DHL Hong Kong Air Trade Leading Index (DTI)

Q3 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

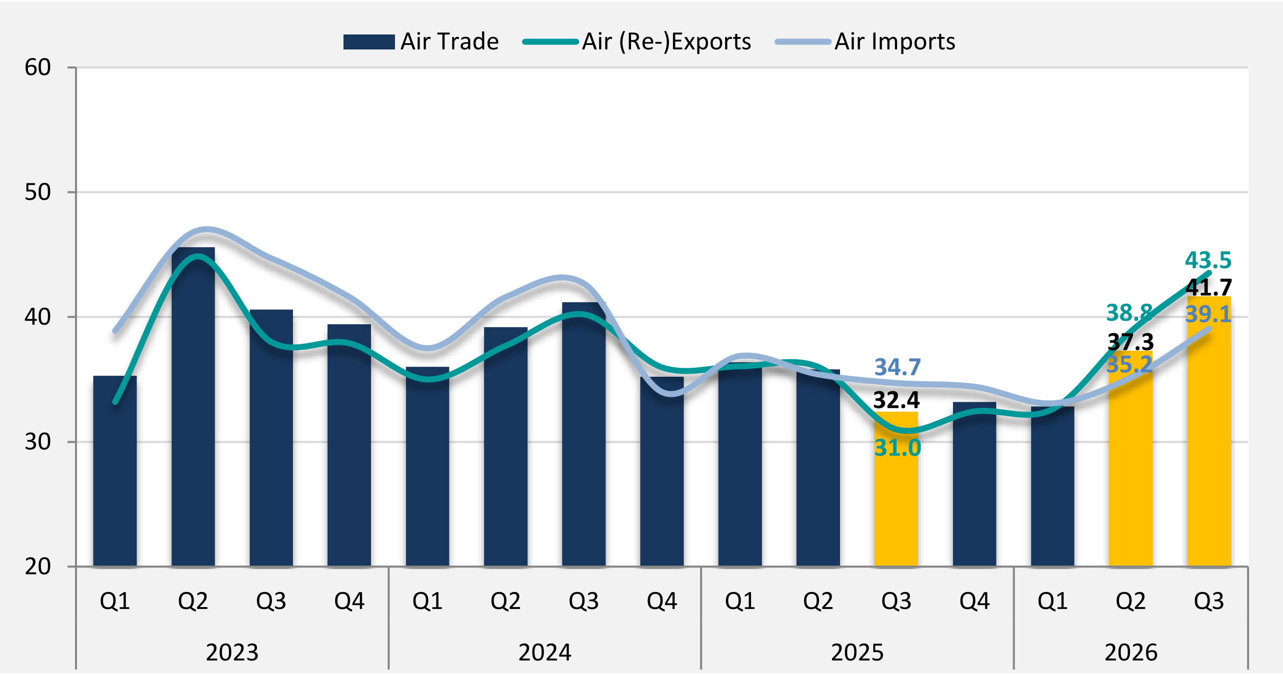
In Q3, 2026, the Overall Air Trade Index rose to 41.7, the highest level recorded since the Q2 2023 peak, signalling a continued recovery in Hong Kong's air trade outlook. However, external uncertainties, particularly the ongoing developments in the Middle East and around the Strait of Hormuz, are expected to exert pressure on air freight rates and fuel costs, prompting traders to adopt more active cost-management strategies.

- The Overall Air Trade Index further climbed by 4.4 points to 41.7 in Q3 2026, reaching its highest level since Q2 2023. The increase was primarily driven by strong growth in (re-)exports (+4.7 points), which outpaced the Air Imports Index (+3.9 points).
- Market performance improved across most regions and key commodities. The Americas posted the strongest growth and recorded the highest reading among all markets, while Asia Pacific region surpassed the 40-point level. Among commodities, Gifts, Toys & Houseware registered significant growth and reached a historical high, while Apparel & Clothing Accessories remained broadly stable.
- Amid ongoing uncertainty in the Middle East and developments around the Strait of Hormuz, two-thirds (67%) of air traders expect overall air freight rates to face upward pressure in the second half of the year.
- In response to rising fuel costs, over 80% of air traders indicated they would adopt cost-allocation measures. Among them, the majority planned to either share the additional costs with customers (51%) or pass them on in full (30%).
- Regarding fuel price outlook, nearly half (47%) of air traders expect fuel prices to remain elevated for at least three months (34%) or to rise further in the near term (13%).
- Following the EU's removal of the €150 low-value duty exemption threshold, the most commonly cited impacts among affected companies were "More complex customs clearance procedures, affecting efficiency and lead time" (30%), "Customers becoming more price sensitive" (28%), and "Overall cost increase (tariffs, customs declaration/ clearance fees, and related charges)" (23%).
- To adapt to the EU customs regulatory changes, companies expressed interest in learning more about customs-related requirements, particularly "Customs clearance procedures and processes" (28%), "Customs declaration documentation requirements" (22%), and "Customs duties (based on HS codes) and other related handling fees" (18%).

Mr Edmond LAI, Chief Digital Officer of HKPC, commented, "Hong Kong's air trade outlook continued to strengthen in Q3 2026, with the Overall Air Trade Index reaching levels close to the peak of Q2 2023, driven by sustained growth in both (re-)exports and imports. The broad-based improvement across major markets, particularly the Americas and Asia Pacific, together with stronger performance in key product categories, reflects the sector's resilience amid an evolving trade environment. While developments in the Middle East and around the Strait of Hormuz may place upward pressure on freight rates and fuel costs, air traders are proactively adapting through cost-management measures and operational optimisation. Looking ahead, we remain cautiously optimistic about the sector's growth momentum."

