



Going International 2026

Experiences and outlook of the German economy in international business – Results of a business survey

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Key findings

Pessimism is waning – yet there remain significant headwinds for free trade

1. The business outlook for German exporting companies is less pessimistic than in the past two years. However, increasing trade barriers are creating significant headwinds for international business. This is preventing a more positive development in global trade. On balance, therefore, the business outlook remains negative. The bright spots are the positive expectations for business in India and Latin America. However, these are overshadowed by a sharp downturn in the US market and still excessive European regulation.
2. Global trade barriers for German companies in their foreign business have reached an all-time high (69 percent, up from 58 percent). Geopolitical tensions and growing protectionism in many countries are causing shifts in the global trading system. The increasing move away from free global trade is hitting the export-oriented German economy particularly hard, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in particular.
3. The challenges facing German companies' international operations vary significantly depending on the region of the world. Companies that perceive an increase in trade barriers in their international business cite the following obstacles: just under two-thirds are facing higher tariffs – with tariff increases affecting trade with the US being the main issue. In their international business, companies also perceive non-tariff trade barriers in the form of local certification regulations or stricter safety requirements (51 percent and 37 percent respectively). Export controls also pose a challenge for more than a third (35 percent) of companies – particularly in their dealings with the US (41 percent) and China (29 percent).
4. 83 percent of companies view home-grown trade barriers in Germany and Europe as a challenge to their international business. For many companies, regulation within the EU single market and German requirements act as a stumbling block. Examples include due diligence and reporting obligations in supply chains, requirements under the Packaging Directive, and the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). 42 percent of companies that cite home-grown challenges are experiencing difficulties in conducting their international business, for instance due to lengthy approval times at the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA) or complex customs clearance procedures.
5. Trade relations with the US are increasingly becoming a risk for German companies: [Click here for the special analysis on the US](#)

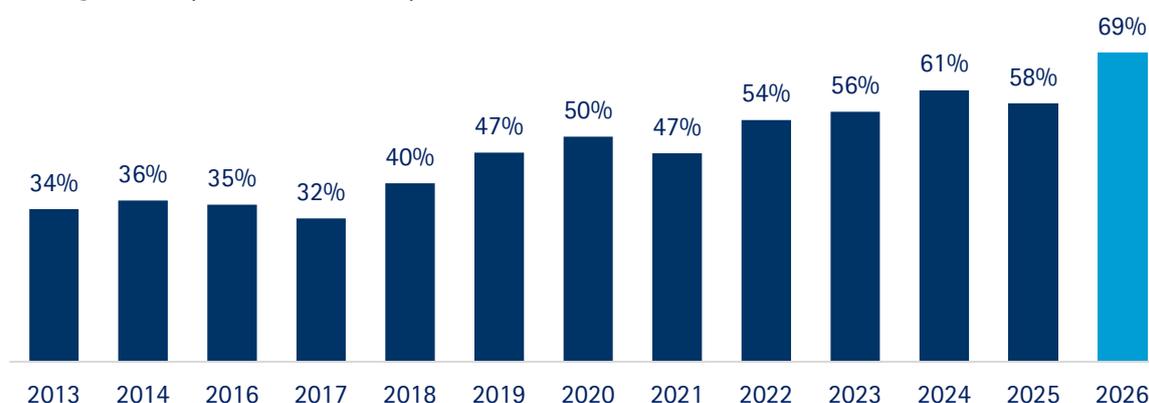
Global trade barriers are on the rise

The slight improvement in business prospects for international trade is overshadowed by increasing trade barriers, the severe downturn in the US market and excessive European regulation. Growing protectionism in many countries is weakening international trade relations. At the same time, geopolitical tensions and shifts in the international trading system make it clear that the global economy is increasingly moving away from the principle of free and rules-based world trade. One ray of hope is the prospect of new sales and procurement markets such as India and parts of Latin America. Trade agreements with these regions offer significant opportunities for diversification and future growth.

The proportion of German companies that perceive an increase in trade barriers in their international business has reached a new high of 69 percent. This is eleven percent higher than in the previous year. Many regions are erecting new barriers ostensibly for protection, partly in response to economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions, and partly for domestic political reasons. Given the US tariff policy under the new US administration since the start of last year, this development comes as little surprise. The increasing fragmentation of world trade is evident in particular through higher US import tariffs, but also through export controls in China and the US, local content requirements and technology transfer regulations. Geopolitical measures such as stricter export control regimes or sanctions are also placing a burden on companies in their international business dealings. Whilst global protectionism is on the rise, European bureaucracy remains a key competitive risk.

Large enterprises (over 1,000 employees) are more likely to report an increase in trade barriers in their international business (84 percent) than small and medium-sized enterprises (up to 249 employees), 65 percent of which report this. Large enterprises often operate in numerous markets and therefore face many different trade barriers across various regions of the world.

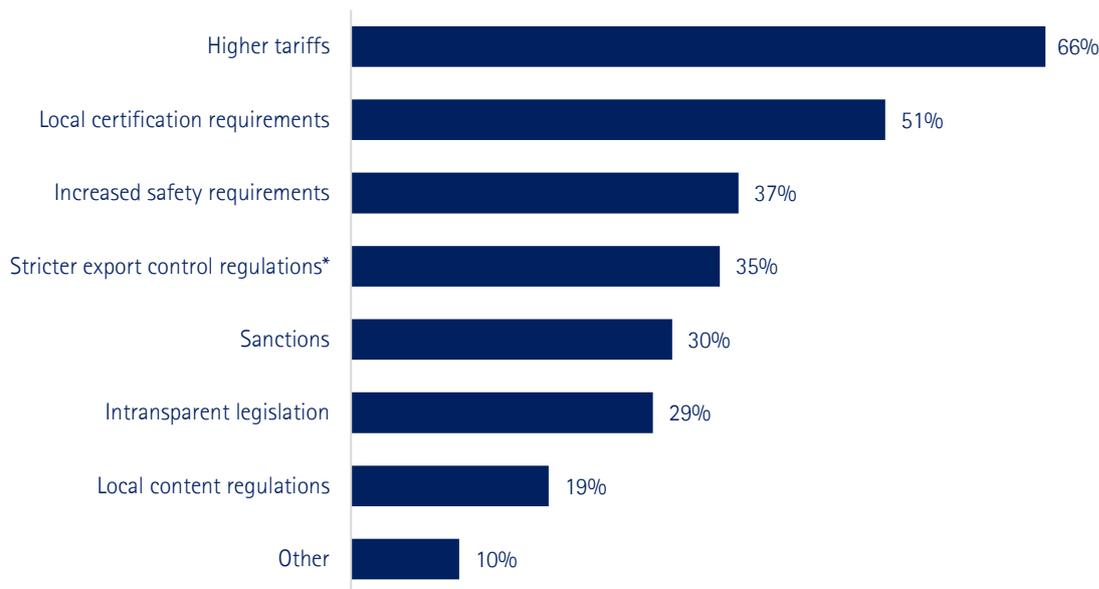
Percentage of companies that have experienced an increase in barriers to their international business



Companies that have noticed an increase in trade barriers affecting their international business over the past twelve months cite higher tariffs as the main cause for concern (66 percent). In view of US trade policy and its global impact, companies are affected by this either directly or at least indirectly. Non-tariff trade barriers in the form of local certification requirements are a challenge for over half (51 percent), whilst stricter safety requirements are a challenge for 37 percent. Export controls are cited as trade barriers by 35 percent of companies, and sanctions by 30 percent.

