



DHL Hong Kong Air Trade Leading Index (DTI)

Q4 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.

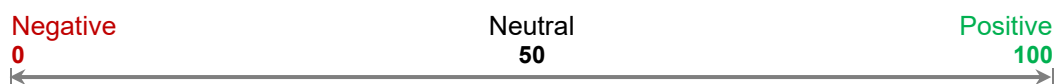
Methodology

$$DTI = [100 \times (\text{Percentage of samples responded "Positive"})] + [50 \times (\text{Percentage of samples responded "Neutral"})] + [0 \times (\text{Percentage of samples responded "Negative"})]$$

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.



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

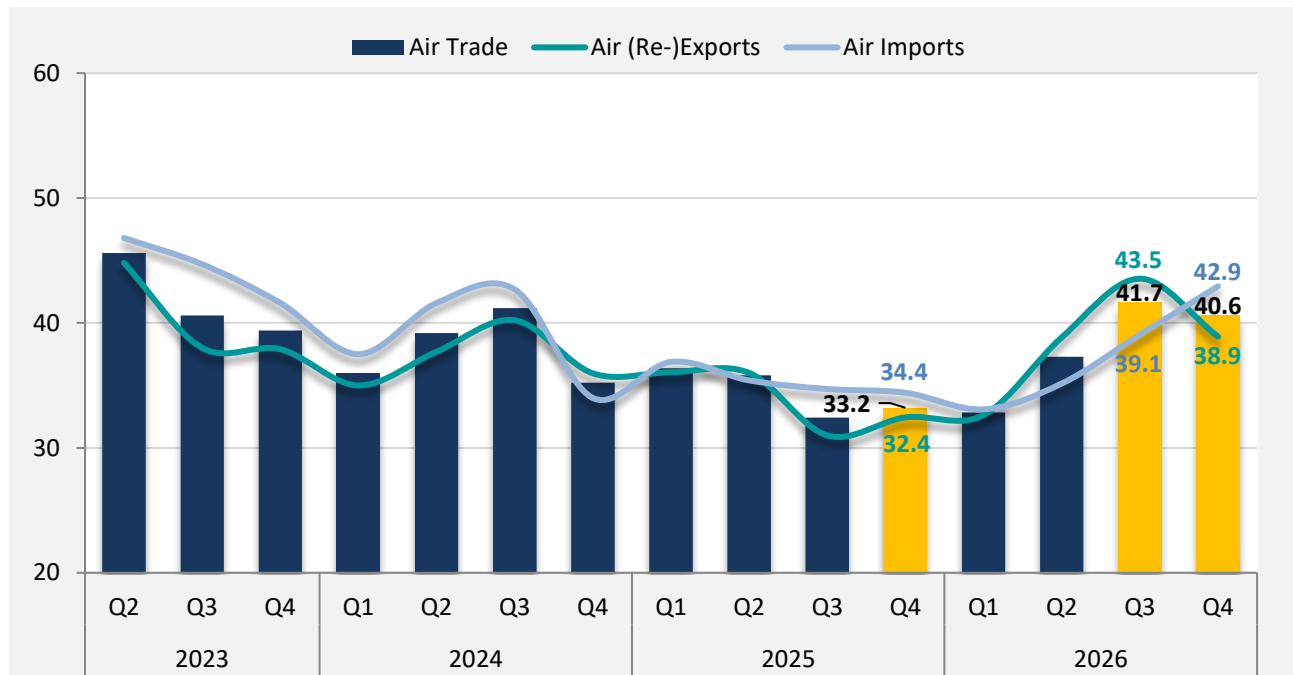
The Overall Air Trade Index remained above the 40-point mark in Q4 2026, supported by stronger imports and activity across Asia Pacific and Europe, with air traders expecting stable peak-season volumes.

- The Overall Air Trade Index edged down by 1.1 points to 40.6 in Q4 2026, remaining the second-highest reading recorded in the past two years. While the (re-)exports softened, the Air Imports Index further rose by 3.8 points to 42.9, marking its third consecutive quarter of growth.
- Market performance remained mixed. Asia Pacific and Europe continued to strengthen, supported by strong growth in the Chinese Mainland and improving import activity respectively. In contrast, the Americas recorded the sharpest decline among all markets.
- Commodity performance was led by Food & Beverage, which rose to a three-year high of 52. Electronic Products & Parts also reached a two-year high of 45, while Apparel & Clothing Accessories and Watches, Clocks & Jewellery softened amid softer (re-)export activity.
- Ahead of the Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas peak season, over half of respondents (56%) expected air trade volume to remain broadly stable. Positive sentiment (23%) reached its highest level since 2022, while negative sentiment (21%) declined to its lowest level.
- Following the new U.S. tariff measures introduced on 24 July 2026, air traders exporting to the Americas identified higher operating costs (22%), supply chain adjustments (20%), and increased business uncertainty (20%) as the most significant expected impacts, reflecting growing concerns over cost pressures and operational disruption.
- Regarding the EU's planned B2C handling fee in November 2026, over one-quarter (27%) of sellers exporting to Europe expect limited business impact. Nevertheless, respondents anticipate pricing adjustments, additional customs and documentation requirements, and pressure on volumes and profit margins.
- Despite the rapid advancement of AI and related technologies, air traders remain cautious about their practical benefits. While 29% of respondents reported positive outcomes or saw future potential from AI adoption, 70% have yet to observe significant benefits or remain uncertain, suggesting that adoption across the sector remains at a relatively early stage.

Mr Edmond LAI, Chief Digital Officer of HKPC, commented, "The Q4 2026 results indicate that Hong Kong's air trade sector continues to demonstrate resilience amid a changing global trade landscape. While export momentum moderated during the quarter, sustained growth in imports and improving conditions across Asia Pacific and Europe helped maintain overall market stability. The improvement in peak-season sentiment is also a positive signal, reflecting greater confidence among air traders compared with recent years. Nevertheless, ongoing policy changes in major markets and rising operating costs remain important considerations. Moving forward, greater supply chain flexibility, market diversification and the effective use of emerging technologies will be key to sustaining competitiveness and capturing new opportunities."