Air Trade Index

The Q3 2026 readings reflect a broad-based improvement in air trade sentiment, with both (re-)exports and imports gaining further momentum. Growth in (re-)exports continued to drive the overall recovery, while imports also strengthened, reaching levels close to the Q3 2024 peak.



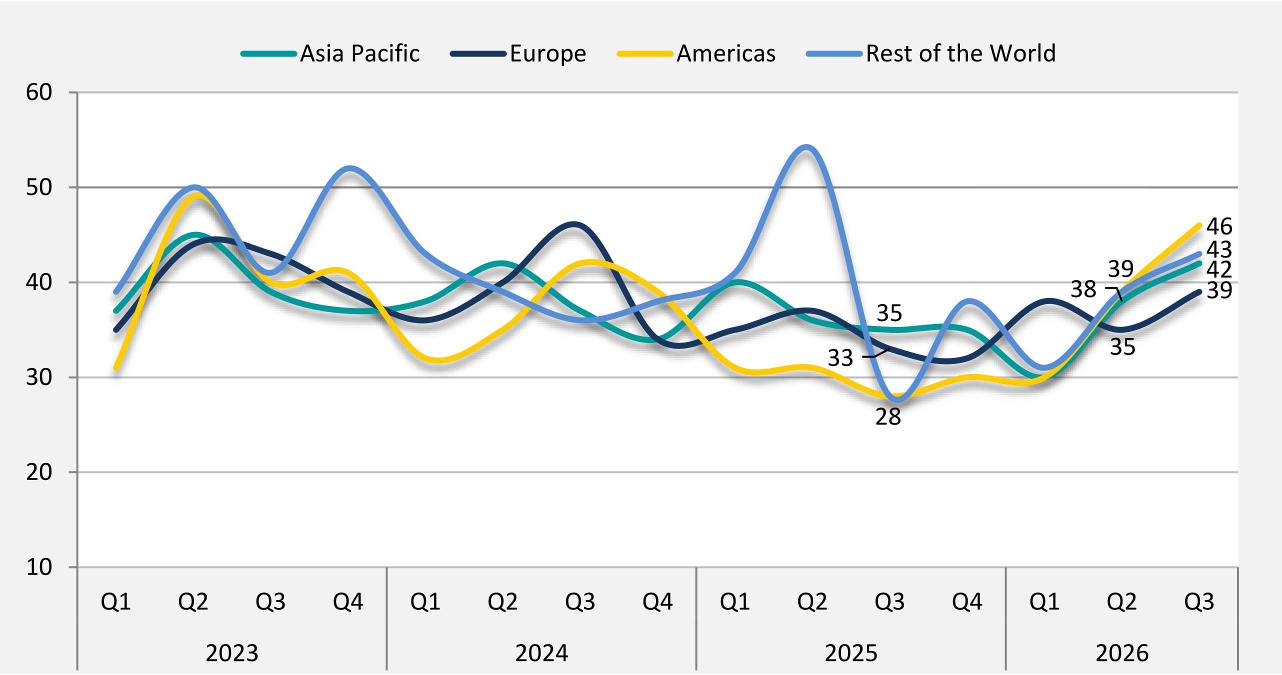
In Q3 2026, the **Overall Air Trade Index** rose by 4.4 points to 41.7, extending its upward momentum from Q1 2026 and reaching its highest level since the Q2 2023 peak.

The **Air (Re-)Exports** Index rose by 4.7 points to 43.5, further widening its lead over the Air Imports Index and reaching its highest level since Q2 2023 peak.

The **Air Imports** Index rose by 3.9 points to 39.1 in Q3 2026, reaching its highest level since Q3 2024 peak.

Markets

Market sentiment improved across all regions in Q3 2026, with the Americas leading the gains and recording the strongest reading among all markets. Asia Pacific also rose above the 40-point level, supported by stronger (re-)exports, particularly from Japan, while Europe rebounded to its Q1 2026 level.



The **Americas'** Index rose sharply by 7 points to 46 in Q3 2026, making it the strongest-performing market and reaching its highest level since Q2 2023 peak.

Asia Pacific's Index rose by 4 points to 42.

