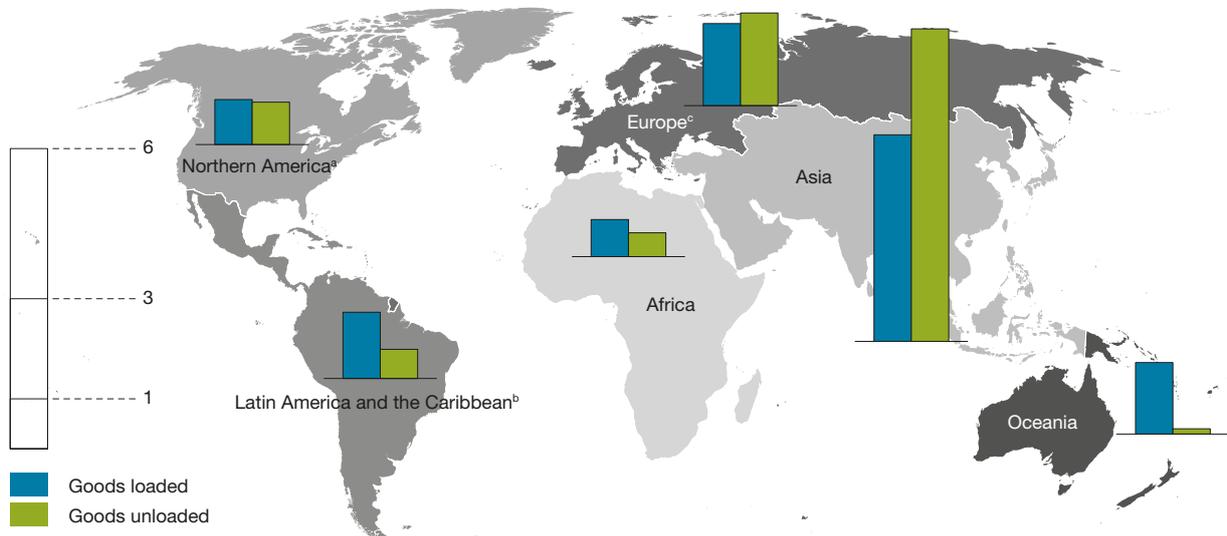




# Fact sheet #13: World seaborne trade

**Map 1** | Tonnage loaded and unloaded, 2016  
(Billions of metric tons)



<sup>a</sup> Equal to the group 'Developed economies: America' on UNCTADstat.  
<sup>b</sup> Equal to the group 'Developing economies: America' on UNCTADstat.  
<sup>c</sup> Incl. the Russian Federation and the French overseas departments.

## Concepts and definitions

The figures on seaborne trade in this section measure the volumes, in metric tons, of goods loaded and unloaded in the world's seaports for international shipment. Cabotage and transshipments are not included.

The data have been compiled from various sources including country reports as well as port industry and other specialist websites.

Surpluses or deficits in volume terms are not necessarily related to commercial balances of payments, as different types of cargo may have different monetary value per metric ton.

Goods loaded for international shipment are assumed to be exports, while goods unloaded from ships are assumed to be imports.

The seaborne trade balance measures the difference between the volumes of loaded and unloaded goods.

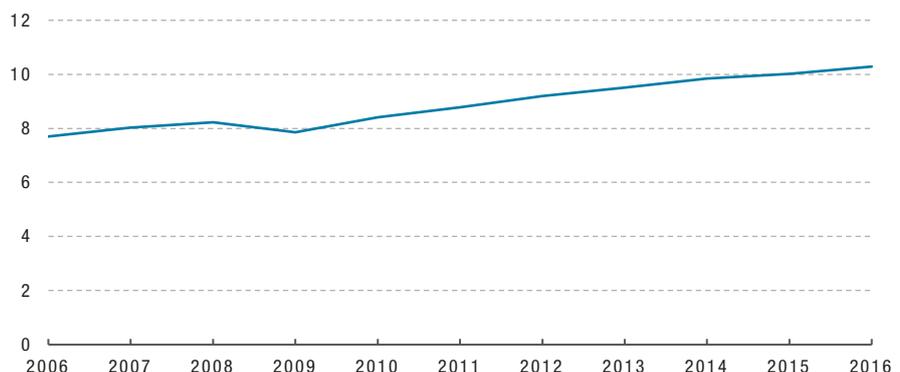
## Trends and geography of world seaborne trade

World seaborne trade reached 10.3 billion tons in 2016 after a steady increase over the last seven years. Since 2009, the volume of goods loaded and unloaded in ports worldwide has grown by 2.4 billion tons. In particular the trade of dry cargo and petroleum products and gas by sea has increased.