Air Trade Index

The Overall Air Trade Index softened slightly in Q4 2026, following three consecutive quarters of growth. While (re-)exports retreated from the previous quarter's high, imports continued to strengthen and reached their highest level in more than three years.



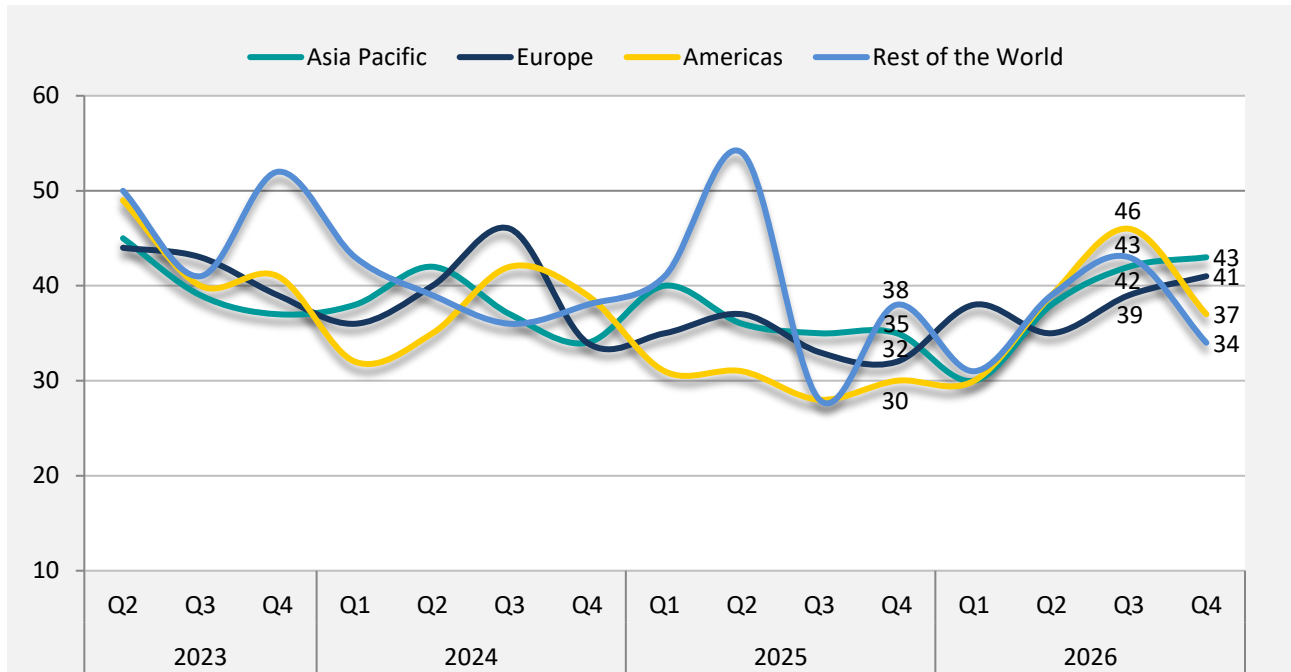
In Q4 2026, the **Overall Air Trade Index** edged down by 1.1 points to 40.6, remaining the second highest reading recorded over the past two years.

The **Air Imports** Index continued its upward momentum, rising by 3.8 points to 42.9 during this quarter. Since Q1 2026, the index has increased by 9.8 points, reflecting a sustained recovery in import activity.

The **Air (Re-)Exports** Index declined by 4.6 points to 38.9, pausing the upward trend observed since Q1 2026. Despite the decline, the index remained above the levels recorded during most of 2026.

Markets

Market performance remained mixed in Q4 2026. Asia Pacific and Europe continued to strengthen, while the Americas softened following its strong Q3 performance, reflecting weaker import and export sentiment.



Asia Pacific's Index edged up by 1 point to 43 in Q4 2026, extending its recovery trend for a third consecutive quarter. Since reaching a low of 30 points in Q1 2026, the index has risen by 13 points, reflecting steadily improving sentiment across the region.

- The **Chinese Mainland's** Index rose sharply by 10 points to 48, reaching its highest level in the past two years, primarily driven by a strong increase in imports (+17 points).
- **Japan's** Index declined by 10 points to 34, returning to its Q2 2026 level. The decrease was mainly attributable to a substantial drop in (re-)exports (-20 points).
- **Other Asia Pacific** markets recorded a modest increase of 1 point, supported mainly by stronger imports (+6 points).

