

Sustainable Trade Index **2026**

South Korea

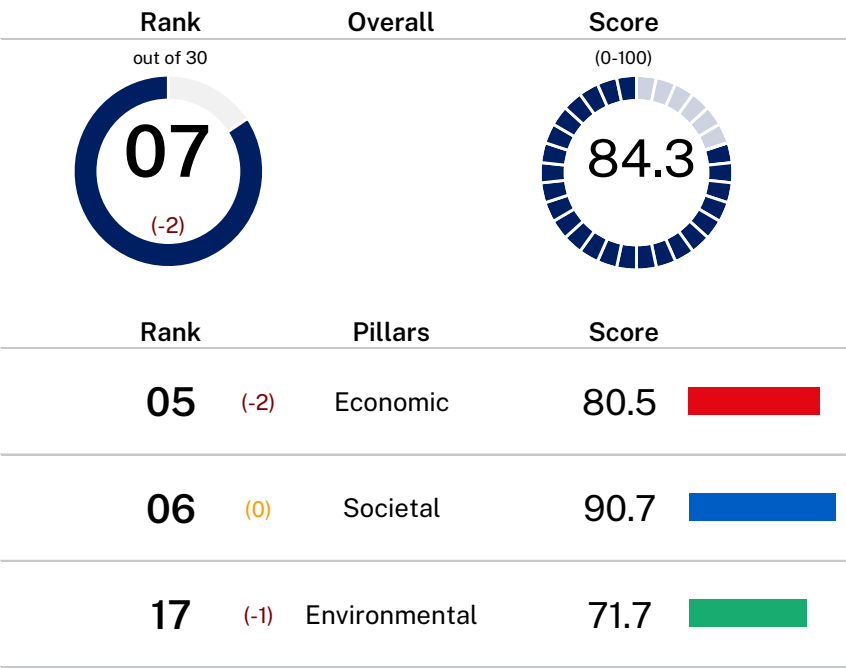


Sustainable Trade Index

The Hinrich-IMD Sustainable Trade Index measures 30 economies' readiness and capacity to participate in the global trading system in a manner that supports the long-term goals of economic growth, environmental protection, and societal development.

Overall and pillars

South Korea



The values in (parentheses) indicate the one year ranking change

Background information

Population, millions (2025)	51.69	Large
Income level, GDP per Capita US\$ (2025)	36,227	High
Membership	APEC, RCEP	

Economic pillar

The Economic pillar measures an economy's ability to ensure and promote economic growth through international trade. In this category, economies receive scores for indicators that demonstrate a link between the trading system and economic growth.

Some indicators capture the quality of trade infrastructure, while others measure the ease of conducting international trade. We measure export diversification by evaluating an economy's bilateral trade destinations and how heavily its exports are concentrated by sector. Furthermore, we consider the technological infrastructure and innovation capabilities of an economy by assessing its emphasis on research and development investments and digital technologies.

