DHL Hong Kong Air Trade Leading Index (DTI)

Q2 2026 REPORT

Commissioned by DHL Express (Hong Kong) Limited, DTI is implemented independently by the Hong Kong Productivity Council to measure air traders' forward-looking business outlook, presented in the form of an Index. Please visit u.hkpc.org/dti_eng for details.

Background

Hong Kong is one of the major regional aviation hubs in Asia Pacific. Hong Kong International Airport is globally recognised as one of the busiest airports on its international cargo throughput. The city's dynamic air trade industry generates a total revenue of over HK$165.8 billion annually, with HK$48.1 billion from freight revenue, and creates over 36,000 job opportunities [1].

DHL Express (Hong Kong) Limited (DHL) has commissioned the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) to conduct independent air trade research – the result of which is the DHL Hong Kong Air Trade Leading Index (DTI).

DTI is developed, after months of preparation and preliminary studies, and compiled findings on air trade across multiple quarters. It reflects and investigates on respondents' outlook on Hong Kong's air trade, and its related attributes, market sentiment, as well as key types of commodities.

DTI is the first of its kind in Hong Kong, offering publicly accessible market intelligence for local enterprises to take reference from a comprehensive business review of the sector which they operate, especially SMEs that typically have scarce resources or limited access to information.

DTI first launched in the second quarter of 2014 and has been published on a quarterly basis since then.

Methodology

DTI = [100 x (Percentage of samples responded "Positive")] + [50 x (Percentage of samples responded "Neutral")] + [0 x (Percentage of samples responded "Negative")]

Readings

An index value above 50 indicates an overall positive outlook while a reading below 50 represents an overall negative outlook for the surveyed quarter.

As such, the further the reading deviates from 50, the more pronounced the positive or negative outlook becomes.

Negative	Neutral	Positive
0	**50**	**100**

[1] Key Statistics on Business Performance and Operating Characteristics of the Transportation, Storage and Courier Services Sector in 2024, Census and Statistics Department

Demographics

Respondents are Hong Kong-based companies with either in-bound or out-bound air trade. Sectors cover air-freighted commodities including Watches, Clocks & Jewellery, Apparel & Clothing Accessories, Electronic Products & Parts, Gifts, Toys & Houseware, Food & Beverage and Others (including courier items and other items that do not belong to the categories listed above).

Since the first reading in the second quarter of 2014, over 600 samples have been randomly selected from over 10,000 targeted entries every quarter to reveal the respondents' expectations on air trade by telephone. Surveyed samples are based on company and air-freighted commodity, without weighting adjustments for the business size of companies.

REPORT SUMMARY

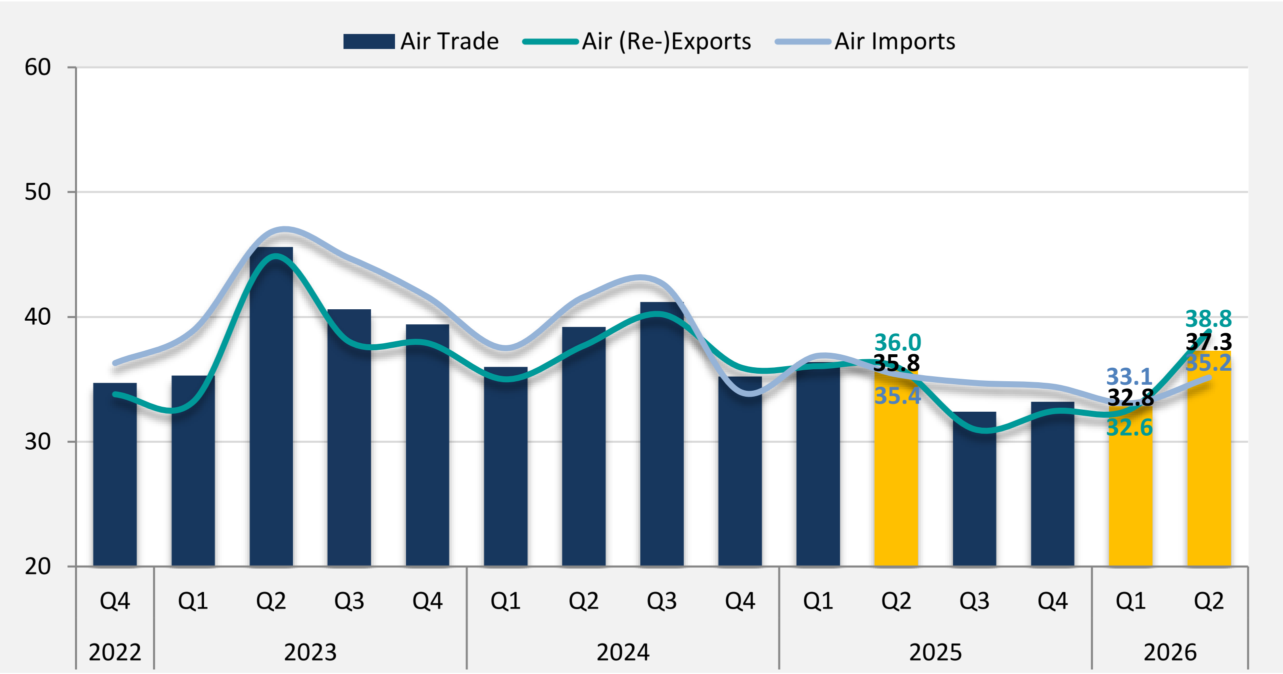
In Q2 2026, the Overall Air Trade Index rebounded to 37.3, marking a six-quarter high since Q4 2024. The recovery was driven by strong gains in the Americas Index - possibly reflecting the temporary easing of U.S. tariff pressures - alongside robust Asian demand and a strong uplift in (re)exports.

