Standard Bank

ISSUE 5

AFRICA TRADE BAROMETER

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT CROSS-BORDER TRADE LANDSCAPE OF AFRICA.

SOUTH AFRICA

FOREWORD

Global trade is undergoing a profound realignment, one in which Africa's role is being redefined.

For decades, those seeking to understand and unlock African trade have relied on fragmented or externally produced data, often shaped by institutions and multinational perspectives that do not fully reflect the realities of businesses operating across the continent. The Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer was created to address that gap. It provides reliable, contemporary, Africa-centric insight into the conditions under which businesses trade across ten key markets representing 68% of Sub-Saharan Africa's GDP.

By combining quantitative indicators with direct business sentiment, this Barometer equips policymakers, investors and corporates with the clarity required to make informed decisions in an increasingly uncertain global environment.

This fifth edition arrives at a pivotal moment for global trade and Africa's place within it. Global trade flows are being reshaped by geopolitical realignment, tariff adjustments, supply chain diversification and renewed industrial policy. While volatility defines the present landscape, it also presents opportunity. For Africa, long positioned at the periphery of global trade architecture, this recalibration offers a rare window to move beyond participation and become a strategic architect within global value chains.

The findings in this edition reflect growing resilience across African markets, even as global complexity intensifies. Businesses are diversifying supplier networks, expanding export destinations and leveraging emerging trade corridors. Across our client base, we see increasing sophistication in how African enterprises are positioning themselves for long-term competitiveness.

Our Africa–China Trade Solutions, enabled by our strategic partnership with ICBC, are helping African manufacturers and agro-processors to access advanced technology, capital equipment and new markets at scale. At the same time, intra-African trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) continues to strengthen supply chain resilience and deepen continental integration.

Africa's transformation is unfolding on multiple fronts. Agricultural commodities are increasingly processed at source, unlocking greater value retention and industrial growth. Renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture and water technologies are becoming central to resilience. Critical minerals are anchoring the continent within emerging global industrial supply chains. And a young, dynamic workforce continues to drive productivity, innovation and market expansion.

Trade remains the connective tissue across all these developments.

As global systems evolve, Africa now has the opportunity to shape, rather than simply respond to, the next era of international trade. Realising this potential will require disciplined execution, coordinated reform and sustained investment in competitive infrastructure and value addition.

The Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer is our contribution to that journey: enabling better decisions through better insight and supporting Africa's transition into a more influential and strategic participant in global trade.

We are committed to supporting that transformation.

Philip Myburgh

Executive Sponsor: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer
Group Head: Trade, Business & Commercial Banking

BEHIND THE BAROMETER

Enabling Insight. Shaping Impact.

Behind every credible trade index lies not only data, but design, discipline and deliberate execution. This is the story behind the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer.

The Africa Trade Barometer is more than a publication. It is a proprietary intelligence platform built to deepen understanding of trade dynamics across ten of Africa's most influential markets. From a marketing and technical perspective, our role has been to transform complex economic signals into accessible, strategic insight, ensuring that this Barometer serves as a trusted tool for the bank, its clients, policymakers and academia.

At its core, the Barometer integrates multiple layers of intelligence. It combines reliable macroeconomic and financial data, sourced from institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Trade Centre, country central banks and the Standard Bank Economics Unit, with expert economic analysis and qualitative insights drawn directly from market participants.

Crucially, the research goes beyond publicly available economic indicators. Through comprehensive quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews with traders, decision-makers and industry stakeholders across diverse regions, the Barometer captures the lived realities of domestic and cross-border trade. On average, approximately 65% of surveyed businesses are small enterprises, ensuring that the perspectives of those who form the backbone of Africa's commercial ecosystem are meaningfully represented.

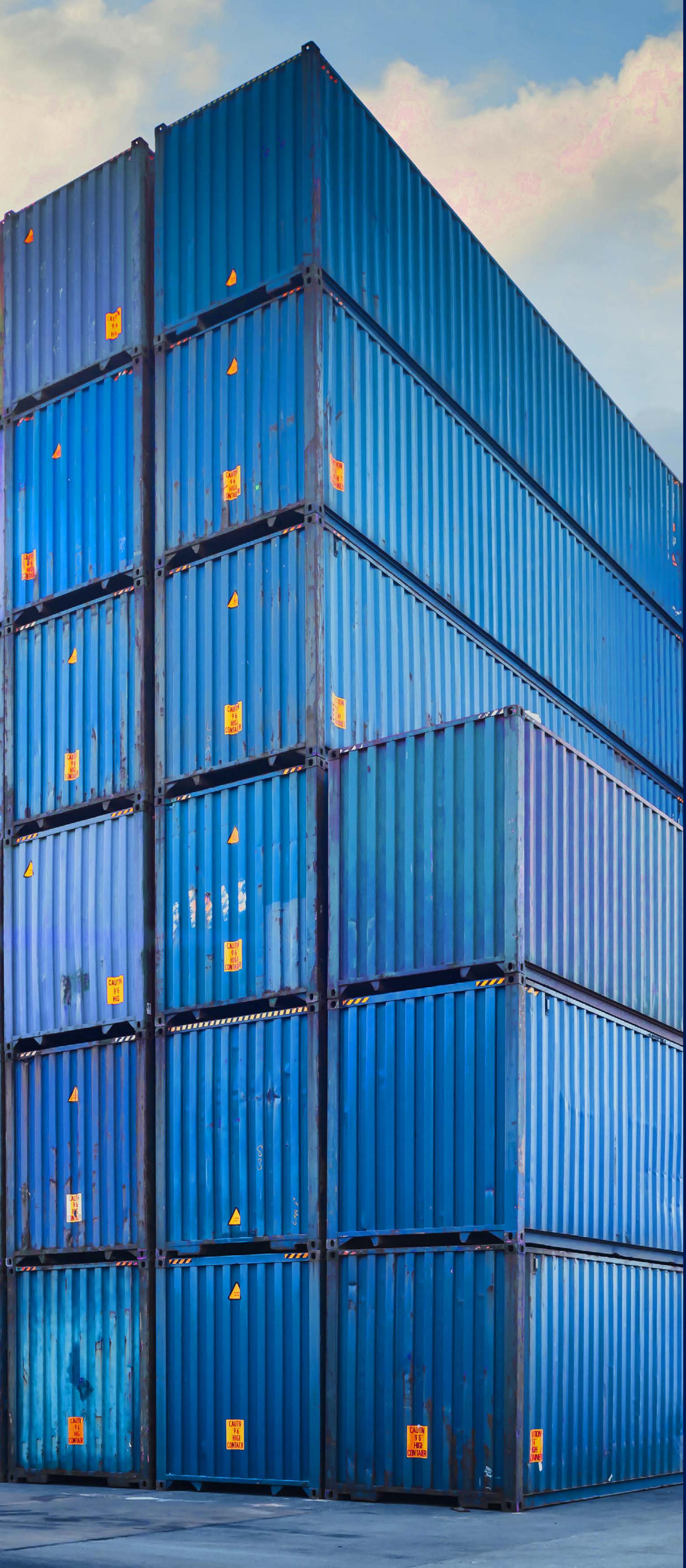
By engaging traders in regions where trade activity is most dynamic, the research provides a genuine pulse of business conditions, reflecting not only performance metrics, but sentiment, constraints and opportunity.

Our mandate has been to ensure that this intelligence is rigorous, accurate and strategically presented, translating economic complexity into insight that informs decision-making and strengthens Standard Bank's leadership in enabling trade across the continent.

The Africa Trade Barometer stands as a reflection of that commitment: insight with integrity, relevance and impact.

Italia Matlala

Executive Group Head: Brand & Marketing
Standard Bank Business and Commercial Banking



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Being Africa's largest bank, Standard Bank has leveraged its presence and expertise across the continent to create the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB).

REPORT KEYS

Arrows indicate statistically significant increase/decrease from the previous survey

The SB ATB was launched in 2022 with the intention of creating Africa's leading trade index to address the information gap in reliable African trade data and to support and enable the growth of intra-African trade.

The availability of trade data remains a challenge across Africa, and the SB ATB aims to fill part of this data gap through up-to-date survey data on the views of African businesses regarding the environment in which they operate, their trade behaviour, trading activities, and their perceptions of trade.

This is Issue 5 of the SB ATB. The SB ATB focuses on 10 countries: Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

To construct the SB ATB index rankings, seven broad thematic categories of data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. These thematic categories are trade openness, access to finance, macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, foreign trade, governance & economy, and traders' financial behaviour. These are the seven variables on which the traders' barometer scores for each country are constructed.

From a primary data perspective, the Standard Bank Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB) is constructed. The SB STB scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the data collected only from the primary research surveys conducted with 2 218 firms across the 10 countries of interest.

From a secondary research perspective, the Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB) is constructed. The SB QTB scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the selected indicators collected only from existing secondary data sources.

The SB ATB is an aggregate of the SB QTB and the SB STB.

This is the country report for South Africa.

It contains an analysis of the primary and secondary data gathered specifically for South Africa between September and October 2025 and showcases trends and opportunities in trade within the country.

South Africa's performance across the SB surveys saw a shift in leadership in this iteration of the survey. The country dropped to 2nd place from 1st in August 2024 in the SB ATB and SB QTB rankings, while its SB STB ranking remained unchanged at 4th place. Consequently, the drop in the SB QTB resulted in a lower standing in the SB ATB, despite the country's SB STB score actually improving. It is important to note that the SB ATB ranking of countries is relative to the 10 countries themselves. In other words, countries are ranked against each other, i.e., relative scores to each other.

South Africa fell in the overall SB ATB ranking from position 1 in August 2024 to position 2.

The table below shows South Africa's relative performance in the seven broad thematic categories of the SB ATB.

SB STB performance for South Africa across seven thematic areas

Note: All (except for the ease of trade) indicators have an index score ranging from 0 to 100, where 0 represents a low score and 100 the highest score. For the ease of trade indicator, 0 represents a high score and 100 a low score.

October 2025
August 2024

South Africa's macroeconomic environment gained modest momentum in 2025 as it was supported by enhanced energy supply and price stability. Real GDP growth was estimated to rise to 1.2% in 2025, which was a notable improvement from the 0.5% recorded in 2024, largely led by the agriculture and services sectors. Inflationary pressures were well contained as headline inflation was estimated to average 3.8% for the year, which allowed the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) to transition into a measured easing cycle aimed at sustaining growth in real incomes. The fiscal position showed signs of stabilisation with the Treasury anticipating a primary budget surplus of about 0.5% of GDP in 2025, marking the first surplus in over a decade. Furthermore, the South African Rand was one of the continent's strongest performers in 2025, reflecting improved sentiment and gradual reform progress as it appreciated against the US dollar by October 2025.

South Africa's business confidence index rose to 69 from 56 in August 2024, partly signalling a surge in confidence regarding the economy. This score reflects growing optimism as the share of surveyed businesses that were very or extremely optimistic about the economy increased to 50% in this iteration of the survey. Optimism stems from tangible macroeconomic improvements, such as the projection that real GDP growth will continue rising alongside an easing inflationary environment. Business sentiment was further strengthened by the country's formal exit from the Financial Action Task Force grey list in October 2025, which restored international financial credibility and reduced the compliance burden for cross-border transactions. Additionally, S&P Global Ratings upgraded South Africa's sovereign credit rating to 'BB' with a positive outlook in November 2025, citing structural reform progress. Stability was further reinforced by the formal announcement of a new 3% inflation target (with a 1 percentage point tolerance band on either side) in the November 2025 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, which is expected to lower inflation expectations and allow for permanently lower interest rates over the medium term.

South Africa's government support index for trade rose to 71 from 55 in August 2024, partly reflecting a substantial positive shift in business confidence regarding state cross-border trade facilitation. This improvement was anchored by initiatives like the 2025 launch of the Export Support Desk, which provided firms with tailored advisory services and direct links to foreign missions to diversify export markets. The government also launched the AI-powered Electronic Travel Authorisation in September 2025 to modernise border management by automating visa applications and integrating facial recognition technology at major international airports. Support was further affirmed by the passage of the Public Service Amendment Bill in November 2025, which created a legal firewall between political office and administrative duties to improve regulatory enforcement predictability. Furthermore, the Ports Regulator of South Africa launched a strategic plan in April 2025 to double port productivity and review tariff methodologies.

Surveyed businesses indicated a rise in the quality of trade-related infrastructure, with the index score rising to 56 from 47 in August 2024. This recovery was defined by significant improvements in power supply ratings, which rose to 2.6 as the country went 230 days without loadshedding due to stronger generation performance and consistent maintenance. Telecommunication infrastructure ratings significantly increased to 3.4, driven by government and private sector interventions aimed at enhancing network resilience and accelerating 5G deployment. Port infrastructure ratings also saw a notable improvement to 3.0, partly due to the Department of Transport launching an initiative in March 2025 to develop an enabling environment for private sector participation in rehabilitating port and rail infrastructure. Additionally, surveyed businesses perceived significant reductions in obstacles to their operations arising from all infrastructural sectors, reflecting gradual improvements in service reliability.

The South African Rand was one of the continent's strongest performers in 2025, reflecting improved sentiment and gradual reform progress as it appreciated against the US dollar by October 2025.

The government launched the AI-powered Electronic Travel Authorisation in September 2025 to modernise border management.

Surveyed businesses perceived significant reductions in obstacles to their operations arising from all infrastructural sectors, reflecting gradual improvements in service reliability.

Access to credit for surveyed South African businesses' index score has risen to 62 from 49 in August 2024, partly signalling that businesses generally perceived it significantly easier to access credit. This positive shift was primarily catalysed by the South African Reserve Bank cutting the repo rate several times in 2025 to reach 7.00% by September 2025, which reduced the debt-service burden for Small and Medium Enterprises. Consequently, the more favourable borrowing environment aligned with goals to support businesses to invest while enabled by digital infrastructure. The improved funding landscape was also a result of unprecedented competition, including the rise of neobanks and alternative lenders, which forced the financial sector to move toward faster AI-driven cash-flow lending models. However, even with easier access to formal credit, surveyed big businesses increased their reliance on supplier credit to leverage their superior creditworthiness.

The ease of trade index score also rose to 58 among surveyed businesses from 42 in August 2024, signalling that surveyed businesses found it significantly easier to trade with other countries. This upward shift was partly supported by a positive outlook on trading with the rest of the world, where 37% of surveyed businesses cited it as easy due to high-quality products and easy trading procedures. Surveyed businesses continued to cite African countries and the European Union as their preferred trading partners, with preference for the EU increasing to 20% in this iteration of the survey. However, trading with North America remained less preferred as surveyed businesses cited high shipping costs, high tariffs, and taxes as key reasons for not trading with US-based companies. Despite some challenges, the majority of surveyed businesses cited trading with the rest of Africa as easy due to cheaper products and easier trading procedures.

South Africa's cross-border trade is expanding among surveyed businesses as its index score rose to 62 from 55 in August 2024, reflecting a growing confidence in the ability to increase both imports and exports. This growth was significantly driven by surveyed importers increasingly sourcing inputs from the rest of the world, particularly from Germany and the United Arab Emirates, which showed the most consistent growth. Openness was further demonstrated by surveyed exporters increasing shipping goods to the rest of the world, with the proportion of exports to Singapore growing notably by 10 percentage points from August 2024. Within the continent, awareness of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement increased significantly to 68% among surveyed businesses compared to 39% in August 2024. This notable rise in awareness was partly driven by initiatives such as the Intra-African Trade Fair 2025 roadshow held in Johannesburg in June 2025, which focused on positioning businesses for growth across African markets.

In conclusion, South Africa's trade landscape in 2025 is defined by a significant increase in internal business confidence and structural resilience, even as the country navigates a shift in its relative regional standing. While South Africa's overall position in the SB ATB slipped to 2nd, this decline largely reflected faster economic improvements in Mozambique rather than a deterioration of domestic conditions, as evidenced by the country's rise in business confidence and government support scores. The year was consequently marked by a phase of structural revitalisation where sectors, including electricity and shipping, were opened up to more private players to enhance efficiency. As South Africa capitalises on its formal exit from the grey list and a stabilising energy sector future, iterations of the survey will be insightful in tracking whether these structural reforms translate into a recovery in the country's comparative standing.

The more favourable borrowing environment aligned with goals to support businesses to invest while enabled by digital infrastructure.

Despite some challenges, the majority of surveyed businesses cited trading with the rest of Africa as easy due to cheaper products and easier trading procedures.

The year was consequently marked by a phase of structural revitalisation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Africa's largest bank, Standard Bank, has leveraged its presence and expertise across the continent to create the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB).

The SB ATB was conceived with the intent of creating Africa's leading trade index to address the information vacuum of reliable African trade data and to support and enable the growth of intra-African trade.

Trade—in the context of the SB ATB—should be understood as the process of production and transfer of goods and services that is enabled by solutions that effectively connect the supply chain domestically and internationally to create economic value.

Launched in 2022, this is Issue 5 of the SB ATB. Issues 1, 2, 3 and 4 were published in June 2022, November 2022, September 2023 and August 2024, respectively. The SB ATB focuses on 10 countries: Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

The objective of the SB ATB is to provide dynamic and insightful analysis that can intelligently inform and grow Africa's trade ecosystem.

Updated annually, the data enables stakeholders to take the pulse of African trade in near real-time to measure improvements or declines in business confidence, track operational challenges, and identify shifts in overall tradability.

The SB ATB is based on primary and secondary data sources. Primary research is gathered through a survey of over 2 218 firms representing small businesses, big businesses, and corporates across the 10 countries. The survey is augmented by in-depth interviews with select thought leaders in respective countries, and secondary data from sources such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and central banks of the respective countries.

To complement the individual country reports, a consolidated report will be published, serving as a cornerstone of the Trade Barometer. This overarching document will synthesise the data from the various country analyses to offer a comparative perspective of the factors enabling and impeding trade across the 10 African markets surveyed.

This is the country report for South Africa. It contains an analysis of the primary and secondary data gathered specifically for South Africa and showcases trends and opportunities in trade within the country. Primary and secondary data were gathered in South Africa between September and October 2025 for this fifth issue of the SB ATB.

