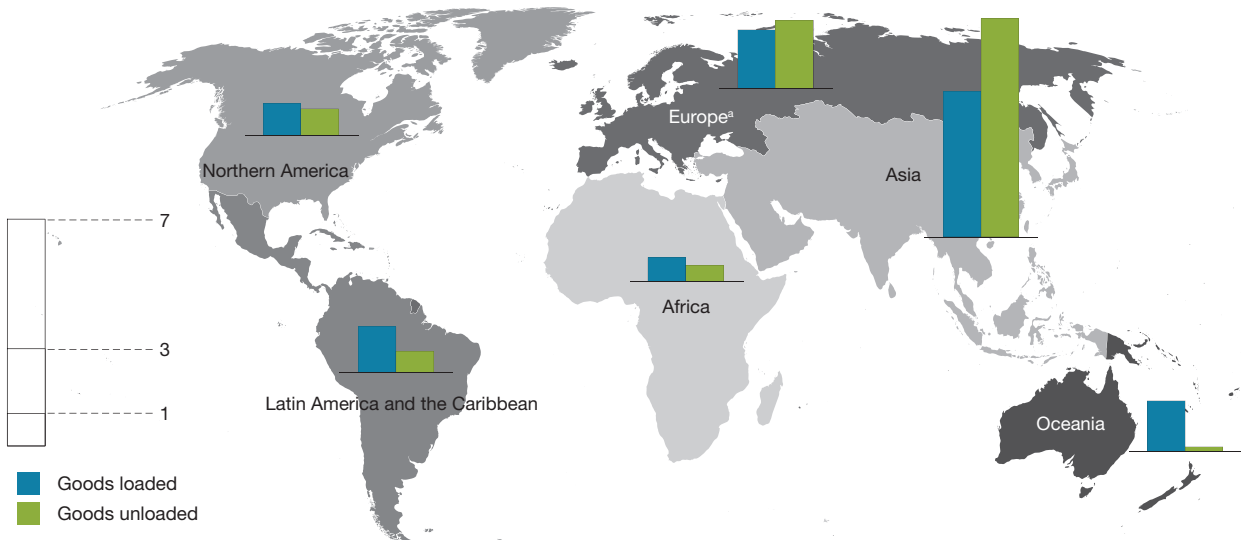




# Fact sheet #13: World seaborne trade

**Map 1** | Tonnage loaded and unloaded, 2018  
(Billions of tons)



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

## Concepts and definitions

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

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.

Dry cargo refers to cargo that is usually not carried in tankers, such as dry bulks (e.g. coal, ores, grains), pallets, bags, crates, and containers. Other tanker trade refers to refined petroleum products, gas and chemicals.

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

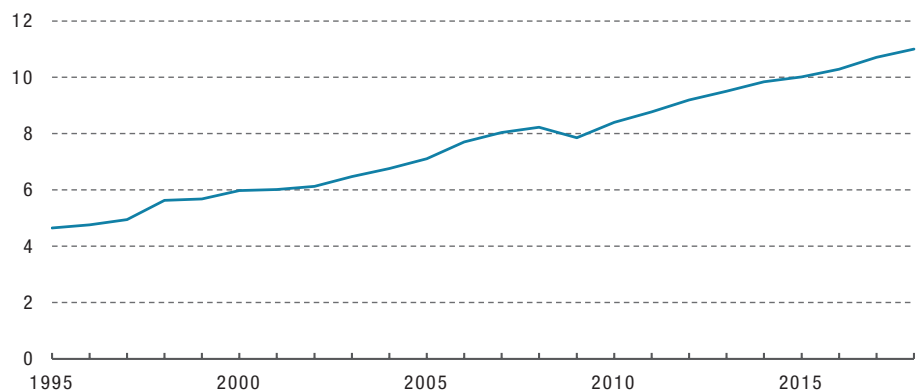
## Trends and geography of world seaborne trade

International seaborne trade lost momentum in 2018, with volumes only increasing at a modest 2.7 per cent, after a surge of 4.1 per cent in 2017. Since 2013, growth in seaborne trade has been relatively sluggish, as compared to the aftermath of the 2009 financial crisis, when annual growth rates ranged between 4.4 and 7 per cent. Nevertheless, in 2018, world seaborne trade volumes rose to a new all-time high of 11 billion tons.