- The Overall Air Trade Index climbed 4.5 points to 37.3 in Q2 2026, reaching its highest level since Q4 2024. The increase was underpinned by a strong rebound in (re-)exports (+6.2 points), while imports also recorded a moderate increase (+2.1 points), remaining broadly in line with the same quarter last year.
- Market performance improved across most regions and key commodities. The Americas and Asia Pacific led the recovery, while Europe was the only market to record a decline, reflecting softer import activity. Among commodities, Apparel & Clothing Accessories and Electronic Products & Parts outperformed, whereas Gifts, Toys & Houseware softened following earlier strength.
- In anticipation of the EU's upcoming €3 customs fee on low-value goods effective from 1 July 2026, over 90% of sellers exporting to Europe who intend to manage the impact through pricing adjustments plan to either pass on or share the additional customs cost with consumers.
- Against a backdrop of ongoing U.S. and EU trade policy uncertainties, air traders exporting to Europe and/or Americas identified Southeast Asia (37%) as the key alternative market with strong growth potential.
- When expanding internationally, “Complex tariff and customs clearance procedures” (23%) and “High logistics and delivery costs” (20%) emerged as the top challenges for air traders. Nonetheless, over 85% maintained a neutral or positive outlook towards overseas expansion.
- The results for this quarter have not incorporated the possible implications of recent incidents in the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz, which will be assessed in the subsequent readings.

Mr Edmond LAI, Chief Digital Officer of HKPC, commented, “Air trade continued its upward trajectory in Q2 2026, reaching a six-quarter high, underpinned by a strong rebound in (re-)exports and steady import recovery. The Americas and Asia Pacific led the regional improvement, while Southeast Asia is gaining traction as promising alternative market amid ongoing global trade policy shifts. The resilience in product variety and the recovery in sales volume reflect traders’ adaptability to evolving demand patterns. As the industry prepares for upcoming regulatory changes in Europe, air traders are responding with pragmatic strategies, including pricing adjustments and market diversification, to sustain growth in a complex global environment.”

Air Trade Index

Air trade momentum strengthened in Q2 2026, reaching its highest level in six quarters since Q4 2024, supported by a strong rebound in (re-)exports and a steady recovery in imports. Air traders continued adapting to evolving market conditions amid ongoing U.S. and EU trade policy uncertainties.



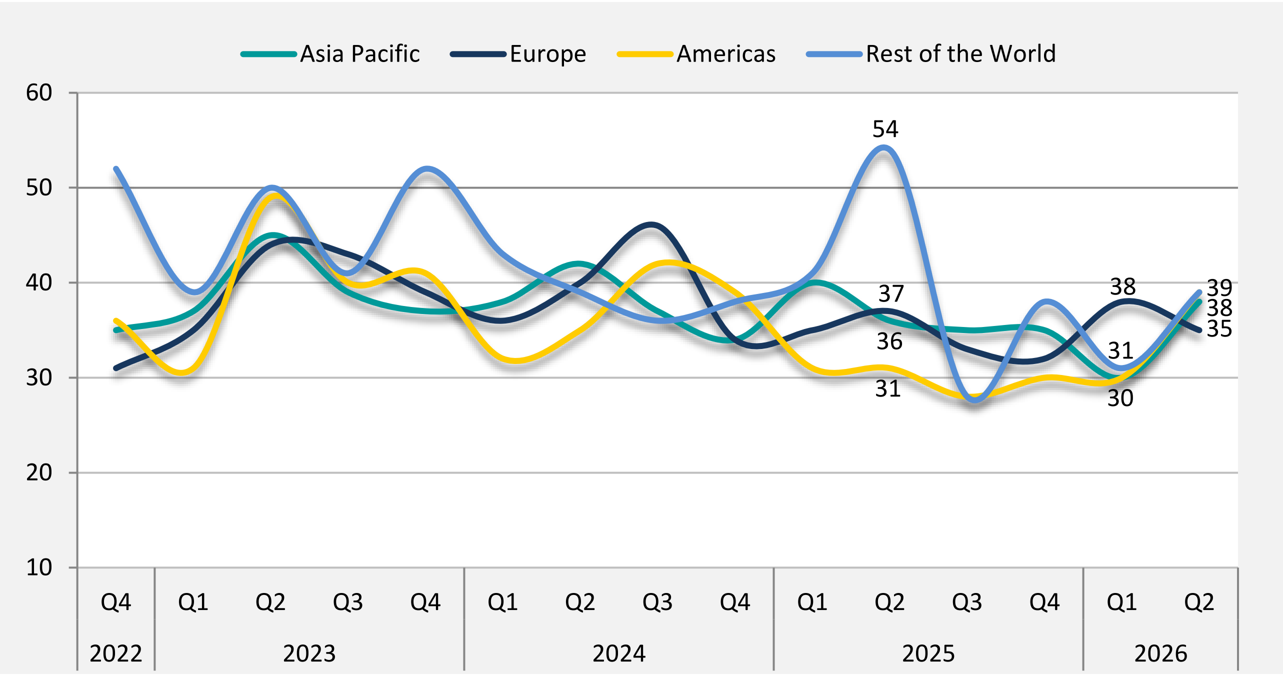
In Q2 2026, the **Overall Air Trade Index** increased by **4.5 points to 37.3**, marking the highest readings since Q4 2024.

The improvement was largely driven by the **Air (Re-)Exports** Index, which rose by 6.2 points to 38.8.