Trade barriers in international business

in percent, multiple answers possible, responses refer to companies that have experienced an increase, * first surveyed in 2026

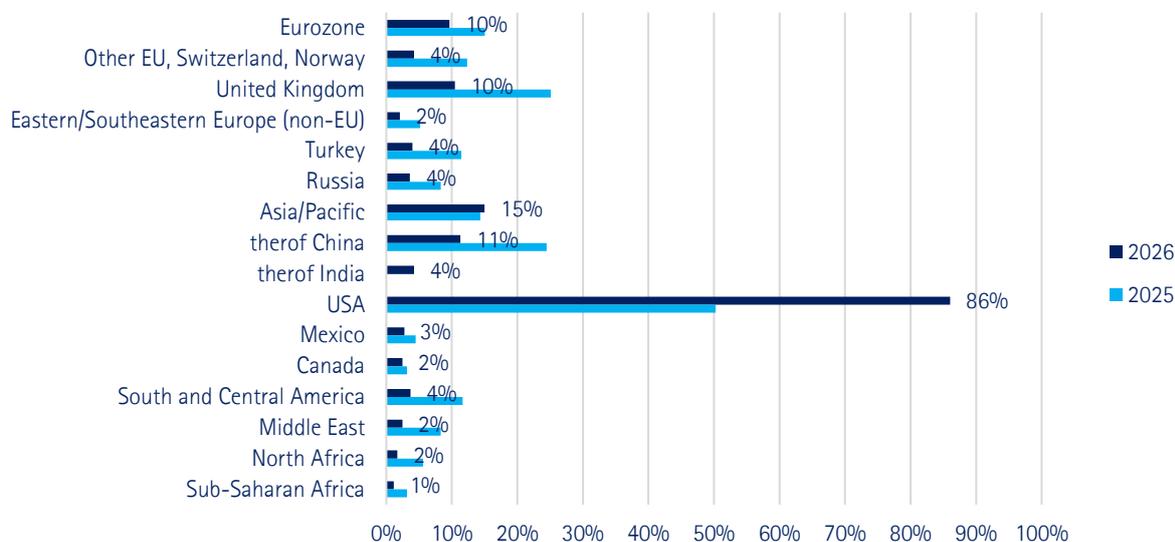


The perceived trade barriers vary by region, as they are closely linked to geopolitical developments. The following text examines the individual barriers in greater depth. The subsequent chapter addresses self-imposed trade barriers within the EU.

Almost two-thirds of companies affected by trade barriers (66 percent, previous year 31 percent) feel a significantly greater burden from higher tariffs on their international business. US tariff policy is the main reason for this development. Companies affected by tariff increases feel this particularly keenly in their trade with the US (86 percent). Previously, the figure was 50 percent. Just under a year after 'Liberation Day' and the US announcement of sweeping tariff increases for all trading partners, trade tensions have noticeably intensified – particularly in trade with the US.

In which regions do you primarily encounter higher tariffs as a trade barrier?

in percent; the responses refer to companies that have experienced an increase in tariffs



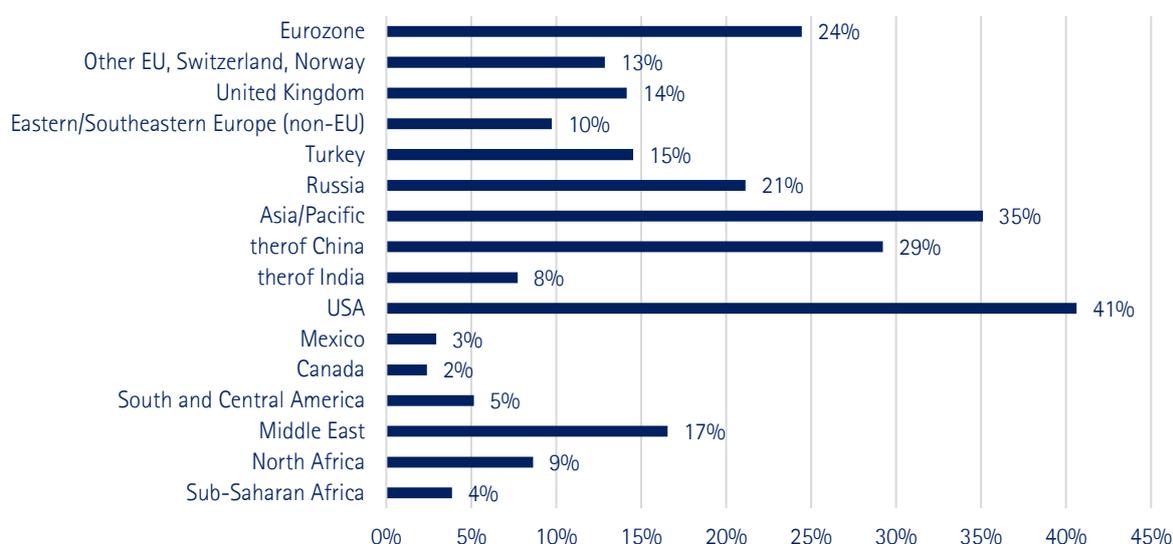
Non-tariff trade barriers in the form of **local certification requirements** make it difficult for companies to conduct their international business. More than half (51 percent) of companies that have noticed an increase in trade barriers view

local certification requirements as a challenge. Differing national certification standards, as well as the lack of recognition of local certifications, affect exporting firms. Just under half of the companies (46 percent) affected by local certification requirements feel the impact of this in their business within the eurozone. This is more than in business in all other regions of the world. The numerous certification requirements not only present challenges for companies, but the certifying bodies often struggle to keep up as well.

Stricter export control regimes are making it harder for many companies to do business abroad; more than one in three companies affected by trade barriers (35 percent) cite them as an additional challenge. In particular, China's tighter controls on rare earths and critical raw materials, in place since April 2025, have increased the regulatory burden on many businesses. The extraterritorial US re-export controls can also affect German companies. Furthermore, companies are facing additional export controls due to EU sanctions against Russia, which are usually closely coordinated with partners such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland or Norway. With the reintroduction of sanctions against Iran in the Fall 2025, the corresponding trade restrictions against Iran have also come back into force.

In which regions do you primarily encounter stricter export control regimes as a barrier to trade?

in percent; the responses refer to companies that have experienced a tightening of export control regimes, surveyed for the first time in 2026



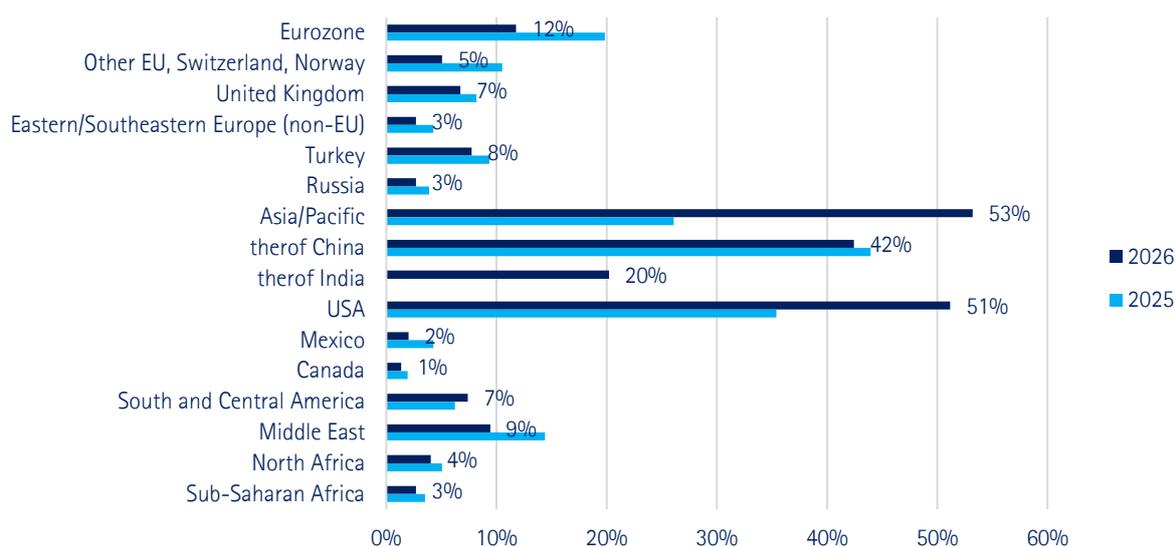
Around a third of companies (30 percent; 2025: 36 percent) that perceive increasing obstacles in their international business cite **sanctions** as a specific trade barrier. 73 percent of these companies are feeling the impact of the sanctions particularly in their business with Russia. Compliance with the measures is seen as a particular challenge there. In early 2025, the EU adopted its 20th package of sanctions against Russia, which, in addition to direct import and export bans, also aims to prevent circumvention via third countries. The Middle East is also mentioned, which is likely due to the reintroduction of sanctions against Iran in the Fall 2025. The EU has reinstated a series of sanctions relating to Iran's nuclear activities, which had been suspended when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) came into force in 2015.