A total of 252 businesses were surveyed in South Africa.

The surveyed businesses in South Africa were located in the following regions: Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. In order to be representative, the majority of these (75%) were small businesses (see Figure 1), given that most businesses in the country fall in this category. There were three in-depth interviews conducted in South Africa as part of this issue. These were with representatives from the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, and the Auditor General of South Africa.

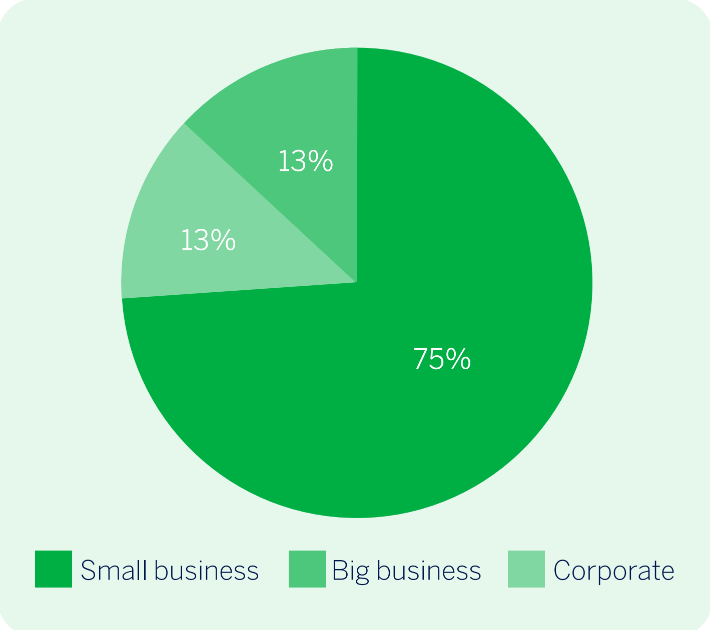
The fact that the majority of surveyed businesses were small businesses is one of the central value-adds of the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB). Conventionally, aggregate trade data and information on the African continent are skewed by large businesses that trade specific commodities in large volumes. The trading activities and behaviour of small businesses are therefore often not adequately represented.

Skewness towards small businesses of SB ATB

The emphasis and findings in the SB ATB relate to small businesses, their trade behaviour, trading activities and their perceptions on trade. The SB ATB also makes a contribution in understanding the trade perceptions of small businesses in Africa that do not necessarily engage in cross-border trade. Understanding the trade perceptions of all small businesses is key, as it aids in Africa's journey from a disjointed trading landscape to a more cohesive one where an extensive range of economic participants actively engage in trade with one another.

Notes: Certain survey findings in this report may differ from data at the aggregate level because data at the aggregate level is skewed by a few large businesses that trade large volumes of specific commodities. This is pointed out in the report as relevant.

Figure 1: Breakdown of surveyed businesses in South Africa by business segment



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

2 STANDARD BANK AFRICA TRADE BAROMETER ISSUE 5 COUNTRY RANKINGS

South Africa dropped to position 2 in the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer ranking.

In order to construct the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB) index rankings, seven broad thematic categories of data are collected from both primary and secondary data sources.

These thematic categories are macroeconomic environment, macroeconomic stability, government support, infrastructure constraints and enablers, trade openness, traders' financial behaviour and access to finance, and foreign trade and trading in Africa.

The SB ATB consists of the following two trade rankings:

- **The Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB)** is constructed from a secondary research perspective. The SB QTB scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the selected indicators collected from existing secondary data sources and reports.
- **The Standard Bank Firm Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB)** is constructed from a primary data perspective. The SB STB scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the survey data collected from 2 218 businesses.

The SB ATB is an aggregate of the SB QTB and the SB STB. Changes in a country's ranking on the three indices (SB ATB, SB QTB and SB STB) are driven by changes in both the aggregate score for that country, as well as its relative ranking against the other countries included. Changes in the SB ATB rankings over the past year are driven mostly by the changes in the SB STB scores.

The SB ATB ranking of countries is relative as countries are ranked against each other, i.e., relative scores to each other. This is pegged on a scale of 0 - 100. When indexed between this range, Mozambique has the highest Tradability Index, while Zambia has the lowest. This does not imply that one cannot trade in Zambia or that Mozambique is perfect; it only implies that on a common starting point of 0 and a maximum point of 100, this is how the two markets fared.

South Africa dropped to position 2 from first place in this year's SB ATB and SB QTB rankings. In both rankings, it had retained position 1 from June 2022 to August 2024 (see **Figure 2**). The country's SB STB remained unchanged, at 4th place.

South Africa's drop to second place is mainly due to Mozambique's stellar performance in this iteration of the SB ATB and SB QTB scores, rather than a reflection of a significant domestic decline. This is because, although surveyed South African businesses had, on average, weakened perceptions of import and export tariffs and client credit terms, all other indicators showed improvement in this iteration of the survey compared to August 2024.

Figure 2: ATB, QTB and STB ranking, by country

1 = High tradability score — 10 = Low tradability score

ATB										
Oct '25	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Aug '24	3	1	2	4	5	7	6	10	9	8
May '23	3	1	2	7	4	5	6	10	8	9

QTB										
Oct '25	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Aug '24	3	1	2	4	8	5	7	6	9	10
May '23	3	1	2	4	5	6	8	7	9	10

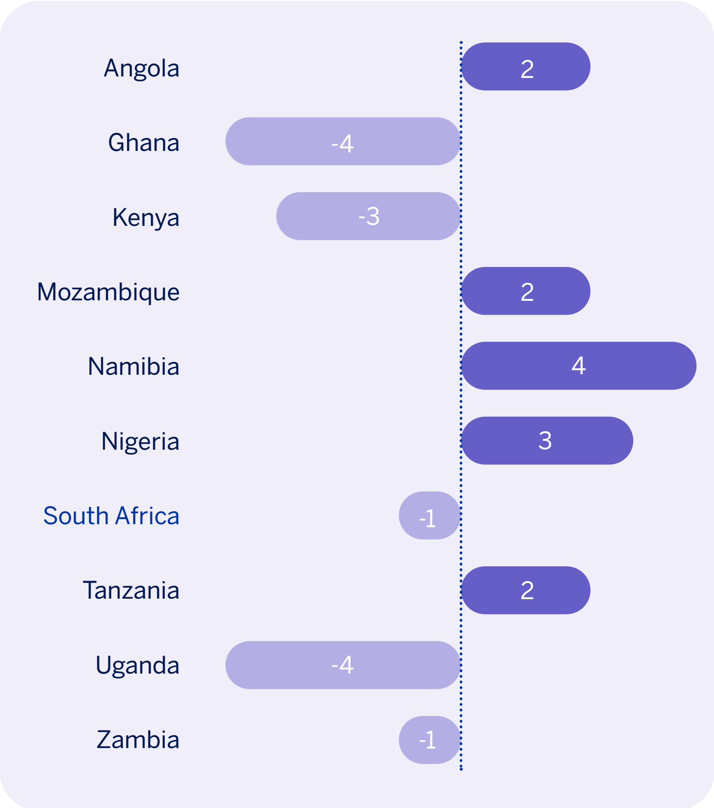
STB										
Oct '25	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Aug '24	1	3	2	4	7	5	8	6	9	10
May '23	2	1	4	3	8	7	5	9	6	10

Improved in ranking — Remained in the same ranking — Declined in ranking

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Notes: All values are shown so that a higher value is 'better' for trade, with the best to least ranking economies being ranked 1, 2, 3, etc., and how this has changed over time. A Red border indicates that the country has declined in the relevant ranking from August 2024; a Green border indicates that the country has improved in the ranking from August 2024; and a Grey border indicates that the country has remained in the same position as in August 2024.

Figure 3: Big movers across all five iterations of the SB ATB (June 2022 – October 2025)



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer 5

South Africa has dropped by one position across all five iterations of the SB ATB, from June 2022 to October 2025 (see **Figure 3**). South Africa maintained position 1 in the previous three iterations of the SB ATB, dropping to position 2 in this iteration—the same position it held in June 2022. Only Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya have recorded larger negative movements across all five iterations of the survey.

South Africa's SB ATB score dropped from 100 in the last three iterations of the SB ATB to 90 (see **Figure 4**). This, in turn, led to a drop from 1st to 2nd position in the SB ATB overall rankings. This decline was largely driven by its SB QTB ranking, which fell to 2nd place from 1st place, a position the country has held since September 2022.

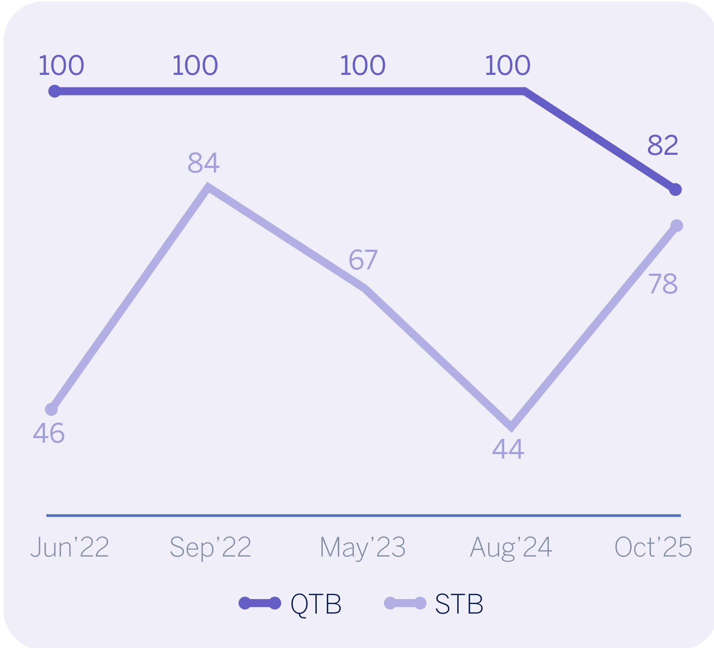
Despite this shift in ranking—which, as already mentioned, is mainly driven by Mozambique's better performance in this iteration—South Africa's economic outlook is supported by tangible macroeconomic improvements and significant structural reforms. This is because it is characterised by a stabilising fiscal position, marked by the first primary budget surplus in over a decade, and an easing inflationary environment, with headline inflation standing at 3.6% in October 2025. Furthermore, the country's international financial credibility was restored following its formal exit from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list," a milestone complemented by S&P Global Ratings upgrading South Africa's sovereign credit rating to 'BB' with a positive outlook in November 2025. These gains are reinforced by a strengthening Rand and critical efficiency improvements in logistics, such as the dramatic reduction in vessel waiting times at the Durban port due to private sector participation.

Figure 4: South Africa's SB ATB score and ranking (June 2022 – October 2025)

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

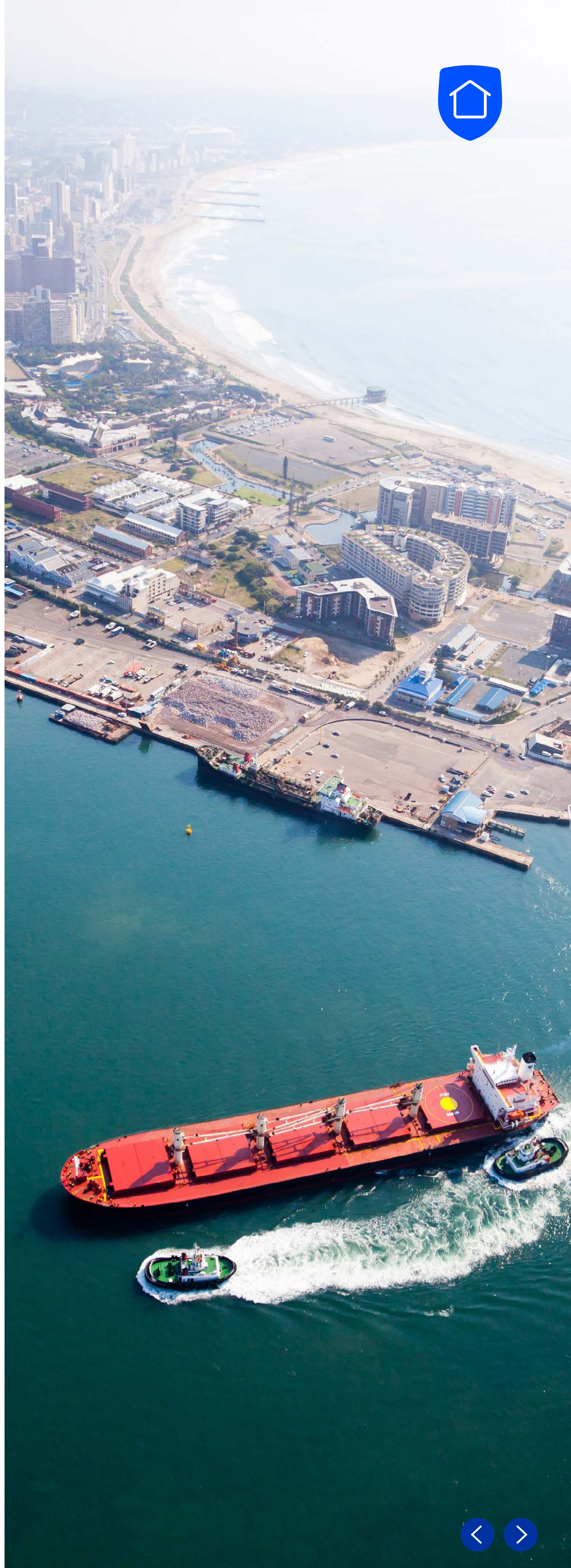
South Africa maintained its position in the top half of the SB STB rankings as its SB STB score continued an upward trend to 78 in this iteration of the survey, up from 46 in June 2022 (see **Figure 5**). However, its SB QTB score declined to 82 from a consistent high of 100 recorded in all previous surveys since June 2022. This downward movement was primarily influenced by the country's 10th-place ranking in annual real GDP growth and poor perceptions of tariff regulations targeting importers. Additionally, the country faced challenges in specific categories, ranking 9th in credit terms extended to clients and 8th in both inflation and mobile cellular subscriptions.

Figure 5: South Africa's SB QTB and SB STB scores (June 2022 – October 2025)



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

The rest of this report unpacks South Africa's performance in the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5 from both a primary and secondary research perspective, in line with the seven broad thematic areas referenced earlier.



3 MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

South Africa's macroeconomic conditions have a moderately stabilising impact on its tradability attractiveness.

A country's macroeconomic environment is a crucial factor in determining its attractiveness for trade and business. Some factors that increase a country's trade and investment attractiveness are high GDP (indicating a strong production of goods and services); high GDP per capita (suggesting strong consumer purchasing power); low inflation (ensuring the local currency remains favourable for importers); high foreign direct investment (FDI) (indicating a generally business-friendly environment) and high merchandise trade as a percentage of GDP (reflecting substantial imports and exports).

South Africa's macroeconomic environment gained modest momentum in 2025, supported by enhanced energy supply and price stability. Real GDP growth was estimated to rise to 1.2% in 2025, a notable improvement from the 0.5% recorded in 2024 (see **Table 1**), largely led by the agriculture and services sectors. Inflationary pressures were well contained, as headline inflation averaged 3.2% for the year, which allowed the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) to transition into a measured easing cycle aimed at sustaining growth in real incomes. Furthermore, the fiscal position showed signs of stabilisation with the Treasury anticipating a primary budget surplus of about 0.5% of GDP in 2025, marking the first surplus in over a decade. In addition, the South African Rand was one of the continent's strongest performers in 2025 as it averaged R17.9 per USD for the year, appreciating to below R17.0 per USD in December 2025 and projected to strengthen further below R16.0 per USD in January 2026. This performance was supported by a double-digit terms-of-trade spike, driven by higher export prices and lower import prices, which provided a significant tailwind for the currency.

Agriculture remained one of South Africa's more resilient sectors in 2025, supported by favourable weather conditions, steady input supplies, and strategic investments in irrigation and logistics infrastructure. This resilience was quantified in September 2025 when the Crop Estimates Committee (CEC) projected a 2025/26 winter crop harvest of approximately 2.77 million tonnes, a 4% year-on-year increase, resulting from a 5% rise in wheat yields and a 95% expansion in sweet lupine plantations.[1] Furthermore, cumulative agricultural exports reached USD 11.7 billion by September 2025, representing a 10% increase from 2024 as improved port efficiency and strong demand from Africa and the EU increased trade volumes.[2] However, these gains occurred alongside a national disaster in the livestock subsector, as Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) cases reached a record 24,406 reported infections by late 2025, spreading across eight provinces and entering high-biosecurity commercial piggeries by November 2025.[3] The Ministry of Agriculture responded by emergency-vaccinating over 930,000 animals by the end of 2025.[4] The resulting movement restrictions and biosecurity breaches have placed the livestock industry under extreme pressure, with export markets restricted and local meat and dairy prices expected to rise sharply due to decreased production. Additionally, climate volatility also disrupted the sector; while January 2025 saw a recovery from previous droughts, subsequent heavy rains in February 2025 triggered floods in Gauteng, North-West, and KwaZulu-Natal, which submerged maize crops and damaged rural infrastructure.[5]

1 Agbiz, 2025. Available here.
2 EcoFin Agency, 2025. Available here.
3 BEACON, 2026. Available here.
4 Business Tech, 2026. Available here.
5 Climate Change Writers, 2025. Available here.

Inflationary pressures in South Africa were well contained throughout 2025, supported by a combination of lower fuel prices, a stable food supply, and moderate domestic demand. Headline inflation for the year was estimated to average 3.2%, comfortably positioned within the South African Reserve Bank's (SARB) preferred target range of 3% (with a 1 percentage-point tolerance band on either side), while December 2025 data showed a moderation to 3.6%.[6]

Following a period of holding the repo rate steady at 8.25% through 2024, the SARB transitioned into a measured easing cycle. This proactive monetary policy was initiated with 25-basis-point cuts in January and March 2025, and continued with subsequent reductions that brought the repo rate down to 6.75% effective November 2025.[7] Such continued price stability was anticipated to anchor business confidence and sustain growth in real incomes across the country.