Asia was by far the largest trading region. In 2018, 4.5 billion tons of goods were loaded, and 6.7 billion tons unloaded in Asian seaports. The other continents registered less than half of these amounts.

Of the 11 billion tons shipped internationally in 2018, 7.8 billion tons were classified as dry cargo. Crude oil, the most transported cargo in the 1970s, has lost market share over the last four decades, and by 2018 it accounted for less than one fifth of the goods delivered by sea.

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



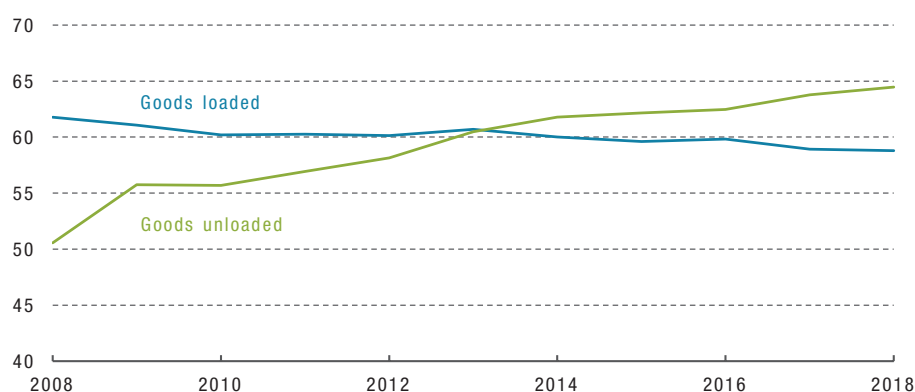


### Contribution of developing economies

In 2018, developing economies still accounted for the largest share of global seaborne trade, both in terms of exports (goods loaded) and imports (goods unloaded). They loaded 59 per cent and unloaded 64 per cent of the world total. With a volume of 4.2 billion tons loaded and 5.9 billion tons unloaded, Asian and Oceanian developing economies together accounted for most of that share.

The contribution of developing economies to world maritime exports has declined slightly over time, while their share of imports has risen.

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



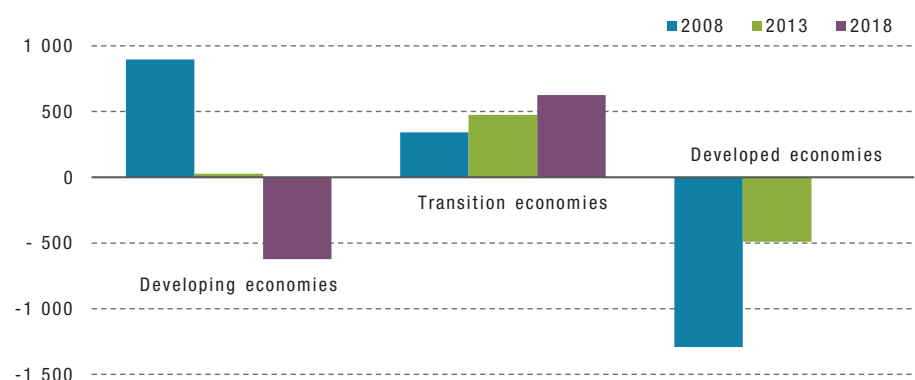
### Developments in seaborne trade balances

The declining contribution of seaborne trade exports and increasing contribution of seaborne trade imports has led to a steady reduction of the developing economies' trade balance. As a result, in 2014 they switched from net exporters into net importers. In absolute terms, their balance changed from a surplus of 896 million tons in 2008 into a deficit of 623 million tons in 2018.

Over the same time period, transition economies recorded an increase in their surplus from 343 million tons to 627 million tons. For developed economies, the deficit of 1.3 billion tons recorded in 2008 has fallen. In 2018, they loaded and unloaded an equal volume of goods at their seaports.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further analyses on that topic, see UNCTAD (2019c).

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



For references, see UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2019, annex 6.4.