Asia is by far the largest trading region. In 2016, 4.1 billion tons of goods were loaded and 6.3 billion tons of goods were unloaded in Asian seaports. The other continents registered less than half of these amounts.

Contrary to Asia, in Oceania, in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Africa, more goods were loaded than unloaded. The volumes of goods delivered to ports in Oceania were, at less than 200 million metric tons, particularly small.

**Figure 1** | Goods loaded worldwide  
(Billions of metric tons)

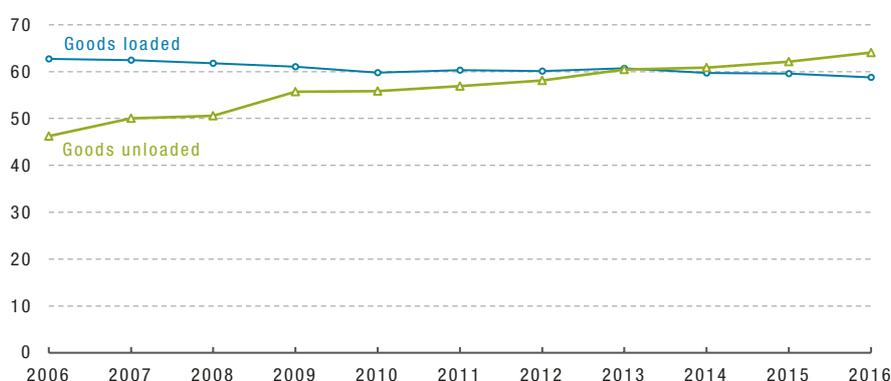




### Contribution of developing economies

Developing economies, as a group, are a strong contributor to world seaborne trade. In 2016, they accounted for 59 per cent of total goods loaded and for 64 per cent of total goods unloaded. Their share in goods loaded has decreased slightly over the last ten years, whereas their share in goods unloaded has grown considerably: in 2006, less than half of the goods shipped worldwide were destined for seaports in developing economies; by 2016, this had increased to almost two thirds.

**Figure 2** | Seaborne trade of developing economies  
(Percentage of corresponding world tonnage)



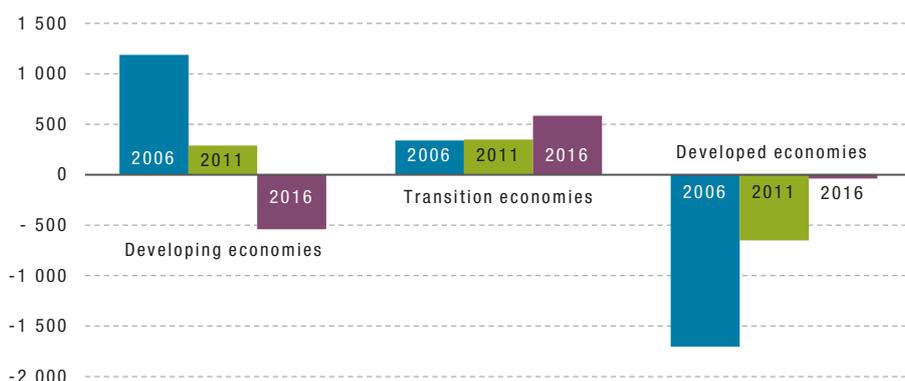
### Developments in seaborne trade balances

In 2014, developing economies turned from net exporters into net importers of seaborne trade volumes. In 2016, they recorded 541 million tons more of goods unloaded than of goods loaded.

Transition economies have increased their seaborne trade surplus over the last five years, due to a strong growth of dry cargo loaded (from 331 million to 422 million tons) and a considerable drop of dry cargo unloaded (from 148 million to 57 million tons). The seaborne trade of developed economies is currently in balance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further analyses on that topic, see UNCTAD (2017c).

**Figure 3** | Seaborne trade balance  
(Millions of metric tons)



For references, see UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2017, annex 6.4.

World seaborne trade amounts to 10.3 billion tons in 2016



61% of goods delivered by sea are unloaded in Asian seaports



Developing economies: unloading exceeds loading by 541 million tons



Seaborne trade for developed economies currently in balance