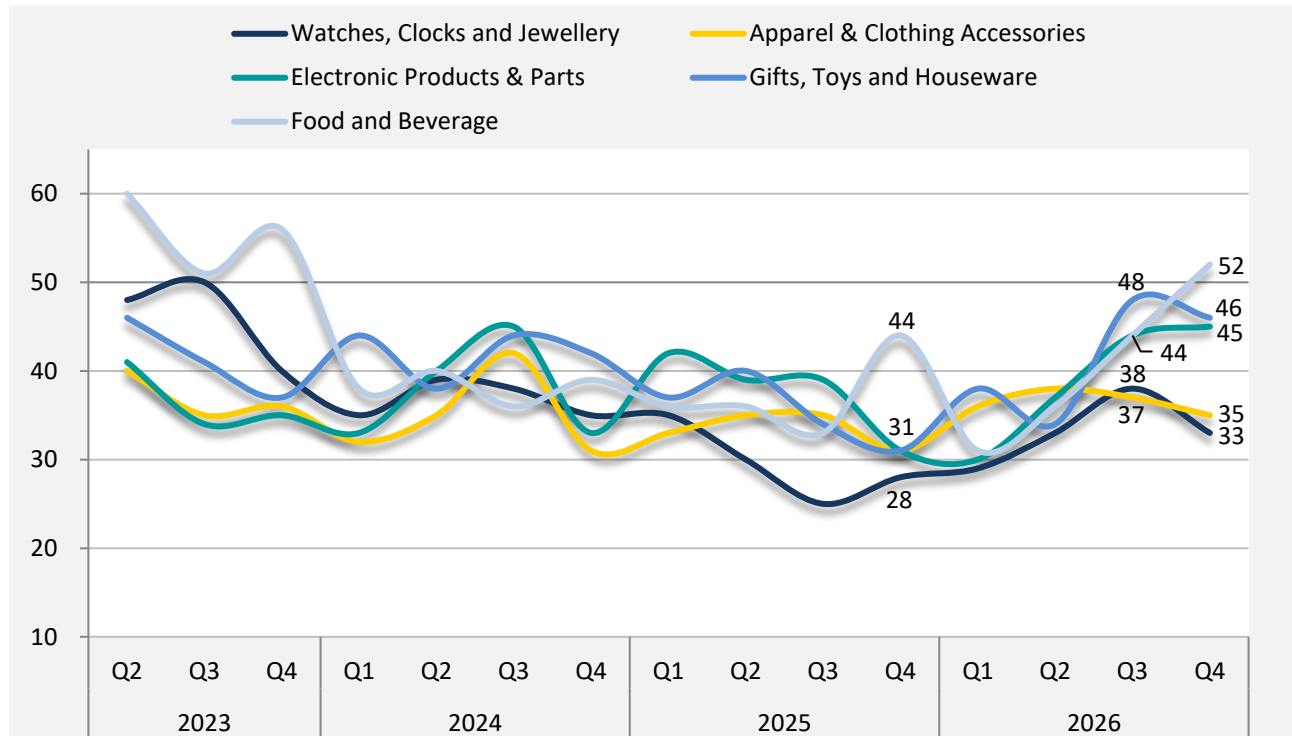
Europe's Index increased by 2 points to 41, marking a second consecutive quarter of improvement. Since reaching a low of 35 points in Q2 2026, the index has recovered by 6 points, supported primarily by stronger imports (+4 points).

Americas' Index declined sharply by 9 points to 37, representing the largest decrease among all markets. Both imports (-9 points) and (re-)export (-7 points) weakened during the quarter.

Rest of the World Index also fell by 9 points to 34, reversing part of the gains recorded in the previous quarter.

Air-Freighted Commodities

Commodity performance remained mixed in Q4 2026. Food & Beverage reached a three-year high, while Electronic Products & Parts also strengthened further. In contrast, Apparel & Clothing Accessories and Watches, Clocks & Jewellery softened amid weaker (re-)export activity.



Food & Beverage extended its strong recovery, rising by 8 points to 52 in Q4 2026. Driven primarily by stronger imports (+11 points), the index not only surpassed its previous peak recorded in Q4 2025 (44 points), but also reached its highest level in the past three years.

Gifts, Toys & Houseware eased by 2 points to 46. The decline was mainly attributable to weaker (re-)exports (-6 points), although a 3-point increase in imports helped partially offset the decrease.

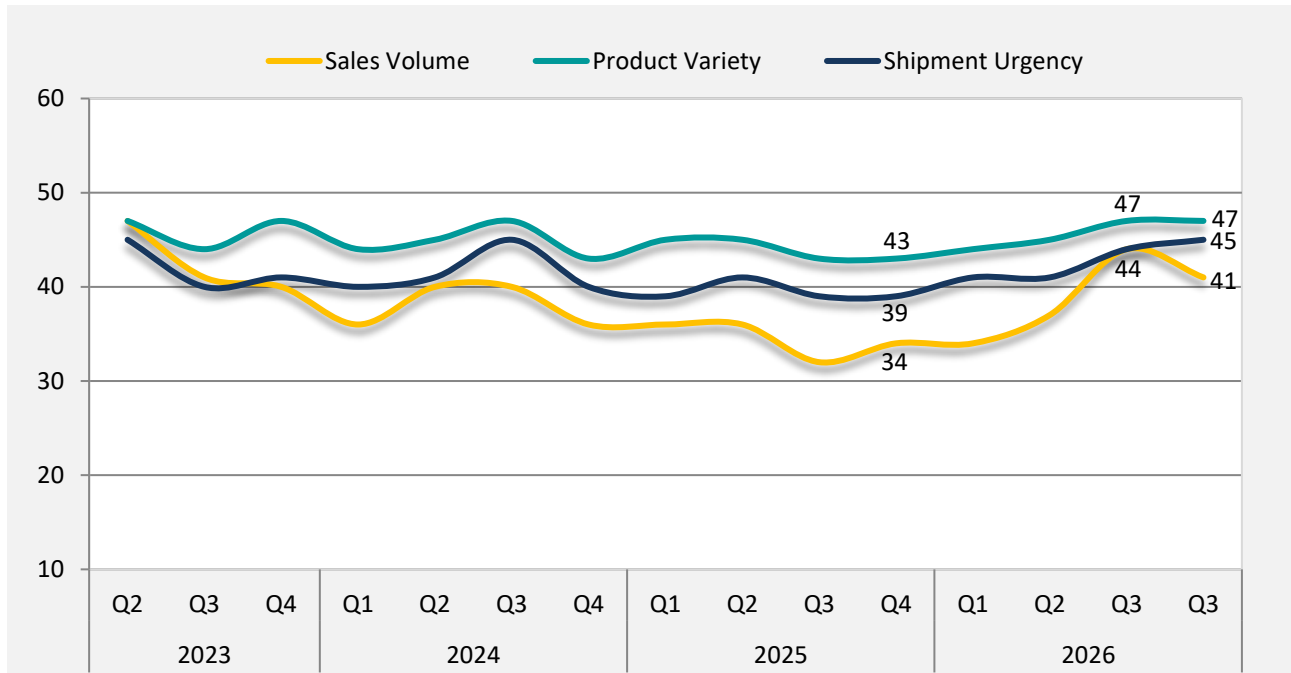
Electronic Products & Parts edged up by 1 point to 45, reaching its highest level in the past two years.

Apparel & Clothing Accessories declined by 2 points to 35. A sharp drop in (re-)exports (-7 points) was partially offset by a significant increase in imports (+8 points).

Watches, Clocks & Jewellery fell by 5 points to 33, returning to its Q2 2026 level. The decline was mainly driven by weaker (re-)exports (-9 points).

