2025

Review of maritime transport

Staying the course in turbulent waters

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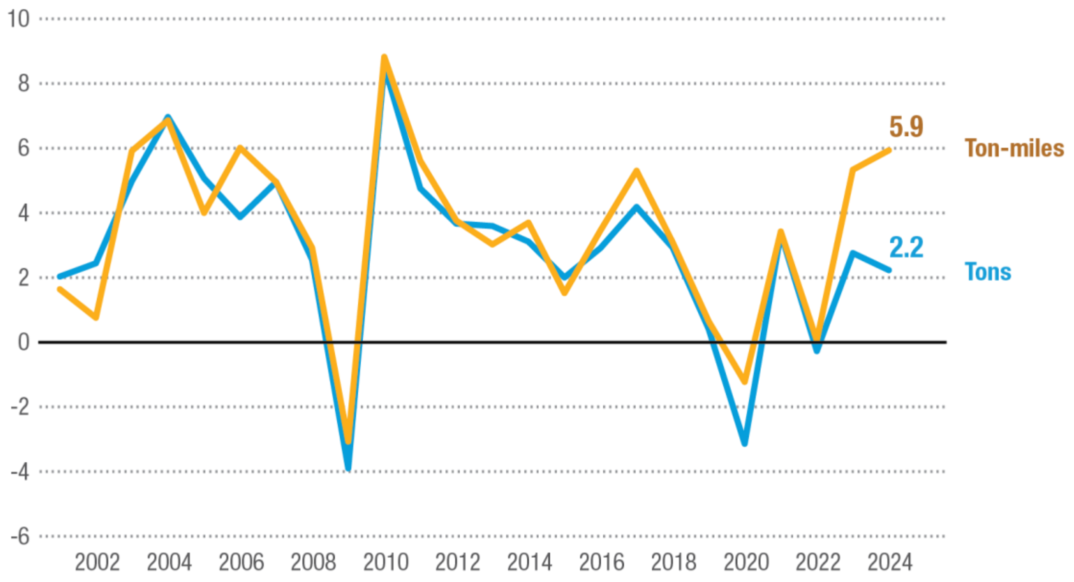
Chapter I

International maritime trade

Maritime trade continues to adjust to geopolitical and structural pressures

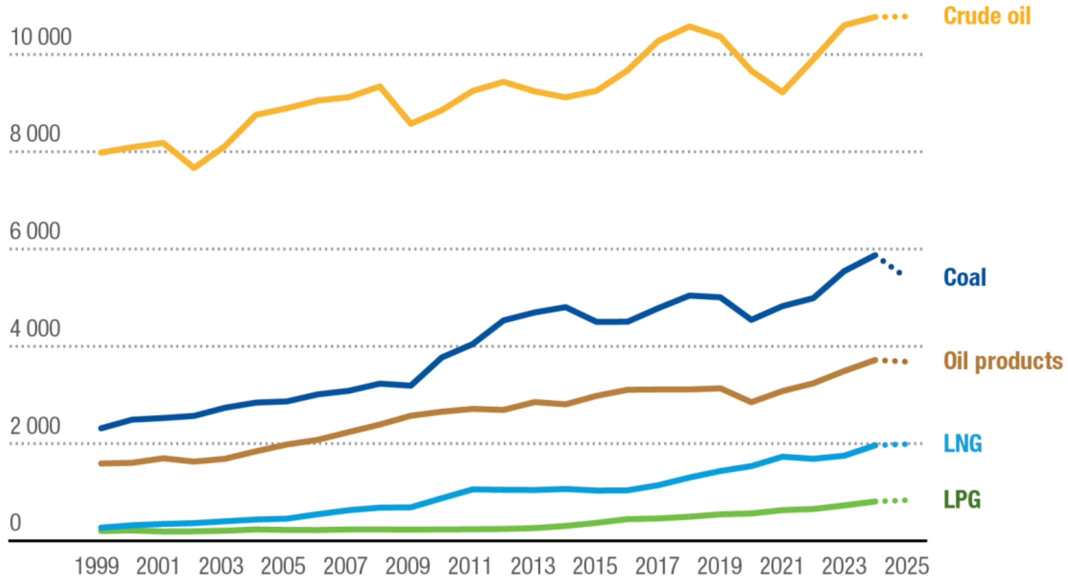


Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on Clarksons Research, Shipping Intelligence Network time series (July 2025).