Structural hurdles such as **intransparent legislation** also hamper international business: almost one in three companies affected by trade barriers (29 percent) cite this as an obstacle to international business. For German companies, it can be difficult at their foreign locations to fully comprehend local legislative changes or new regulations. Companies affected by opaque legislation feel the impact particularly keenly when doing business with the US (41 percent). The US government's trade policy has been highly volatile for over a year. Companies often do not know whether the current regulations will still apply to their business today or in the coming weeks.

Just under a fifth of companies affected by trade barriers (19 percent) report an increase in **local content regulations**. These strategically deployed measures require companies to generate a specified proportion of value added locally. Otherwise, their goods are subject to tariffs, excluded from preferential treatment – or they are denied a sales licence. Among the companies that perceive an increase in local content regulations in their overseas business, 51 percent report that these requirements relate to their US operations. Foreign firms are increasingly finding themselves compelled to produce locally in order to continue selling their products in that country. The trend is also evident in China: 42 percent of companies noting greater local content pressure are experiencing this in their China operations. There, the localisation of production is being driven in a targeted and centralised manner, which is weighing on bilateral trade flows between Germany and China. Companies are also increasingly encountering local content requirements in the Asia-Pacific region. Since 2014, India has been pursuing increasing localisation of production on the ground through its 'Make in India' initiative. The trend towards 'Made by Indians, Made by India' is moving towards more production in India for the Asian and global markets. Progress through knowledge and technology transfer is the stated goal here.

In which regions do you primarily encounter local content regulations as a barrier to trade?

in percent; the responses refer to companies that have noticed an increase in local content regulations

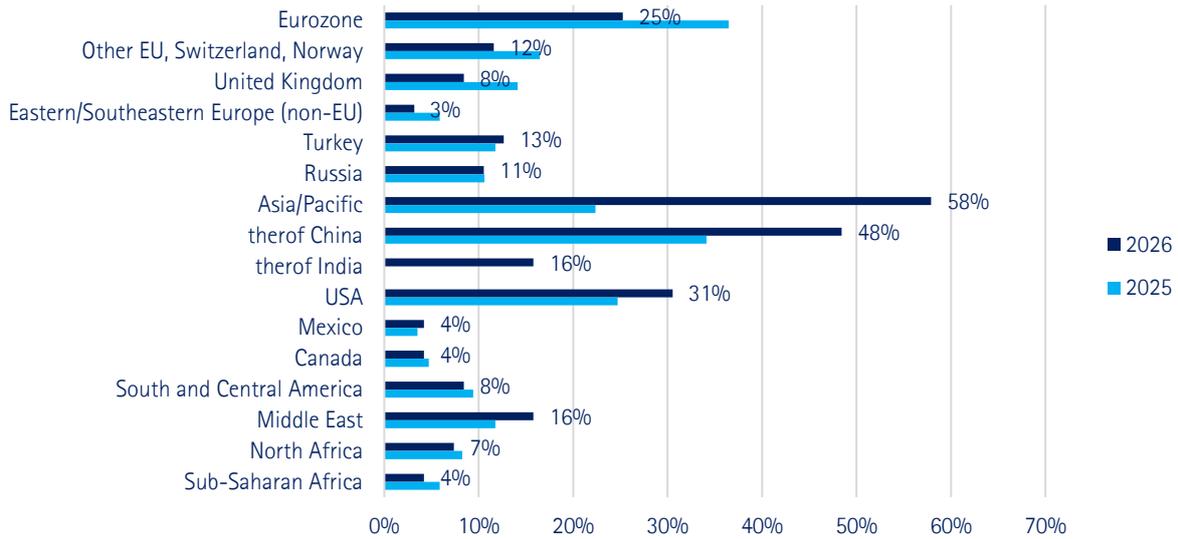


In view of the growing number of trade barriers, just under one in ten affected companies (9 percent) state that **access to public procurement contracts** is becoming more difficult. This is often linked to being at a disadvantage compared to local competitors. Affected companies cite this hurdle particularly frequently in relation to their business within the EU. 44 percent of companies reporting difficulties in accessing public procurement contracts experience these restrictions in the eurozone. In the Asia-Pacific region, almost a third of these companies report similar problems in China (31 percent); in India, the figure is still 15 percent. In the US, too, companies report restricted access to public procurement: a quarter of these companies cite this barrier in US business. US trade policy severely restricts market access for foreign companies and their products. The aim is to balance the trade deficit – by relocating production back to the US, thereby reducing imports from abroad.

Six percent of companies affected by trade barriers cite **technology transfer regulations**. However, a look at individual regions of the world highlights how technology transfer and the sharing of know-how are increasingly coming into focus against the backdrop of a fragmented global economy. Of the companies that perceive more regulations than in the previous year, 48 percent report stricter regulations in China and 31 percent in the USA. Technology transfer may also be subject to export control regulations.

In which regions do you primarily encounter technology transfer regulations as a trade barrier?

in percent; the responses refer to companies that have noticed an increase



In addition to the response options listed, some companies used the free-text field to identify **further trade barriers**. Planning uncertainty and a high level of bureaucracy in implementing legal requirements were frequently cited. Compliance with EU-level regulations such as the CBAM, the Packaging Directive or the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is also perceived as a trade barrier. Problems with the processing of international transactions, for example due to long processing times in customs clearance, are also cited as a hurdle. The following question on further challenges in international business explores this in more detail.



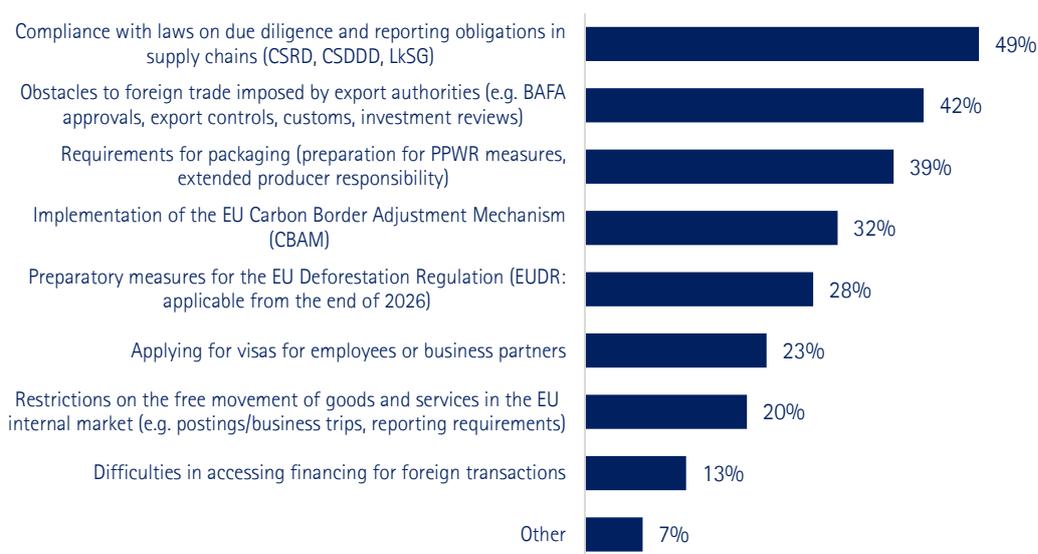
Challenges from Germany and the EU

The European Union provides businesses with a virtually open single market, based, among other things, on the removal of both tariff and non-tariff trade barriers. Nevertheless, German companies frequently find themselves confronted with home-grown trade barriers in their international business dealings – that is, regulations, administrative requirements or national peculiarities from Germany or the EU that put them at a disadvantage in their international business.