Sub-Indices

Product Variety and Shipment Urgency remained robust in Q4 2026, underscoring continued resilience in demand diversity and time-sensitive shipments. Meanwhile, Sales Volume moderated following a sustained period of growth.



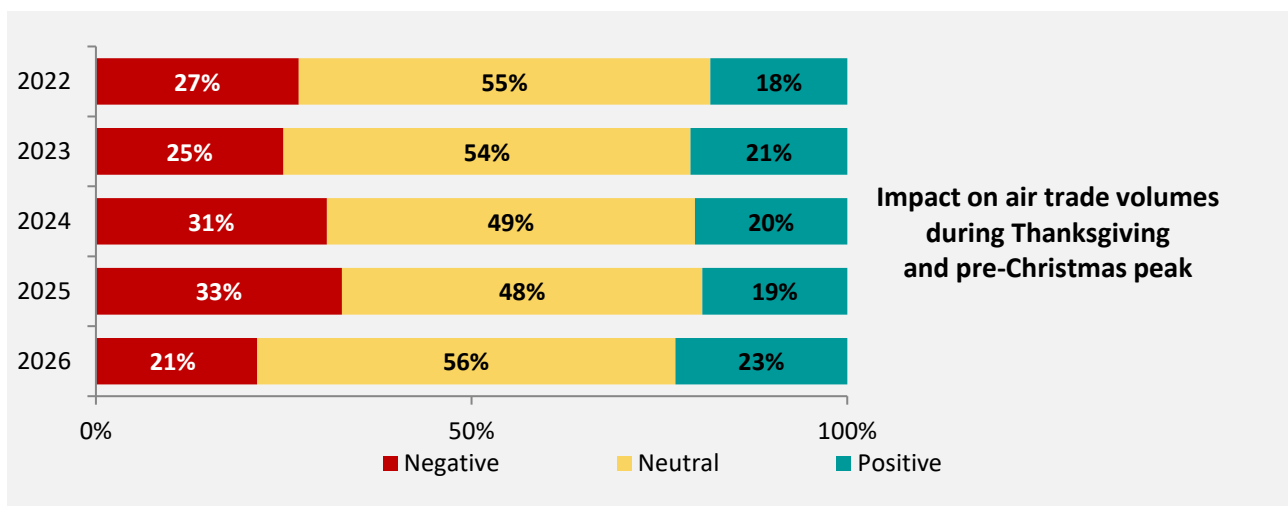
Product Variety remained unchanged at 47 points in Q4 2026, retaining its position as the highest-ranked sub-index. The index has remained consistently strong throughout 2026, reflecting sustained diversity in air-freighted goods.

Shipment Urgency edged up by 1 point to 45, primarily supported by a 2-point increase in imports, indicating continued demand for time-sensitive shipments.

Sales Volume declined by 3 points to 41 during the quarter. The decrease was mainly attributable to weaker (re-)exports (-7 points), although this was partially offset by stronger imports (+3 points). The decline temporarily paused the upward trend that had been sustained since Q3 2025.

Air Trade Outlook Shaped by Recent Market Developments

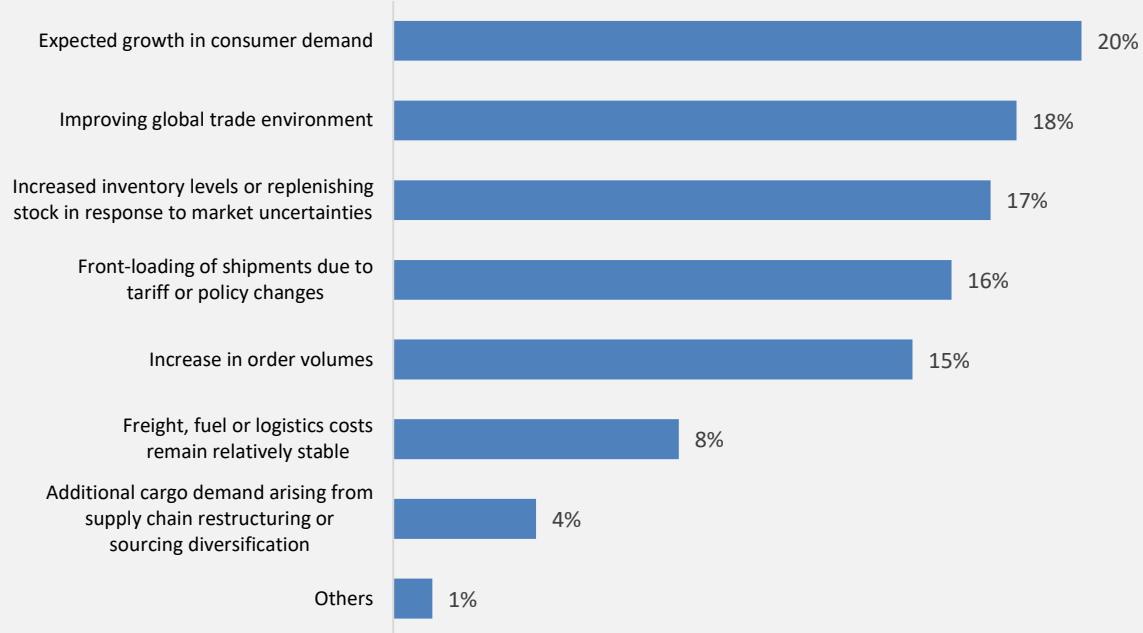
Recent market developments continue to influence air traders' outlook and business strategies. Sentiment towards the upcoming Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas peak has improved, with positive sentiment reaching its highest level while negative sentiment falling to its lowest level since 2022. While stronger demand expectations and improving trade conditions are supporting market confidence, concerns over economic uncertainty and rising operating costs remain. At the same time, evolving U.S. and EU trade measures are expected to increase cost pressures and administrative complexity, prompting businesses to review sourcing, supply chain and pricing strategies. Perceptions of AI remain mixed, suggesting that adoption across the air trade sector is still at a relatively early stage despite growing recognition of its long-term potential.