Indicators

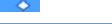
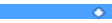
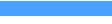
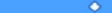
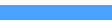
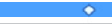
1 Economic Pillar		Rank	Rank +/-	Value	Year	Score and 30 country average
1.01	Consumer price inflation	13	(-1)	2.10	2025	86.39
1.02	Real GDP Growth per capita, % GDP	23	(-4)	1.14	2025	31.75
1.03	Growth in labor force, %	25	(0)	0.04	2025	36.94
1.04	Foreign direct investment, net inflows, % GDP	24	(-5)	0.84	2025	7.78
1.05	Gross fixed capital formation, % GDP	07	(-5)	28.33	2025	58.19
1.06	Tariff & non-tariff barriers	21	(0)	-	-	63.26
1.06.01	Tariff barriers	20	(+3)	-	-	81.41
1.06.01.a	Tariff barriers in force	21	(-2)	927	2025	86.11
1.06.01.b	New tariff barriers 2025	22	(+2)	77	2025	80.95
1.06.01.c	Net percentage of imports affected by new tariff barriers (2025)	26	(-13)	0.035	2025	74.28
1.06.02	Non-tariff barriers	22	(-1)	-	-	58.56
1.06.02.a	Non-tariff barriers in force	21	(0)	4,249	2025	80.49
1.06.02.b	New non-tariff barriers 2025	24	(+2)	1,107	2025	63.26
1.06.02.c	Net percentage of imports affected by new non-tariff barriers (2025)	18	(-13)	0.40	2025	35.44
1.07	Trade liberalization	05	(-1)	-	-	76.14
1.07.01	Regional Trade Agreements, number in force	04	(0)	23	2025	54.29
1.07.02	Capital account liberalization, Index	01	(0)	2.28	2023	100.00
1.07.03	Investment Freedom, Index	10	(-1)	60.00	2026	57.14
1.08	Exchange rate stability, parity change from national currency to SDR, 2025/2023	22	(-7)	0.10	2025	80.95
1.09	Domestic credit to private sector, % of GDP	05	(0)	160.35	2024	70.60
1.10	Foreign trade and payments risk	06	(0)	-	-	71.81
1.10.01	Country credit rating	07	(0)	53.00	2025	87.72
1.10.02	Gross debt, % GDP	14	(-1)	52.30	2025	75.22
1.11	Trade costs	08	(+2)	-	-	84.46
1.11.01	Logistics performance indicators	07	(-1)	-	-	86.58
1.11.01.a	Aviation import dwell time (days)	05	(NEW)	0.90	2024	97.16
1.11.01.b	Number of aviation partner economies	09	(NEW)	137.0	2024	84.62
1.11.01.c	Container import dwell time (days)	19	(NEW)	5.90	2024	60.37
1.11.01.d	Number of maritime partner economies	05	(NEW)	82.0	2024	95.89
1.11.01.e	Business-to-business postal delivery time (days)	08	(NEW)	2.50	2024	94.41
1.11.01.f	Number of business-to-business postal partner economies	08	(NEW)	121.0	2024	89.23
1.11.02	Corruption perceptions, index	10	(0)	63	2025	69.12
1.11.03	Rule of law, index	08	(+2)	76.20	2024	84.19
1.12	Monetary policy intervention	24	(-3)	-	-	40.93
1.12.01	Current account balance, % GDP	23	(0)	6.60	2025	51.18
1.12.02	Change (1-year) in total reserves (includes gold), % GDP	16	(-7)	0.001	2025	29.58
1.13	Export concentration	10	(0)	-	-	64.33
1.13.01	Export market concentration, Top 5 as % total	12	(+1)	56.51	2025	67.97
1.13.02	Export product concentration, Top 5 as % total	11	(-2)	57.30	2025	67.42
1.14	Exports of goods and services	07	(0)	-	-	31.52
1.14.01	Merchandise exports, US\$ millions	05	(-1)	709,330	2025	40.21
1.14.02	Commercial services exports, US\$ millions	08	(0)	149,306	2025	14.92
1.15	Technological innovation	01	(0)	-	-	100.00
1.15.01	R&D expenditure, % GDP	01	(0)	4.94	2023	100.00
1.15.02	Researchers in R&D, per 1,000 inhabitants	01	(+1)	9.47	2023	100.00
1.15.03	Patent applications, per million inhabitants	01	(0)	5,714.34	2024	100.00
1.15.04	High-technology exports, % of manufactured exports	07	(0)	36.26	2024	47.24
1.15.05	Scientific articles, per million people	07	(0)	1,385.17	2023	44.23
1.16	Technological infrastructure	02	(0)	-	-	91.51
1.16.01	Fixed internet speed, Mbps	07	(-5)	219.52	2025	66.91
1.16.02	Internet users, % population	02	(+1)	97.90	2024	99.84
1.16.03	Fixed broadband subscriptions (per 100 people)	01	(0)	47.80	2024	100.00
1.16.04	Mobile subscriptions (per 100 people)	04	(+2)	172.52	2024	58.59
1.17	Digital readiness (e-commerce legislations)	13	(NEW)	78.0	2025	72

Societal pillar

Social factors matter in an economy's capacity to trade internationally over the long term. Economies are measured on the environment that encourages and supports the development of human capital, such as the extent of education and labor standards.

This pillar also captures factors that influence public support for trade expansion. These include income inequality, political stability, goods produced by forced and child labor, and the government response to human trafficking.

Indicators

2 Societal Pillar		Rank	Rank +/-	Value	Year	Score and 30 country average
2.01	Inequality (Gini coefficient)	08	(-4)	32.90	2021	63.73 
2.02	Educational attainment	04	(0)	-	-	75.38 
2.02.01	Mean years of schooling	06	(0)	12.72	2023	87.62 
2.02.02	University education Index	07	(+1)	33.96	2026	20.45 
2.02.03	Tertiary enrollment	02	(0)	111.85	2024	92.46 
2.03	Labor standards	07	(+1)	-	-	88.74 
2.03.01	Gender non-discrimination in hiring	01	(0)	100	2024	100.00 
2.03.02	Freedom of association and assembly	08	(+2)	0.69	2025	77.49 
2.04	Political stability and absence of violence	07	(+3)	76.82	2024	82.16 
2.05	Goods produced by forced labor or child labor	12	(0)	-	-	95.35 
2.05.01	Goods produced by forced labor	12	(0)	-	-	90.71 
2.05.01.a	Goods produced by forced labor, number of goods categories	01	(0)	0	2024	100.00 
2.05.01.b	% population in forced labor	11	(0)	0.35	2023	80.02 
2.05.02	Goods produced by child labor, number of goods categories	01	(0)	0	2024	100.00 
2.06	Government response to human trafficking	21	(0)	-	-	59.42 
2.06.01	Government response to human trafficking, Criminalization	22	(0)	5	2025	40.00 
2.06.02	Government response to human trafficking, Strategy	25	(0)	38.46	2023	32.35 
2.06.03	Government response to human trafficking, Action	01	(0)	1	2025	100.00 
2.07	Trade in goods at risk of modern slavery	17	(+4)	-	-	85.09 
2.07.01	Imports of goods at risk of modern slavery, US\$ millions	24	(+2)	14,620	2025	82.39 
2.07.02	Exports of goods at risk of modern slavery, US\$ millions	01	(0)	0.0	2025	100.00 
2.08	Legatum prosperity index	10	(NEW)	74.07	2023	82.61 
2.09	Life expectancy at birth	03	(0)	84.33	2023	93.90 
2.10	Uneven economic development	04	(0)	3.10	2024	88.89 
2.11	Universal Health Coverage Index	04	(-2)	88	2023	93.33 
2.12	Equal distribution of resources index	04	(NEW)	0.95	2025	97.45 