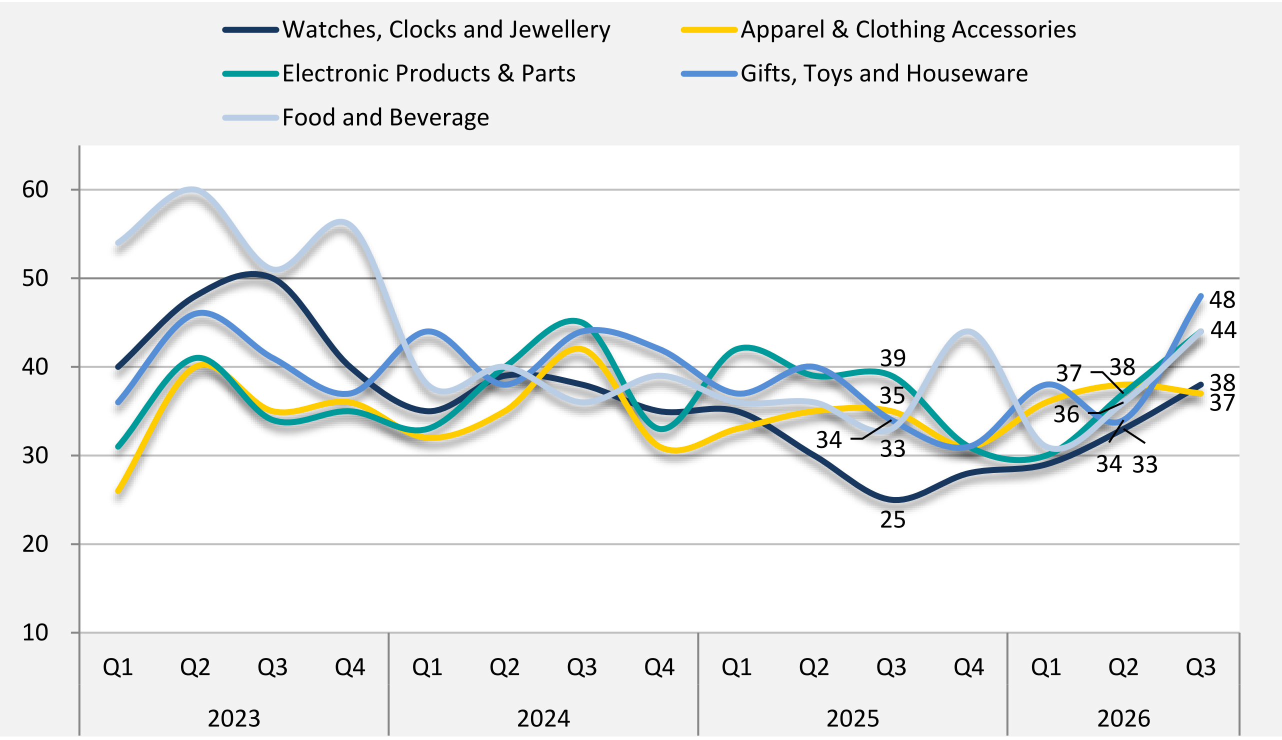
- The **Chinese Mainland's** Index rose by 4 points to 38, mainly supported by stronger (re-)exports (+7 points).
- **Japan** recorded another strong quarter, with its Index rising by 10 points to 44. The increase was driven primarily by a substantial gain in (re-)exports (+15 points), alongside a modest rise in imports (+6 points).
- **Other Asia Pacific** markets improved slightly by 1 point, supported by modest gains in (re-)exports (+2 points).

Europe's Index rebounded by 4 points to 39, returning to its Q1 2026 level.

The **Rest of the World** Index rose by 4 points to 43.

Air-Freighted Commodities

Most air-freighted commodity indices improved in Q3 2026, led by a sharp rebound in Gifts, Toys & Houseware, which moved closer to the 50-point neutral level and reached a historical high. Food & Beverage and Electronic Products & Parts also recorded solid gains, while Apparel & Clothing Accessories remained broadly stable.



Gifts, Toys & Houseware rebounded strongly from the previous quarter's decline, rising by 14 points to 48. The index moved closer to the 50-point neutral level and reached a historical high.

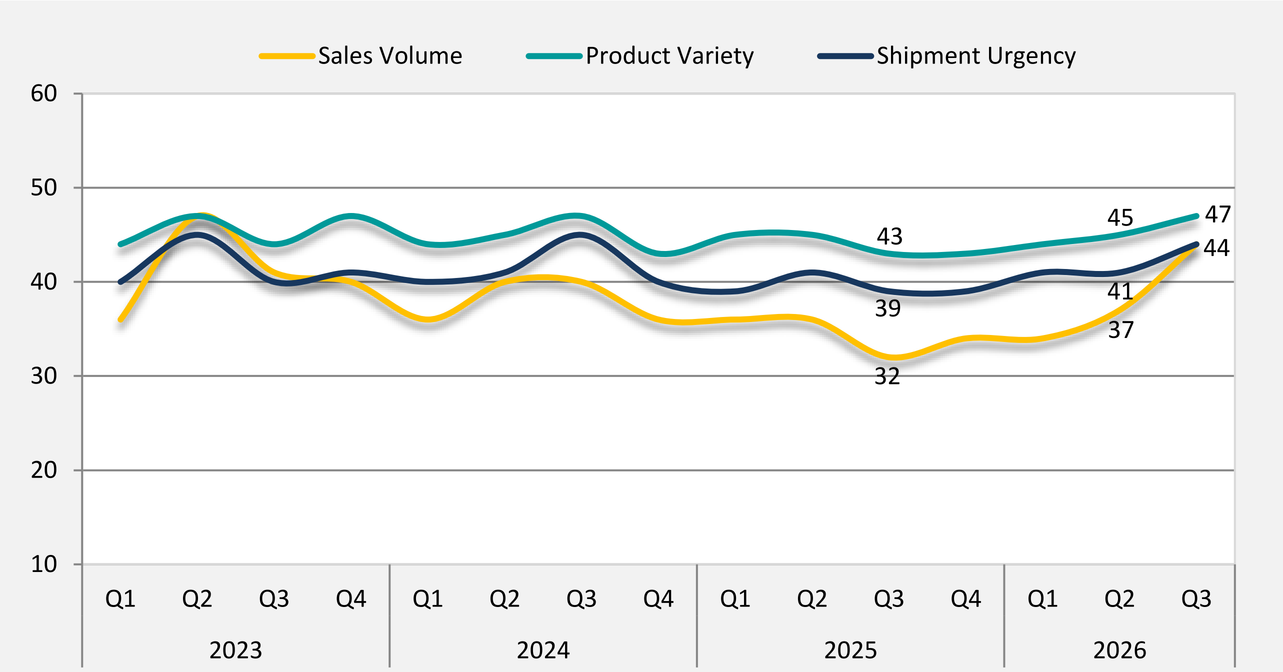
Food & Beverage and **Electronic Products & Parts** both rose to 44, increasing by 8 points and 7 points respectively.