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

For the upcoming Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas peak, 23% of air-traders expressed a positive outlook towards air trade volumes, while 56% expected conditions to remain stable and 21% anticipated a negative impact. This represents the highest proportion of positive responses and the lowest proportion of negative responses recorded since 2022, indicating an improvement in market sentiment ahead of the traditional peak season. Nevertheless, this year's peak season is anticipated to be broadly stable rather than experiencing strong growth.

Reason(s) for holding positive expectation on air trade volume towards the Thanksgiving and Pre-Christmas peak

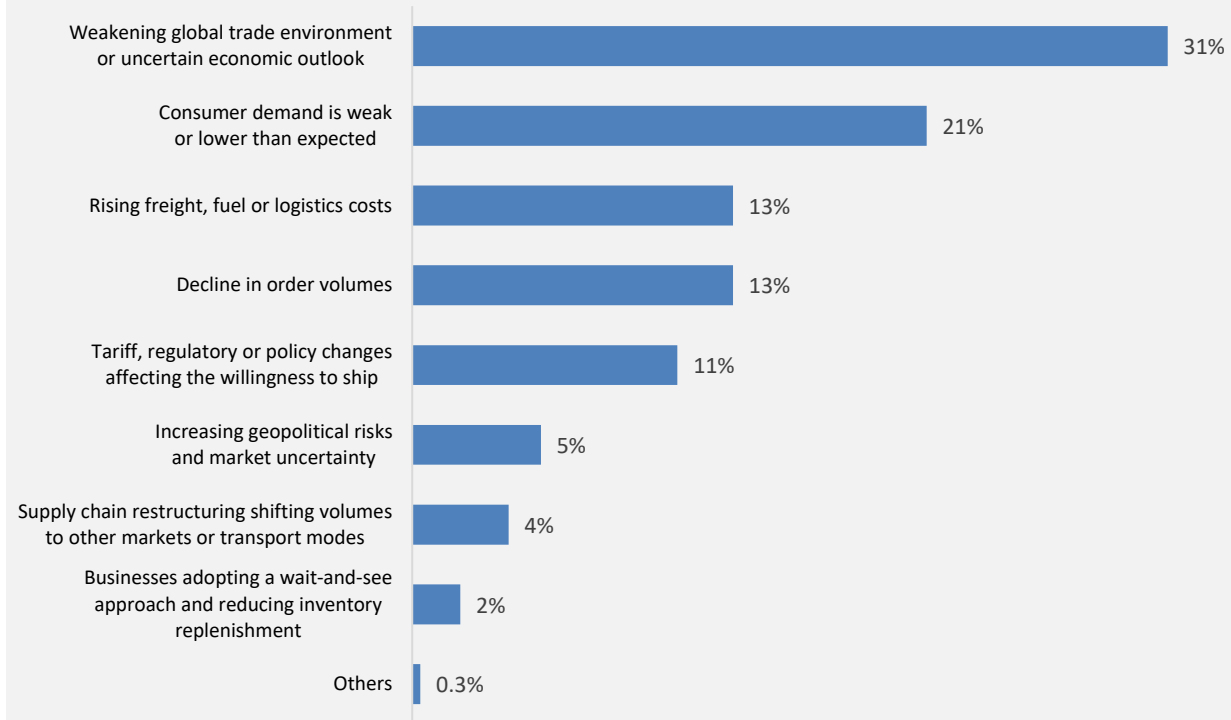


Note: Based on those air traders who expected positive outlook on air trade volume towards the Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas peak

Note: At most three answers allowed

Among air-traders with a positive outlook towards the Thanksgiving and Pre-Christmas peak, the top three drivers were “Expected growth in consumer demand” (20%), “Improving global trade environment” (18%), and “Increased inventory levels or replenishing stock in response to market uncertainties” (17%). These findings suggest that optimistic respondents expect stronger market demand and a more supportive global trading environment during the upcoming peak season.

Reason(s) for holding a negative expectation on air trade volume towards the Thanksgiving and Pre-Christmas peak

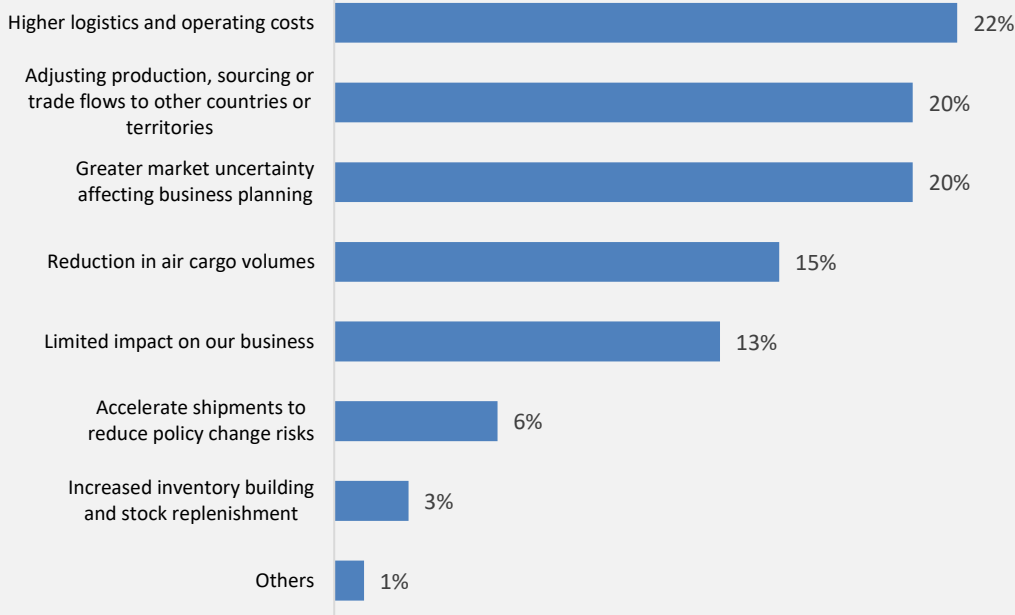


Note: Based on those air traders who expected negative outlook on air trade volume towards the Thanksgiving and pre-Christmas peak

Note: At most three answers allowed

Conversely, among respondents with a negative outlook, the most frequently cited concerns were “Weakening global trade environment or uncertain economic outlook” (31%), “Consumer demand is weak or lower than expected” (21%), “Rising freight, fuel or logistics costs” (13%), and “Decline in order volumes” (13%). These findings indicate that concerns over demand uncertainty, softer global trade conditions, and elevated operating costs continue to weigh on business confidence.