Table 1: Select macroeconomic indicators for South Africa

Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025e	2026f
Nominal GDP	USD, billions	338.29	420.12	405.27	377.78	406.45	443.71	450,00
GDP per capita	USD	5 630	6 920	6 640	6 130	6 360	6 670	6 830
Real GDP growth rate	%	-6.2	4.9	2.1	0.8	0.5	1.2	1.4
Inflation rate pa	%	3.3	4.5	6.9	6.0	4.4	3.2	3.4
Lending interest rate	%	7.7	7.0	8.8	11.5	11.6	10.6	9.7
Merchandise trade	% of GDP	50.27	56.44	63.68	63.46	58.35	N/A	N/A
Exchange rate stability (USD/ZAR)	ZAR per USD	16.5	15.7	16.9	18.5	18.3	17.9	16.7
FDI	USD, billions	3.1	40	9.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Trade (exports and imports as % of GDP)	%	50.8	56.0	64.8	65.2	61.7	N/A	N/A

Sources: World Bank Group, IMF, Statistics South Africa, ITC Trade Map, Standard Bank Research

Notes: Values rounded to the nearest figure | 'e' represents estimated data point. 'pa' represents period average. '**' represents forecasted data point | Information collected is up to January 2026, and estimates/forecasts could have been revised by the time of publication.

6 The World Bank, 2025. Available here.

7 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.

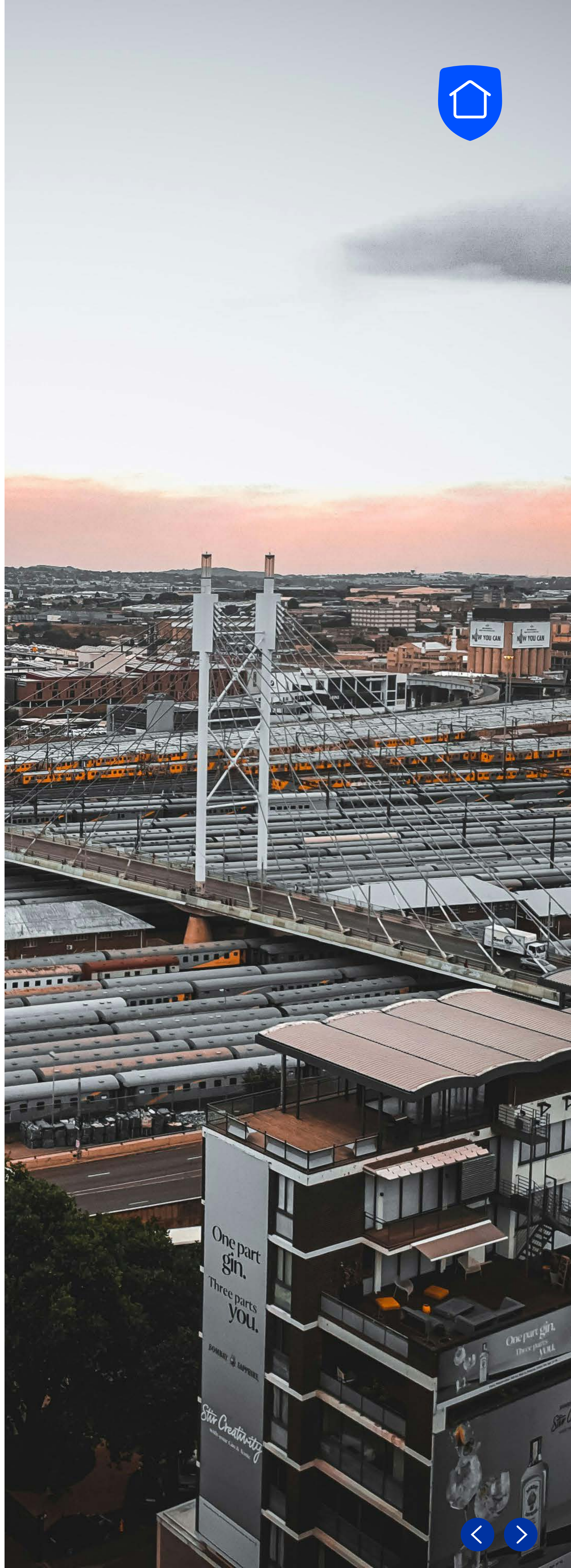
South Africa's fiscal position is showing early signs of stabilisation in revenue performance, underpinned by tax collection and expenditure control. The consolidated budget deficit stood at approximately 4.8% of GDP in the 2024/25 financial year and is expected to decline to 3.4% of GDP by 2027/28 as the main budget deficit narrows.[8] The Treasury also anticipates a primary budget surplus of about 0.5% of GDP in 2025, the first surplus in over a decade, signalling progress toward fiscal sustainability.[9] Total gross government debt was estimated at R5.7 trillion (USD 347 billion), 77% of GDP, as of March 2025, while debt-service costs are expected to absorb roughly 22 cents of every Rand of revenue.[10,11] These improvements reflect stronger revenue performance, particularly from corporate and personal income taxes, alongside tighter spending discipline and credible fiscal management, which have reinforced market confidence and supported the Rand.

On the external front, however, South Africa is facing several headwinds. The United States, which accounts for about 9% of South Africa's total exports, introduced sweeping tariff measures that elevate risk for key export industries. More specifically, in early 2025, the US imposed up to a 30% "reciprocal tariff" on South African goods under a new regime of global tariffs. At the same time, the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the preferential duty-free access legislation under which South Africa benefited, was extended through December 31, 2026, after President Trump signed a short-term reauthorization on February 3, 2026.[12] While this provides retroactive relief for the lapse since September 2025, South Africa's eligibility remains under intense scrutiny due to geopolitical tensions and demands for greater reciprocity for U.S. businesses.[13] The uncertainty around the long-term existence of the AGOA and the involvement of South Africa has pushed South Africa to increasingly lean on Africa and the Global South in general as a primary source of economic stability. Intra-African trade serves as a critical buffer; for instance, South Africa already accounts for nearly one-fifth (19%) of all goods traded between African nations. By leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA), South Africa is working to diversify its export channels. These regional partnerships offer an alternative to traditional Western routes, ensuring that if one market (like the US) closes or becomes too expensive due to tariffs, South African businesses have established, duty-free pathways to sell their goods within the growing African and Global South markets.

The South African Rand was one of the continent's strongest performers in 2025, reflecting improved sentiment and gradual reform progress. After peaking at R19.9 per USD in early April 2025, the rand appreciated to R17.1-R17.4 per USD by October 2025, about 14% stronger and below the 2025 average of R18.0 per USD.[14,15] The stronger Rand has eased import costs for machinery, fuels, and inputs, supporting tradability and price stability. This recovery was boosted by a significant surge in investor confidence, as non-resident portfolio inflows rose to an impressive R33-45 billion (USD 2-2.7 billion) per quarter in 2025. Furthermore, FDI turned positive with a R7.5 billion (USD 457 million) inflow in the Q4 2024/25 financial year, a marked improvement from the R3.2 billion (USD 195 million) outflow previously.[16] These gains reflect policy continuity and reform momentum under Operation Vulindela Phase II, which is driving a comprehensive structural overhaul of the economy. Beyond expanding private access to rail and port infrastructure, this second phase is successfully stabilising the energy sector through market liberalisation and massive renewable energy procurement, while also streamlining water licensing and digital communications. Alongside growing trade through the AfCFTA, the Rand's recovery underscores improving investor confidence in South Africa's external position.

Despite structural constraints, South Africa's medium-term outlook remains positive. This is largely supported by gradual improvements in logistics reform, energy supply, and policy stability under the government of National Unity. Supported by ongoing growth-supportive policy reforms, notably from Operation Vulindlela and interventions to accelerate infrastructure spending, growth is forecast to improve further to 1.4% in 2026. Fiscal consolidation and contained inflation should sustain investor confidence, while renewable energy investment and a manufacturing recovery will underpin medium-term growth. However, the near-term trajectory remains fragile, pressured by weak employment creation, high debt-service costs, and exposure to commodity and political risks. Until stronger productivity gains and structural reforms take hold, South Africa's economy is likely to register only modest and uneven growth in 2026, led more by stabilisation than by a broad-based expansion.

8 The National Treasury, 2025. Available here.
9 The Parliament, 2025. Available here.
10 The South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
11 The National Treasury, 2025. Available here.
12 African Business, 2026. Available here.
13 Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, 2026. Available here.
14 Exchange Rates UK, 2025. Available here.
15 SARS Rates of Exchange. Available here.
16 The South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.



4 MACROECONOMIC STABILITY

Surveyed South African businesses recorded a surge in confidence in the economy, driven by structural reforms, improved logistics, and a brighter economic outlook.

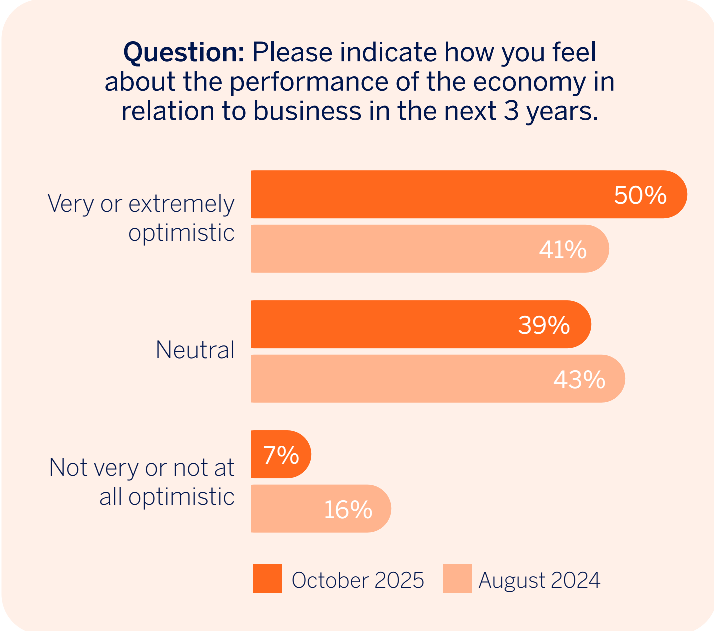
SOUTH AFRICA'S BUSINESS CONFIDENCE INDEX SCORE

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Business confidence can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates an extreme lack of confidence, 50 neutrality and 100 extreme confidence. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's business confidence index score significantly increased to 69, from 56 in August 2024.

The share of surveyed businesses that were very optimistic or extremely optimistic about the economy's performance in relation to business in the next 3 years increased to 50% in this iteration of the survey, compared to 41% in August 2024 (see **Figure 6**). This trend was largely driven by surveyed big businesses and corporates. Similarly, the share of surveyed businesses that were either not very optimistic or not at all optimistic reduced by 9-percentage points to 7%. This suggests that a share of surveyed businesses that previously expressed pessimistic sentiments have shifted towards being optimistic about the future of the economy in relation to their business. It is also reflected in the significant reduction in the share of surveyed businesses that expressed neutral sentiments by 4-percentage points to 39%.

Figure 6: Surveyed South African businesses' outlook on the performance of the economy in relation to business



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: "Refused" not shown on slide. Bars may not add exactly to 100%.

Surveyed businesses cited various reasons for their optimism. The share of surveyed businesses citing business growth increased significantly to 71% in this iteration of the survey, compared to 44% in August 2024. Similarly, 48% pointed to increased economic growth, a significant increase from 25% in August 2024. Additionally, surveyed businesses expecting a change in government to boost the economy rose by 5-percentage points to 39%. This may be due to the fact that growth of the economy is currently partly curbed by political uncertainty on the durability of the government of National Unity. 37% of surveyed businesses draw their optimism from good policies in place, increasing from 33% in August 2024. Economic stability as a factor was cited by 36% of surveyed businesses in this iteration, increasing by 6-percentage points.

Optimism among surveyed South African businesses stems from tangible macroeconomic improvements and structural reforms. To begin with, South Africa's real GDP growth is projected to continue rising, signalling broader economic momentum that would benefit businesses (see **Figure 7**). This momentum is anchored by an easing inflationary environment with the headline inflation that was estimated to average 3.8% in 2025, well within the South African Reserve Bank's (SARB) target range.[17,18] This moderation in prices helps preserve the real purchasing power of consumers, providing a clearer path for businesses to achieve growth targets through increased sales volumes rather than just price adjustments. Business confidence is further bolstered by the strengthening of the financial and external sectors, such as South Africa's formal exit from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list" in October 2025, restoring international financial credibility.[19] For businesses, this delisting reduces the compliance

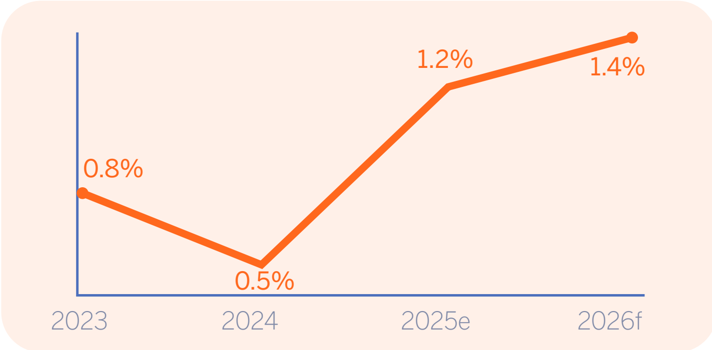
17 The World Bank, 2025. Available here.
18 Ministry of Statistics South Africa, 2025. Available here.
19 The National Treasury, 2025. Available here.

burden and "high-risk" flagging that previously increased the cost of cross-border transactions and global capital. Complementing this, S&P Global Ratings upgraded South Africa's sovereign credit rating to 'BB' with a positive outlook in November 2025, citing a primary budget surplus and structural reform progress.[20] This upgrade signals a more stable environment for long-term investment and helps lower the cost of borrowing for businesses looking to expand. Efficiency gains in logistics are also providing immediate relief to supply chains, as vessel waiting times at the Durban port dropped from 18 days in January 2025 to 2–3 days by December 2025 due to the integration of private terminal operators and the rapid procurement of modern gantry cranes.[21] This turnaround lowers inventory holding costs and improves reliability for manufacturers and retailers. Crucially, the operational turnaround at Eskom has fundamentally altered the business landscape. For example, by January 2026, South Africa recorded over 230 consecutive days without loadshedding, with only 26 hours of power cuts reported for the entire 2025 calendar year.[22] This stability is underpinned by the Generation Recovery Plan, which saw the Energy Availability Factor (EAF) climb to approximately 65% by early 2026, significantly reducing reliance on expensive diesel-powered turbines and allowing for a R16 billion (USD 973 million) saving in fuel costs.[23,24] Furthermore, the 2025 commencement of the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act has paved the way for a competitive wholesale market, encouraging private sector investment and ensuring that the reserve margin remains healthy as the country enters 2026.[25]

That said, surveyed businesses remain cautious about potential risks to revenue growth over the next three years. 66% reported concerns over decreased production, a 20-percentage point increase from August 2024 (see **Figure 8**). 65% of surveyed businesses expressed fears over contraction of the wider economy, similar to August 2024. Furthermore, the inability to secure funding for expansion saw 65% of surveyed businesses express concerns, a 3-percentage point increase from August 2024.

20 S&P Global, 2025. Available here.
21 SCT Supply Chains, 2025. Available here.
22 EcoFin Agency, 2026. Available here.
23 Eskom, 2026. Available here.
24 EcoFin Agency, 2026. Available here.
25 Solarquarter, 2026. Available here.

Figure 7: South Africa's Real GDP Growth (%)

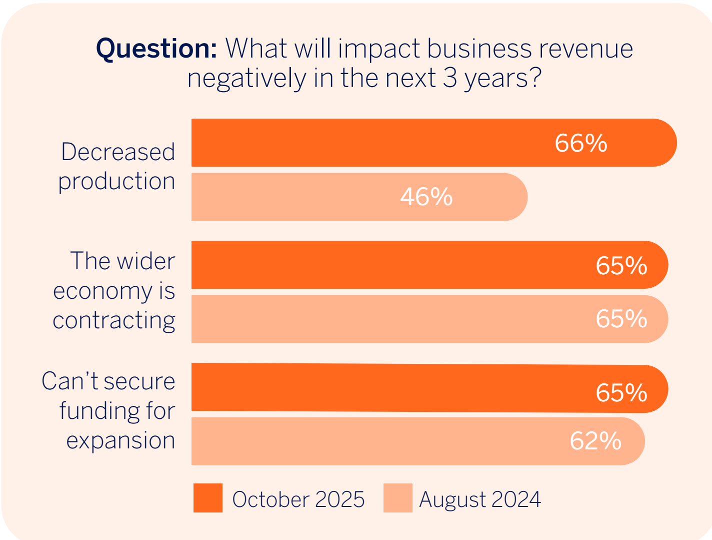


Source: Standard Bank, 2026. African Markets Revealed January 2026

Note: 'f' represents a forecasted data point, and 'e' represents an estimated data point.

Climate change is increasingly impacting the environment in which surveyed South African businesses operate, negatively affecting their performance. 31% reported changes in customer behaviour, as 29% reported disruptions in the supply chains and increased operational costs resulting from climate change. A further 27% of surveyed businesses decried the loss of productivity.

Figure 8: Reasons for pessimism among surveyed South African businesses concerning business revenue in the next 3 years



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

In response, the government of South Africa and regulatory bodies have accelerated legislative and financial reforms to mitigate these risks and stabilise the macroeconomic landscape. A definitive milestone was reached in March 2025, when the Climate Change Act (CCA) was formally proclaimed, enabling the development of an effective climate change response and a long-term, just transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy and society for South Africa in the context of sustainable development, and to provide for matters connected therewith. In effect, this established the first comprehensive legal framework to mandate greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions across high-impact sectors like mining and manufacturing.[26,27] By providing a statutory basis for carbon budgets and sectoral emission targets, the Climate Change Act offers businesses a predictable regulatory roadmap, reducing the "policy uncertainty" that often hampers long-term green investment. To operationalise this, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) moved to finalise the enabling regulations for carbon budgets in late 2025, allowing businesses to align their operational strategies with national targets and avoid punitive carbon tax rates.[28] Furthermore, the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) bolstered financial stability by issuing updated guidance on climate-related financial disclosures in October 2025.[29] These guidelines encourage banks to consider and disclose physical and transition risks, supporting more risk-informed lending decisions and strengthening financial system resilience to climate shocks. Complementing these financial safeguards, the government released the South African Green Hydrogen Potential Atlas and specific Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) guidelines in February 2025 to de-risk new energy projects.[30] These tools directly address supply chain disruptions by fostering a more resilient and localised energy mix. Complementing these financial safeguards, the government initiated a public nomination process in August 2025 to appoint a new cohort of commissioners for the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC).[31] This ensures that the private sector remains a central partner in shaping the 2026–2030 climate agenda, specifically targeting the inclusive action needed to address the productivity losses and supply chain disruptions cited by surveyed businesses.