The **Air Imports** Index also registered a moderate increase of 2.1 points to 35.2, remaining in line with the same quarter last year.

Markets

Most major markets recorded improvement in Q2 2026, led by strong gains in the Americas, with their index level ranking the highest among all markets. The Asia Pacific also demonstrated a growing momentum, supported by renewed momentum in (re-)exports to the Chinese Mainland and Japan. Europe was the only market to post a decline, reflecting softer import activity.



The **Americas'** Index rose sharply by 9 points to 39 points in Q2 2026, returning to the level last seen in Q4 2024. It marked the highest index among all markets during the quarter, reflecting a broad-based improvement in trade sentiment.

Asia Pacific's index recorded the second-highest index at 38 points, representing an 8-point quarter-on-quarter increase.

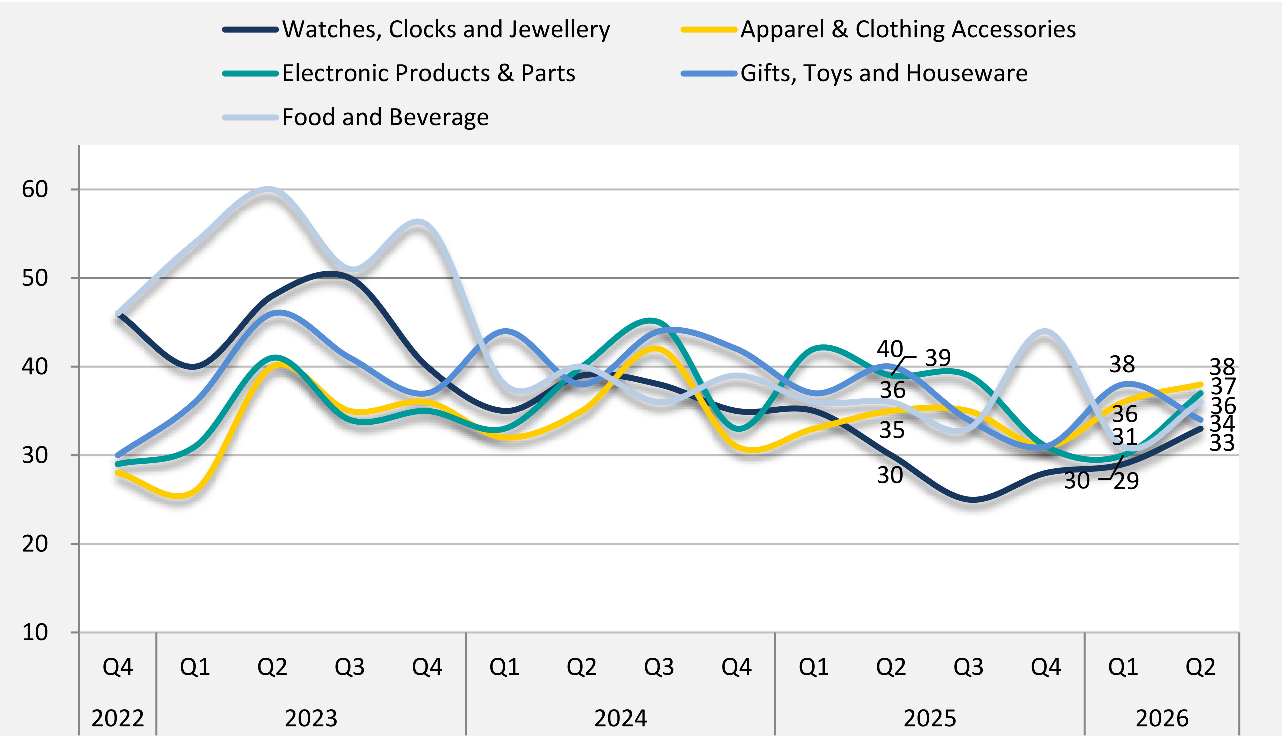
- The **Chinese Mainland's index** increased by 4 points to 34 points, supported by improvements in both (re-)exports (+7 points) and imports (+2 points).
- **Japan** experienced a strong rebound, with its index surging 9 points, reaching 34 points, underpinned by a substantial rise in (re-)exports (+11 points) and a solid increase in imports (+9 points).
- **Other Asia Pacific** markets also showed a notable improvement, with the index rising 9 points to 42 points, driven by strong gains in (re-)exports (+7 points) and imports (+11 points).

Europe's Index declined by 3 points to 35 points, making it the only market to record a contraction in Q2 2026. The decrease was primarily attributable to a sharper drop in imports (-6 points).

The **Rest of the World** Index increased by 8 points to 39 points.

Air-Freighted Commodities

Overall commodity performance improved in Q2 2026, led by strength in Apparel & Clothing Accessories and a pronounced rebound in Electronic Products & Parts, mainly driven by increase in (re-) exports. Food & Beverage also showed signs of recovery, Gifts, Toys & Houseware saw a modest pullback.



Apparel & Clothing Accessories increased by 2 points to 38 points in Q2 2026, ranking as the highest-ranking commodity this quarter. The improvement was primarily driven by stronger (re-)exports (+5 points), partially offset by a notable decline in imports (-6 points).

Electronic Products & Parts recorded a strong rebound, rising 7 points to 37 points. The rebound was broadly supported, with improvements in both (re-)exports (+6 points) and imports (+7 points).