Impacts towards air trade business in next quarter under new tariff measure by the United States in July

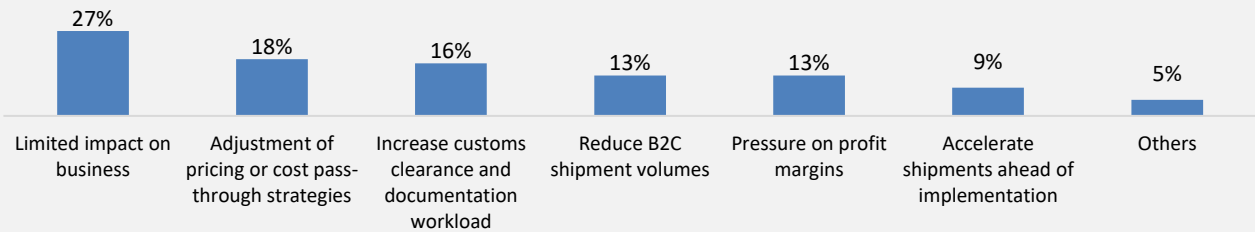


Note: Based on those air traders who exported to the Americas

Note: At most three answers allowed

Following the introduction of new U.S. tariff measures announced in July 2026, the most commonly cited impacts among air traders exporting to the Americas were “Higher logistics and operating costs” (22%), “Adjusting production, sourcing or trade flows to other countries or territories” (20%), and “Greater market uncertainty affecting business planning” (20%). The findings indicate that businesses are preparing for both increased operating costs and potential supply chain reconfiguration in response to the evolving trade environment, which may potentially lead to greater volatility in trade routes and volumes over the coming quarters.

Impact on air trade business towards the planning of the introduction of handling fee on B2C shipments in EU starting from November

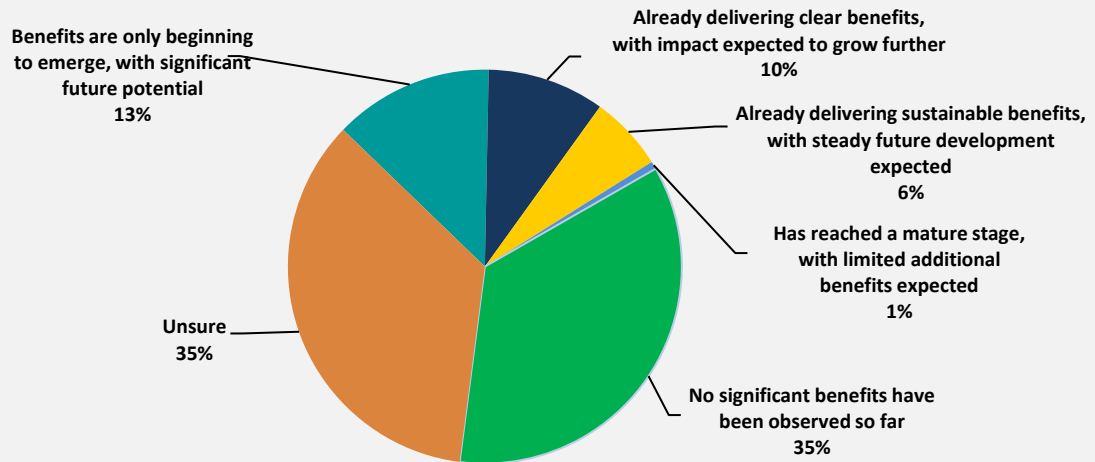


Note: Based on those air traders who exported to Europe and their roles are Sellers

Note: At most three answers allowed

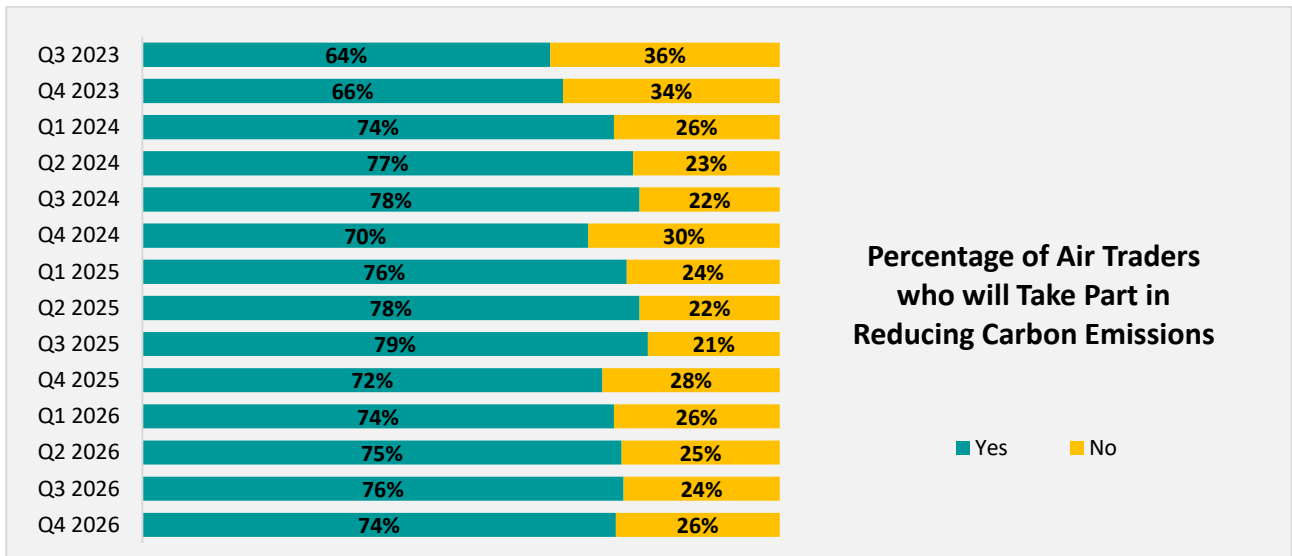
Following the EU's planned introduction of a handling fee on B2C shipments in November 2026, 27% of air traders exporting to Europe indicated that the measure would have limited impact on their business. Among the anticipated impacts, the most frequently cited were “Adjustment of pricing or cost pass-through strategies” (18%), “Increase customs clearance and documentation workload” (16%), “Reduce B2C shipment volumes” (13%), and “Pressure on profit margins” (13%). The findings indicate that sellers generally view the proposed EU handling fee as manageable rather than disruptive. However, many expect to adjust pricing strategies, strengthen customs and documentation processes, and manage potential pressure on both shipment volumes and profit margins.