26 Presidential Climate Commission, 2025. Available here.
27 To be formally proclaimed means that following its enactment by Parliament and signing by the President, the specific date for the law to come into legal force was officially published in the government Gazette.
28 Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, 2025. Available here.
29 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
30 Cliff Dekker Hofmeyr, 2025. Available here.
31 South African government, 2025. Available here.

STANDARD BANK'S OFFERINGS

Partnerships for Market Access

Standard Bank partners with Chambers of Commerce, Trade Promotion Agencies and Industry Bodies to collaborate on enabling Market Access across African and international markets.

We leverage our Market Access solutions and vast networks, to deliver valuable and impactful collaboration with our partners to enable growth opportunities for African businesses.

Africa China Trade Solutions

Our Africa China Trade Solutions (ACTS) helps unlock Market Access for African businesses for export and import opportunities.

Through our Export Solution, we assisted a South African family-owned wine producer to expand into the Chinese market. By connecting them with a Chinese wine importer, we enabled the business to broaden its international trade footprint.. Our Import Solution enables us to assist businesses grow their operations through importing quality machinery and equipment.

Exporter Readiness Programme

Standard Bank's Exporter Readiness Programme equips SMEs with the information and training required to become successful exporters.

The programme covers regulatory requirements, registration processes, and logistics considerations. It supports SMEs that aspire to grow through exporting, enabling them to develop sustainable market-entry strategies informed by research, market insights, and guidance on product and service positioning.

5 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Surveyed South African businesses recorded a significant increase in their perception of government support for cross-border trade.

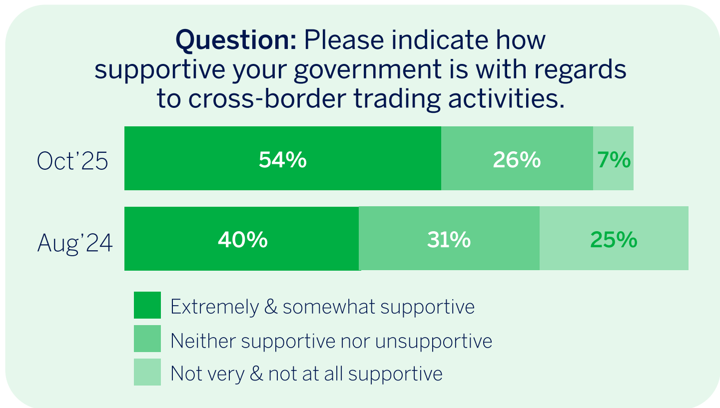
SOUTH AFRICA'S GOVERNMENT SUPPORT ON TRADE

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Government support index can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates an extreme lack of government support, 50 neutrality and 100 extreme government support. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's government support index score significantly increased to 71 from 55 in August 2024. This means that compared to August 2024, surveyed businesses in South Africa feel the government has been significantly more supportive of cross-border trade activities in this iteration of the survey.

Surveyed businesses in South Africa perceived the government as significantly more supportive of their cross-border trading activities in this iteration of the survey compared to August 2024. Surveyed businesses that perceived the government as supportive (either extremely supportive or somewhat supportive) of their cross-border business activities increased significantly to 54% from 40% in August 2024 (see **Figure 9**). Similarly, there was a significant decline of surveyed businesses that perceived the government as not supportive (either not very supportive or not at all supportive) to 7% from 25% in August 2024. The survey results indicated a substantial positive shift in business confidence regarding state cross-border trade facilitation.

Figure 9: Perceptions of government support for cross-border trade



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: Numbers may not add up to exactly 100% due to "don't know" and "refused" responses not being included.

The significant increase in surveyed businesses' perception of government support for cross-border trade was mostly driven by surveyed small businesses (see **Figure 10**). Surveyed small businesses that perceived the government as supportive of their cross-border trade activities increased significantly to 57% from 37% in August 2024. Similarly, those that perceived the government as not supportive of their cross-border trade declined significantly from 30% in August 2024 to 5%.

Figure 10: Surveyed small businesses' perceptions of government support for cross-border trade as supportive & not supportive

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

There are a number of government initiatives that could be driving these positive sentiments. For instance, the South African government implemented a robust Economic Response Package to mitigate global trade volatility and enhance market predictability. A central pillar of this was the 2025 launch of the Export Support Desk, which provided firms with tailored advisory services and direct links to foreign

> "The South African government is aggressively looking for alternative markets by negotiating cooperation agreements with BRICS countries and utilising the AfCFTA to ensure that manufacturers who are struggling to access the US market have other destinations for their products."
>
> Representative from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

missions to diversify export markets.[32] The Localisation Support Fund (LSF) is also committed to issuing an open call to firms impacted by the imposition of 30% import tariffs by the United States by providing targeted assistance for improving competitiveness and operational efficiency.[33] This initiative aimed to build alternative markets and reduce dependence, turning a challenge into an opportunity for broader trade growth.

54% of surveyed businesses perceive the government as supportive of cross-border trade compared to 40% in August 2024.

South Africa also accelerated its market diversification strategy to mitigate the impact of unilateral US tariffs imposed in 2025. Central to this effort was the Clean Trade and Investment Partnership (CTIP), which sought to unlock a R90 billion investment package to bolster local strategic industries. The CTIP specifically aimed to expand market access for high-value green exports, such as Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and electric vehicles, while integrating South African producers into new global clean energy supply chains. Beyond Europe, the government also secured vital protocols to open vast agricultural markets in China and Thailand, while making significant inroads into high-growth regions across the Middle East, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. The government signed the Stone Fruit Protocol with China in October 2025, exposing South African exporters to a market that imports over 40 million cartons of stone fruit annually.[34] South Africa also reopened the Thai market for fresh apples in February 2025 and at the same time secured access to export fresh table grapes to the Philippines following a 10-year negotiation process, thereby allowing exporters to tap into the Asian markets.[35,36] At the same time, South Africa's citrus industry strategically pivoted toward Saudi Arabia as a high-growth hub, with the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) securing protocols that utilise the Kingdom's geographic location to bypass US tariff challenges.[37] These proactive partnerships, combined with the accelerated implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic) by securing Cabinet approval for the Schedule of Tariff Concessions, which covers 90% of the country's tariff lines, were foundational steps toward building a more resilient, diversified trade portfolio which remained a work in progress even as South Africa continues to navigate significant structural risks and external shocks.[38]

Furthermore, the South African government launched the AI-powered Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) in September 2025 to modernise border management. This fully digital system leverages machine learning to automate visa applications, allowing eligible foreign visitors to apply online and receive real-time approvals instead of relying on paper-based embassy appointments.[39] By integrating with facial recognition technology at major international airports, the ETA ensures seamless arrivals and reduces the time spent at immigration for short-term visitors, including those travelling for business and international conferences.[40] The digitisation of entry procedures reduced the administrative challenges for firms and signalled that the country was actively removing barriers to entry to remain a competitive destination for international commerce. Consequently, the ETA serves as a vital tool in the state's broader strategy to use digital transformation to drive growth and strengthen regional and global trade links. In 2025, the Department of Home Affairs also successfully eradicated its decade-old visa backlog, processing over 306,000 pending applications, which unlocked a powerful economic multiplier effect, where the recruitment of each highly skilled foreign professional is estimated to create seven new jobs for unskilled workers, directly driving domestic industrial growth.[41,42]

67% of surveyed businesses perceived reducing business tax as an important intervention for cross-border trade, a significant reduction from 79% in August 2024.

In addition, the Ports Regulator of South Africa (PRSA) launched its 2025–2030 Strategic Plan in April 2025, which serves as a critical enabler for expanding regional and international trade volumes.[43] Central to the plan is the doubling of port productivity to 30 crane moves per hour by 2030, alongside the review of tariff methodologies to lower

> The government's current strategy combines export promotion with a strong drive for industrialisation, aiming to ensure that South Africa processes its own resources and creates jobs rather than being left behind while other economies develop.
>
> Representative from The Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance

32 Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2025. Available here.
33 South African government News Agency, 2025. Available here.
34 Ministry of Agriculture, 2025. Available here.
35 Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, 2025. Available here.
36 Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, 2025. Available here.
37 SABC News, 2025. Available here.
38 Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2025: Available here.
39 KPMG, 2025. Available here.
40 South African government, 2025. Available here.
41 IBN Immigration Solutions, 2025. Available here.
42 Polity, 2025. Available here.
43 Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2025. Available here.

high transit costs for cross-border traders. Implementation formally commenced in April 2025 with the launch of the 2025/26 Annual Performance Plan, which prioritised the corporatisation of the National Ports Authority and the establishment of a transparent ports tribunal. The strategy further integrated advanced cargo-handling technology. The plan's focus on technological innovation and logistics reliability makes South Africa a more competitive hub for high-value regional supply chains. In December 2025, Transnet SOC Ltd and the world's largest independent terminal operator, International Container Terminal Services, Inc. (ICTSI), officially signed a landmark 25-year partnership agreement for Durban Container Terminal (DCT) Pier 2. This marked the definitive end of the state monopoly in South Africa's port operations, ushering in a R11 billion private investment program aimed at nearly doubling terminal productivity.[44]

FAST FACT:
Governance reforms and investor confidence are driving infrastructure-led growth.

The South African government's commitment to building a conducive trade environment reached a major milestone with the passage of the Public Service Amendment Bill, which was officially sent to the President for assent in November 2025. This legislative reform is widely viewed as a pro-business victory because it creates a clear, legal firewall between political office and administrative duties, effectively curbing the practice of cadre deployment. By granting Directors-General and Heads of Department full administrative authority over their departments, including recruitment and disciplinary matters, the Bill aims to insulate the state's technical functions from political interference. While this may seem more like a public service intervention, the Bill aimed to improve the predictability of regulatory enforcement and ensure that infrastructure projects, such as port and rail upgrades, are managed by qualified experts rather than political appointees.

There were several ways in which surveyed businesses needed the government to support cross-border trade in this iteration of the survey (see **Figure 11**)**.** Surveyed businesses perceived legislation conducive to imports as an important area of intervention at 72%. Other areas perceived as important included lowering customs duties (70%), simple business policies (70%), promoting the AfCFTA (69%), and business and trade literacy support (69%). 67% of surveyed businesses perceived reducing business tax as an important intervention for cross-border trade, a significant reduction from 79% in August 2024.

The decline in perceptions around business tax could, in part, be due to the fact that the South African government made a strategic decision to reverse proposed tax hikes and shift to a fully digital correspondence model in 2025. This was done in order to secure revenue through modernised oversight rather than new tax burdens. While the 2025 Budget initially proposed increasing the value-added tax (VAT) rate, this proposal was subsequently withdrawn, keeping the rate at 15%, thereby easing immediate cost concerns for businesses.[45] Effective 31 May 2025, SARS also discontinued the printing and posting of system-generated letters, transitioning all official correspondence to electronic delivery via eFiling and other digital channels.[46] This move eliminated the delays associated with physical mail distribution, allowing for faster and more reliable communication with businesses.

Figure 11: Perceptions of how the government can support cross-border trading activities

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

"Quotas impose a strict cap on the quantity of goods a country will accept; consequently, even when South Africa has an oversupply of a product ready to export, trading partners will refuse to admit anything beyond that pre-set limit, which severely restricts trade opportunities."

Representative from the Auditor General of South Africa

44 Transet, 2025. Available here.

45 EY, 2025. Available here.

46 South African Revenue Authority, 2025. Available here.

6 INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

Surveyed South African businesses perceive the infrastructure network as increasingly efficient and dependable, following significant quality improvements.

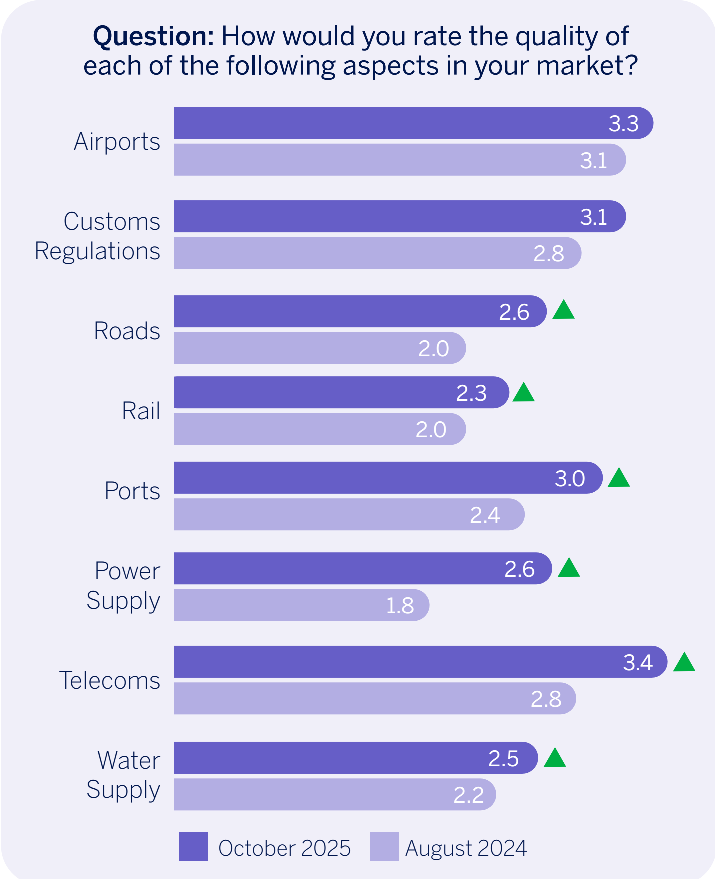
SOUTH AFRICA'S TRANSPORT-RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE INDEX SCORE

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

The quality of the trade-related infrastructure index can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates poor quality, 50 indicates fair quality, and 100 indicates excellent quality. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's quality of trade-related infrastructure index score significantly increased to 56 from 47 in August 2024. This means that compared to the August 2024 survey, surveyed businesses in South Africa perceived the quality of transport-related infrastructure to be significantly better in this iteration.

Surveyed businesses perceived the quality of infrastructure to be better across all infrastructural aspects in this iteration of the survey relative to August 2024 (see **Figure 12**). These improved perceptions suggest that public investment and maintenance programs are improving service reliability.

Figure 12: The perceived quality of various infrastructural aspects by businesses



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Notes: Rating is on a 5-point scale, where 5 = excellent quality and 1 = poor quality. Arrows denote whether the value of the variable is significantly higher / lower than in the previous survey.

On average, surveyed businesses rated power supply infrastructure at 2.6 on a 5-point scale, a significant increase from 1.8 in August 2024, the largest year-on-year gain across all infrastructural aspects for South Africa. This notable improvement may be, in part, due to a combination of government interventions aimed at improving power generation reliability, transmission capacity, and system efficiency. In July 2025, the African Development Bank (AfDB) approved a USD 475 million loan for South Africa's Infrastructure Governance and Green Growth Programme (IGGGP).[47] The loan specifically funds the structural restructuring of the power sector to break up monopolies, the acceleration of private-sector grid integration, and the modernisation of municipal electricity distribution to reduce localized outages. Furthermore, the state utility company, Eskom, successfully returned Kusile Unit 6 and Medupi Unit 4 to the grid by mid-2025, which, combined with the return of Koeberg Unit 1 in September 2025 after long-term maintenance, brought approximately 2,330 megawatt (MW) of reliable capacity back to the national grid, thereby achieving a critical generation recovery target.[48,49,50]

47 African Development Bank, 2025. Available here.
48 Eskom, 2025. Available here.
49 World Nuclear News, 2025. Available here.
50 Kusile Unit 6 and Medupi Unit 4 are newly completed 800MW coal-fired generation units while Koeberg Unit 1 are the first of two units at South Africa's sole nuclear power station to finish a 20-year life-extension upgrade.

Additionally, in May 2025, the South African Photovoltaic Industry Association announced that private rooftop solar installations, predominantly self-funded by households and businesses to reduce reliance on Eskom, had surpassed 5.5GW.[51] Plans to incentivise Small-Scale Embedded Generation (SSEG) further nationwide, reinforcing efforts to decentralise power generation and expand access beyond the traditional utility model. However, implementation of these plans has progressed more gradually than envisaged, with the rollout of the Independent Transmission Projects (ITP) programme for private-sector grid expansion continuing into 2026.[52] These supply-side investments are complemented by broader structural reforms, with the government outlining the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) 2025, a ZAR 2.23 trillion (USD 126 billion) energy roadmap centred on a diversified mix including 6,000MW of new gas-to-power, in October 2025.[53] This strategy targets a reduction in power generation costs through a competitive multi-market structure enabled by the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act, promising more affordable electricity tariffs over the medium term and significantly enhancing the competitiveness of the manufacturing and service sectors.[54]

51 South African Photovoltaic Association, 2025. Available here.
52 Eskom, 2025. Available here.
53 Department of Mineral Resources, 2025. Available here.
54 The National Energy Crisis Committee, 2024. Available here.