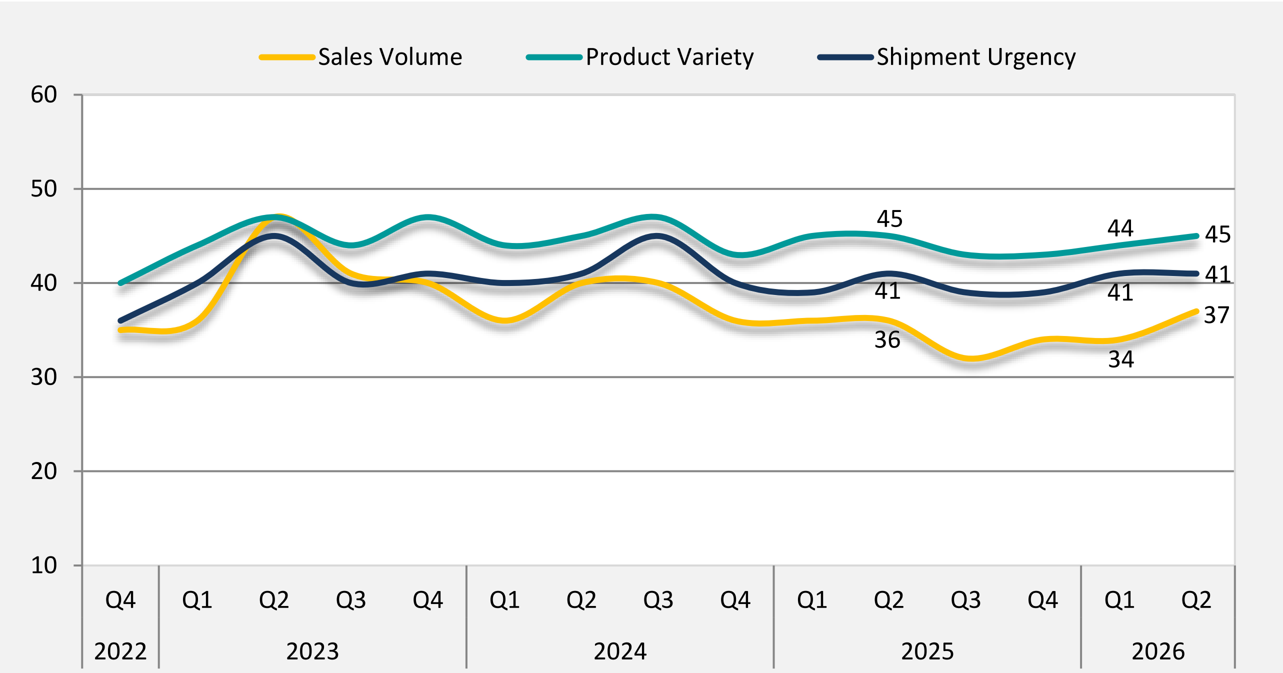
Food & Beverage also showed renewed recovery, with the index rising 5 points to 36 points, reversing part of the weakness observed in the previous quarter.

Gifts, Toys & Houseware softened during the quarter, with the index declining 4 points to 34 points, indicating easing demand following earlier strength.

Watches, Clocks & Jewellery increased by 4 points to 33 points, supported by concurrent improvements in both (re-)exports and imports.

Sub-Indices

Sub-indices performance strengthened modestly in Q2 2026, led by continued gains in Product Variety and a recovery in Sales Volume, while Shipment Urgency remained stable. The results indicated sustained resilience in demand diversity, improving shipment activity and steady demand for time-sensitive shipments.



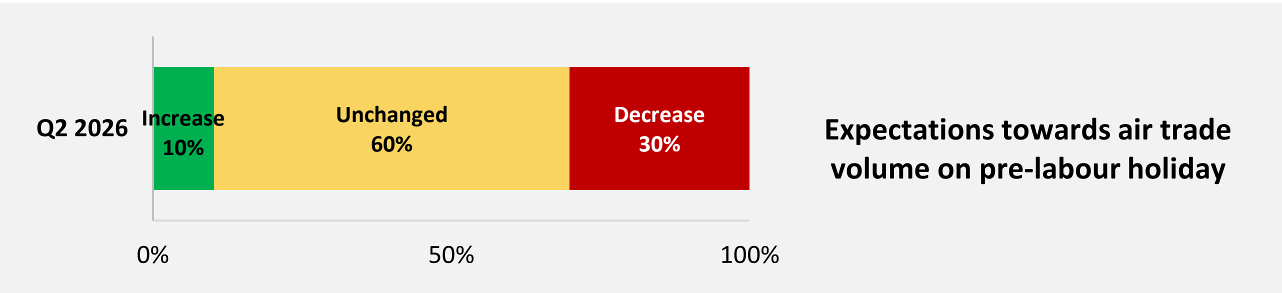
Product Variety continued its gradual upward trend, increasing by 1 point to 45 points in Q2 2026. It remained the highest-ranking sub-index, reflecting a sustained diversity in air-freighted goods.

Shipment Urgency remained unchanged at 41, indicating a stable demand for time-sensitive shipments during the quarter.

Sales Volume showed clearer improvement, rising by 3 points to 37, mainly driven by the increase in (re-)exports in Americas Region (+11 points), suggesting a modest pickup in overall shipment activity.

Air Trade Outlook Shaped by Recent Market Developments

Air traders are adopting a cautious near-term stance, with most expecting a stable air trade volumes ahead of the pre-Labour Day period. In Europe, the removal of the de minimis threshold is prompting pricing adjustments, primarily through cost pass-through or costsharing mechanisms. Seller type exporters to Europe are also making operational and strategic adjustments, including freight consolidation, selective order management, and market diversification. Against the backdrop of tightening global trade policies, Southeast Asia has emerged as key alternative growth market. While air traders continue to face structural challenges in "Go Global"- particularly tariff complexity and high logistics costs, most remain a measured and neutral level of confidence. This reflects a pragmatic and riskaware approach to navigating global expansion opportunities.



Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Approximately two-thirds of air traders (60%) expect no change in air trade volume ahead of the pre-Labour Day period. By comparison, 10% anticipate an increase in volume, while 30% foresee a decline.

While most air traders foresee broadly stable volumes, the corresponding index registered 40 points, slightly above the Overall Air Trade Index reading. This indicates a cautious yet moderately optimistic outlook for seasonal demand despite ongoing uncertainty in the broader market environment.

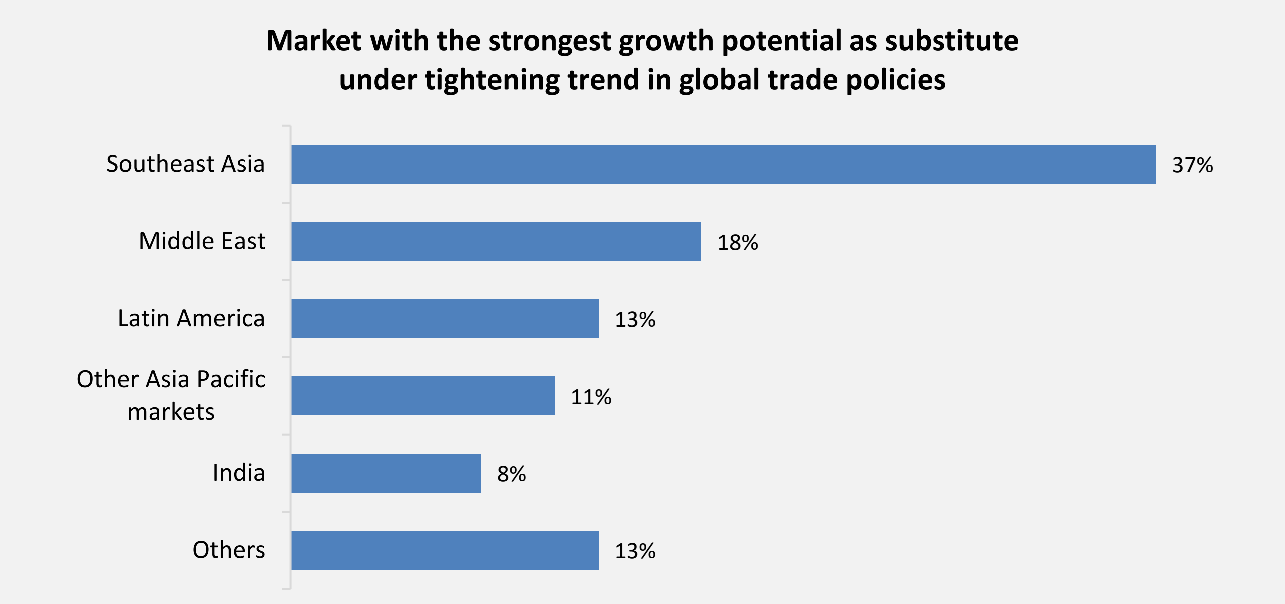
Measures Taken by Seller-type Air Traders in Response to the Removal of the De minimis Threshold for Low-value Parcels valued at €150 or below in EU

A. Pricing Adjustments | **B. Other Business / Operational Strategies**

Note: Based on those air traders who exported to Europe and their roles are Sellers
Note: Respondent can choose one among the three options in part A
Note: Multiple answers allowed for part B
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

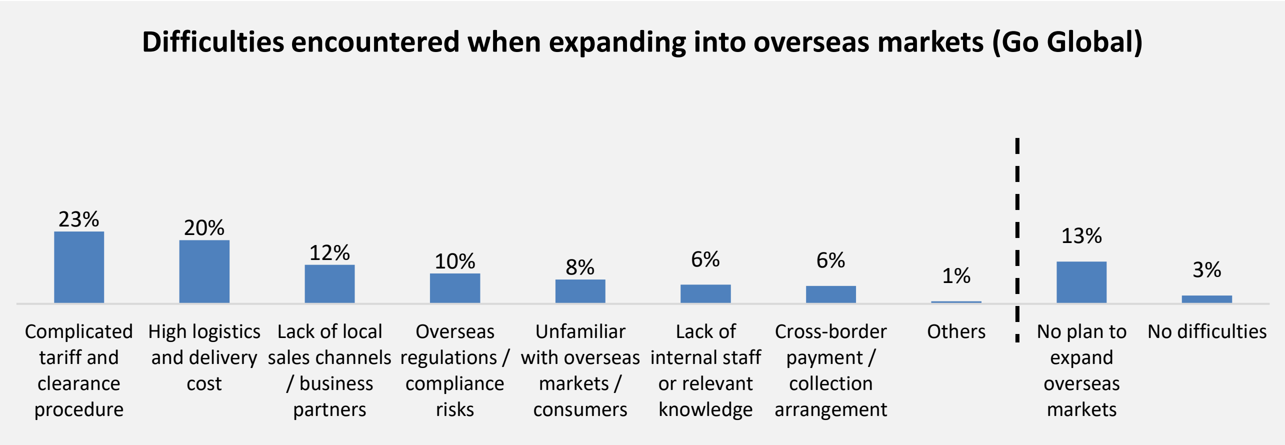
In response to the upcoming removal of the de minimis threshold for low-value parcels (valued at €150 or below) in the EU, seller-type air traders exporting to Europe expect to adopt a mix of pricing adjustments and broader business strategies to mitigate tariff impact. Among those planning to manage the change through pricing measures, 57% intend to pass all additional tariff costs on to consumers, while 34% plan to share the additional costs with consumers. Only 9% indicated that they would bear the additional costs entirely.

