Impact of trade tensions on business strategies and other ad hoc questions in the Netherlands

BCS Workshop 2025

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1: Experiences with ad hoc questions

Background

- Already experience with including ad hoc questions since Brexit
- During COVID-19 crisis: increasing need for timely and specific information on businesses and the economy

- The mechanism for business tendency surveys provides a flexible instrument for obtaining information in response to significant shocks to the economy

- Minimize societal costs for statistics production and minimize extra response burden by utilizing advantages of existing panel and infrastructure

Motivation

"Provide timely and (specific) additional information on events, beliefs and behaviour in the economic environment or business activity to support public debate, policy development and scientific research"

Guiding principles: questions (ideally)…

Are not a substitute for (quantitative) data from an existing set of statistics, but (should) provide information additional to an existing set of statistics

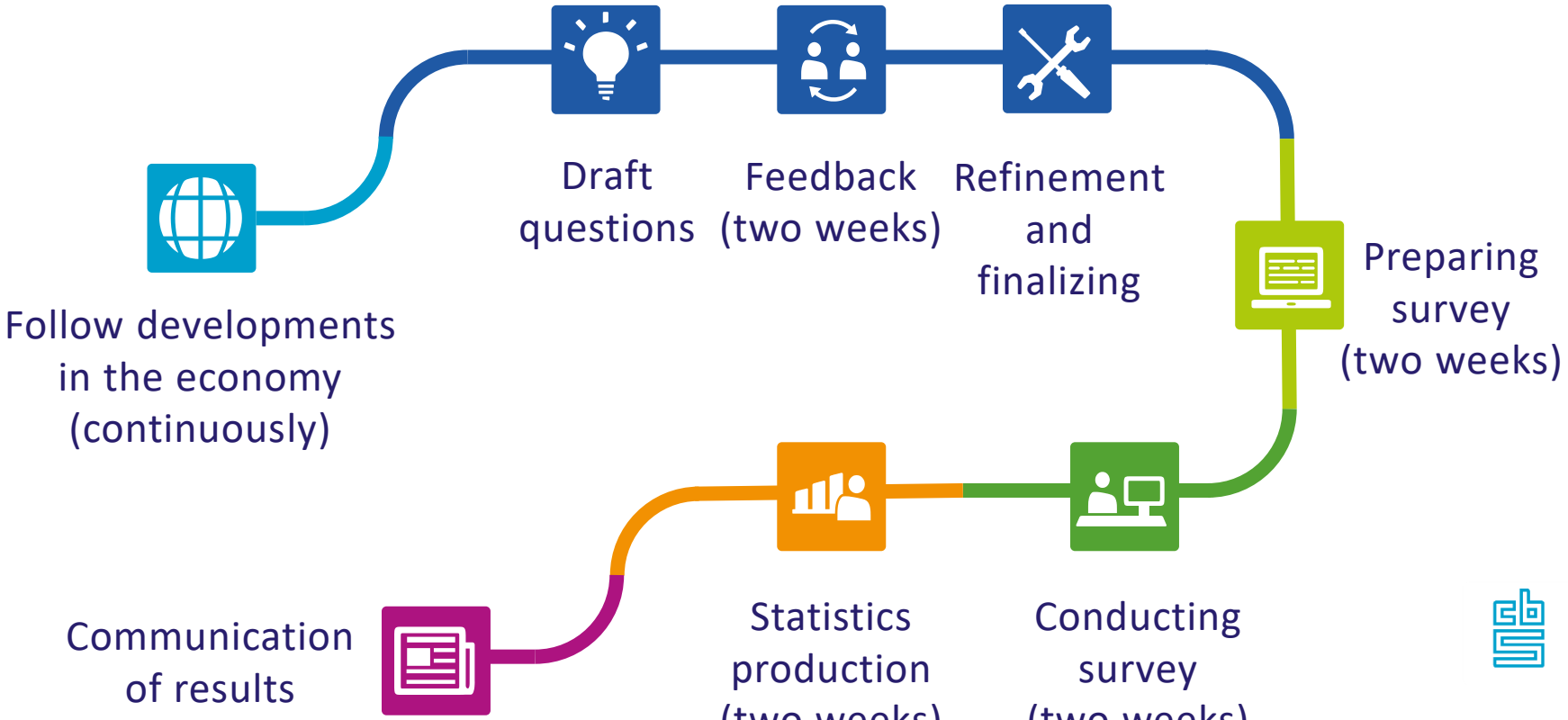
- Ideally, data collection should not coincide with the data collection for an existing set of statistics on the same topic
- If a question tends towards substitution, the gain should be more timely publication of information