On average, surveyed businesses rated telecommunication infrastructure at 3.4 on a 5-point scale, significantly increasing from 2.8 in August 2024. This notable improvement may be, in part, due to a combination of government and private sector interventions aimed at enhancing network resilience, expanding fiber footprint, and accelerating 5G deployment. Nokia and Fibertime, for instance, successfully launched an expanded fiber rollout in October 2025, aiming to connect an additional 400,000 homes in underserved communities with high-speed, contract-free fiber, which, combined with Telkom's allocation of 27% of its 2025 financial year capital expenditure specifically for fiber deployment, accelerated the national transition from legacy copper to next-generation broadband.[55,56] Additionally, in July 2025, the government allocated R710 million (USD 40 million) to the SA Connect Phase 2 programme to accelerate the deployment of fiber broadband infrastructure across schools, clinics, and underserved communities, reinforcing efforts to bridge the digital divide and expand high-speed access, particularly outside major urban centres.[57,58] However, permanent decommissioning of legacy networks has progressed more gradually than envisaged, with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) signalling in June 2025 a shift away from a rigid mandatory deadline for the 2G/3G switch-off to allow for continued device migration through 2026.[59] These supply-side investments are complemented by broader structural reforms, with the government outlining a Next-Generation Radio Spectrum Policy in mid-2025 centred on a "Data-for-All" transition. This strategy, supported by Independent Communications Authority of South Africa's (ICASA) preparations for a follow-up spectrum auction in early 2026, targets a further reduction in communications costs through enhanced infrastructure sharing and competitive licensing, promising more affordable digital services over the medium term.[60,61]

55 Telecoms, 2025. Available here.
56 Samena Daily News, 2025. Available here.
57 Samena Daily News, 2025. Available here.
58 Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2025. Available here.
59 Boston Technical, 2025. Available here.
60 Ministry of Communications and Digital Technologies, 2025. Available here.
61 ICASA, 2025. Available here.

On average, surveyed businesses rated port infrastructure at 3.0, a significant increase from 2.4 in August 2024. This notable improvement may be, in part, due to a combination of government and international interventions aimed at enhancing cargo handling efficiency, modernising ageing equipment, and introducing private-sector operational expertise. In March 2025, the Department of Transport launched an online Request for Information (RFI) to develop an enabling environment for private sector participation, receiving an unprecedented 162 formal responses from private entities interested in rehabilitating port and rail infrastructure.[62] Furthermore, Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) successfully commissioned four new ship-to-shore (STS) cranes at the Durban Container Terminal (DCT) Pier 2 in October 2025, which, combined with the earlier delivery of nine rubber-tyred gantry (RTG) cranes to the Cape Town Container Terminal in September, brought critical equipment availability closer to operational targets.[63,64] Following a favourable High Court ruling in October 2025, which dismissed the interdict and cleared the way for the partnership between Transnet and International Container Terminal Services Inc. (ICTSI), the finalisation of the deal continued into late 2025.[65] These investments are complemented by broader structural reforms, with the government outlining a Medium-Term Development Plan target in October 2025 centred on a goal of 30 Gross Crane Moves (GCM) per hour across all major national container terminals, including Durban, Cape Town, and Ngqura.[66] While this represents a doubling of recent local performance levels (which often languished between 15–18 GCM), it specifically aims to align South Africa with the global average, which sat at approximately 23.6 to 25 GCM in 2024–2025.[67] This strategy targets a reduction in vessel turnaround times through a combination of asset renewal and private sector expertise, promising more efficient logistics services over the medium term, significantly enhancing the competitiveness of the manufacturing and service sectors.

62 Transnet, 2025. Available here.
63 Southern Africa's Freight News, 2025. Available here.
64 Ministry of Transport, 2025. Available here.
65 EcoFin Agency, 2025. Available here.
66 South African Freight News, 2025. Available here.
67 The World Bank, 2025. Available here.

On average, surveyed businesses rated road infrastructure at 2.6 on a 5-point scale, a significant increase from 2.0 in August 2024. This notable improvement may be, in part, due to a strategic shift by the government toward massive capital investment and the acceleration of primary corridor upgrades designed to enhance network reliability, logistical capacity, and connectivity. In February 2025, President Cyril Ramaphosa committed to an infrastructure-led recovery in his State of the Nation Address, earmarking ZAR 940 billion (USD 51 billion) for the next three fiscal years to revitalise primary transport corridors and bridge the financing gap through private sector expertise.[68] Furthermore, in October 2025, the South African National Roads Agency SOC Limited (SANRAL) officially opened the upgraded ZAR 6.8 billion (USD 394 million) section of the N3 between Cato Ridge and Ashburton.[69,70,71,72] This milestone, consisting of three major project packages, expanded the national construction footprint and significantly improved the primary freight corridor between Durban and Gauteng. However, implementation of some complex arterial works has progressed more gradually than envisaged, with the engineering phases of the Mtentu Bridge and the R573 Moloto Road rehabilitation continuing into 2026.[73] These large-scale capital investments in physical road-building are reinforced by broader structural reforms aimed at improving the financial and operational health of the transport network. Specifically, the Gauteng Provincial government paid the second instalment of ZAR 3.37 billion (USD 189 million) in June 2025 to resolve historical e-toll debt, while the Vala Zonke pothole repair initiative was intensified across the North West and Gauteng provinces in August and October 2025.[74,75] This multi-pronged strategy of corridor expansion and maintenance targets a reduction in vehicle operating costs through a higher-quality road surface and improved regional transit, promising more efficient logistics

68 Government of South Africa, 2025. Available here.
69 Engineering News, 2025. Available here.
70 The Witness, 2025. Available here.
71 SANRAL, 2023. Available here.
72 N3 is the country's most critical primary freight artery, which serves as the economic lifeline connecting the Port of Durban to the industrial hub of Gauteng.
73 South African government News Agency, 2025. Available here.
74 Gauteng Provincial Treasury, 2025. Available here.
75 Department of Transport, 2025. Available here.

> Climate change has forced farmers in areas like Limpopo to shift from planting avocados and producing other things because the seasons for planting certain commodities and harvesting them have changed.
>
> Representative from the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance

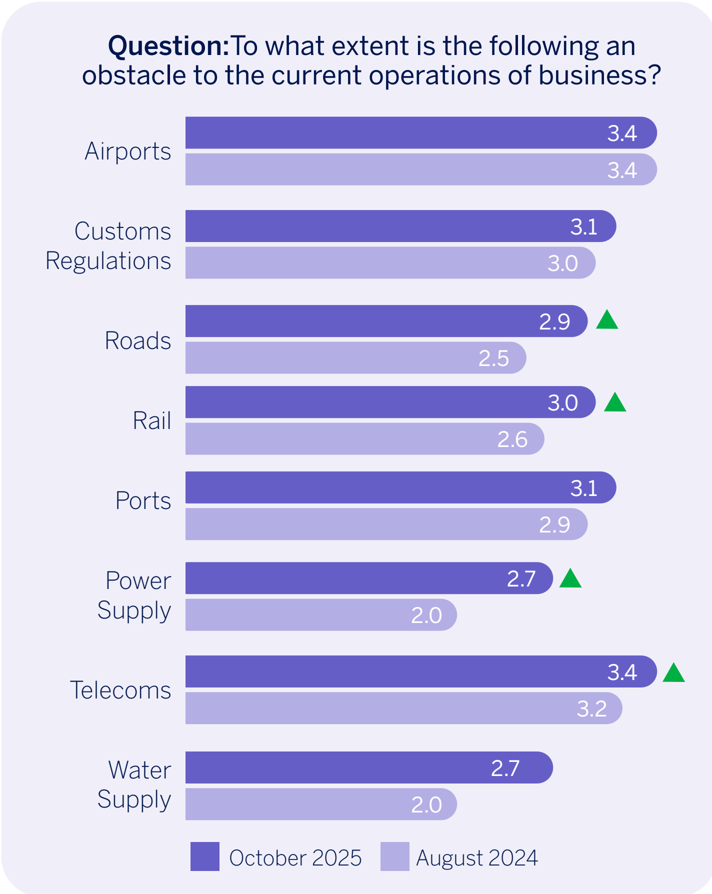
services over the medium term, significantly enhancing the competitiveness of the manufacturing and service sectors.

On average, surveyed businesses rated water supply infrastructure at 2.5 on a 5-point scale, significantly increasing from 2.2 in August 2024. This notable improvement may be, in part, due to an intensified focus on large-scale bulk water augmentation and the modernisation of ageing distribution networks to enhance storage capacity, supply assurance, and operational resilience. In February 2025, the government officially operationalised the South African National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency (NWRIA) Act, establishing a dedicated state-owned entity to centralise the funding and management of national water assets.[76] Furthermore, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) Phase II reached a significant milestone in September 2025 with the Polihali Transfer Tunnel reaching 46% completion and the Polihali Dam reaching 37% completion.[77] The project remains on track for the commissioned delivery of water to the Vaal River System by 2029, providing critical relief to South Africa's economic hub.[78] In August 2025, construction began on the Mokolo and Crocodile River (West) Water Augmentation Project Phase 2A following the signing of a ZAR 10.6 billion (USD 600 million) contract to support Limpopo's demand.[79,80,81] Conversely, the uMkhomazi Water Project Phase 1 progressed gradually, remaining in the design and tender phases in October 2025, with construction of the Smithfield Dam now targeted for October 2027.[82] Additionally, South Africa's hosting of the African Union–Africa International Panel (AU-AIP) Water Investment Summit in August 2025 launched the Global Outlook Council on Water Investments, a G20 legacy initiative to bridge the global water investment gap, while targeting reduced scarcity through enhanced institutional capacity and the expansion of Blue and Green Drop regulatory programs to improve service dependability and sector competitiveness.[83]

76 South African government, 2025. Available here.
77 African Development Bank, 2025. Available here.
78 Newsday, 2025. Available here.
79 Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority, 2025. Available here.
80 Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority, 2024. Available here.
81 Engineering News, 2025. Available here.
82 Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2025. Available here.
83 African Union, 2025. Available here.

Surveyed businesses also perceived significant reductions in obstacles to their operations arising from all infrastructural sectors in this iteration of the survey (see **Figure 13**). This is a reflection, in part, of gradual improvements in infrastructure and service reliability, alongside rising expectations associated with a broad pipeline of planned and ongoing infrastructure investments across the country.

Figure 13: Degree of perceived obstacles impacting businesses



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Notes: Rating is on a 5-point scale, where 5 = no obstacle and 1 = severe obstacle. Arrows denote whether the value of the variable is significantly higher / lower than in the previous survey.

South Africa's commitment to addressing climate-related impacts is increasingly anchored in infrastructure-focused energy, logistics, and regulatory reforms. For example, in January 2025, the Electricity Regulation Amendment Act went into full effect, establishing an independent transmission company to modernise the national grid and facilitate the integration of diverse renewable energy sources.[84] This shift is complemented by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure formally adopting green building standards in November 2025, mandating that all new government building projects and precinct developments meet a minimum 4-star green rating to improve energy efficiency and structural resilience.[85] Furthermore, following the announcement by the Minister of Electricity and Energy in May 2025, the procurement of 616 megawatts (MW) of battery storage advanced toward commercial close in December 2025, providing critical stabilisation for a grid susceptible to climate-induced variability.[86,87] These multi-sectoral efforts align with a broader strategy to modernise the nation's logistics and energy backbones, ensuring physical infrastructure remains a resilient enabler for the manufacturing and services sectors.

At the policy and planning level, South Africa progressed climate governance in October 2025 by submitting its revised Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0), which explicitly integrates infrastructure resilience and water-supply security as core adaptation priorities.[88] During the Conference of the Parties (COP 30) in November 2025, the government championed a G20 legacy initiative to bridge the global water investment gap, emphasising that resilient bulk water systems, such as the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) Phase II, are vital for business continuity.[89] Furthermore, the Climate Change Act came into force in March 2025, followed by the publication of draft National Greenhouse Gas Carbon Budget and Mitigation Plan Regulations in July 2025 to institutionalise sectoral carbon limits.[90,91] Taken together, these initiatives aim to mitigate climate-related infrastructure risks while improving the long-term reliability and competitiveness of the South African economy.

84 International Trade Administration, 2025. Available here.
85 The SA REIT Association, 2025. Available here.
86 The Ministry of Electricity and Energy, 2025. Available here.
87 Engineering News, 2025. Available here.
88 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2025. Available here.
89 AIP Water, 2025. Available here.
90 Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, 2025. Available here.
91 Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, 2025. Available here.

7 TRADE OPENNESS

South Africa's trade openness has improved, driven by surveyed businesses' growing confidence in their ability to increase both imports and exports.

SOUTH AFRICA'S TRADE OPENNESS INDEX SCORE

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

The trade openness index score can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates a high burden of obstacles inhibiting trade, 50 indicates a moderate burden of obstacles inhibiting trade and 100 indicates a low burden of obstacles inhibiting trade. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's trade openness index score slightly improved to 62 from 55 in August 2024.

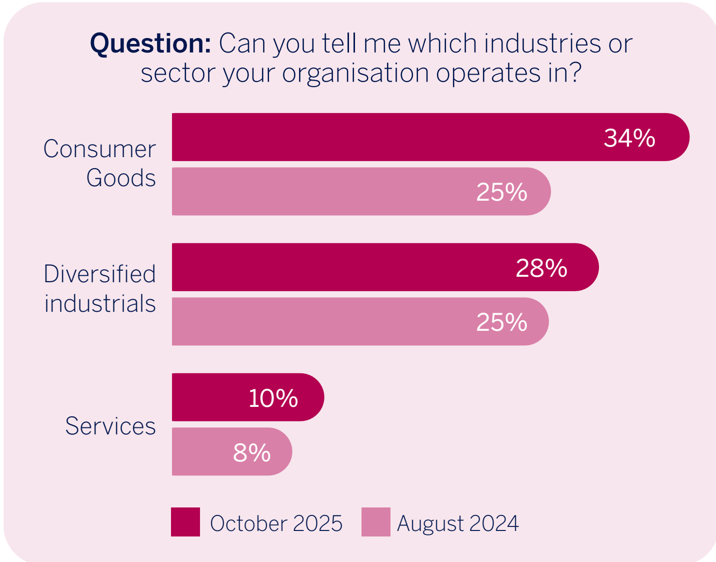
Most surveyed businesses source their goods domestically rather than internationally. The majority of surveyed businesses (88%) buy the goods they sell or use for production domestically, which represents a significant increase from 70% in the August 2024 survey. Of these businesses, 62% source their goods directly from local manufacturers or farmers. Similarly, among the surveyed importers, the majority (79%) source their goods directly from international manufacturers or farmers.

88% of surveyed importers buy the goods they sell or use for production domestically.

Surveyed importers primarily source goods from Europe and Asia. Among surveyed importers, the majority sourced their goods from Europe (52%) and Asia (48%), with some also sourcing from North America (31%). This result aligns with data at the aggregate country level. South Africa's aggregate import data from October 2025 shows that most imports came from Asia (approximately ZAR 827 billion/ USD 50 billion), followed by Europe (approximately ZAR 418 billion/ USD 26 billion). The majority of surveyed importers operate in the consumer goods industry, which increased to 34% in this iteration of the survey compared to 25% in August 2024 (see **Figure 14**). This growth may be partially attributed to increased consumer spending in 2025 compared to 2024. For instance, South Africans spent approximately ZAR 324 billion (USD 19 billion) on fast-moving consumer goods in the first six months of 2025, an increase of 7.4% compared to the same period in 2024.[92]

Surveyed importers are increasingly sourcing their inputs from outside Africa. As the share of inputs imported from the rest of Africa (ROA) decreased, imports from the rest of the world (ROW) increased to 85% in this iteration of the survey compared to 81% in August 2024. Germany and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) showed the most consistent growth, maintaining positive trends over the past three survey iterations (see **Figure 15**). The increase in imports from Germany is partially attributed to South African businesses' growing demand for sustainable and high-tech solutions in sectors like the green economy, waste management, and smart farming.[93] Consequently, South African businesses are increasingly sourcing innovative technology from German suppliers.

Figure 14: Surveyed importers' main industry/ sector of operation



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

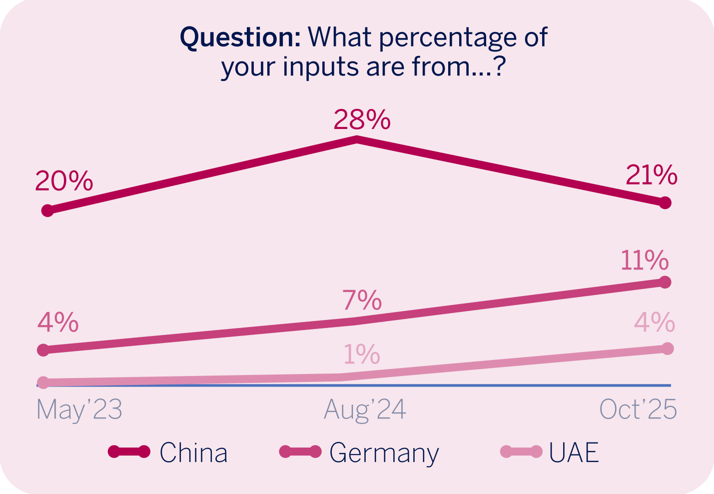
> You will always find Chinese products in our countries because China subsidises their manufacturers significantly.
>
> Representative from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

> If a business is exporting its products and they are charged a tariff in a partner country, that means the products will be more expensive than products that are manufactured locally. So, the risk is that your products might not be bought.
>
> Representative from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

92 Digimix, 2025. Available here.

93 Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, 2025. Available here.