In parallel, certain seller-type air traders plan to adjust their operational strategies. 36% of them plan to consolidate freight, 29% expect to focus on larger-order shipments, and another 36% considering diversifying into other markets in response to the change.



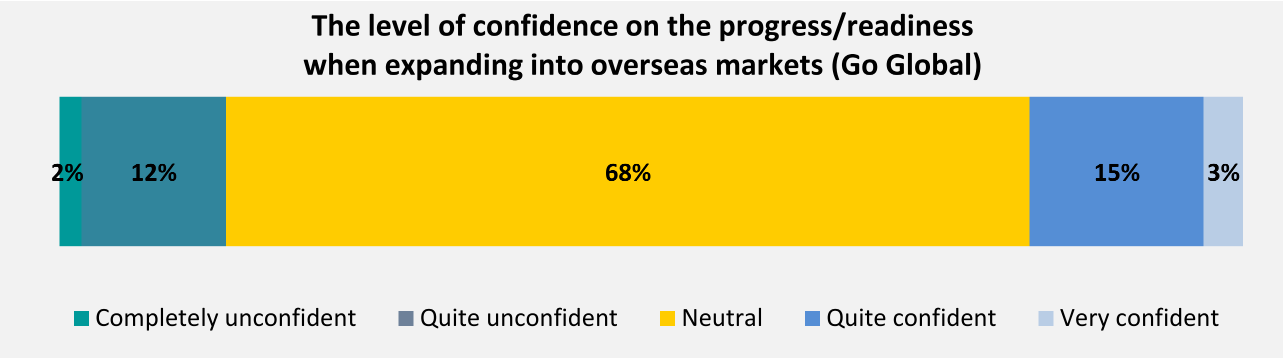
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Note: Based on those air traders who exported to Europe and/ or America

Against a backdrop of tightening global trade policies, air traders with export exposure to Europe and/ or the Americas increasingly view Southeast Asia as the market with the strongest growth potential, cited by 37% of respondents as a key alternative destination. The Middle East market ranked second, identified by 18% of air traders.
These findings underscore a growing strategic focus on market diversification, as traders seek to mitigate rising policy-related and cost pressures in traditional Western markets.



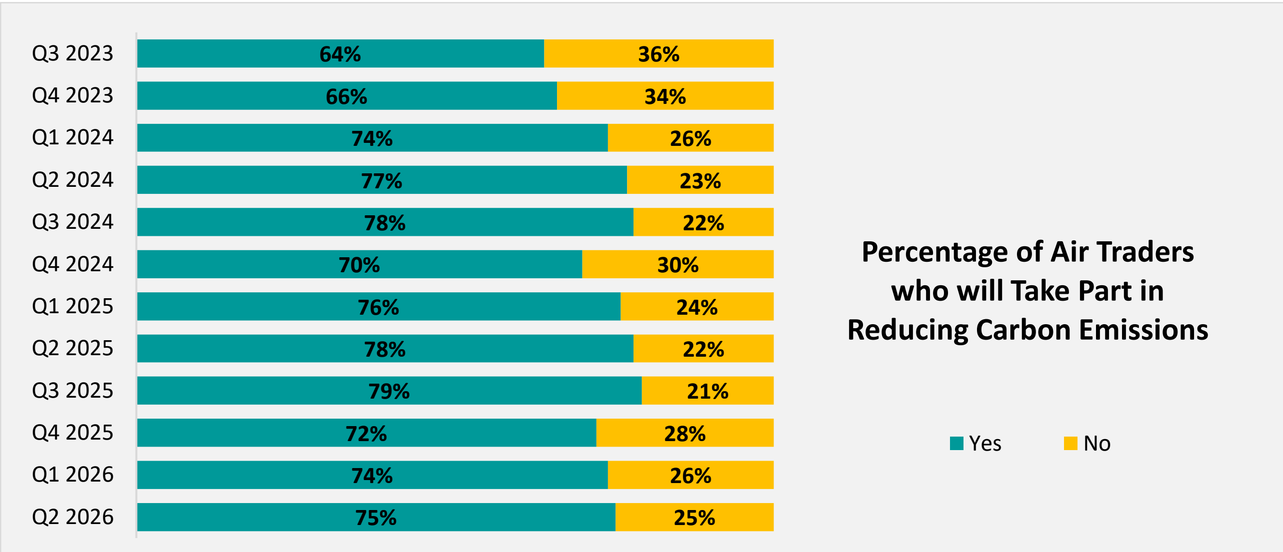
Note: At most three answers allowed

Among all the responses regarding the question about the difficulties encountered when expanding into overseas market (Go Global), the top three challenges were “complicated tariff and customs clearance procedures” (23%), “high logistics and delivery costs” (20%), and “lack of local sales channels/ business partners” (12%). Meanwhile, only 13% of respondents indicated that they do not currently plan to expand into overseas markets.