83 percent of German companies operating internationally state that trade barriers arising from national or European bureaucracy are hampering their international business. These include, for example, compliance with the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG), requirements relating to EU packaging directives and the implementation of the CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism). Among other things, reporting and due diligence obligations mean that companies are required to provide ever more information about business partners, suppliers and sustainability.

(Further) challenges in international business

in percent, multiple responses possible; the percentages in the chart on the right are based on the total number of companies facing challenges (83 percent)



One in two companies affected by home-grown trade barriers (49 percent) is confronted by the **laws on due diligence and reporting obligations in supply chains (CSRD, CSDDD, LkSG) that must be complied with** – a significant bureaucratic burden within the EU single market. Although large companies with more than 3,000 employees are the most likely (57 percent) to report difficulties in complying with the LkSG and sustainability reporting requirements. However, the indirect impact on small and medium-sized enterprises as suppliers in the supply chain means that just over half (48 percent) of companies with up to 500 employees see this as a hurdle. As part of the value chain of companies subject to reporting requirements, they are often faced with numerous requests for information from their customers.

For 42 percent of companies affected by trade barriers within the EU single market, and in Germany in particular, **obstacles to international trade posed by export authorities** represent a problem area – virtually unchanged from the previous year (43 percent). An analysis of over 500 open-ended responses shows that major challenges are concentrated around the issues of customs, export controls and export licences. Companies cite customs-related issues such as processing and tariff requirements, as well as aspects relating to export control licensing procedures. Frequent criticisms include complex and sometimes inconsistently interpreted regulations, a high level of documentation and bureaucracy, and prolonged processing times, which can delay business processes or lead to their abandonment. Furthermore, non-transparent procedures and country-specific special requirements, for example in business with China, are cited, whilst hurdles relating to investment reviews are mentioned comparatively rarely.

Requirements for packaging, or the preparation of measures for the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) and Extended Producer Responsibility, represent a hurdle for 39 percent of companies that perceive internal

barriers to trade. The currently inconsistent interpretation (including regarding registration, labelling and authorisation) of the EU Packaging Directive by Member States is perceived here as a bureaucratic hurdle.

A third of companies (32 percent), cite challenges in **implementing the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)**. The CBAM is a tool designed to offset the international competitive disadvantage caused by carbon pricing in Europe. In practice, however, it very quickly reaches its limits: data on the CO₂ content of imported goods is unavailable, certifiers for this data are lacking or incur high costs, and there are numerous ways to circumvent the system. Importers are burdened with costs that are almost impossible to calculate, either for obtaining and verifying data or for working with standard values that are prohibitively high. The calculation formula for the certification requirement from 2027 (retroactive to 2026) alone is almost impossible for many SMEs to manage without external consultants. A solution that ensures EU companies remain internationally competitive when exporting, despite CO₂ pricing, is still lacking.

Among companies that feel their international business is constrained by regulations within the EU single market, **preparatory measures for the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)** pose a significant challenge for just under a third (28 percent). The regulation, which comes into force at the end of 2026, aims to prevent the import and trade of products linked to deforestation or forest degradation. This affects soya, palm oil, timber, rubber, beef, cocoa and coffee, as well as products made from them such as leather, chocolate, newspapers and furniture. Companies must demonstrate that the products were not produced on land deforested after 31 December 2020, that they comply with the legislation of the country of origin, and that a due diligence statement is in place. This requires geodata and comprehensive checks throughout the supply chain. Small and medium-sized enterprises often face staffing and technical constraints in this regard. Furthermore, some countries of origin refuse to provide necessary information. Despite the postponement and amendment of the complex regulation at the end of 2025, practical implementation issues remain challenging, alongside data availability. These include, amongst other things, the submission of the due diligence statement, the connection to the European Commission's IT system, and the sharing of relevant information within the supply chain. Furthermore, there are several unresolved questions regarding interpretation and detail.

The additional time and administrative effort involved in **applying for visas for employees or business partners** is a concern for just under a quarter (23 percent) of companies affected by home-grown trade barriers. One in five companies (20 percent) complaining about internal EU trade barriers is confronted with **restrictions on the free movement of goods and services**. Companies cite extensive reporting requirements necessary when posting employees to other EU countries, such as the A1 certificate. The multitude of different national regulations and the lack of a single European reporting portal make this process particularly challenging, especially for short-term postings and service assignments of staff, for example for the installation or maintenance of machinery. Regarding goods deliveries, too, several companies also report an increasing administrative burden.

13 percent of companies hampered by self-imposed trade barriers report **difficulties in accessing finance for their international operations**. Particularly in the case of small-scale projects or market entries in high-risk countries, the costs for private financial institutions are often disproportionately high, meaning that financing initiatives are not even initiated in the first place. Furthermore, credit requirements and risk premiums in certain markets are virtually impossible for small and medium-sized enterprises to meet. To address this financing gap, the Federal Government is providing instruments such as the KfW-DEG "ImpactConnect" programme, as well as hedging options such as the Federal Government's export credit guarantees. It is important to align these instruments even more closely with the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, to improve their accessibility and to integrate them strategically with one another.

Some companies have also used the free-text field to highlight further challenges in international business. These include inconsistent VAT rates within the EU, complex regulations and a general increase in bureaucracy. The strong euro also has a negative impact on the competitiveness of German companies in international comparison via exchange rates, as well as on weakening demand from abroad.

Business situation and prospects in the world's regions

The business situation for German companies operating internationally has not improved. The global economic environment remains challenging. Global trade is shifting away from open markets and free trade towards greater state intervention, protectionism and market access barriers. Increasing trade barriers, a sharp downturn in business on the US market and burdensome European regulation are casting a shadow over international business. The global environment remains fragile. German companies therefore continue to rate their business situation on international markets as poor. The outlook for the coming months also remains pessimistic overall. The slight improvement in business prospects has not led to the number of optimists outnumbering the pessimists.

Overall, 23 percent of companies rate their foreign business as good and 47 percent as satisfactory. Three in ten companies (30 percent) report a poor business situation. The balance of positive and negative assessments remains unchanged at minus seven points. A clear difference emerges when looking at company size categories. Large companies (1,000 employees) have a balanced business situation (balance: one point). For small and medium-sized enterprises (up to 249 employees), the situation looks worse (balance: minus ten points). Large companies tend to be more broadly diversified internationally, so that a weaker performance in a single market does not carry as much weight.

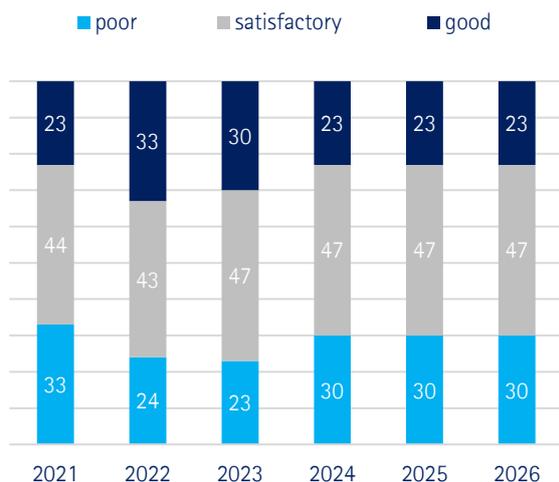
Although the expectations of German companies operating internationally regarding the development of their overseas business in the current year have improved, the overall picture remains negative. Just over a fifth of companies (21 percent) expect business to deteriorate in the current year, whilst 16 percent anticipate an improvement. Almost two-thirds of companies (63 percent) anticipate a steady development in their bilateral business relations. The resulting balance of positive and negative assessments has risen from minus eight to minus five points. As with the assessment of the current business situation, large companies (balance: minus three points) have a slightly better business outlook than small and medium-sized enterprises (balance: minus six points). One ray of hope is the positive outlook for local business in India (balance: 17 points) as well as in South and Central America (balance: one point; Mercosur: balance: five points). However, the massive headwinds caused by trade policy and international crises are significantly hampering international trade.