Figure 15: Surveyed importers' source of inputs by country



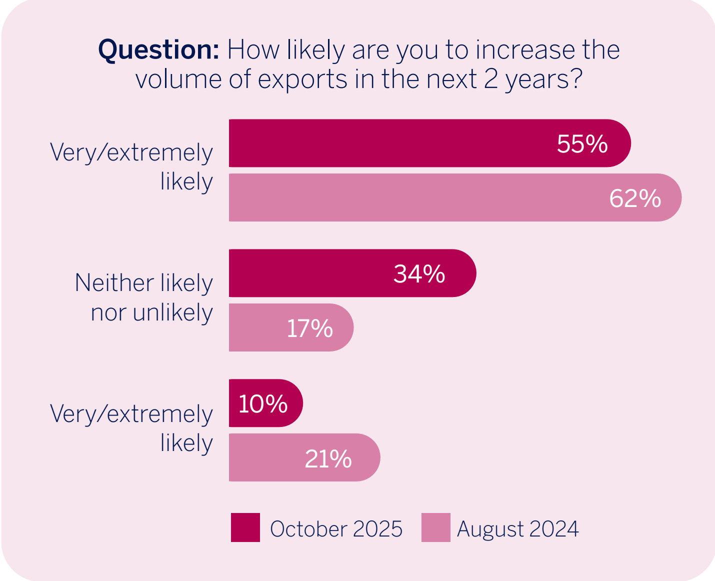
Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

China remains the leading source of imported inputs despite a recent decline. China maintained its position as the top country from which surveyed businesses import inputs, though the share decreased to 21% from 28% in August 2024. This finding, however, is contrary to data at the aggregate country level, which shows that South Africa's imports from China increased by approximately USD 98.5 million (5.43%) between November 2024 and November 2025, rising from USD 1.81 billion to USD 1.91Billion.[94] That said, the survey reveals that the majority of surveyed businesses (38%) import raw materials from China. Both surveyed importers and exporters cited good quality products as an extremely important factor when doing business with China.

Most surveyed importers expect to increase their import volumes over the next two years. The majority of surveyed importers remained optimistic about increasing their import volumes, though there was a 17-percentage point increase in those who reported being neutral about the likelihood of growth (see **Figure 16**). Most surveyed importers cited that the proportion of their inputs from China and the United Kingdom (UK) is likely to increase. Specifically, the expected proportion from China increased by 14-percentage points, while the UK increased by 10-percentage points.

94 OEC, 2025. Available here.

Figure 16: Importers' perceptions of their likelihood to increase import volumes over the next 2 years (%)



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Most surveyed exporters remain optimistic about increasing export volumes despite recent challenges. The majority of surveyed exporters are optimistic about their export volumes increasing over the next two years. However, those reporting that an increase was likely decreased to 45% in this iteration of the survey from 71% in August 2024. This decline may be partially attributed to the 30% US tariff imposed on South African exports on August 7, 2025, which made South African goods more expensive and less competitive in the American market.[95] The situation was compounded by the expiration of South Africa's African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) membership in September 2025, which ended decades of duty-free access to the American market, with renewal remaining uncertain.[96] Despite this setback, there was a notable 39-percentage point decrease in surveyed businesses that considered increased exports unlikely (either very unlikely or extremely unlikely), while those who were indifferent increased by 12-percentage points. This cautious optimism may be attributed to positive economic projections from major trading partners. The IMF expects the Euro area to grow by 1.1%, the US to expand by 2.1%, and China to achieve 4.2% growth. These markets represent critical destinations for South African goods despite ongoing US tariff negotiations.[97] Furthermore, South Africa is actively working to reduce its dependence on traditional Western markets by pursuing opportunities within the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to access intra-African markets and negotiating new agricultural agreements with Japan, China, and Thailand.[98]

95 BBC, 2025. Available here.
96 The American Chamber of Commerce, 2025. Available here.

Surveyed exporters are increasingly shipping goods outside of Africa. Among surveyed exporters, the share of South African exports to the rest of the world (ROW) increased to 46% in this iteration of the survey compared to 37% in August 2024. While the rest of Africa (ROA) remained the destination for the majority of exports (54%), this represented a 9-percentage point decrease from August 2024. Singapore was a major driver of the increased exports to the ROW, with the proportion of exports to Singapore growing by 10-percentage points from the August 2024 survey (see **Figure 17**). Notably, this trend aligns with data at the aggregate country level, which shows that South African exports to Singapore increased by ZAR 1.12 billion (USD 68 million), representing a 162% increase between October 2024 and October 2025. This is because they grew from ZAR 696 Million (USD 42 million in October 2024 to ZAR 1.82 billion (USD 110 million) in October 2025, and were mainly driven by exports of Chromium Ore, Acyclic Hydrocarbons and Raw Nickel.[99]

Figure 17: Importers' perceptions of their likelihood to increase import volumes over the next 2 years (%)

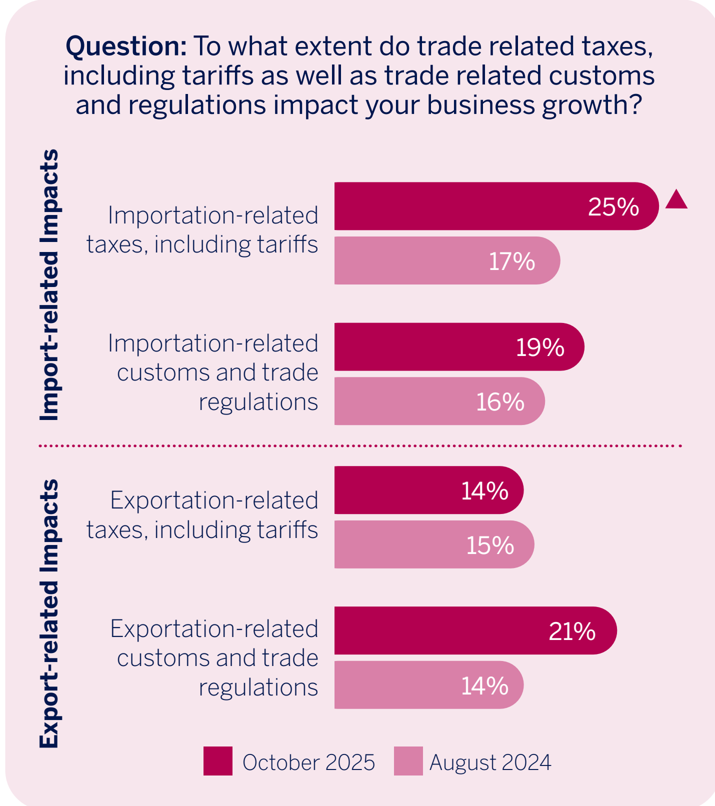
Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

97 Standard Bank, 2025. Available here.
98 Invest - time, 2025. Available here.
99 OEC, 2025. Available here.

Trade-related taxes and regulations are increasingly constraining surveyed businesses' growth. The majority of surveyed businesses reported an increase in the negative impact of trade-related taxes, including tariffs, as well as customs and regulations on their growth (see **Figure 18**). Among surveyed importers, there was a significant 8-percentage point increase in those who cited being negatively impacted by importation-related taxes and tariffs.

85% of surveyed importers source their inputs from the rest of the World (ROW) (as opposed to fellow African countries).

Figure 18: Impacts of trade-related taxes and customs regulations on import and export operations for surveyed businesses



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

8 TRADERS' FINANCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND ACCESS TO FINANCE

Surveyed businesses in South Africa perceived access to credit as significantly easier, enabled by the SARB cutting the repo rate several times in 2025.

SOUTH AFRICA'S ACCESS TO CREDIT INDEX SCORE

October 2025 | August 2024

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

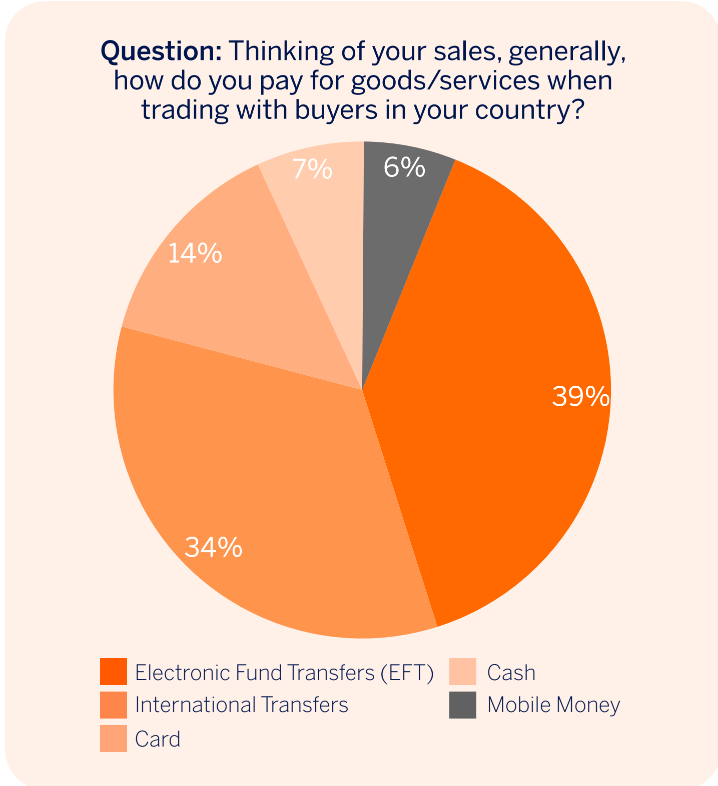
Access to finance can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates extreme difficulty in accessing finance, 50 neutrality, and 100 indicates no difficulty in accessing finance. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's access to finance index score significantly increased to 62 from 49 in August 2024. This means that surveyed businesses in South Africa generally perceived it significantly easier to access credit in this iteration of the survey compared to August 2024.

Electronic funds transfers (EFTs) and international transfers remain the most preferred payment methods for cross-border sales among surveyed businesses. Together, these payment methods account for 73% of payments made for cross-border sales (see **Figure 19**). The high utilisation of EFTs was mostly driven by surveyed big businesses whose proportion of payments for cross-border sales increased to 54% in this iteration of the survey from 40% in August 2024. Conversely, surveyed corporate businesses drove the increased use of international transfers, whose proportion of payments for cross-border sales increased to 48% from 30% in August 2024. These survey results indicate that larger enterprises are increasingly leveraging formal, digital financial infrastructure to secure their international trade flows.

In contrast, surveyed small businesses shifted toward cash for their cross-border sales. The proportion of payments for cross-border sales made using cash among surveyed small businesses increased to 75% from 15% in the August 2024 survey. This increased reliance on cash for cross-border sales among small surveyed businesses was possibly driven by the need to bypass the high costs and operational hurdles of formal payment corridors. Findings from recent technical assessments indicate that in critical channels like the South Africa-Zimbabwe corridor, remittances are slow and costs remain as high as 13%, far exceeding the G20 target of 3%. This cash dominance is largely driven by a lack of confidence in local currencies and the inability of many traders or migrants to access formal financial services.[100]

100 International Monetary Fund, 2025. Available here.

Figure 19: The proportion of cross-border sales by payment method



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

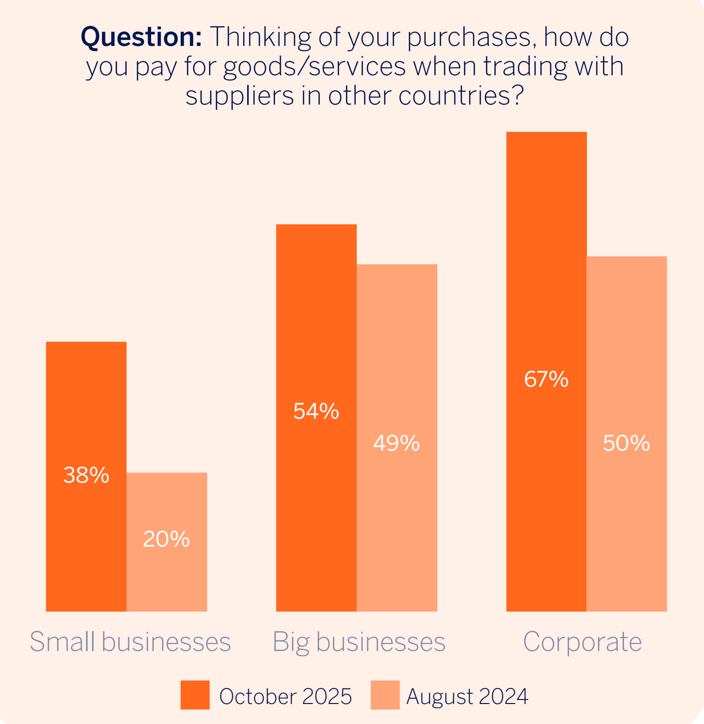
> While AI and blockchain make running a business easier, they represent an advantage that comes with a high cost, hence only established companies with sufficient capital can afford these technologies. This means that SMEs are left behind because they cannot afford the necessary access to technology to remain competitive.
>
> Representative from the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition

The shift toward cash for cross-border sales among South African small businesses in 2025 could have resulted from the decommissioning of low-value EFT payments within the Common Monetary Area (CMA). As of September 30, 2024, the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) and its counterparts in Namibia, Lesotho, and Eswatini stopped treating regional transfers as domestic transactions, mandating that they be processed as international payments via the SADC-RTGS or SWIFT networks.[101] This change introduced significant friction for SMEs, including higher transaction fees, longer settlement times, and new mandatory Balance of Payments (BoP) reporting in 2025. For many small traders, the administrative burden and increased costs of digital channels outweighed the benefits, leading to a resurgence in cash-based transactions to maintain the speed and profitability of their cross-border operations.

An additional reason for the reliance on cash for cross-border sales among small businesses is the fact that the South African government introduced the draft AML/CTF Amendment Bill in December 2024, which led to its successful removal from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in October 2025.[102.103] This legislation sought to establish stricter reporting timelines and mandate the public disclosure of beneficial ownership for all legal entities. For small businesses, however, the bill introduced immediate administrative requirements by requiring the verification of funds for high-risk clients every three years and the submission of Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs) within just 15 days.[104] These stringent regulations effectively raised the barrier to entry for formal digital trade, as many smaller firms lacked the dedicated compliance teams needed to navigate the new legal landscape. Consequently, the threat of penalties for non-compliance and the complexity of digital reporting could have incentivised small businesses to remain in the informal, cash-based economy to maintain operational flexibility.

International transfers are the most preferred payment method for cross-border purchases, increasing to 83% in this iteration of the survey from 75% in August 2024. The increased adoption of international transfers for cross-border purchases was evident across all surveyed businesses (see **Figure 20**). The mandatory November 2025 deadline for ISO 20022 migration served as a critical turning point that solidified international transfers as the primary channel for cross-border commerce. Effective 22 November 2025, Swift officially decommissioned legacy MT103 and MT202 payment messages, making the richer, XML-based "MX" format the exclusive standard for the interbank network**.** This transition mandated South African banks to retire outdated messaging "pipes" in favour of a universal data language that carries significantly more structured information, such as detailed beneficiary data and purpose codes. By mandating these high-fidelity data formats, the migration—which was a key milestone in the ongoing work to modernise South Africa's national payment system (NPS)—ensured interoperability across the financial industry.[105] Consequently, the convergence of this technical deadline and South Africa's concurrent exit from the FATF greylist created a highly reliable and secure environment for international purchases.

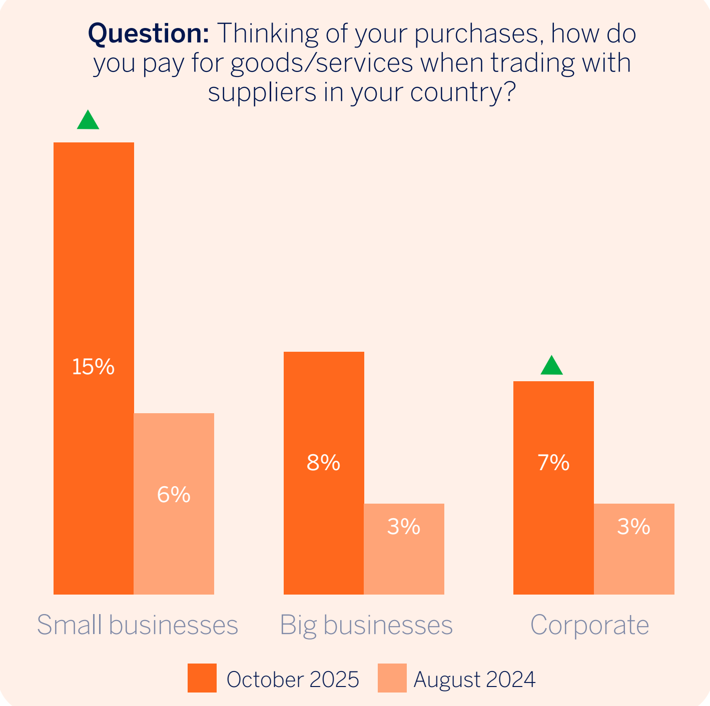
Figure 20: Proportion of cross-border purchases by surveyed business segment using international transfers



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

With regard to domestic transactions, EFTs and cards are the most preferred payment methods among surveyed businesses. The preference for EFTs among surveyed businesses increased significantly to 97% and 96% in this iteration of the survey from 86% and 88% in August 2024 for domestic sales and purchases respectively. Similarly, the adoption of cards increased to 92% and 87% from 80% and 79% in August 2024 for domestic sales and purchases, respectively. The utilisation of mobile money for domestic transactions also increased significantly to 14% and 13% in both from 5% in August 2024 for local sales and purchases, respectively. The increased use of mobile money was evident across all surveyed business segments. Similarly, the proportion of payments for domestic purchases made using mobile money increased across all surveyed business segments (see **Figure 21**).

Figure 21: Proportion of domestic purchases by surveyed business segment using mobile money



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

14% of the payments for domestic sales among surveyed businesses was made through mobile money compared to 5% in August 2024.

"Developing digital trade protocols requires one to consider the reality that about 60% of traders in Africa are informal, and many cannot even access a basic computer, let alone utilize advanced technologies like blockchain."

Representative from The Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance

101 South African Reserve Bank, 2024. Available here.
102 Relycomply, 2025. Available here.
103 National Treasury, 2025. Available here.
104 Fintech Global, 2025. Available here.
105 Standard bank, 2025. Available here.