Seaborne trade growth
(Annual percentage change)

Seaborne trade recorded firm growth in 2024 (2.2 per cent in volumes and 5.9 per cent in ton-miles), largely due to rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope as the Red Sea disruption persisted

Diverging trends across shipping segments: Containerized and energy trade



Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on Clarksons Research, Shipping Intelligence Network time series (July 2025).
Note: Figures for 2025 are forecasts. LPG indicates liquified petroleum gas.

Seaborne trade by energy commodity
(Billions of ton-miles)

These developments illustrate how changing demand patterns, geopolitical factors and diversification strategies are reshaping energy flows, distances travelled by ships, and cargo and trade in ton-miles

Chapter II

World shipping fleet and services

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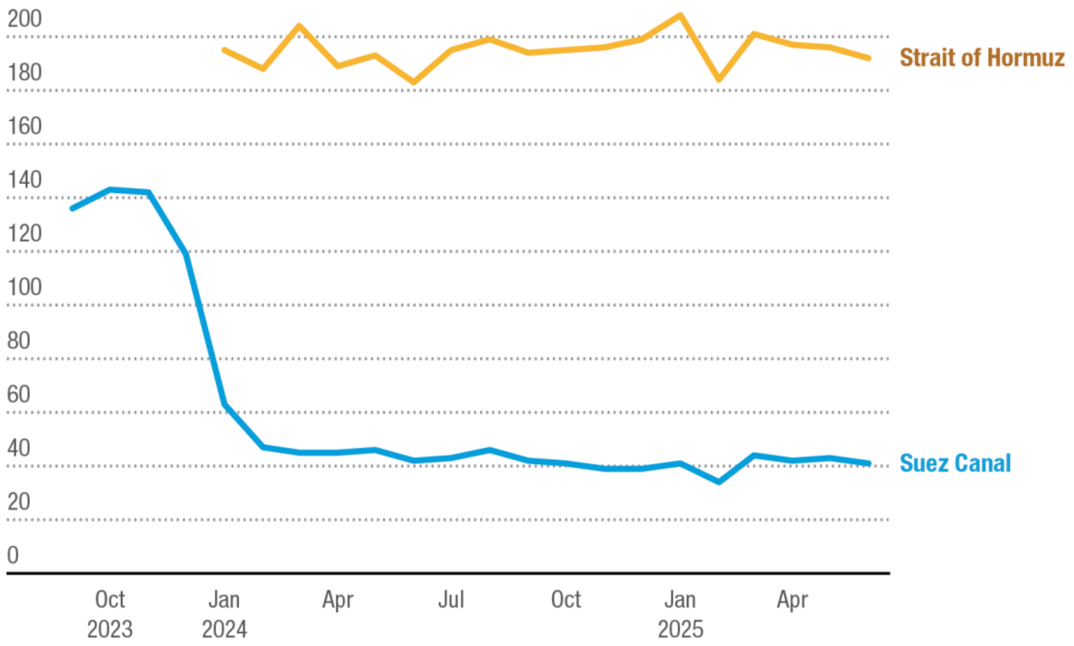
Maritime transport is navigating uncharted waters amid geopolitical instability and trade policy uncertainty