Global business situation and business outlook for the German economy

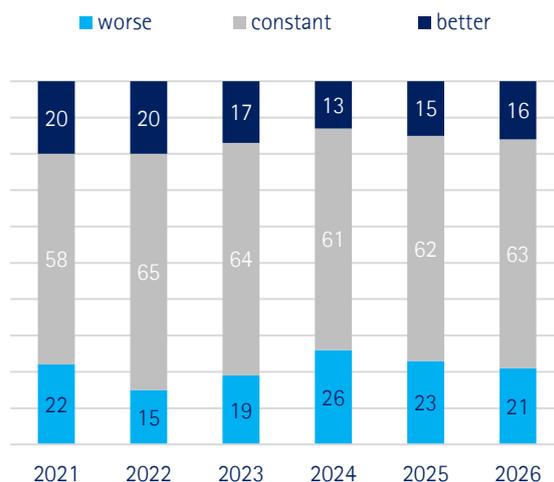
balance of 'good/better' reports minus 'bad/worse' reports



Business situation of companies (Percentage share)



Business outlook of companies (Percentage share)

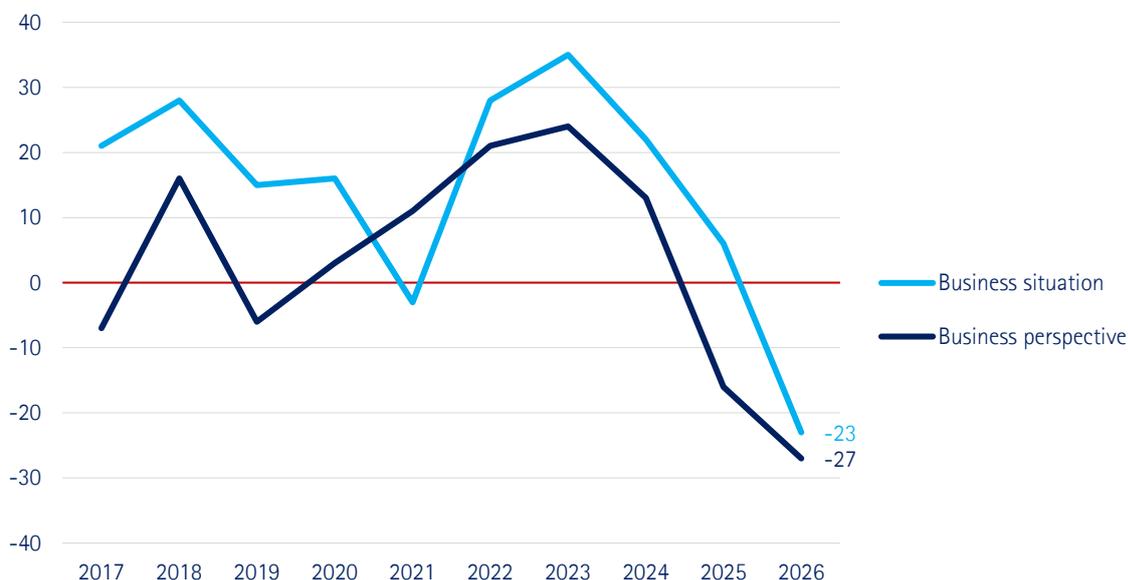


The US is becoming a risk factor

Sentiment is plummeting among companies with US operations. Both the assessment of the current business situation and business expectations have fallen to their lowest levels ever recorded in this survey: only 20 percent of companies now rate their business situation as 'good', whilst 43 percent rate it as 'poor'. The balance has shifted from slightly positive to deeply negative (minus 23 points, down from plus six points previously). Business prospects for the coming year were already gloomy in 2025. For this year, however, they are rated significantly worse once again: only 16 percent of companies expect business to improve, whilst 43 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus 27, down from minus 16 points previously). Since 2023, US business relations have been becoming increasingly less attractive for German companies. The US market is not only losing its reliability but is also increasingly failing as an export market. At the same time, US tariff policy is placing a considerable strain on German companies' export business. Just under two-thirds of companies that perceived an increase in trade barriers in their international business last year see the problem in higher tariffs; 86 percent of these companies cite specific tariff increases affecting US business.

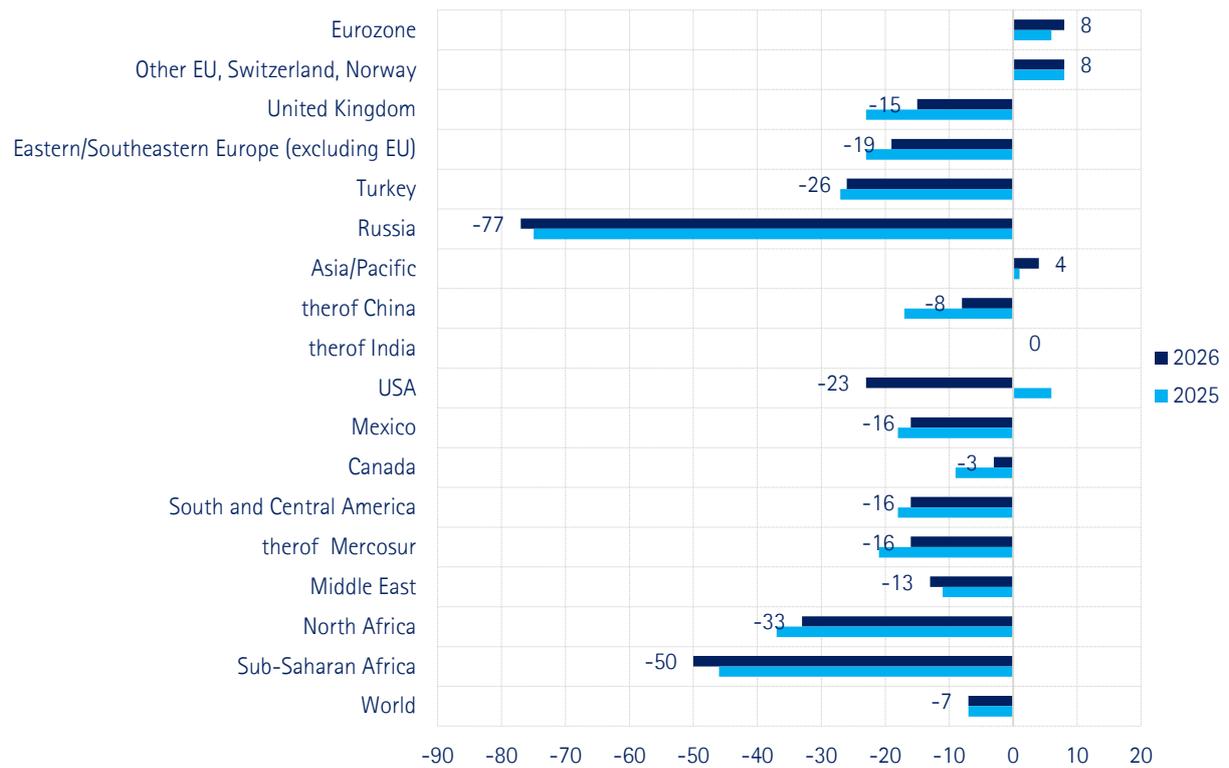
Current business situation and business prospects of German companies with US business