Environmental pillar

The Environmental pillar measures the extent to which an economy's trade supports sustainable resources. The factors include measurements of non-renewable natural resources in trade and the management of externalities that arise from economic growth and participation in the global trading system.

While an economy's capacity to participate in the global trading system is dependent on economic development, achieving sustainable trade requires prudent stewardship of natural resources and limiting externalities in an economy's economic calculus to promote its overall environmental capital. The indicators chosen in this section measure an economy's environmental capital and include indicators for air and water pollution. In terms of future impact, we measure national environmental standards, carbon emissions, and share of natural resources in exports.

Indicators

3 Environmental Pillar		Rank	Rank +/-	Value	Year	Score and 30 country average
3.01	Air pollution, PM2.5 micrograms per cubic metre	17	(+6)	21.90	2025	75.37
3.02	Deforestation, Index	19	(-2)	0.0037	2024	19.41
3.03	% of wastewater treated	02	(0)	99.43	2024	99.39
3.04	Energy intensity (Energy use (kg of oil equivalent) per \$1,000 GDP)	23	(-7)	98.76	2024	32.83
3.05	Ecological footprint	19	(+3)	5.11	2025	30.75
3.06	Renewable energy, %	26	(-1)	3.60	2021	5.72
3.07	Environmental standards in trade, count	01	(+20)	-	-	100.00
3.07.01	Convention: Hazardous Wastes	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.02	Convention: Prevention of Marine Pollution	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.03	Convention: Protection of the Ozone Layer (Vienna)	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.04	Convention on Climate Change (Kyoto)	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.05	The International Timber Agreement	01	(+20)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.06	Convention: International Trade in Endangered Species	01	(+27)	2	2025	100.00
3.07.07	Convention: Prior Informed Consent - Hazardous Chemicals (Rotterdam)	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.08	Transfer emissions, million tonnes carbon	05	(0)	-32.67	2023	61.67
3.09	Share of natural resources in trade, %	12	(+2)	15.44	2025	81.54
3.10	Carbon	11	(-2)	-	-	75.83
3.10.1	Carbon pricing	01	(0)	2	2025	100.00
3.10.2	CO2 emissions per capita	24	(0)	11.29	2024	45.33

About us

Global trade has helped lift hundreds of millions of people around the world out of poverty. It is a powerful driver of economic growth and job creation. Yet its benefits are not self-sustaining. Without responsible stewardship, trade can widen income inequalities, disrupt labor markets, and impose significant environmental costs. Sustainable trade means striking a durable balance by expanding the economic opportunities that open markets generate while ensuring those gains are broadly shared and maintained. This requires sound public policy, responsible business leadership, and evidence-based frameworks to guide decision-making.

The Hinrich Foundation and the IMD World Competitiveness Center have combined their expertise to build the Hinrich-IMD Sustainable Trade Index, a framework for policy makers, business executives, and civil society leaders to understand and advance sustainable global trade.

hinrich foundation
advancing sustainable global trade

The Hinrich Foundation is an independent Asia-based philanthropic organization dedicated to advancing mutually beneficial and sustainable global trade.

We believe that mutually beneficial and sustainable global trade is a powerful force for shared prosperity, technological progress, sustainability and peaceful international cooperation. Our work is grounded in rigorous fact-based research and the development of innovative trade education programs.

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IMD / World Competitiveness
Center

IMD is an independent academic institution with close ties to business and a strong focus on impact. Challenging what is and inspiring what could be, it develops leaders who transform organizations for a more prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive world. Through its Executive Education, MBA, Executive MBA, and advisory work IMD helps leaders and policymakers navigate complexity and change.

The IMD World Competitiveness Center is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge on world competitiveness and offers benchmarking services for countries and companies using the latest data. The Center has pioneered research on how nations and enterprises compete to lay the foundations for future prosperity.

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