Watches, Clocks & Jewellery increased by 5 points to 38, extending its improvement trend since Q3 2025.

Apparel & Clothing Accessories edged down by 1 point to 37, remaining broadly stable throughout the year.

Sub-Indices

All sub-indices continued to improve in Q3 2026, reflecting broader strengthening in air trade activity.



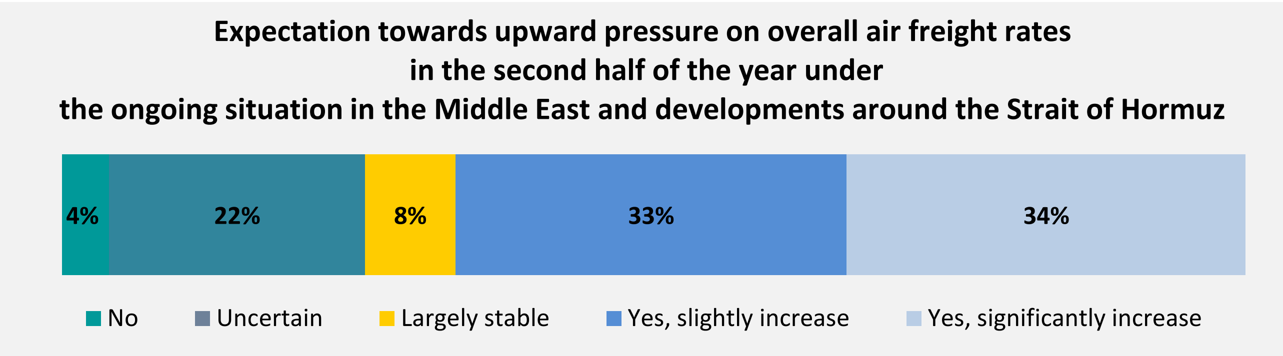
Product Variety rose by 2 points to 47 in Q3 2026, moving closer to the 50-point neutral level and returning to its Q3 2024 level.

Sales Volume increased notably by 7 points to 44, reaching its highest level since Q2 2023 peak.

Shipment Urgency rose by 3 points to 44, returning to its Q3 2024 level.

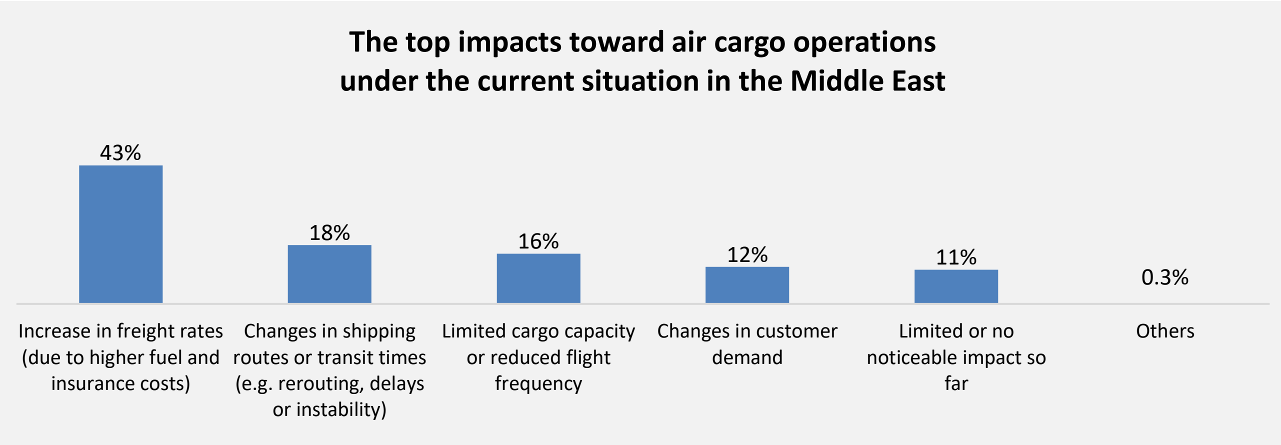
Air Trade Outlook Shaped by Recent Market Developments

Recent market developments continued to shape air traders' outlook. Most respondents expect stronger upward pressure on air freight rates amid ongoing uncertainty in the Middle East and developments around the Strait of Hormuz. In response to rising fuel costs, air traders are primarily sharing or passing on additional costs to customers, while strengthening internal cost controls and optimising shipping arrangements. For Europe-bound trade, the removal of the EU's low-value duty exemption threshold is expected to increase customs complexity, heighten customer price sensitivity and raise overall costs, prompting traders to seek clearer guidance on customs procedures, documentation and related duties.



