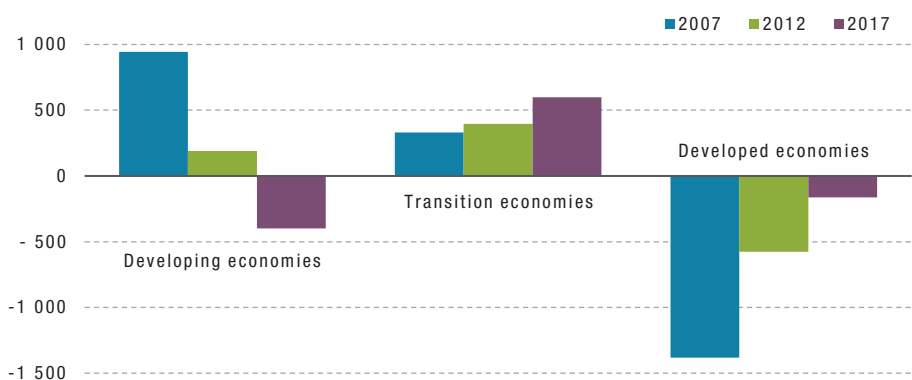
### Developments in seaborne trade balances

In 2014, developing economies turned from net exporters into net importers of seaborne trade volumes. By 2017, they developed a deficit of 400 million tons, as compared to a surplus of 190 million tons in 2012. These figures, however, hide considerable differences across continents. Unlike developing economies in Asia and Oceania, and consistent with past trends, developing economies in America and Africa continued running significant surpluses in 2017.

Transition economies have almost doubled their surplus over the last ten years, reaching 599 million tons in 2017. In developed economies, the deficit of 1.4 billion tons in 2007 almost vanished by 2017.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further analyses on that topic, see UNCTAD (2018c).

**Figure 3** | Seaborne trade balance  
(Millions of tons)



For references, see UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2018, annex 6.4.

International seaborne trade gathered momentum:



4.4 out of 10.7 billion tons of goods loaded in Asian seaports



Developing economies' share of global goods unloaded rose to 63% in 2017



Trade surplus in transition economies almost doubled in 10 years