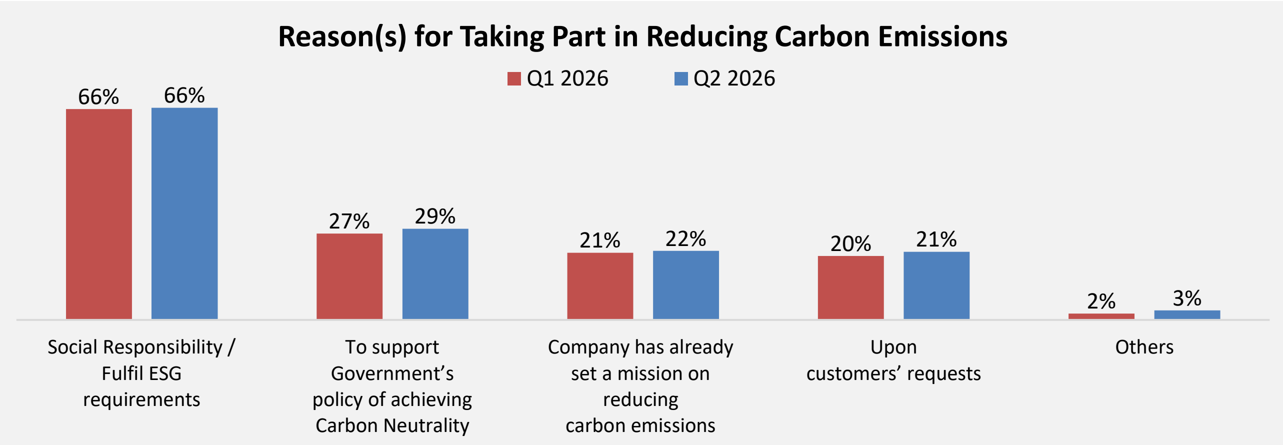
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Note: Based on those who have plans to expand into overseas markets.

When expanding into overseas markets, most air traders (68%) reported a neutral level of confidence, while around one-fifth (18%) expressed that they are quite or very confident in view of their overseas expansion.



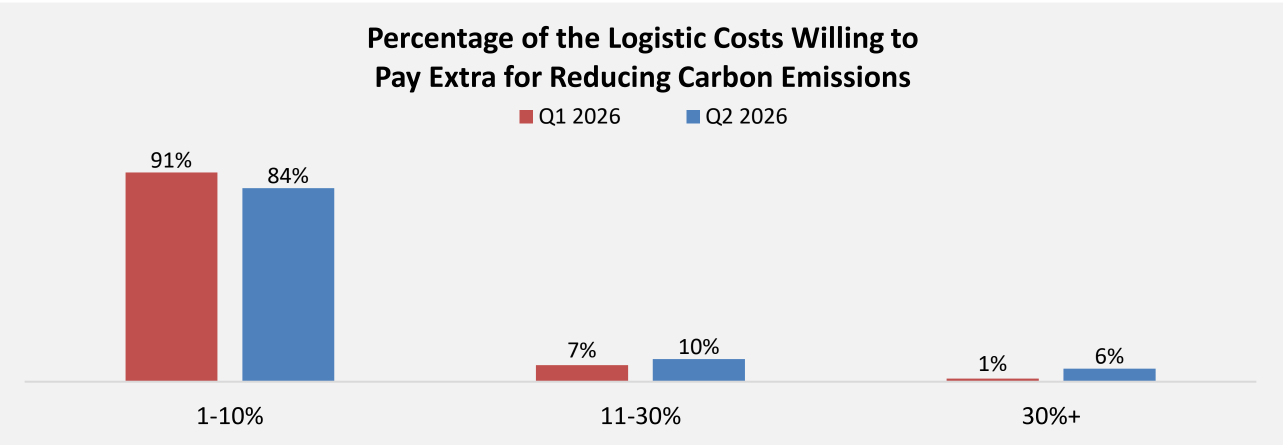
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

In Q2 2026, a large proportion of air traders (75%) indicated a willingness to engage in carbon emission reduction initiatives, remaining broadly in line with the previous quarter.



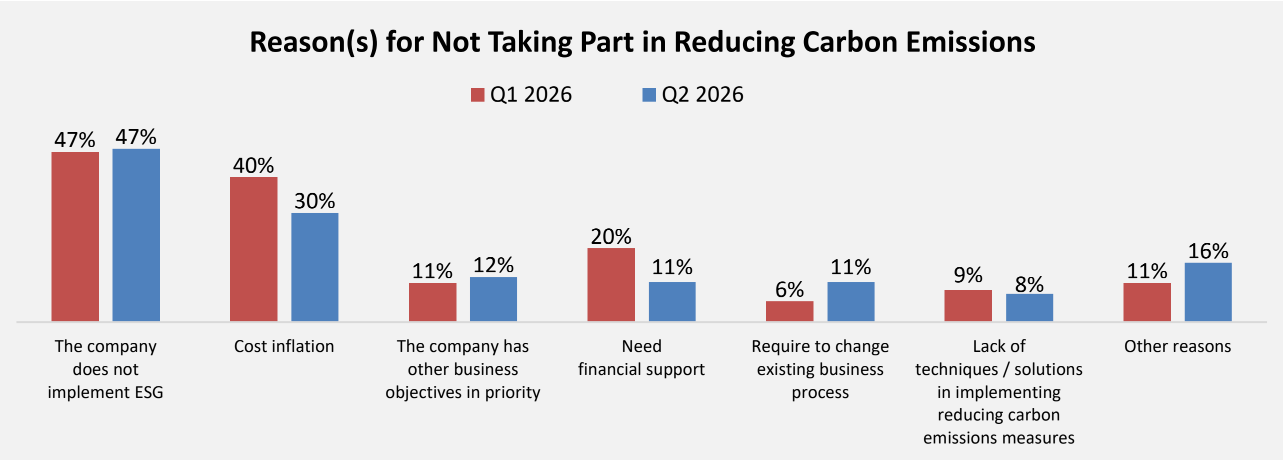
Note: Based on air traders willing to take part in reducing carbon emissions
Note: Multiple answers allowed

Among air traders that willing to participate in carbon emission reduction initiatives, the primary motivation cited was "social responsibility / fulfilment of ESG requirements" (66%). Other key drivers included support for the government's carbon neutrality policy (29%) and alignment with existing corporate missions to reduce carbon emissions (22%).