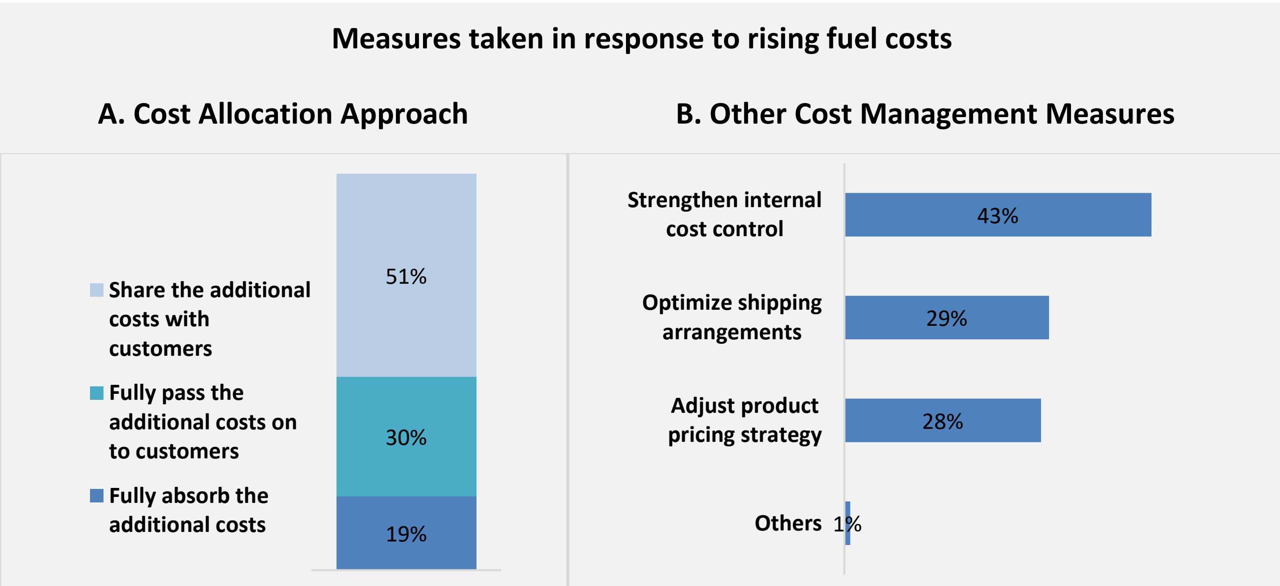
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Amid the ongoing situation in the Middle East and developments around the Strait of Hormuz, 67% of air traders expected upward pressure on overall air freight rates to increase in the second half of the year. Meanwhile, 8% expected rates to remain stable, while 22% were uncertain about future developments.



Note: At most three answers allowed

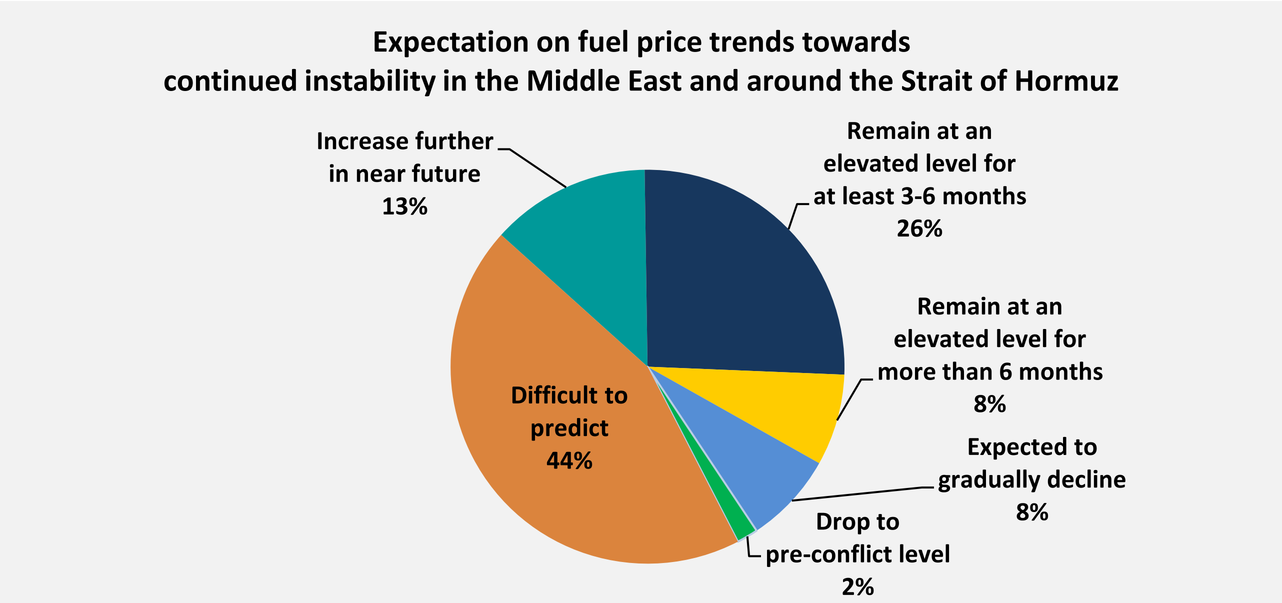
The current situation in the Middle East has affected air cargo operations in several ways. The most commonly reported impact was "Increase in freight rates (due to higher fuel and insurance costs)" (43%), followed by "Changes in shipping routes or transit times (e.g. rerouting, delays or instability)" (18%), and "Limited cargo capacity or reduced flight frequency" (16%).