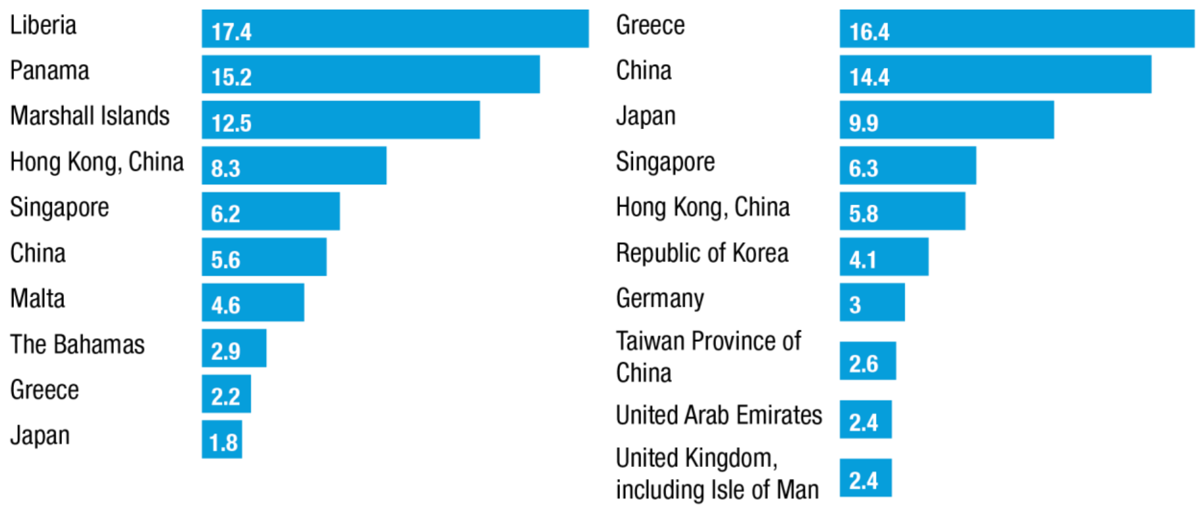


Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on Clarksons Research Services, Shipping Intelligence Network (August 2025).

Monthly ship transits through the Strait of Hormuz and Suez Canal
(Millions of gross tons)

By the end of June 2025, ship transit patterns through the maritime passage had not shown any significant changes

Transformational trends are influencing the global fleet profile and capacity



Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on data from Clarksons Research and UNCTADstat (available at https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/).

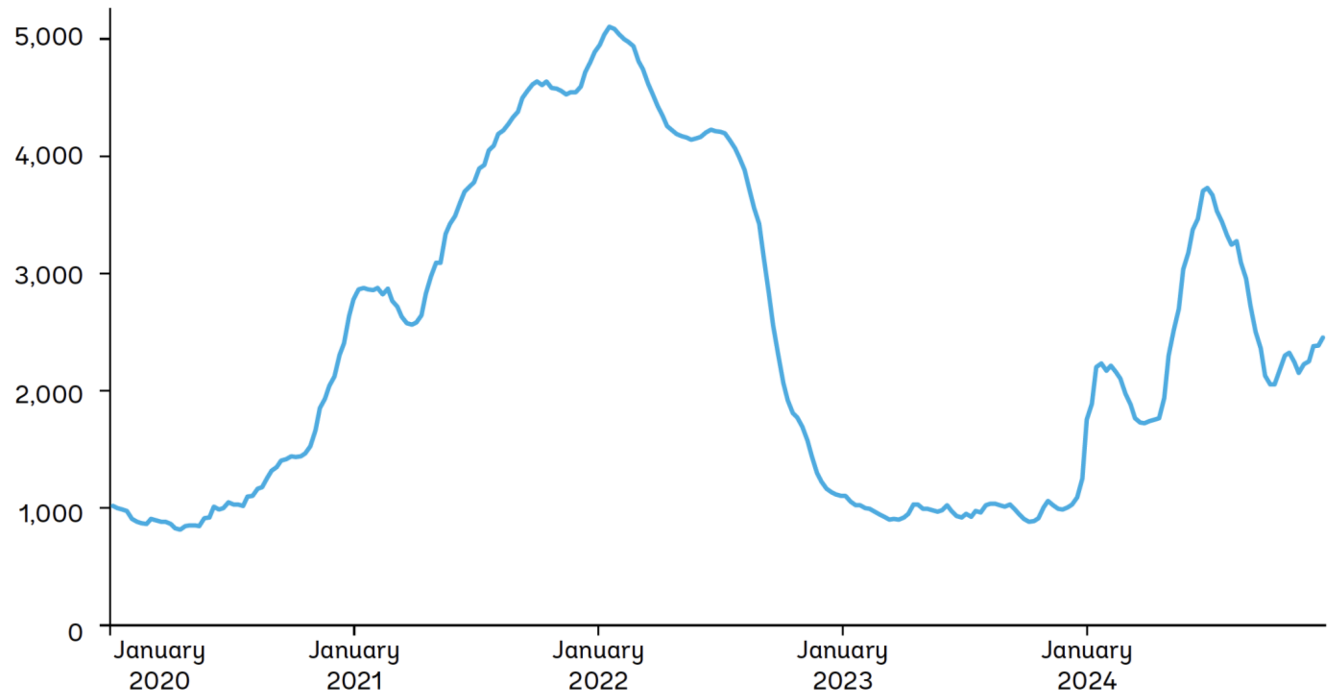
Top 10 leading flags of registration (left panel) and ship-owning countries (right panel), 1 January 2025
(Percentage of dead weight ton capacity)