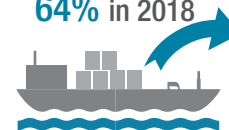
International seaborne trade slows:



61% of all goods unloaded in Asian seaports



Developing economies' share of seaborne trade imports rose to 64% in 2018



The maritime trade balance of developed economies is falling




**Table 1** Total seaborne trade by group of economies

Group of economies	Loaded			Unloaded			Balance	
	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume	
	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)	
	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018
<b>World<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>9 513</b>	<b>11 005</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>9 501</b>	<b>11 002</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>
Developing economies	5 774	6 470	2.5	5 745	7 093	3.9	28	-623
Developing economies: Africa	815	767	3.5	433	516	3.9	383	251
Developing economies: America	1 264	1 404	2.3	569	653	5.7	694	751
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	3 695	4 299	2.4	4 743	5 924	3.7	-1 049	-1 625
Transition economies	551	713	2.7	77	86	6.2	475	627
Developed economies	3 188	3 822	3.0	3 679	3 823	0.7	-491	-1

<sup>a</sup> Annual totals of goods loaded and unloaded are not necessarily the same, given that goods loaded in one calendar year may reach their port of destination in the next calendar year.

**Table 2** Seaborne trade by cargo type and group of economies

Crude oil

Group of economies	Loaded			Unloaded			Balance	
	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume	
	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)	
	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018
<b>World<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1 738</b>	<b>1 886</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>1 882</b>	<b>2 048</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>-144</b>	<b>-162</b>
Developing economies	1 478	1 525	0.6	874	1 102	4.5	604	423
Developing economies: Africa	328	289	-0.7	37	42	4.8	291	247
Developing economies: America	240	219	-2.6	69	52	9.0	171	167
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	911	1 016	1.8	768	1 007	4.3	143	9
Transition economies	145	204	-1.5	1	0	0.0	144	203
Developed economies	114	158	3.3	1 007	947	-3.3	-892	-789

<sup>a</sup> Annual totals of goods loaded and unloaded are not necessarily the same, given that goods loaded in one calendar year may reach their port of destination in the next calendar year.

Other tanker trade

Group of economies	Loaded			Unloaded			Balance	
	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume	
	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)	
	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018
<b>World<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1 091</b>	<b>1 308</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>1 096</b>	<b>1 322</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-14</b>
Developing economies	588	757	2.5	529	821	3.9	59	-64
Developing economies: Africa	82	74	4.8	65	94	0.1	17	-20
Developing economies: America	70	78	8.9	89	149	5.3	-20	-71
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	436	605	1.5	375	578	4.2	61	27
Transition economies	32	40	-4.8	11	5	4.3	21	35
Developed economies	471	511	4.1	557	496	0.2	-86	15

<sup>a</sup> Annual totals of goods loaded and unloaded are not necessarily the same, given that goods loaded in one calendar year may reach their port of destination in the next calendar year.



## Dry cargo

Group of economies	Loaded			Unloaded			Balance	
	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume		Annual growth rate	Volume	
	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)		(Percentage)	(Millions of tons)	
	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018	2018	2013	2018
<b>World<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>6 685</b>	<b>7 811</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>6 523</b>	<b>7 632</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>179</b>
Developing economies	3 707	4 188	3.2	4 342	5 170	3.8	-635	-982
Developing economies: Africa	405	404	6.6	331	380	4.8	75	24
Developing economies: America	954	1 106	2.9	411	452	5.5	543	654
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	2 348	2 678	2.8	3 601	4 338	3.5	-1 253	-1 660
Transition economies	374	470	5.4	65	81	6.4	309	389
Developed economies	2 603	3 153	2.9	2 116	2 381	2.6	487	772

<sup>a</sup> Annual totals of goods loaded and unloaded are not necessarily the same, given that goods loaded in one calendar year may reach their port of destination in the next calendar year.

**Table 3** | **Development of goods loaded worldwide by type of cargo**  
(Millions of tons)

Year	Total goods	Crude oil	Other tanker trade	Dry cargo
1973	3 274	1 514	353	1 407
1978	3 550	1 604	296	1 650
1983	3 231	1 069	392	1 770
1988	3 735	1 160	456	2 119
1993	4 330	1 443	502	2 385
1998	5 631	1 548	534	3 549
2003	6 480	1 690	533	4 257
2008	8 231	1 785	957	5 489
2013	9 513	1 738	1 091	6 685
2018	11 005	1 886	1 308	7 811