This dominance of digital payment methods in domestic transactions is hardly surprising given the fact that South Africa's digital payment landscape experienced significant acceleration, primarily guided by the South African Reserve Bank's (SARB) Digital Payments Roadmap, which was published in April 2024 with the finalisation happening in 2025.[106] This plan focused on dismantling long-standing barriers to digital adoption, such as low bank account usage and a high reliance on physical cash. A major milestone in this transition was the Payments Ecosystem Modernisation (PEM) Programme, which began opening the National Payment System to non-bank fintech providers, thereby increasing competition and lowering transaction costs for small businesses.[107] Additionally, the launch of Digital Financial Identity (DFID) pilots streamlined the traditionally complex Know Your Customer (KYC) verification processes, facilitating easier access for underserved populations. The DFID entailed moving away from rigid, paper-based requirements such as physical utility bills for proof of residence toward the use of verified digital attributes, thereby establishing a client's identity through real-time biometric features and secure digital credentials.[108] These structural reforms, combined with the expansion of real-time systems like PayShap, have been instrumental in modernising South Africa's financial ecosystem and improving business confidence in the state's role as a digital enabler.

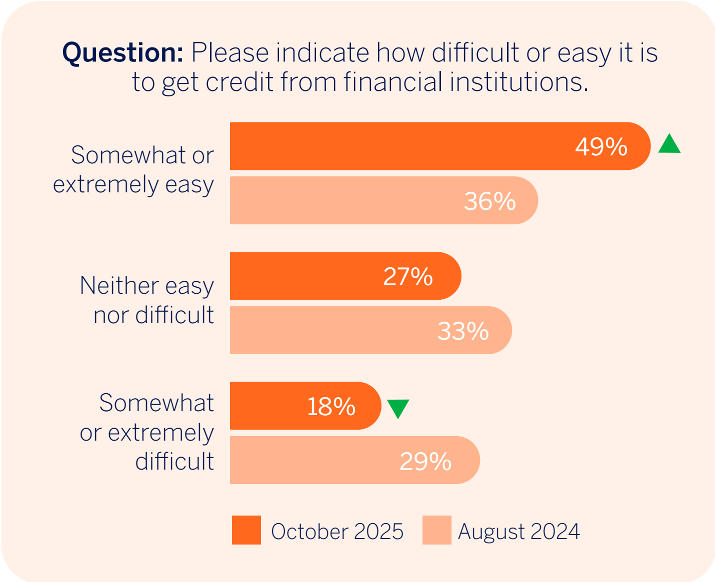
The surge in South African digital trade in 2025 was also driven by a drop in costs for small businesses. Through SoftPOS technology, any smartphone can now act as a card machine, removing the need for expensive hardware and allowing even the smallest traders to accept digital payments easily. QR codes also turned into a primary payment method for domestic trade by making different apps work together under a single standard. The industry also simplified scanning to pay, making it as trusted and common as traditional card swiping for both customers and informal vendors.[109]

49% of surveyed businesses perceived access to credit as easier compared to 36% in October 2024

106 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
107 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
108 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
109 Puzzl, 2025. Available here.

Access to credit was perceived significantly easier in this iteration of the survey compared to August 2024. Surveyed businesses that perceived it to be easy (either somewhat easy or extremely easy) to access credit increased significantly, while those that perceived it as difficult (either somewhat difficult or extremely difficult) declined significantly as compared to the August 2024 survey (see **Figure 22**). This trend was mostly driven by surveyed small businesses whose perception of access to credit being easy increased significantly to 53% from 34% in August 2024. Similarly, their perception of access to credit as difficult declined significantly from 36% in August 2024 to 17%.

Figure 22: Ease of access to credit



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: Numbers may not add up to exactly 100% due to "don't know" and "refused" responses not being included.

These positive perceptions may, in part, be because in 2025, the South African financial environment was defined by a shift toward cheaper capital, as moderating inflation and subsequent interest rate cuts by the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) eased credit conditions. As headline inflation cooled toward the mid-point of the SARB's 3% to 6% target range, the central bank initiated a series of repo rate reductions. SARB cut the repo rate several times in 2025, bringing it to 7.00% as of September 2025, significantly lower than its previous decade-highs.[110] This monetary easing reduced the debt-service burden for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), whose interest-sensitive repayments became more manageable, thereby lowering their default risk. Furthermore, this more favourable borrowing environment aligned with the Digital Payments Roadmap's goals of supporting MSMEs, allowing them to invest, enabled by digital infrastructure.[111] The improved funding landscape is also a result of unprecedented competition, including the rise of neobanks and alternative lenders, which forced the entire financial sector to move away from collateral-heavy models toward AI-driven, cash-flow lending that is faster and more accessible for the SMEs.[112]

The overall proportion of surveyed businesses with credit agreements with suppliers saw a decline from 51% in August 2024 to 46% this iteration of the survey. The decline was primarily driven by surveyed small and corporate businesses whose credit arrangements with suppliers declined from 41% and 79% in August 2024 to 38% and 72%, respectively. However, surveyed big businesses' credit arrangements with suppliers increased to 68% from 56% in August 2024. This showcases their continued reliance on supplier credit to leverage their superior creditworthiness and strengthen their operational resilience.

Surveyed businesses identified a deeper understanding of their operations as the most critical way financial institutions could provide support to them (at 74%). The provision of insurance for goods was cited by 71% of the surveyed businesses as important. Other ways in which financial institutions could support them—each mentioned by 69% of surveyed businesses—included introduction to buyers and suppliers in other countries, offering flexible loan terms and quicker access to funding. These results show that businesses need financial institutions to act as trusted advisors who can simplify the complex world of international trade.

110 Business Report, 2025. Available here.
111 South African Reserve Bank, 2025. Available here.
112 MD Finance, 2025. Available here.

STANDARD BANK'S OFFERINGS

Intra-Africa Trade Solutions

Standard Bank's Intra-Africa Trade Solutions enables market access for African businesses seeking import opportunities.

Through our Import Solution, we supported a Zimbabwean mining client who required specialised chemicals and faced challenges with an international supplier. We sourced a South African supplier offering the same quality product at a significantly reduced cost, improving their operational efficiency.

SimplyBlu

Standard Bank's SimplyBlu offering empowers South Africa's small and micro businesses with an easy, all-in-one digital platform that integrates payments, stock management and online sales.

By enabling card acceptance and creating digital records of every transaction, it helps entrepreneurs—especially in townships—improve cashflow visibility, reduce losses and make informed decisions. SimplyBlu replaces manual processes, expands market reach and strengthens business resilience, allowing spaza shops, salons and informal traders to operate more competitively and grow sustainably.

9 FOREIGN TRADE AND TRADING IN AFRICA

Surveyed South African businesses are finding it increasingly easier to trade both within Africa and globally.

SOUTH AFRICA'S EASE OF TRADE INDEX SCORE

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

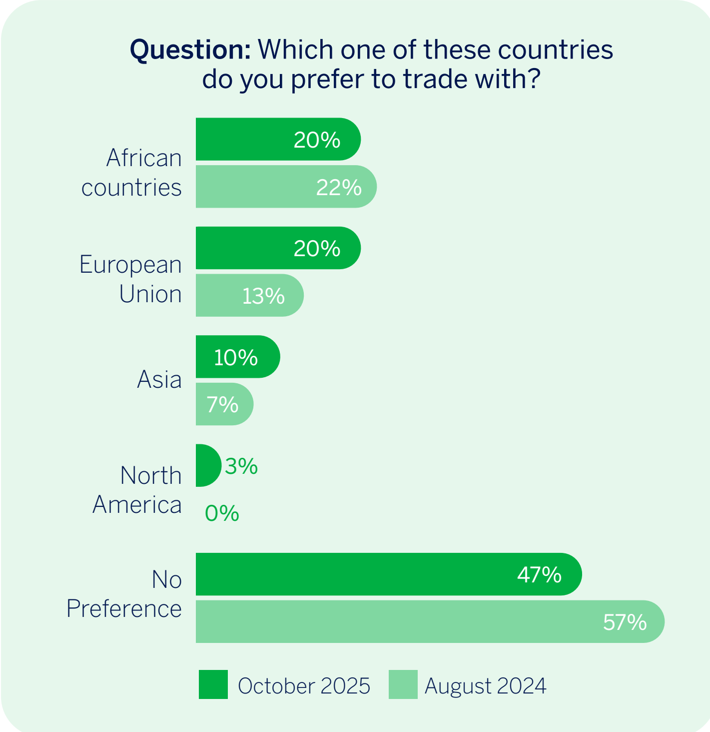
Ease of trade can vary between 0 and 100, where 0 indicates an extreme difficulty in trading with other countries, 50 neutrality and 100 indicates an ease of trade with other countries. In the October 2025 SB ATB survey results, South Africa's ease of trade index score significantly increased to 58 from 42 in August 2024. This means that compared to August 2024, surveyed businesses in South Africa found it significantly easier to trade with other countries in this iteration of the survey.

African countries and the European Union remain the preferred trading partners for surveyed businesses in South Africa. The majority of surveyed businesses cited African countries and the European Union as their preferred trading partners. However, the share preferring African countries declined by 2-percentage points from August 2024, while the share citing the European Union as a preferred trading partner increased to 20% in this iteration of the survey, compared to 13% in August 2024 (see **Figure 23**). This increase was largely driven by corporates, as the share of corporates that preferred trading with the EU increased to 50%, compared to 12% in August 2024. Surveyed businesses cited several reasons for preferring the European Union: fast response time (50%), good quality products (50%), and simple purchase/selling processes (50%). In contrast, the share of surveyed businesses citing North America as a preferred trading partner is still very low (see **Figure 23**). The three top reasons surveyed businesses gave for not trading with US-based companies were high shipping costs (52%), high tariffs and taxes (38%), and longer lead times (24%).

Surveyed businesses have a positive outlook on trading with the rest of the world. The share of surveyed businesses that cited trading with the rest of the world (ROW) as very/extremely easy increased significantly to 37% in this iteration of the survey, compared to 15% in August 2024. Additionally, the share of surveyed businesses that cited trading with the ROW as very/extremely difficult decreased to 26% from 38% in August 2024. The top three reasons surveyed businesses cited for finding trading with the ROW as easy were high quality products (37%), easy trading procedures (24%), and cheaper products (23%) (see **Figure 24**).

37% of surveyed businesses found trading with the rest of the World (ROW) as very/ extremely easy.

Figure 23: Preferred trading partners



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

68% of surveyed businesses are aware of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA).

> "The Africa-Europe relationship is one of the traditional markets with well-developed and long-term partnerships. Africa would like to maintain that relationship, especially in terms of trade and exports to the EU."
>
> Representative from The Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance

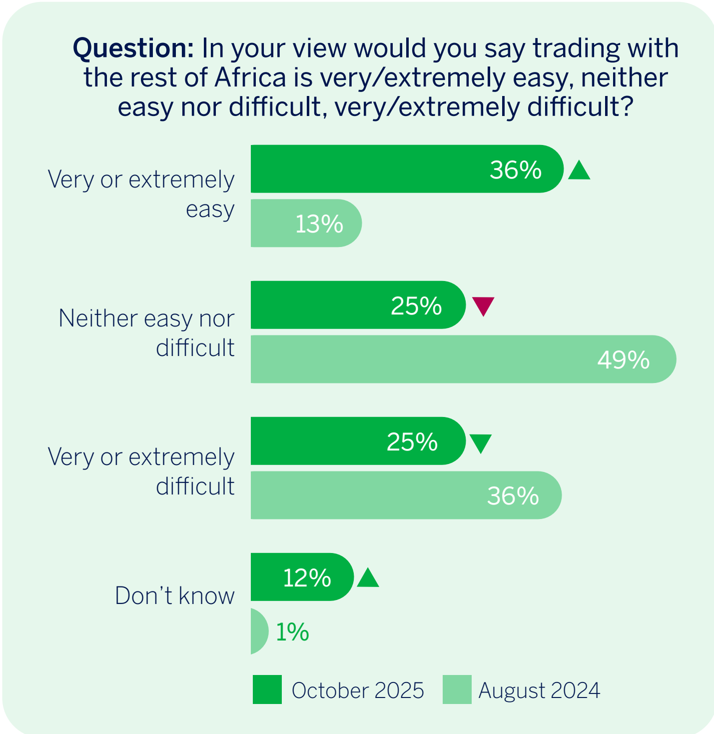
Figure 24: Top 3 reasons for trading with the ROW

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

The majority of surveyed businesses cited trading with the rest of Africa as easy. The share of surveyed businesses that cited trading with the rest of Africa (ROA) as very/extremely easy increased to 36% in this iteration of the survey, compared to 13% in August 2024 (see **Figure 25**). The top three reasons surveyed businesses cited for finding trading with the ROA to be easy were high-quality products (35%), cheaper products (28%), and easy trading procedures (28%). Additionally, factors that were previously obstacles to trading with the ROA have become less problematic, with the most notable improvements in power supply, lack of trade investment, and road infrastructure. The improvement in power supply is supported by the fact that in 2025, South Africa went 230 days without loadshedding, the longest period compared to previous years. This was attributed to stronger generation performance and consistent maintenance, which enabled the country to meet demand.[113] Regarding road infrastructure, improvements were partially driven by various infrastructure projects, including the South African National Roads Agency Limited's (SANRAL) upgrade of the N1 and N2, which had been plagued by congestion and road accidents. Particularly problematic was the Key Ridge section on the N3, which has a very steep gradient and has led to numerous truck accidents. These routes are critical for freight transportation, with 70% of freight that moves on land going through the N2-N3 corridor to the ports of Durban and Richards Bay.[114]

FAST FACT:
Export performance is improving as energy reliability returns.

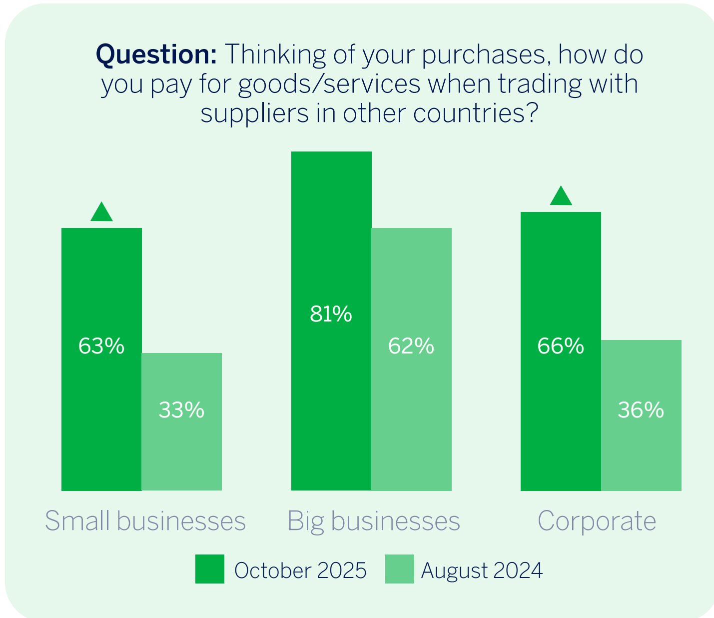
Figure 25: Perception of trading with the rest of Africa (ROA)



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Awareness of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) has increased significantly among surveyed businesses. The share of surveyed businesses that reported being aware of the AfCFTA increased significantly to 68%, compared to 39% in August 2024. This increase was largely driven by small businesses and corporates, which showed significant increases in this iteration of the survey compared to August 2024 (see **Figure 26**). This notable rise in awareness may be partially attributed to initiatives which brought the AfCFTA into the spotlight. These included several preparatory activities associated with South Africa's 2025 G20 and B20 Presidencies. For example, working group discussions on the AfCFTA took place under the Trade and Investment taskforce, particularly during the B20 launch event held in Cape Town on February 24-25, 2025.[115] Additionally, the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) 2025 roadshow was launched in Johannesburg in June 2025 as part of preparations for the main Intra-African Trade Fair held later in Algiers, Algeria. The South African launch brought together officials from Afreximbank and private sector representatives to help local businesses understand how to take advantage of opportunities created by the AfCFTA, with a focus on positioning businesses for growth and expanding their reach across African markets.[116] The most cited benefit of the AfCFTA among surveyed businesses (28%) was that it allows for greater competition, which increased significantly from 18% in August 2024.

Figure 26: Awareness of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)



Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

"The African Continental Free Trade Area has expanded our market access because now we are able to go to more countries than we are accustomed to in the continent. It has also fostered our own growth as well as the country's growth."

Representative from the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA)

113 Townpress South Africa, 2025. Available here.

114 KZN Industrial Business News, 2025. Available here.

115 Afreximbank, 2025. Available here.

116 Ibid

CONCLUSION

South Africa's trade landscape is characterised by a significant increase in internal business confidence and structural resilience, even as the country navigated a shift in its relative regional standing. South Africa moved to 2nd position in the overall SB ATB rankings, ending a long tenure at the top. This shift was linked to external factors, such as the imposition of 30% US reciprocal tariffs in August 2025 and the expiration of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in September 2025. However, the domestic story is one of robust recovery; business confidence increased significantly to 69 from 56 in August 2024, fueled by the most stable energy period in years and the country's formal exit from the FATF "grey list." This delisting, combined with an S&P Global credit rating upgrade to 'BB' with a positive outlook, also revitalised international financial credibility and lowered the compliance burden for cross-border transactions.

The domestic landscape entered a phase of structural revitalisation, as a series of market-liberalising reforms aimed to guarantee competitive advantages for South African firms were pursued. The current environment reflected the impact of deregulated energy and logistics markets, where sectors including electricity and shipping were opened up to more private players to enhance efficiency. Surveyed businesses reported a significant uplift in power supply reliability, linked to the "Just Energy Transition" and the decentralisation of the national grid. This newfound stability was mirrored in the maritime sector, where private-sector participation models successfully optimised port throughput, slashing vessel waiting times at the Durban Container Terminal from 18 days to a mere 48–72 hours. These efficiency gains were being underwritten by a supportive monetary environment. The South African Reserve Bank pivoted to an easing cycle, reducing the repo rate to 6.75%, effectively lowering the cost of doing business. Furthermore, the integration of the AI-powered Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) and the surge in AfCFTA awareness to 68% from 39% in August 2024 signal that South Africa is aggressively digitising its trade corridors to maintain its status as the continent's primary commercial gateway.

