



KEY STATISTICS AND TRENDS

in International Trade 2019



INTERNATIONAL TRADE SLUMP



UNITED NATIONS



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NOTE

Key Statistics and Trends in International Trade is a yearly publication. It is a product of the Trade Analysis Branch, Division on International Trade and Commodities (DITC), UNCTAD secretariat. This publication monitors the trends of international trade in goods and services in the medium term.

The series is part of a larger effort by UNCTAD to analyse trade-related issues of particular importance for developing countries, as requested by the mandate of UNCTAD XIV. Alessandro Nicita and Ksenia Koloskova contributed to this study. This study benefited from inputs and comments from various DITC staff members and the UNCTAD Statistics team. Desktop publishing was done by Jenifer Tacardon-Mercado.

OVERVIEW

After a recovery in international trade in 2017 and the first half of 2018, economic conditions started deteriorating in the second half of 2018 and further in 2019. The reasons were trade tensions between the United States of America and China, fears of a disorderly Brexit in Europe and a negative global output outlook more generally. Preliminary data for 2019 indicate a sharp decline in trade growth to negative 3 per cent. This most recent trend would make target 17.11 of the Sustainable Development Goals more difficult to achieve. Similar to the trade downturn of 2015 and 2016, negative trade growth coincides with positive growth in global output. But projections indicate that the current episode—triggered by prolonged trade tensions between major economies and more generally by the weakening of multilateralism—is unlikely to be followed by a swift recovery, as it was observed in 2017 and 2018 due to commodity prices rebound and a growth in volumes backed by solid output and investment growth.

In contrast with 2019, trade growth of 2018 has been widespread to include most goods and services sectors. Merchandise trade has shown a particularly strong increase while services trade increase was more gradual. Trade in agricultural goods and natural resources showed the strongest value growth in 2018 because of higher prices, while manufactured goods trade growth was more modest. The trade surge of 2018 also affected positively all geographic regions. South–South trade has recovered above its 2014 levels.

This report is structured into two parts. The first part presents an overview of the status of international trade using preliminary statistics up to the third quarter of 2019. The second part provides illustrative statistics on international trade in goods and services covering the last decade. The second part is divided into two sections. Section 1 provides trade statistics at various levels of aggregation illustrating the evolution of trade across economic sectors and geographic regions. Section 2 presents some of the most commonly used trade indicators at the country level, to illustrate trade performance across countries.

DATA SOURCES

The statistics in this publication were produced by the UNCTAD secretariat by using data from various sources. This report relies on the United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE) (comtrade.un.org) hard data for merchandise trade statistics. UNCTADStat (unctadstat.unctad.org) is the sources of service statistics. Monthly data for merchandise trade comes from the *International Monetary Fund (IMF)* Directions of Trade Statistics and from national authorities' statistics. The data has been standardized to ensure cross country comparisons. Data, although comprehensive and comparable across countries, does not perfectly reflect national statistics, and thus some discrepancies with specific national statistics may be present. Unless otherwise specified international trade is defined as trade in goods (merchandise) and services. Countries are categorized by geographic region as defined by the United Nations classification (UNSD M49). Developed countries comprise those commonly categorized as such in United Nations statistics. For the purpose of this report, transition economies, when not treated as a single group, are included in the broad aggregate of developing countries. Product sectors are categorized according to the Broad Economic Categories (BEC) classification and the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) augmented by five broad agricultural sectors based on the Harmonized System (HS) classification. Figures are in current United States of America dollars, except where otherwise specified.

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