balance in points of "good/better" minus "bad/worse" reports



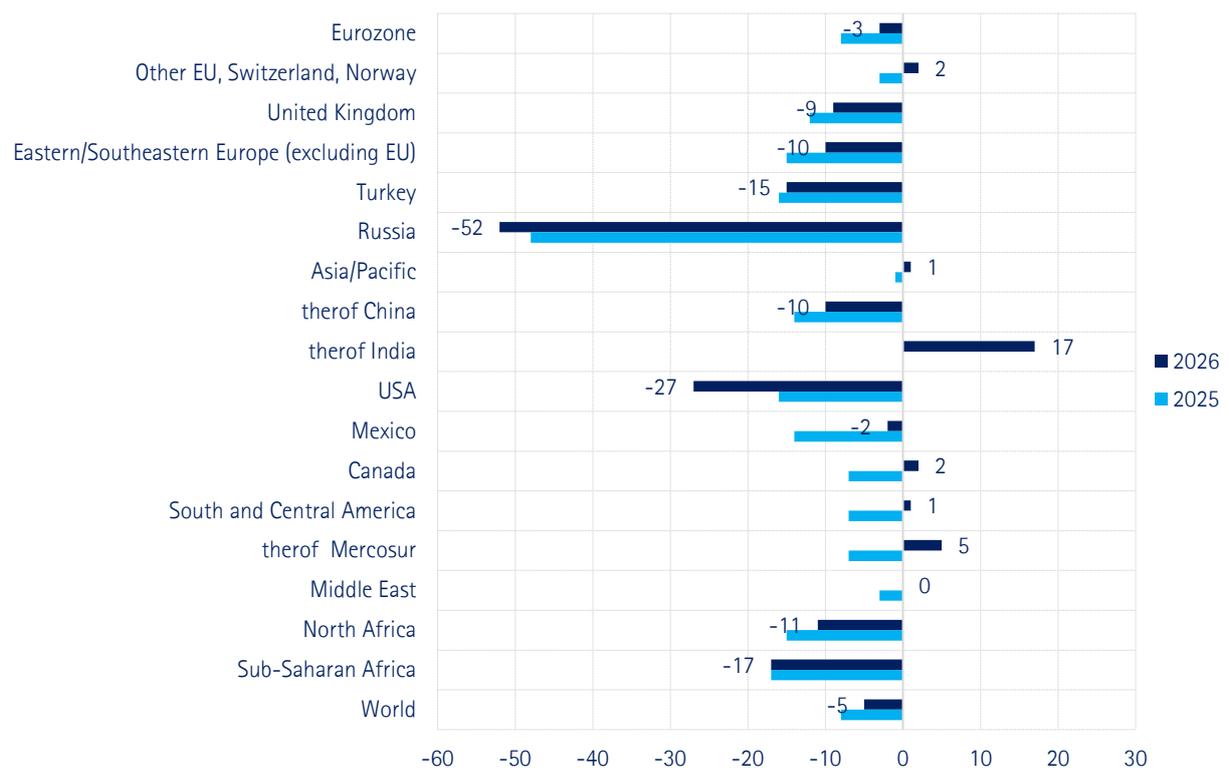
Current business situation in the world's regions

balance in points of "better" minus "worse" reports



Business outlook in the world's regions

balance in points of "better" minus "worse" reports

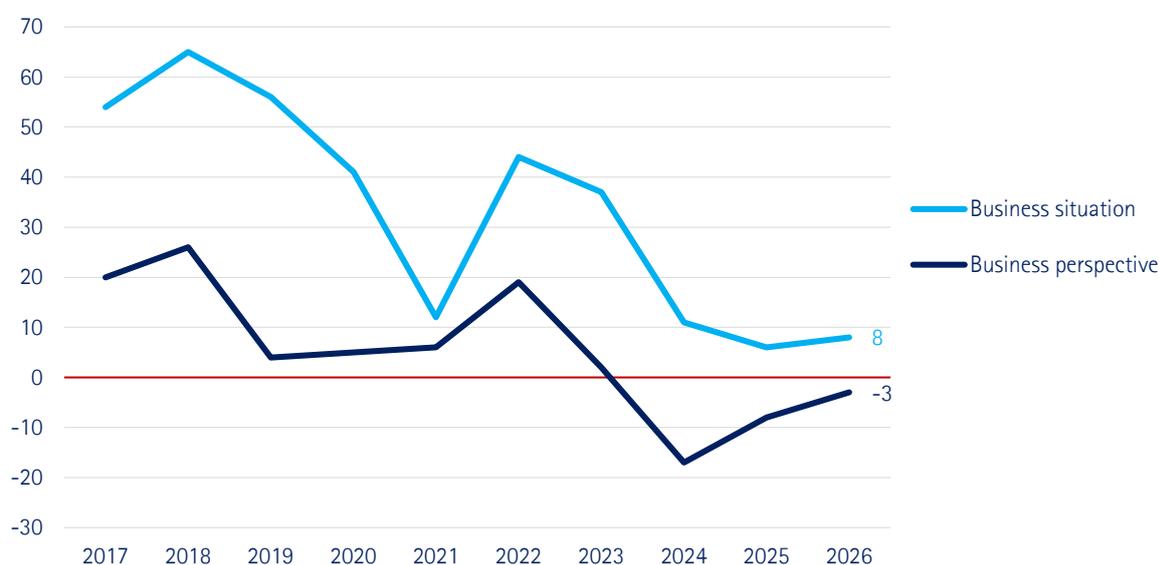


Outlook for business in Europe more confident

German companies with business ties to neighbouring European countries are currently reporting a positive business climate. In the **eurozone**, the balance has risen slightly from six points to eight points. Business expectations are also more optimistic than they were last year, though on balance they remain slightly pessimistic. For their business in the eurozone, 17 percent of companies expect an improvement in 2026, whilst 20 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus three points, minus eight points previously). Exchange rates and the resulting stronger euro, combined with the burdens of bureaucracy, are dampening economic momentum in the eurozone.

Current business situation and business prospects of German companies in the eurozone

balance in points of "good/better" minus "bad/worse" reports



Business conditions for companies in **EU countries outside the single currency area, as well as in Switzerland and Norway**, remain positive at the same level (balance: unchanged at eight points). Business prospects are brightening: 16 percent expect an improvement and 14 percent of companies fear a deterioration (balance: two points, up from minus three points previously).

Pessimism prevails in Turkey and Eastern Europe

When it comes to their business dealings with **Turkey**, only 11 percent of companies expect business to improve, whilst just over a quarter (26 percent) anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus 15 points, minus 16 points previously). High inflation and the ongoing depreciation of the Turkish lira are driving up the cost of European goods and services in Turkey. As a result, demand for high-quality but less affordable intermediate goods from Germany remains sluggish, even though the local economy relies on imports.

The current situation has improved slightly in trade with **Eastern and South-Eastern European countries (excluding the EU)** but remains generally poor overall (balance: minus 19, minus 23 points previously). Whilst 10 percent expect business to improve, 20 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus 10 points, minus 15 points previously).

Due to the economic sanctions imposed by the EU and other countries against **Russia**, their impact naturally affects business with Russia in particular. The business situation has deteriorated again compared with the previous year (balance: minus 77, down from minus 75 points). Expectations also remain unchanged and pessimistic: more than half of the companies (55 percent, up from 54 percent) operating in sectors not subject to sanctions expect a decline in their business in the coming months.

German British business relations remain challenging

For the United Kingdom, the business situation remains negative overall, even though it has improved compared to the previous year (balance: minus 15 points, minus 23 points previously). Only 11 percent of companies expect business to improve, whilst one in five expect it to deteriorate (balance: minus nine points, minus twelve points previously). Five years after Brexit took effect, German British business relations remain challenging. New momentum could be provided by the deeper cooperation agreed at bilateral level in areas such as the defence industry, innovation, energy and digitalisation under the Kensington Agreement, which was signed by both heads of government in London on 17 July 2025.