South Africa's strategic trajectory is increasingly defined by its emergence as a global green industrial pioneer and a central architect of the new African trade order. Beyond traditional mining, the country leveraged its G20 Presidency to champion high-growth sectors. This was a strategic effort to leverage its role as the first African host to shift the global narrative toward a more inclusive, just, and sustainable economic order that benefited emerging economies thereby contributing to the positive sentiments among surveyed businesses whereby perceptions of government support for trade increased significantly to 71% in October 2025 from 55% in August 2024. This move was reinforced by a record USD 12 billion in agricultural exports for the first nine months of 2025 and the launch of the South African Renewable Energy Masterplan (SAREM). This industrial pivot was supported by deep-seated institutional reforms that rebranded the country as a destination for stability-seeking investors. South Africa positioned itself as a leader in high-value exports like sustainable aviation fuels and green hydrogen. By doing so, it successfully transitioned from a commodity-dependent exporter to a sophisticated, technology-driven trade hub.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB) Country Ranking for Issue 5, 2025

The Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB) scores are an aggregate of the Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB) scores and the Standard Bank Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB) scores. Countries are ranked against each other, i.e., relative scores to each other. This is pegged on a scale of 0 - 100. When indexed between this range, Mozambique has the highest Tradability Index, while Zambia has the lowest. This does not imply that one cannot trade in Zambia or that Mozambique is perfect; it only implies that at a common starting point of 0 and a maximum point of 100, this is how the two markets fared.

SB ATB scores remained the same for Uganda, while over half of the countries saw their scores increase from August 2024 (see **Table 2**).

Countries that have retained their ranking from August 2024:

- Nigeria (5th position)
- Tanzania (4th position)
- Uganda (9th position)

Countries that have improved in their ranking from August 2024:

- Angola (10th to 8th position)
- Ghana (7th to 6th position)
- Mozambique (3rd to 1st position)

Countries that have declined in their ranking from August 2024:

- Kenya (6th to 7th position)
- Namibia (2nd to 3rd position)
- **South Africa (1st to 2nd position)**
- Zambia (8th to 10th position)

Table 2: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer (SB ATB) scores by country

Africa Trade Barometer (ATB) Score			ATB Ranking	
			Aug '24	Oct '25
Angola	10	0	10	8
Ghana	24	14	7	6
Kenya	21	16	6	7
Mozambique	100	29	3	1
Namibia	44	43	2	3
Nigeria	30	19	5	5
South Africa	90	100	1	2
Tanzania	31	25	4	4
Uganda	7	7	9	9
Zambia	0	13	8	10

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: The scores denote the performance of each country relative to the full country list on the specified measures.

Appendix 2: Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB) Country Ranking for Issue 5, 2025

The Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB) scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the selected indicators collected from existing secondary data sources and reported facts.

SB QTB scores increased for Ghana, Mozambique, and Nigeria, while Angola's score remained the same. Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia had their scores decline from August 2024 (see **Table 3**).

Countries that have retained their ranking from August 2024:

- Angola (10th position)
- Nigeria (4th position)
- Tanzania (7th position)
- Uganda (9th position)

Countries that have improved in their ranking from August 2024:

- Ghana (8th to 5th position)
- Mozambique (3rd to 1st position)

Countries that have declined in their ranking from August 2024:

- Kenya (5th to 6th position)
- Namibia (2nd to 3rd position)
- **South Africa (1st to 2nd position)**
- Zambia (6th to 8th position)

Table 3: Standard Bank 3-Year Quantitative Trade Barometer (SB QTB) scores by country

	Africa Trade Barometer (ATB) Score		ATB Ranking	
			Aug '24	Oct '25
Angola	0	0	10	10
Ghana	23	20	8	5
Kenya	19	22	5	6
Mozambique	100	37	3	1
Namibia	36	45	2	3
Nigeria	30	25	4	4
South Africa	82	100	1	2
Tanzania	16	20	7	7
Uganda	9	11	9	9
Zambia	9	21	6	8

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: The scores denote the performance of each country relative to the full country list on the specified measures.

Appendix 3: Standard Bank Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB) Country Ranking for Issue 5, 2025

The Standard Bank Firm Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB) scores and ranking by country are the averages of all the data collected from the primary research surveys conducted with 2 218 businesses.

The SB STB scores have remained unchanged for Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia in this wave for all countries, while all other countries saw their scores rise (see **Table 4**).

Countries that have retained their ranking from August 2024:

- Mozambique (9th position)
- **South Africa (4th position)**
- Tanzania (1st position)
- Zambia (10th position)

Countries that have improved in their ranking from May 2024:

- Angola (3rd to 2nd position)
- Kenya (7th to 5th position)
- Nigeria (8th to 7th position)

Countries that have declined in their ranking from August 2024:

- Ghana (5th to 6th position)
- Namibia (2nd to 3rd position)
- Uganda (6th to 8th position)

Table 4: Standard Bank Survey Trade Barometer (SB STB) scores by country

Africa Trade Barometer (ATB) Score			ATB Ranking		
			Aug '24	Oct '25	
Angola	81	79	3	2	▲
Ghana	57	37	5	6	▼
Kenya	64	34	7	5	▲
Mozambique	33	25	9	9	●
Namibia	79	79	2	3	▼
Nigeria	55	31	8	7	▲
South Africa	78	44	4	4	●
Tanzania	100	100	1	1	●
Uganda	44	34	6	8	▼
Zambia	0	0	10	10	●

Source: Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5

Note: The scores denote the performance of each country relative to the full country list on the specified measures.

Appendix 4: Appendix 4: Selected Macroeconomic Indicators for South Africa

This appendix is structured around the thematic categories of the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer: macroeconomic stability, trade openness and foreign trade, access to finance and infrastructure. These are important in evaluating the trade environment and prospects of a country. Within each theme, specific indicators have been selected to quantify elements contributing to the overall trade climate. The data spans from 2020 to the estimated values for 2025 and forecasted values for 2026, offering a temporal perspective on trends and potential future directions.

Table 5: South Africa macroeconomic overview

Thematic Categories	Indicator	Unit	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025f	2026f
Macroeconomic Stability	GDP per capita	USD	5 630	6 920	6 640	6 130	6 360	6 670	6 830
	Nominal GDP	USD' Billions	338.29	420.12	405.27	377.78	406.45	443.71	450.00
	Real GDP growth rate	%	-6.2	4.9	2.1	0.8	0.5	1.2	1.4
	Inflation rate	%	3.3	4.5	6.9	6	4.4	3.2	3.4
	Exchange rate stability (USD/ZAR)	ZAR per USD	16.5	15.7	16.9	18.5	18.9	17.9	16.7
	Lending Interest Rate	%	7.7	7.0	8.8	11.5	11.6	10.6	9.7
	Policy rate	%	4	3.6	5.6	8.1	8.1	7.1	6.2
	Total reserves (includes gold, current USD)	USD, billions	55.0	57.6	60.6	62.5	65.4	63.4	N/A
Trade Openness and Foreign Trade	Trade (exports and imports as % of GDP)	%	50.8	56.0	64.8	65.2	61.7	N/A	N/A
	Balance of Trade*	USD, billions	17.0	30	11.7	3.4	5.2	N/A	
	Current account (% of GDP)	%	2.00	3.7	-0.30	-1.11	-0.7	-0.5	-0.8
	Merchandise of Trade (%of GDP)	%	50.27	56.44	63.68	63.46	58.35	N/A	N/A
	Exports of goods and services	USD, billions	93.2	130.9	135.8	124.7	127.5	N/A	N/A
	Imports of goods and services	USD, billions	78.4	104.9	127.8	123.4	119.5	N/A	N/A
Access to Finance	Domestic credit to private sector (% of GDP)	%	109.1	93.0	91.7	90.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	%	12.3	13	15.4	15.5	13.94	14.3	N/A
	Net official development assistance and official aid received	USD, billions	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Personal remittances received (% of GDP)	%	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	N/A	N/A
	FDI	USD, billions	3.1	40	9.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Infrastructure	Individuals using the internet (% of population)	%	72.1	75.0	75.5	75.7	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Access to electricity (% of population)	%	90	89.3	86.5	87.7	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Mobile cellular subscription (per 100 people)	Ratio	158.4	163.1	160.7	171.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Air transport, freight (million ton-km)	million ton-km	102.4	15.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Container traffic at ports	TEUs***, thousands	4 076	4 415	4 053	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: World Bank Group | Statistics South Africa | ITC Trade Map | IMF | Economics Intelligence Unit | World Bank. Available here.

Note: *Negative values indicate that a country is a net importer, while positive values indicate it is a net exporter. **2025 data points are estimates. 2026 data points are projections ***TEUs refers to the twenty-foot equivalent unit. N/A denotes that the relevant data was unavailable from the specified source.

Appendix 5: Key Results of the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer Issue 5 Survey in South Africa

This appendix presents the key results of the main questions asked to businesses in South Africa as part of the fifth edition of the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer. The results are structured according to the SB ATB thematic categories: macroeconomic stability, trade openness and foreign trade, infrastructure, government support, as well as traders' financial behaviours and their access to finance. **Not all questions in the SB ATB survey are presented here.** The questions selected for inclusion have been chosen for their closed-ended nature and being succinct enough for a concise presentation. Questions pertaining to the general profile of businesses and individual respondents, or those requiring open-ended responses, have been omitted. This approach ensures that the findings detailed in the following table are directly relevant and valuable for interpreting the trade dynamics within the South African context.

Table 6: Key findings of the survey

Thematic Categories	Question	Responses								
Macroeconomic Stability	Thinking of your business turnover over [from 2020 to 2021], please indicate if turnover increased, decreased or remained the same.	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same		Don't know	Refused			
		N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A			
	Thinking ahead [from 2024 to 2025], do you expect business turnover to increase, decrease or remain the same?	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same		Don't know	Refused			
		72%	11%	16%		1%	N/A			
	Thinking ahead [from 2025 to 2026], do you expect business turnover to increase, decrease or remain the same?	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same		Don't know	Refused			
		54%	6%	33%		7%	N/A			
	Please indicate how you feel about the performance of the economy in relation to business in the next 3 years.	Extremely optimistic	Very optimistic	Neutral	Not very optimistic	Not at all Optimistic	Refused	Don't know		
		29%	21%	39%	6%	1%	3%	2%		
Infrastructure	[Road infrastructure] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		15%	22%	27%	23%	13%	N/A	N/A		
	[Water supply] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		15%	17%	31%	25%	25%	N/A	N/A		
	[Telecommunications] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		27%	34%	26%	11%	1%	N/A	0%		
	[Ports] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		18%	27%	24%	17%	7%	6%	0%		
	[Airports] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		26%	23%	26%	15%	2%	6%	2%		
	[Customs and trade regulations] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		19%	26%	31%	14%	5%	3%	3%		
	[Power supply] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		18%	17%	27%	30%	8%	N/A	N/A		
	[Rail infrastructure] How would you rate the quality of the following aspects in your market?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Do not depend on/ use this	Don't know		
		11%	21%	23%	18%	20%	6%	1%		

Thematic Categories	Question	Responses								
Trade Openness and Foreign Trade	How likely are you to increase the volume of imports in the next 2 years?	Extremely likely	Very likely	Moderate impact		Very unlikely	Extremely likely			
		21%	34%	34%		10%	N/A			
	How likely are you to decrease the volume of imports in the next 2 years?	Extremely unlikely	Very unlikely	Moderate impact		Very likely	Extremely likely			
		15%	25%	35%		20%	5%			
	To what extent do importation-related taxes, including tariffs, impact your business growth?	Severe impact	Major impact	Neither likely nor unlikely		Minimal impact	No impact			
		3%	22%	28%		6%	40%			
	To what extent do importation-related customs and trade regulations impact your business growth?	Severe impact	Major impact	Neither likely nor unlikely		Minimal impact	No impact			
		2%	17%	31%		22%	28%			
	How likely are you to increase the volume of exports in the next 2 years?	Extremely likely	Very likely	Moderate impact		Very unlikely	Extremely unlikely			
		36%	9%	36%		18%	N/A			
	How likely are you to decrease the volume of exports in the next 2 years?	Extremely unlikely	Very unlikely	Moderate impact		Very likely	Extremely likely			
		N/A	22%	67%		11%	N/A			
	To what extent do exportation-related taxes, including tariffs, impact your business growth?	Severe impact	Major impact	Neither easy nor difficult		Minimal impact	No impact			
		0%	14%	32%		12%	41%			
	To what extent do exportation-related customs and trade regulations impact your business growth?	Severe impact	Major impact	Neither easy nor difficult		Minimal impact	No impact			
		1%	20%	25%		19%	35%			
	In your view, would you say trading with the rest of Africa is extremely easy, very easy, neither easy nor difficult, very difficult or extremely difficult?	Extremely easy	Very easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Very difficult	Extremely difficult	Don't know	Refused		
		27%	9%	25%	22%	3%	12%	3%		
	In your view, would you say trading with the rest of the world (OUTSIDE OF AFRICA) is extremely easy, very easy, neither easy nor difficult, very difficult or extremely difficult?	Extremely easy	Very easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Very difficult	Extremely difficult	Don't know	Refused		
		26%	11%	24%	10%	16%	11%	2%		
	Are you aware of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement?	Yes			No					
		68%			32%					
	What are the top 3 benefits of the AfCFTA on your business?	No benefits (Exclusive)	Ease the movement of goods/ services across borders	Allow for a larger market for my goods/ services	Allow for greater competition	Promote the availability of more products and services to choose from	Contribute to the movement of capital and people across borders	Facilitate greater investment across countries	Promote industrial development across the countries	Enhanced regional payment systems
		31%	24%	25%	28%	18%	15%	13%	27%	10
Government Support	Please indicate how supportive your government is with regard to cross-border trading activities.	5 - Extremely supportive	4	3	2	1 - Not at all supportive	Refused	Don't know		
		30%	24%	26%	3%	4%	0%	12%		

Thematic Categories	Question	Responses								
Traders' Financial Behaviour and Access to Finance	Please indicate how difficult or easy it is to get credit from financial institutions	Extremely easy	4	3	2	1 - Extremely difficult	Refused	Don't know		
		30%	19%	27%	6%	12%	1%	4%		
	Why do you prefer using cash to pay for your goods or services when trading with suppliers in other countries?	Minimal cost/ fees	Allows for negotiations		Limited knowledge in other payment methods		Convenient - easy to deal with		Privacy	Other
		75%	75%		N/A		N/A		N/A	N/A
	What challenges, if any, do you encounter when using cash when trading with suppliers in other countries?	Fraud	Loss of money/ security risks		Fluctuating exchange rates		Customs declarations	Inconvenience - of carrying large amounts of money		Other
		25%	50%		50%		25%	25%		N/A
	What benefits or incentives would encourage you to entirely switch to formal channels (such as cards, electronic payments, international transfers) when trading with suppliers in other countries?	Faster transaction processing times	Minimal document requirements	Competitive exchange rates	Guaranteed security	Recorded transactions	Other			
		25%	25%	N/A	50%	25%	N/A			
	Do you offer credit terms to your clients?	Yes			No					
		37%			63%					
	Do you have credit terms arrangements with your suppliers?	Yes			No					
		46%			54%					

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer is based on both primary and secondary research sources. This is Issue 5 of the SB ATB. Issues 1, 2, 3 and 4 were released in June 2022, November 2022, September 2023 and August 2024, respectively. Data collection (both primary and secondary research) for Issue 5 was carried out between September and October 2025 in all 10 countries of interest.

The primary research component involves the administration and analysis of a firm survey (i.e., a survey of sample businesses in the countries of interest) and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. The sample is stratified by size (small, big and corporate), region and industry. A total of 2 218 businesses were surveyed, and 30 in-depth interviews were conducted across the 10 countries in Issue 5.

In South Africa, 252 businesses were surveyed. 38% of these businesses were in Gauteng, 24% in KwaZulu-Natal, 23% in the Western Cape, and 15% in the Eastern Cape. The breakdown of surveyed businesses in South Africa by business segment was as follows:

- 75% were small businesses
- 13% were big businesses
- 13% were corporates

In the context of the SB ATB, small businesses are defined as those with a turnover of less than R300 million, big businesses as those with a turnover of between R300 million and R1.2 billion and corporates as those with a turnover of more than R1.2 billion.

The breakdown of surveyed businesses in South Africa by industry was as in **Table 7**:

Table 7: Breakdown of surveyed businesses in South Africa by industry

Industry	%	Industry	%
Manufacturing	14	Information and communication	2
Other service activities	14	Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	12	Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	1
Financial and insurance activities	10	Human health and social work activities	1
Mining and quarrying (includes oil & gas)	9	Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use	1
Transportation and storage	7	Real estate activities	1
Accommodation and food service activities	7	Professional, scientific and technical activities	0
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	6	Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0
Construction	6	Education	0
Administrative and support service activities	5	Activities of extraterritorial organizations	0
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2		

The breakdown of surveyed businesses by staff complement was as follows:

- 4% had below 5 employees
- 11% had 5 - 10 employees
- 13% had 11 - 20 employees
- 14% had 21 - 50 employees
- 10% had 51 - 100 employees
- 33% had 101 - 1 000 employees
- 13% had 1 001 - 5 000 employees
- 2% had over 5 000 employees

With regard to individual respondent characteristics within the businesses, 67% were female, and 33% were male. The breakdown by their job titles is as follows:

- 19% were general managers
- 17% were chief executive officers (CEOs)
- 11% were owners, partners or co-owners
- 10% were chief financial officers
- 10% were financial directors
- 6% were heads of departments
- 5% were chief accountants
- 4% were director generals
- 4% were deputy director generals
- 4% were managing directors

Further details by region, business segment, industry, staff complement, age of firm, the firms' corporate and strategic decision-making structures, as well as individual respondent characteristics (gender, job title, etc.) are available on request.

There were three in-depth interviews conducted in South Africa as part of Issue 5. The interviews were held with representatives from the Auditor General of South Africa, Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance.

The survey and in-depth interviews were conducted on a confidential basis.

The secondary research component involves the gathering and analysis of quantitative data. This data is primarily collected from World Bank sources, although additional data is obtained from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Trade Center and individual country central banks.

In-depth details on how the Standard Bank Africa Trade Barometer scores for each country are calculated, and the resultant country rankings, are available on request.

The research was produced by Standard Bank Business and Commercial Banking Research & Insights. For any questions or information requirements on this report, please contact **tradebarometer@standardsbg.com**

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