Expectation on trade, logistics and supply chain efficiency, and their future outlook with the use of AI and related technologies



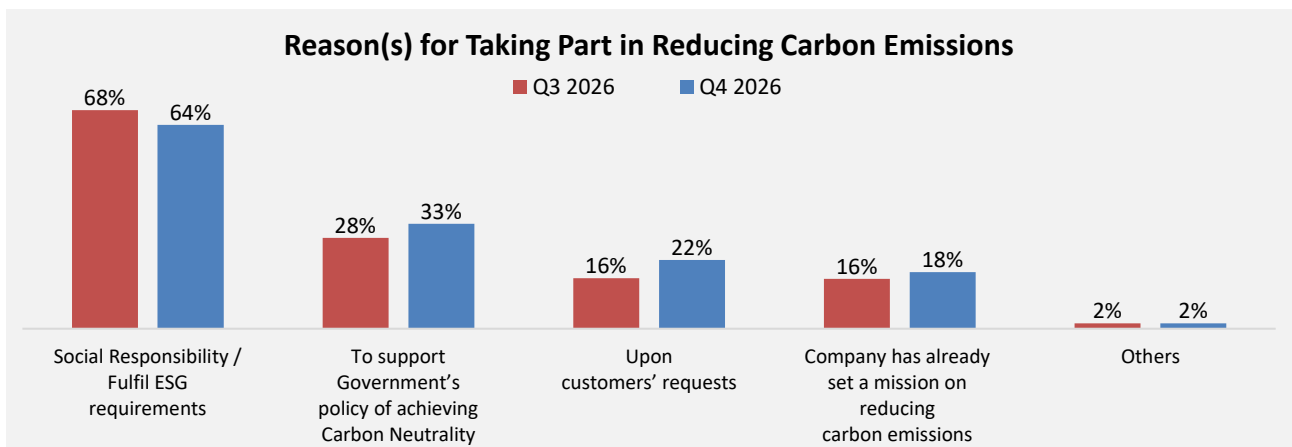
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Despite the rapid advancement of AI and related technologies in recent years, most air traders' remain cautious about the practical benefits these technologies can deliver to their businesses. While 35% reported that they have not yet observed any significant benefits and another one-third (35%) were unsure about the impact, 29% recognised varying degrees of positive outcomes. Among them, 13% believed that the benefits were only beginning to emerge with significant future potential, 10% indicated AI was already delivering tangible benefits with further impact expected in years ahead, and 6% reported having seen sustainable benefits, with steady future development prospects. Only 1% viewed AI as having reached a mature stage, with limited additional benefits expected. Overall, the findings suggest that AI adoption across air trade sector remains at an early stage, with substantial room for future growth and application.



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

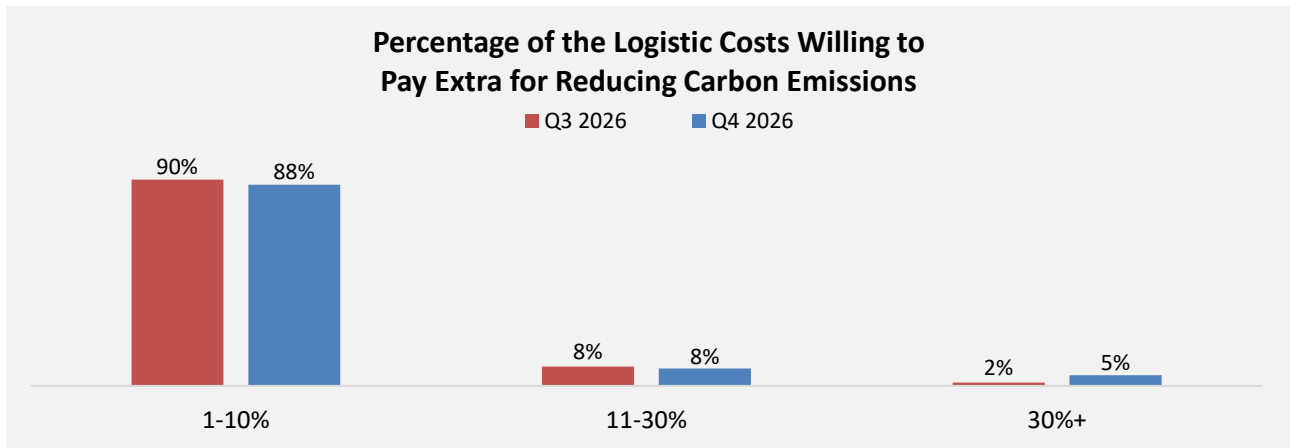
In Q4 2026, 74% of air traders expressed willingness to participate in carbon reduction initiatives, remaining broadly stable throughout 2026 and underscoring continued commitment towards sustainability.