Highs and lows in Asia-Pacific, China and India

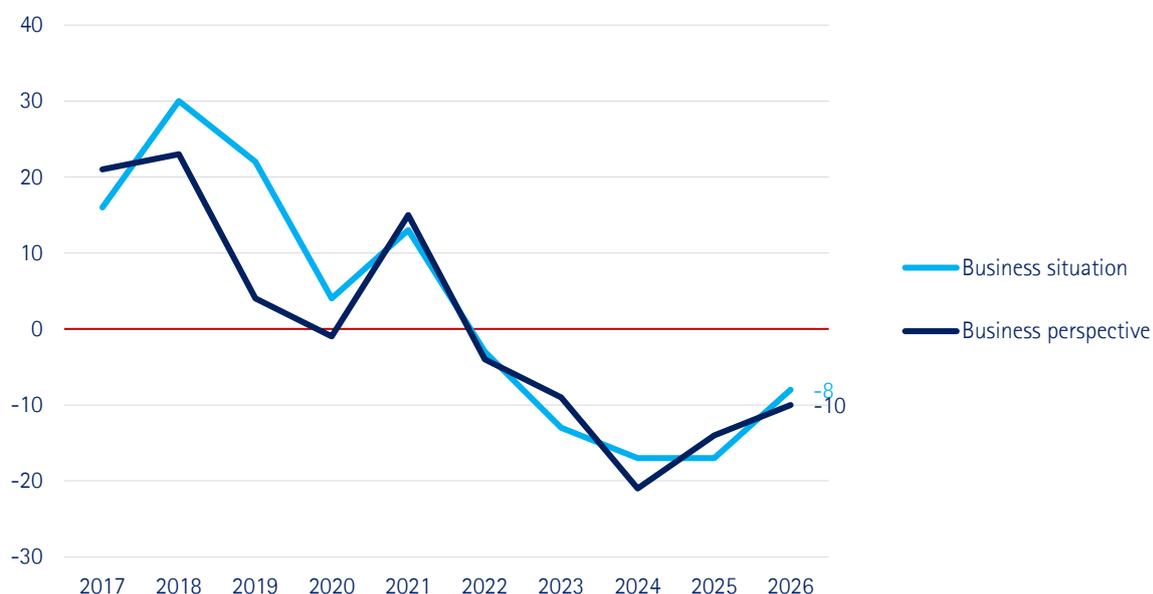
When assessing the business outlook for **Asia-Pacific**, positive and negative expectations are almost evenly balanced. Whilst just under one in five companies (18 percent) expects business to deteriorate in the current year, 19 percent anticipate an improvement. The balance has risen slightly by one point. The current business situation is also viewed positively (balance: four points, up from one point previously). The region stands to benefit from the diversification of many companies' supply chains.

However, companies are significantly more cautious about their business with **China** than in the rest of the region. Although 16 percent expect business to improve in the coming months, more than a quarter (26 percent) anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus ten, up from minus 14 points previously). China's economic weakness and increasing trade barriers, such as localisation requirements, are weighing on bilateral trade.

In **India**, the current business climate is viewed rather soberly: positive and negative assessments are evenly balanced (balance: zero points). The outlook for the future, however, is very optimistic. Here, almost one in three companies expects business to improve in the current year (32 percent), whilst 15 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: plus 17 points). The trade agreement negotiated between the EU and India is raising hopes of new suppliers and customers. Under the agreement, tariffs on almost 97 percent of current EU exports would be abolished or at least reduced. EU exports to India could thus double by 2032. The business potential of the world's most populous country is particularly significant for German companies in key sectors such as the automotive, mechanical engineering, chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

Current business situation and business prospects for German companies in China

balance in points of 'good/better' minus 'bad/worse' reports



Challenging environment in Africa, the Near and Middle East

Companies' assessments of their future business on the African continent are pessimistic. For North Africa, 11 percent expect an improvement in their business, whilst 22 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: minus 11 points, minus 15 points previously). For sub-Saharan Africa, 10 percent expect an improvement, whilst 27 percent anticipate a deterioration (balance: remains at minus 17 points).

Business prospects in the Middle East have improved slightly compared with the previous survey. Positive and negative expectations are roughly balanced. One in five companies (20 percent) expects business to improve in the current year, whilst just as many anticipate a deterioration (balance of zero points, compared with minus three points previously). However, ongoing conflicts in the region continue to cause uncertainty.

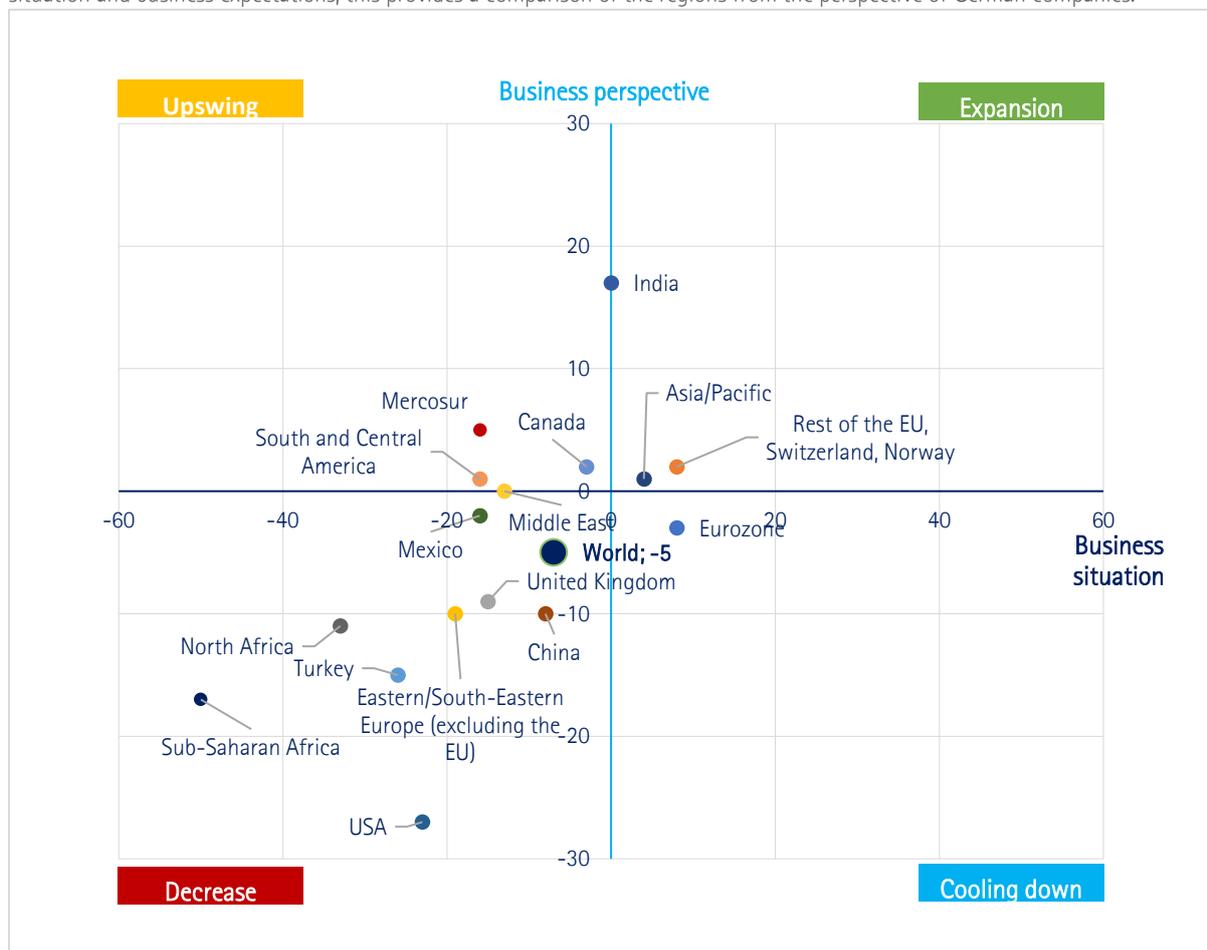
Gloomy business situation, but hope for improvement in South and Central America and Mercosur

Companies in **South and Central America** assess their business outlook as slightly better than the global average. Sixteen percent of companies expect business to improve. The proportion anticipating a deterioration stands at 15 percent. The balance has improved from minus seven to plus one point. However, future business opportunities are assessed as significantly better than the current business situation (balance: minus 18 points), a sign pointing to an upturn in bilateral trade. Companies' expectations for business in **the Mercosur region** are even more positive (balance: five points). The EU-Mercosur Agreement was signed only recently. Once implemented, it will offer opportunities for diversification and growth.