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

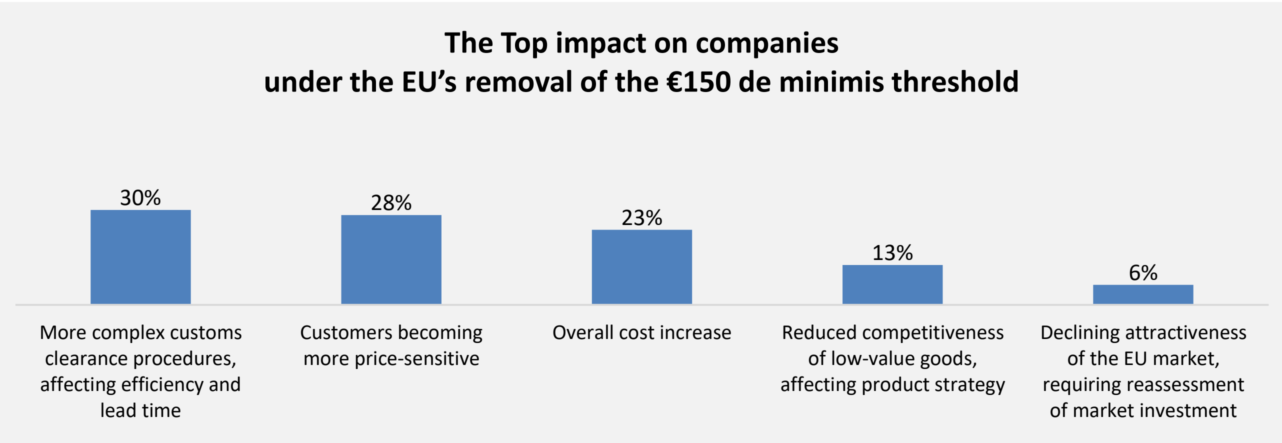
In response to rising fuel costs, over 80% of air traders indicated that they would adopt various cost allocation approaches. Among this group, around half (51%) planned to share the additional costs with customers, while 30% would pass them on fully. The remaining 19% would absorb the additional costs themselves.

For air traders who opted for other cost management measures, 43% responded that they would strengthen internal cost control, such as optimising operations or reducing non-essential expenses. This was followed by optimising shipping arrangements (29%), including shipment consolidation, lower shipment frequency or improved efficiency, and adjusting pricing strategies (28%).



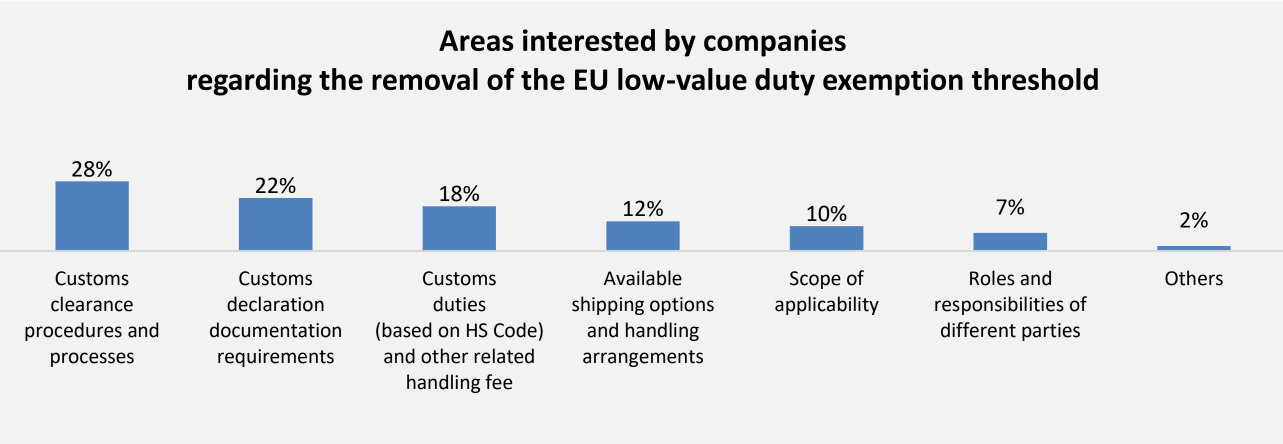
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Given the continued instability in the Middle East and around the Strait of Hormuz, 44% of air traders found fuel price trends difficult to predict. Meanwhile, 34% expected fuel prices to remain elevated for at least three months, 13% anticipated further increases in the near term, and 8% expected prices to gradually decline.



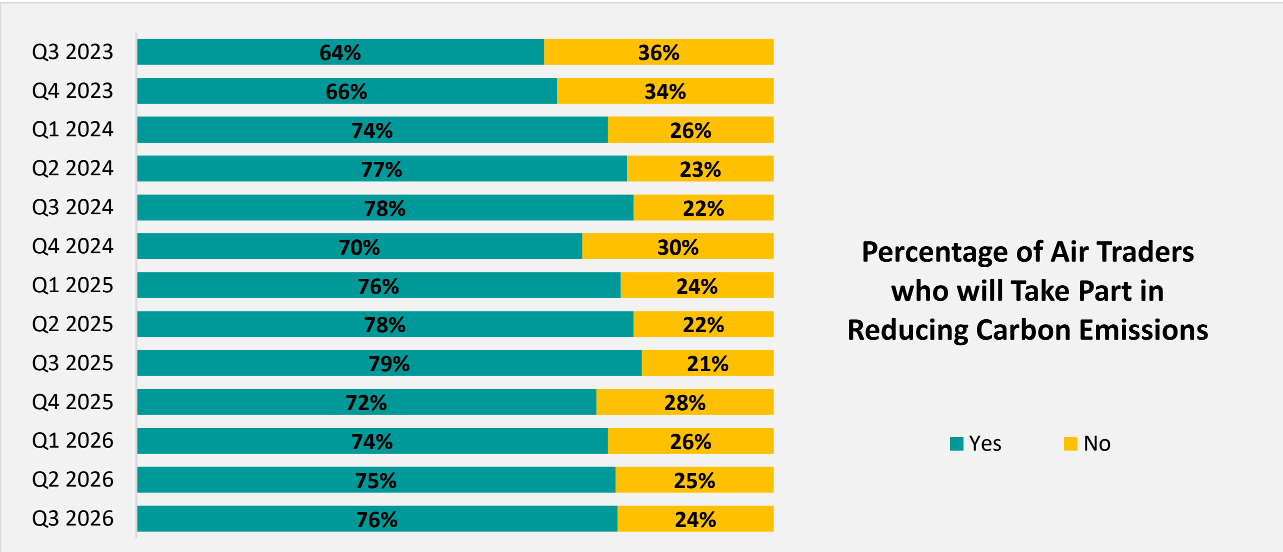
Note: Based on those air traders who exported to Europe and their roles are Sellers
Note: At most three answers allowed

Among companies affected by the EU's removal of the €150 de minimis threshold, the most commonly cited anticipated impact was "More complex customs clearance procedures, affecting efficiency and lead time" (30%). This was followed by "Customers becoming more price sensitive" (28%) and "Overall cost increase (tariffs, customs declaration/ clearance fees, and related charges)" (23%).