The list of top ship-owning nations and flag countries remained broadly unchanged, with some shifts in relative rankings

Chapter III

Freight rates and maritime transport costs

Freight rate volatility is becoming the norm, driven by geopolitical tensions, trade policy shifts, and fragile supply and demand fundamentals



Source: Clarksons (2025b).

Shanghai Containerized Freight Index spot rates
(Monthly averages, United States dollars per 20-foot equivalent unit)

By year-end, spot rates had moderated but remained significantly above pre-crisis levels. The Shanghai Containerized Freight Index (SCFI) averaged 2,496 points in 2024, up 149 per cent from 2023

Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on data from Clarksons Research, Shipping Intelligence Network (July 2025).

Chapter IV

Port performance and maritime trade facilitation

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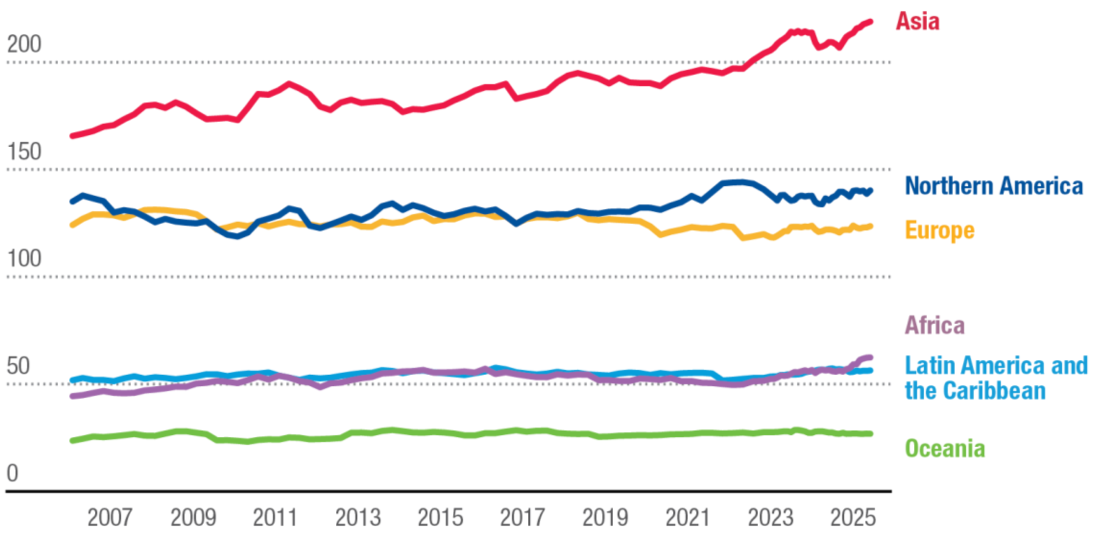
Port performance has varied across indicators and shipping segments; gender balance in the port workforce has yet to be achieved