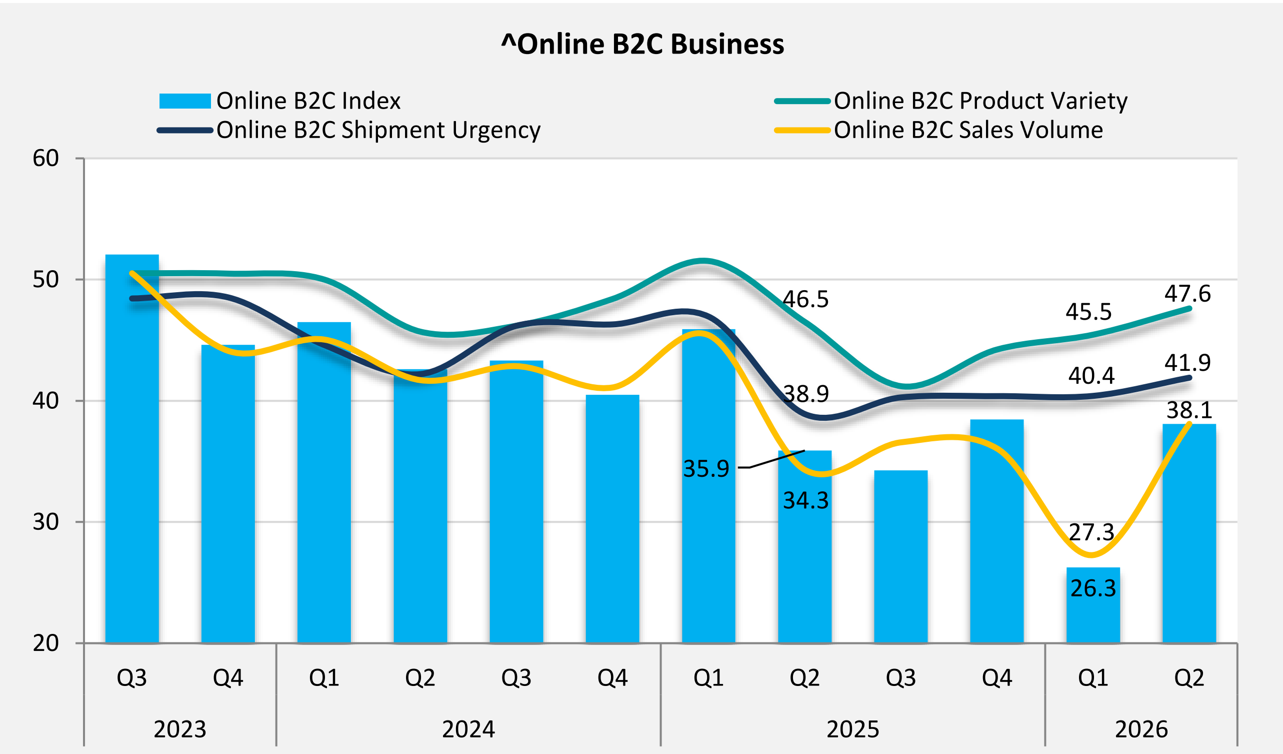
Note: Based on air traders willing to take part in reducing carbon emissions
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Among air traders willing to invest in carbon emission reduction, 84% indicated that they are prepared to allocate up to 10% of their logistics costs, representing a 7-percentage-point decline from the previous quarter. Meanwhile, 10% are willing to allocate up to 30%, and only 6% indicated a willingness to allocate more than 30% of their logistics expenditure to support carbon reduction efforts.



Note: Based on air traders not willing to take part in reducing carbon emissions
Note: Multiple answers allowed

Among air traders not participating in carbon emission reduction initiatives, the most commonly cited reason remained a lack of ESG implementation within the company (47%). This was followed by concerns over cost inflation (30%) and the need to prioritise other business objectives (12%).



Note: Based on air traders with online B2C business

In Q2 2026, the Online B2C Index recorded a significant increase, rising by 11.8 points to 38.1, indicating a strong rebound in online cross-border shipment activity.

About Hong Kong Productivity Council

The Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) is a statutory body established in 1967, dedicated to enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of Hong Kong enterprises through world-class applied R&D, innovative technology services, and integrated manufacturing solutions. As a market-oriented, international R&D organisation, HKPC leverages its deep expertise and extensive industry experience in key areas such as AI, advanced manufacturing, life and health technology, green technology and new energy to drive new industrialisation and support the growth of emerging and future industries.

HKPC focuses on addressing businesses challenges and industrial technology needs, promoting the full integration between technological and industrial innovation. Through technology transfer, product innovation, intellectual property protection and commercialisation of R&D outcomes, the Council fosters collaboration with the local business community as well as top global R&D institutions, delivering added value to industries and advancing the development of new productive forces. HKPC's world-class R&D achievements have been widely recognised over the years, winning an array of local and overseas accolades, reinforcing Hong Kong's role as an international innovation and technology centre and a smart city.

To help enterprises capitalise on Hong Kong's strengths in international connectivity to expand into global markets, HKPC offers comprehensive overseas expansion services tailored to critical areas including product development, technology, manufacturing, and management, enabling businesses to successfully go global from Hong Kong.

HKPC is also committed to providing timely and practical support to SMEs and startups with timely and practical, assisting them in accessing Government funding programmes. Through its FutureSkills training initiatives, HKPC helps both industry and academia stay ahead in latest digital and STEM technologies, nurturing a future-ready talent pool for Hong Kong.

For more information, please visit HKPC's website: www.hkpc.org/en.

Enquiry

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