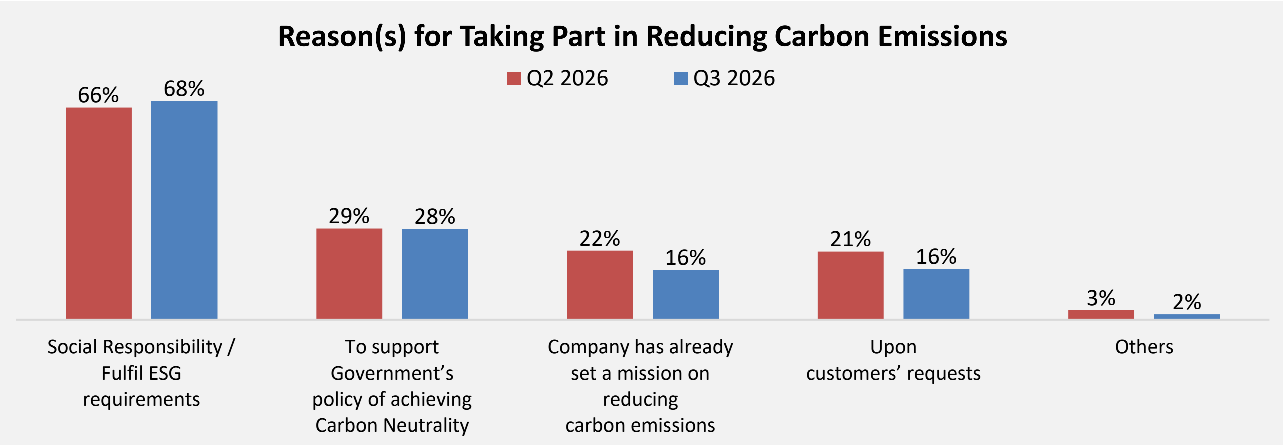
Note: Based on those air traders who exported to Europe and their roles are Sellers
Note: At most three answers allowed

To adapt to the removal of the EU low-value duty exemption threshold, respondents showed interest in learning more about related customs requirements. The top area of interest was "Customs clearance procedures and processes" (28%), followed by "Customs declaration documentation requirements" (22%) and "Customs duties (based on HS codes) and other related handling fees" (18%).



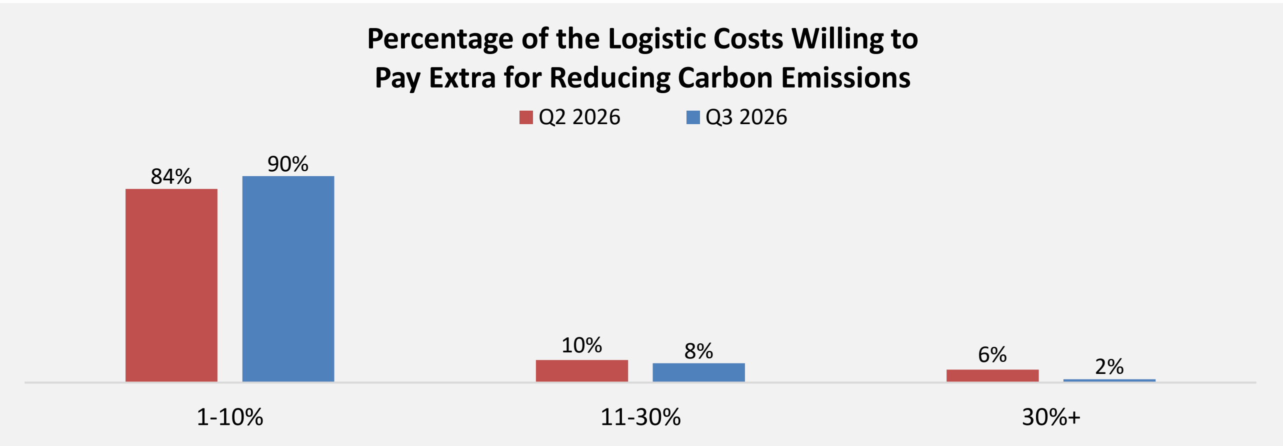
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

In Q3 2026, 76% of air traders expressed willingness to participate in carbon emission reduction initiatives, broadly unchanged from the previous quarter.