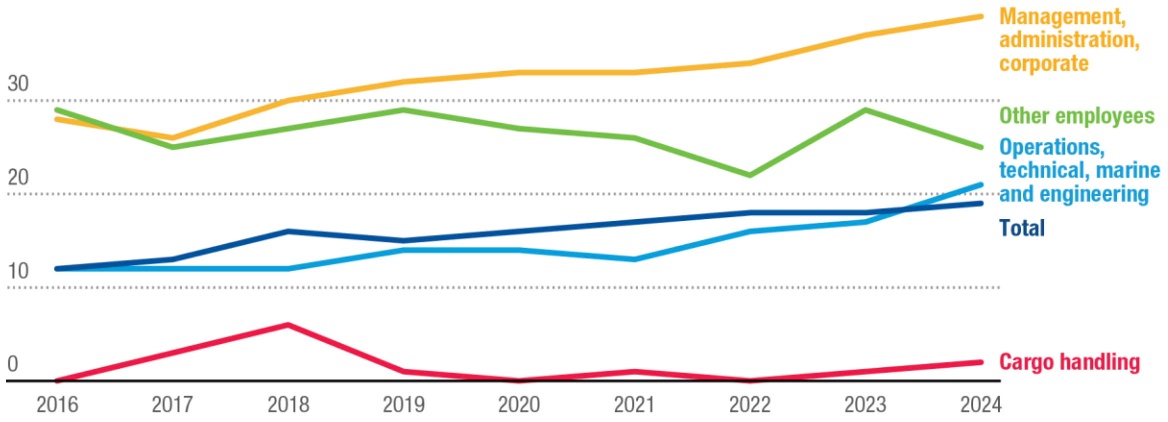
Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on data provided by MDS Transmodal (June 2025). See also UNCTADstat at https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/.
Note: The index is set at 100 for the average value of country connectivity in February of 2023. For countries with no liner shipping connections, values are assumed to be zero to better reflect lost connectivity. Countries with no liner shipping connections for the entire period are excluded from the averages.

Average Liner Shipping Connectivity Index by region

UNCTAD's Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (LSCI), a measure for countries to assess their level of integration into global trade networks and maritime transport connectivity globally, reflects increases in the connectivity of ports in Africa and Asia over the past year

Port performance has varied across indicators and shipping segments; gender balance in the port workforce has yet to be achieved

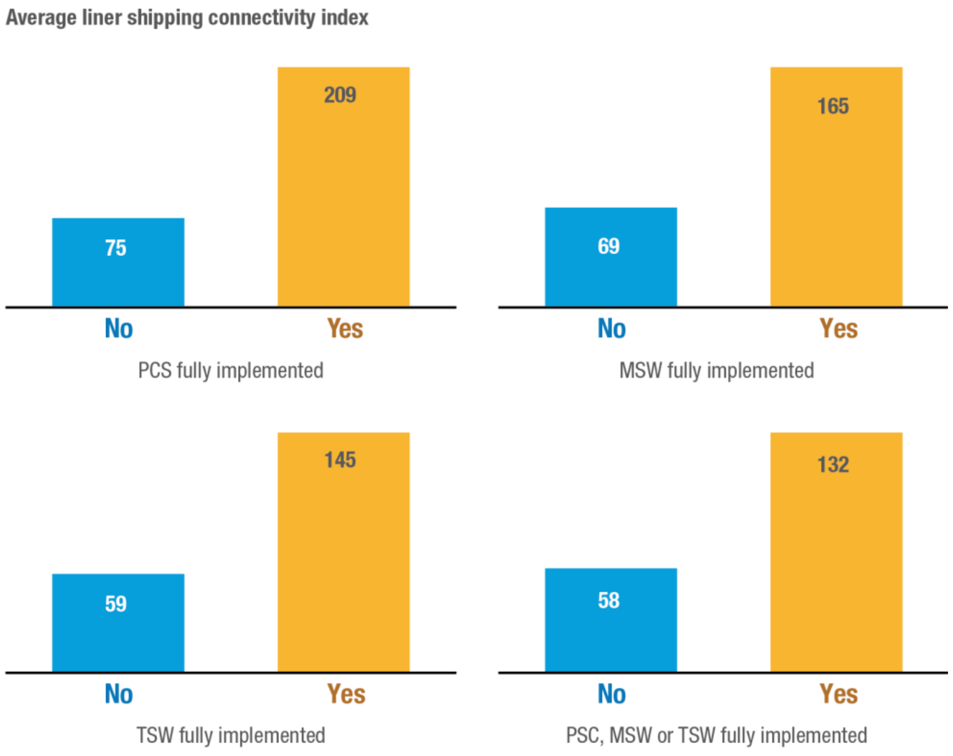
Women's median participation in port workforces
(Percentage)



Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on data from 76 ports reporting on the UNCTAD TrainForTrade Port Management Programme Port Performance Scorecard (June 2025).
Note: Data are summarized without missing data imputation.

Data on 76 ports contributing to the Port Performance Scorecard indicate an improvement in gender diversity, with women now accounting for nearly 40 per cent of managerial positions. Male dominance persists in other areas, however, especially in cargo-handling, where less than 2 per cent of workers are women

Trade facilitation measures can be pivotal for improved port performance in a highly disrupted and unpredictable operating environment



Source: UNCTAD calculations, based on IMO data available at https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Facilitation/Pages/IMOCompendium.aspx, and the websites of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the World Bank Trade Logistics Performance Index and various ports.

Correlation between connectivity and digital trade facilitation tools

Digital infrastructure, such as trade single windows (TSW), maritime single windows (MSW) and port community systems (PCS), enhances collaboration and data exchange. Countries with such tools tend to exhibit improved liner shipping connectivity levels and logistics performance

Chapter V

Legal issues and regulatory developments

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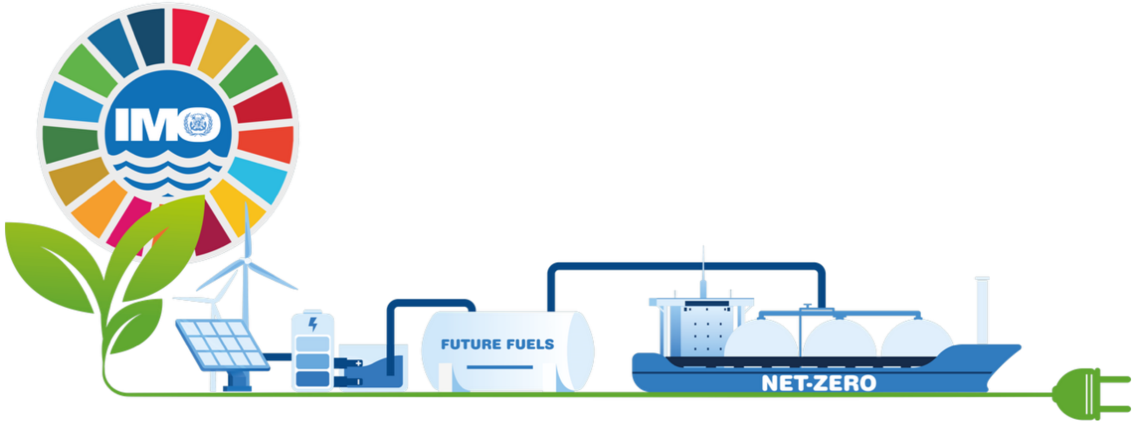
In a bid to curb greenhouse gas emissions from shipping, draft IMO regulations are to be considered for formal adoption in 2026

- Approval of amendments to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) new Chap 5 of Annex VI (Prevention of air pollution from ships) to be adopted Nov 2025

  - Annex VI 108 parties 97% world’s merchant fleet by tonnage!



The international legal and regulatory framework needs to keep pace with the uptake of alternative fuels and advances in technology, including ship automation

A fit-for-purpose regulatory framework is also required for autonomous shipping. IMO is currently developing a non-mandatory maritime autonomous surface ships (MASS) code, scheduled to be concluded in 2026. United Nations Member States and shipping industry stakeholders are strongly encouraged to actively engage in this important work.

Safeguarding seafarers' rights is becoming more crucial

Seafarers operate in a highly challenging environment, often in difficult working conditions. Geopolitical tensions and disruption compound these issues

Thank you

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