

Statistical information is indispensable for policymakers and for orienting the framing and drafting of policies and public strategies, and not only. The UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics is an important source in this regard, as it provides a wide range of statistics and indicators relevant to the analysis of international trade, economy, investment, maritime transport, and development worldwide. The 2022 edition of the UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics is also available on the UNCTAD website in a dedicated page structured as an

[interactive tool](#)

offering access to the main data gathered in the publication, including maps and charts. Users have also a direct access to the

[UNCTADstat database](#)

, a tool containing real time trade statistics on goods and services, including quarterly data, for approximately 130 countries in the world.

The report, divided in [several sections](#), each one dedicated to a specific topic, shows that in 2021 developing economies in Africa experienced the highest rise in exports (+42.2 per cent compared to 2020), the leading exporters being South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. However, from 2020 to 2021 African imports grew more significantly than exports, with a general worsening of the trade balances of African economies, as shown in the table below.

International merchandise trade

Table 1.1.1 | Merchandise trade by group of economies

Group of economies	Exports			Imports			Trade balance	
	Value		Annual growth rate	Value		Annual growth rate	Value	Rat imp
	(Millions of US\$)		(Percentage)	(Millions of US\$)		(Percentage)	(Millions of US\$)	(Perce
	2020	2021	2021	2020	2021	2021	2021	20
World	17 648	22 328	26.5	17 879	22 587	26.3	-258	
Developed economies	10 045	12 410	23.6	10 810	13 319	23.2	-909	
Developing economies	7 604	9 918	30.4	7 069	9 267	31.1	650	
Developing economies: Africa	394	561	42.2	491	629	28.1	-68	
Developing economies: Americas	951	1 208	27.0	917	1 267	38.1	-58	
Developing economies: Asia and Oceania	6 258	8 149	30.2	5 660	7 372	30.2	777	

For what concerns the Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), FDI flows to Africa reached a record level in 2021, totaling 83 billion USD, i.e. more than double the amount of investments that the continent attracted in 2020. This data shows that Africa continues to be at the centre of a global interest and that it is on the right path for becoming the next great investment destination worldwide. Conversely, in terms of direction of exports, results are quite disappointing, as Africa keeps trading massively with extra-regional markets, while the level of intra-African exports remains modest and among the lowest in the world (the proportion between exports to the rest of the world and intra-regional exports is almost 9 to 1). In this regard, the handbook notes, the main export destination of Africa is Asia, with China (93.7 billion USD) and India (42.5 billion USD) as the top of the rank.

Figure 1.2.1 Intra- and extra-regional exports, 2021

(Percentage of total exports)