Business situation and outlook in the world's regions

balance in points derived from 'good' minus 'bad' or 'better' minus 'worse' reports

If we plot the respective balance points for the countries and world regions on a coordinate system comprising the current business situation and business expectations, this provides a comparison of the regions from the perspective of German companies.



Questionnaire

1. How would you assess your current business situation in your target regions?

(Answer: Good/Satisfactory/Poor/Not active in this region)

- Eurozone
- Rest of the EU, Switzerland, Norway
- United Kingdom
- Eastern/South-Eastern Europe (non-EU)
- Turkey
- Russia
- Asia/Pacific
 - China
 - India
- North America
 - Of which: USA
 - Of which: Mexico
 - Of which: Canada
- South and Central America
 - Of which in one or more Mercosur member states (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay)
- Middle East
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa

2. How do you assess the business outlook for this year (2026) in your target regions?

(Answer: Better/Unchanged/Worse/Not active in this region)

- Eurozone
- Rest of the EU, Switzerland, Norway
- United Kingdom
- Eastern/South-Eastern Europe (non-EU)
- Turkey
- Russia
- Asia/Pacific
 - China
 - India
- North America
 - Of which: USA
 - Of which: Mexico
 - Of which: Canada
- South and Central America
 - Of which in one or more Mercosur member states (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay)
- Middle East
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa

3. Have you noticed an increase in barriers to your international business in 2025? (e.g. tariffs; requirements, regulations and laws in the destination country)

- Yes
- No

If 3. "Yes" (hide if 3. "No"):

3.1. What barriers do you encounter in your international business? (Multiple answers possible)

- Higher tariffs
- Stricter security requirements
- Local certification requirements
- Local content requirements (local production)
- Technology transfer requirements
- Tighter export control regimes
- Restricted or no access to public procurement contracts
- Sanctions
- Lack of transparency in legislation
- Other (free text):

If 3.1. 'Higher tariffs':

3.1.a In which countries/regions was this primarily the case? (Multiple answers possible)

- Eurozone
- Rest of the EU, Switzerland, Norway
- United Kingdom
- Eastern/South-Eastern Europe (excluding the EU)
- Turkey
- Russia
- Asia/Pacific
 - China
 - India
- North America
 - Of which: USA
 - Of which: Mexico
 - Of which: Canada
- South and Central America
- Middle East
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa

(3.1.b–3.1.h: for each barrier, respondents are asked in which countries/regions this was primarily the case. On average, companies have cited 2.6 barriers in the past, so the additional time required is therefore limited.)

3.2. Home-grown barriers from Germany and Europe:

What (further) challenges do you encounter in your international business?

(Multiple answers possible, except for "no challenges")

- No challenges
- Barriers to international trade caused by export authorities (e.g. BAFA licences, export controls, customs, investment reviews)
 - If so, which ones: (free text)
- Compliance with laws on due diligence and reporting obligations in supply chains (CSRD, CSDDD, LkSG)
- Preparatory measures for the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR: applicable from the end of 2026)
- Implementation of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)
- Packaging requirements (preparation for PPWR measures, Extended Producer Responsibility)
- Applying for visas for employees or business partners
- Difficulties accessing finance for international business
- Restrictions on the free movement of goods and services within the EU internal market (e.g. posting of workers/business travel, reporting obligations within the EU)
 - If so, which ones: Free text
- Other (free text)

4.1. What opportunities/risks do you anticipate for your company from such a 'Buy European' approach?*(Multiple answers possible)*

- No impact
- Better competitive position in the EU market
- Backlash from key trading partners, leading to poorer market access in third-country markets
- Loss of suppliers
- Relocation of production back to the EU
 - of which: Germany
- Higher production costs
- Withdrawal from the EU internal market
- Increased bureaucracy for proof of origin
- Other (free text)

4.2. To what extent has the EU-Mercosur Agreement already triggered specific measures in your company, or what impacts do you expect in the future?*(Multiple answers possible)***Measures already taken:**

- No specific measures so far
- Specific preparations to expand export activities to Mercosur countries
- Adaptation or reorganisation of supply chains (e.g. sourcing, logistics, supplier structures)
- Review or implementation of investment projects in the Mercosur region
- Adjustments to internal processes (e.g. tariffs, compliance, product approvals)

Expected impacts (once in force):

- Improved market access and removal of trade barriers
- Cost advantages through the removal or reduction of tariffs
- New sales or procurement opportunities
- New/expanded investment activity
- Greater planning certainty for long-term activities in the region
- No significant impact expected

4.3. What do you see as the greatest challenges to your business operations as a result of trade tensions with the US? (Multiple answers possible)

- No challenges
- Trade policy uncertainty
- "Basic tariff rate" of 15%
- Tariffs on steel, aluminium, copper and their derivatives (50%)
- Sector-specific tariffs (on cars and car parts, kitchen and bathroom furniture, etc.)
- Concerns about new sectoral tariffs (pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, 'robotics & industrial machinery', etc.)
- Costs associated with customs procedures, increased bureaucracy
- Financial market instability / euro-dollar exchange rate
- US government export controls and sanctions affecting third-party markets
- Reduced competitiveness in the US market
- Other (free text)

4.4. Who bears the cost of the increased US tariffs? (Multiple answers possible)

- Not relevant/no US exports
- Tariff costs prevent/reduce my US exports
- Tariff costs are mainly borne by my company itself/reduced margin
- Tariff costs are mainly passed on to the customer/importer (price increase)
- Tariff costs are shared

4.5. How does current US tariff policy affect your investment plans in the US? (Only companies with US operations)

- Not relevant/No investments planned
- New investments/relocation of investments in the US
- More investment in the US
- Fewer investments in the US
- Investments are being postponed
- No change

Methodology

The DIHK's nationwide survey "Going International 2026" was conducted with the support of the 79 Chambers of Industry and Commerce (IHKs) in Germany. A total of 2,400 companies based in Germany with international operations took part in the survey, which ran from 2 February to 13 February 2026.

The responses from companies are broken down by company size as follows: 77 percent of companies with up to 249 employees, nine percent with 250–499 employees, five percent with 500–999 employees, and eight percent with more than 1,000 employees.

Of the company responses, 55 percent are industrial companies, three percent are from the construction sector, 16 percent from the retail sector, 13 percent from the service sectors, and 13 percent are 'other'.

The companies operate in their international business as follows: 84 percent export from Germany, 32 percent have subsidiaries or branches abroad, 27 percent import into Germany for sale, 16 percent source goods abroad for production in Germany, 17 percent maintain a representative office or sales office abroad, 17 percent are independent cooperation partners, nine percent have a joint venture or alliance, eight percent have research and development, seven percent are active abroad via e-commerce, four percent engage in transit trade and two percent have a purchasing office abroad.

The regional data covers overarching regions and individual countries.

Respondents could either select an entire region (e.g. *North America, Asia/Pacific or South and Central America*) or a specific country within it (e.g. *USA, India, Mercosur*).

If a respondent selects one or more countries, the corresponding region is automatically included in the count.

This means:

- The figures for the major regions always include all mentions of their constituent countries. Consequently, they may yield higher figures than if the individual countries within them were added together.
- The country figures stand *on their own* and are not true subsets in the statistical sense.
- It is therefore not possible to simply add the country figures together to arrive at the value for the region as a whole.