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

Note: Multiple answers allowed

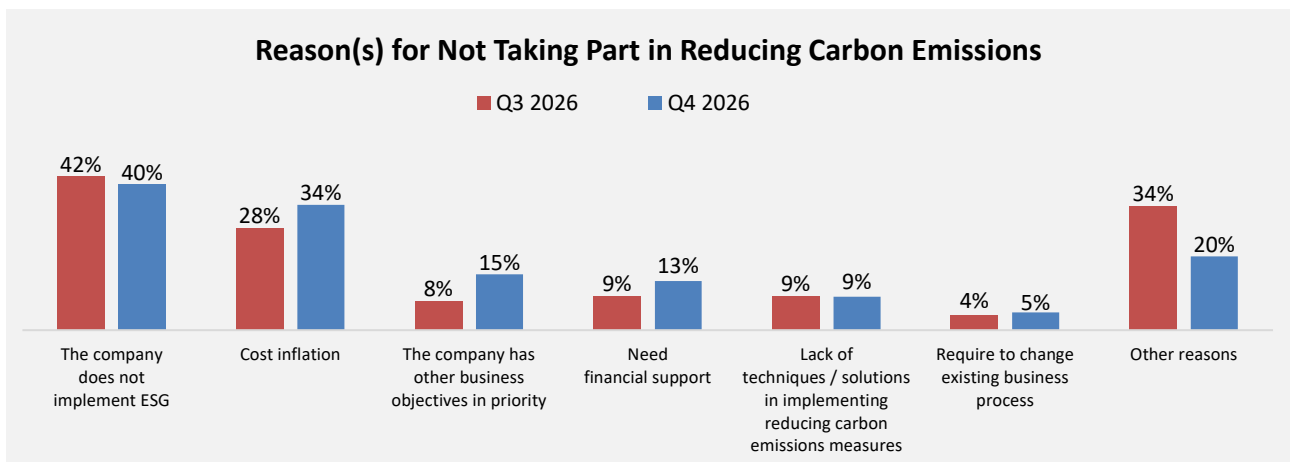
Among participating air traders, the primary motivation remained “Social responsibility / fulfil ESG requirements” (64%), followed by support for the Government’s carbon neutrality policy (33%), customer requests (22%), and alignment with corporate carbon reduction goals (18%).



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

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

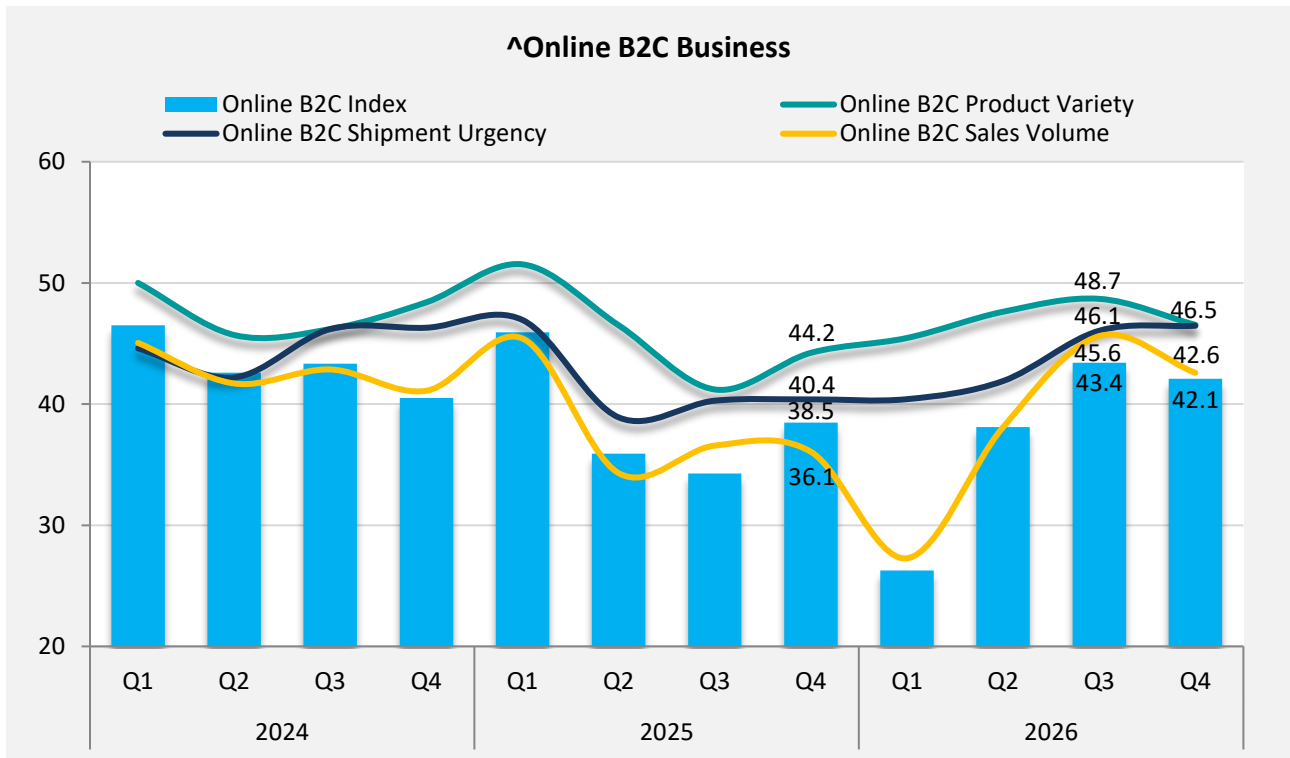
Among air traders willing to invest in carbon emission reduction, 88% were prepared to allocate up to 10% of their logistics costs, representing a modest 2%-point decline from the previous quarter. Meanwhile, 8% were willing to allocate up to 30%, while 5% were prepared to allocate more than 30% of their logistics expenditure, up 3% points from Q3 2026. This suggests a growing willingness among a small segment of businesses to make more substantial sustainability investments.



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 reduction initiatives, the most commonly cited reason remained the lack of ESG implementation within the company (40%). This was followed by cost inflation concerns (34%) and the need to prioritise other business objectives (15%). Both factors became more prominent during the quarter, increasing by 6% points and 7% points respectively compared with Q3 2026, indicating that economic pressures continue to influence sustainability-related decision-making.



Note: Based on air traders with online B2C business

In Q4 2026, the Online B2C Index eased by 1.3 points to 42.1. While the Online B2C Shipment Urgency Index remained strong, edging up to 46.5 (+0.4 points), both the Online B2C Product Variety Index and Online B2C Sales Volume Index moderated to 46.5 (-2.2 points) and 42.6 (-3.0 points) respectively.

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.

Disclaimer

This report contains survey results based on research findings. HKPC will not be liable for any loss, mistake, delay, action, or non-action by viewers of this report.