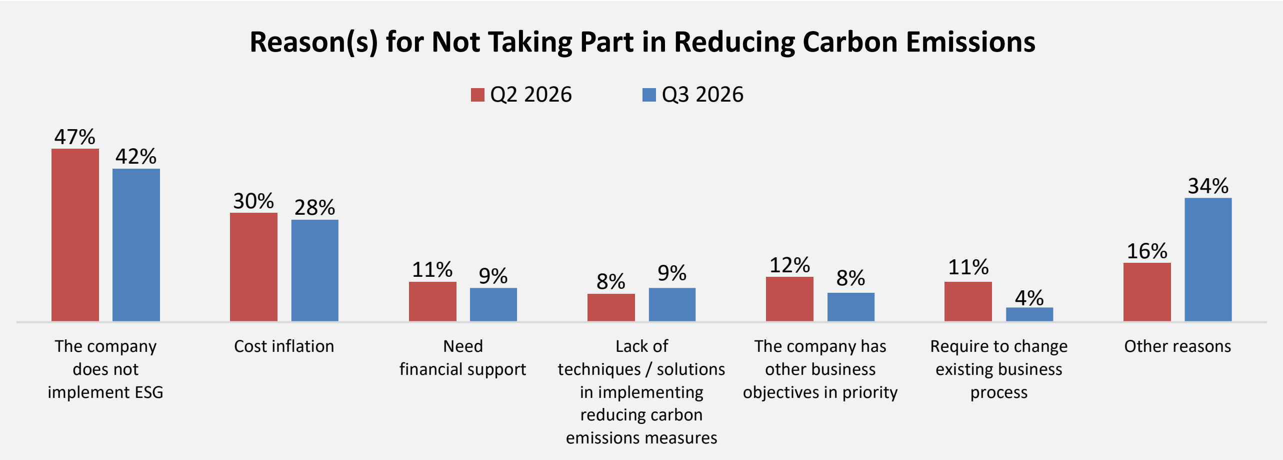
Note: Based on air traders willing to take part in reducing carbon emissions
Note: Multiple answers allowed

Among air traders willing to participate in carbon emission reduction initiatives, the main motivation was "Social responsibility/ fulfil ESG requirements" (68%). Other key drivers included support for the government's carbon neutrality policy (28%), alignment with corporate carbon reduction goals (16%), and customer requests (16%).



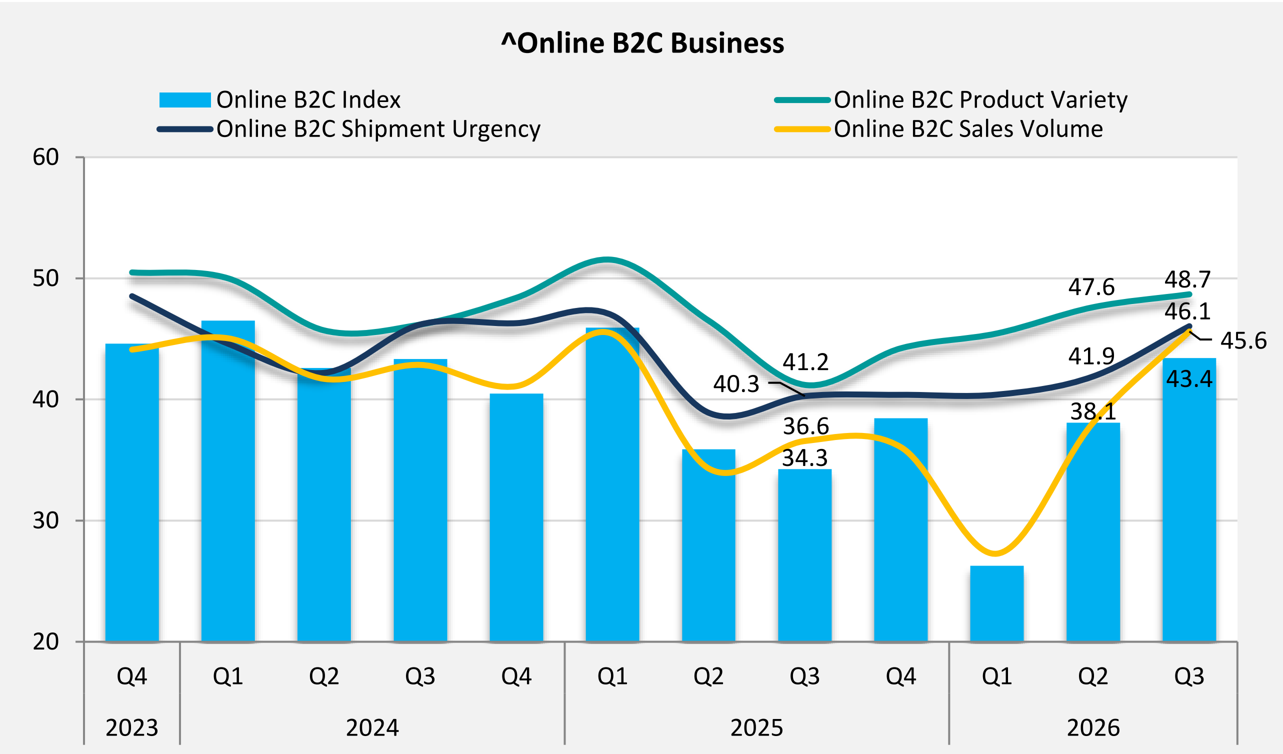
Note: Based on air traders willing to take part in reducing carbon emissions
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Among air traders willing to invest in carbon emission reduction, 90% were prepared to allocate up to 10% of their logistics costs, up 6 percentage points from the previous quarter and returning to the Q1 2026 level. Meanwhile, 8% were willing to allocate up to 30%, while only 2% would allocate more than 30% of their logistics expenditure to 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 was the lack of ESG implementation within their company (42%). This was followed by concerns over cost inflation (28%), the need for financial support (9%), and a lack of technical solutions for implementing carbon reduction measures (9%).



Note: Based on air traders with online B2C business

In Q3 2026, the Online B2C Index continued its upward trend, rising by 5.3 points to 43.4. All three sub-indices increased, led by the Online B2C Sales Volume Index, which recorded the largest gain of 7.5 points.

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

For more details about the Index, please contact HKPC at (852) 2788 5306.

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