Ad hoc questions

Should be well-considered and be kept to a minimum

- Which of the information needs can be measured with a questionnaire?
- Which of those are suitable to be asked?
- Are respondents able to provide accurate answers to such questions?
- (Dilemma) Are questions relatively resilient to sudden changes in the economic/business situation during data collection?

Our proces


Follow developments in the economy (continuously)
Draft questions
Feedback (two weeks)
Refinement and finalizing
Preparing survey (two weeks)
Conducting survey (two weeks)
Statistics production (two weeks)
Communication of results

Our process

- Ad hoc questions when necessary
- Maximum of three questions per month
- Dealing with technical/production limitations
- Creating time series

Dilemma: maximum number of categories permitted for respondents → Two or one?

Types of ad hoc questions

Roughly three different types of ad hoc questions:

1. One-time, reacting to a very specific (mostly national) incident
2. Incidental reacting to (more international) events with the ability to repeat them
3. New set of questions regarding a specific subject with a long horizon or a timeless phenomenon

1.1: Examples of recent results

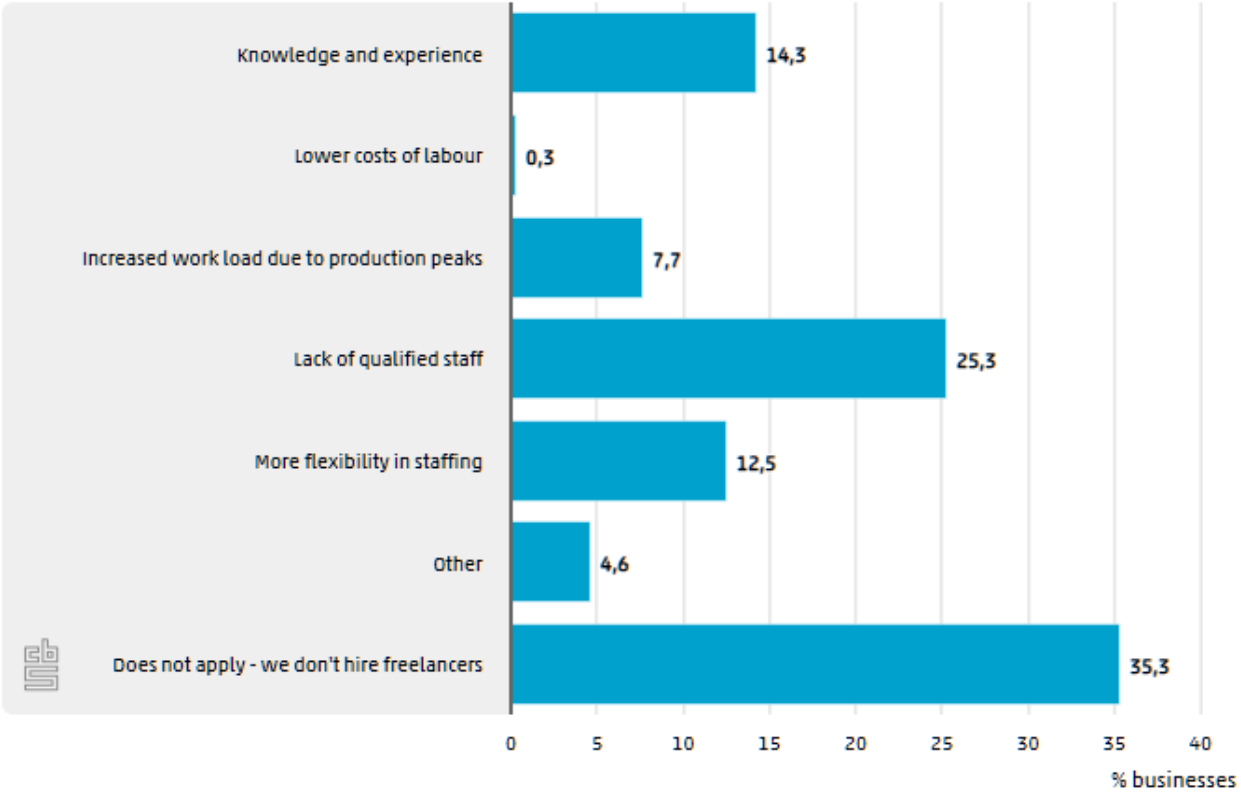
Legislation on freelancers

- Dutch business economy consists of more than 1,62 milion enterprises in 2025 → More than 1,3 milion are self employed (freelancers)

- Existing legislation to prevent false self employment
- Government decided to actually enforce the legislation as of January 2025

- Lot of attention for the consequences for current freelancers but what about businesses that were hiring those?

Main reason for hiring freelancers



Legislation on freelancers

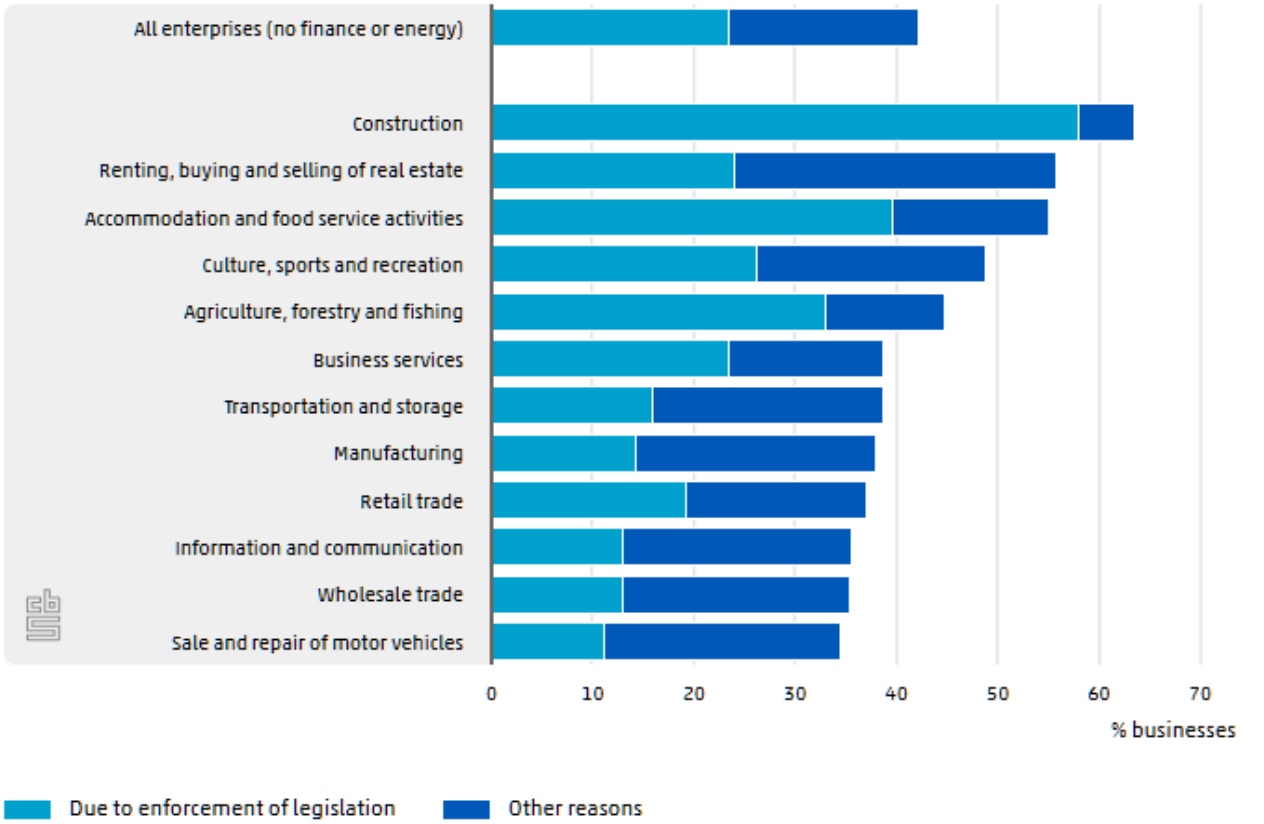
The number of freelancers our company will hire in 2025 compared to 2024 is expected to:

- Increase
- Remains unchanged
- Decrease
- Does not apply – we do not hire freelancers

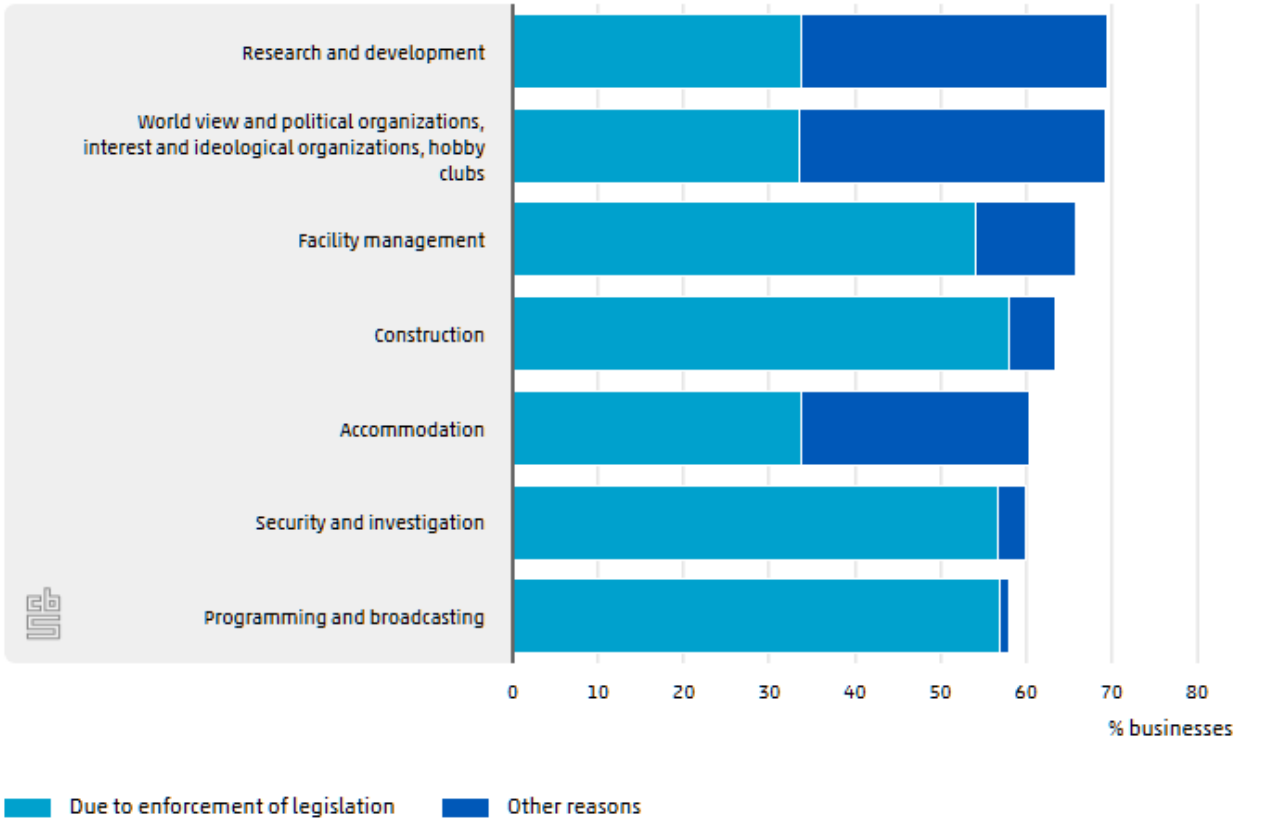
Is the expected decrease due to the announced enforcement of legislation?

- Yes
- No

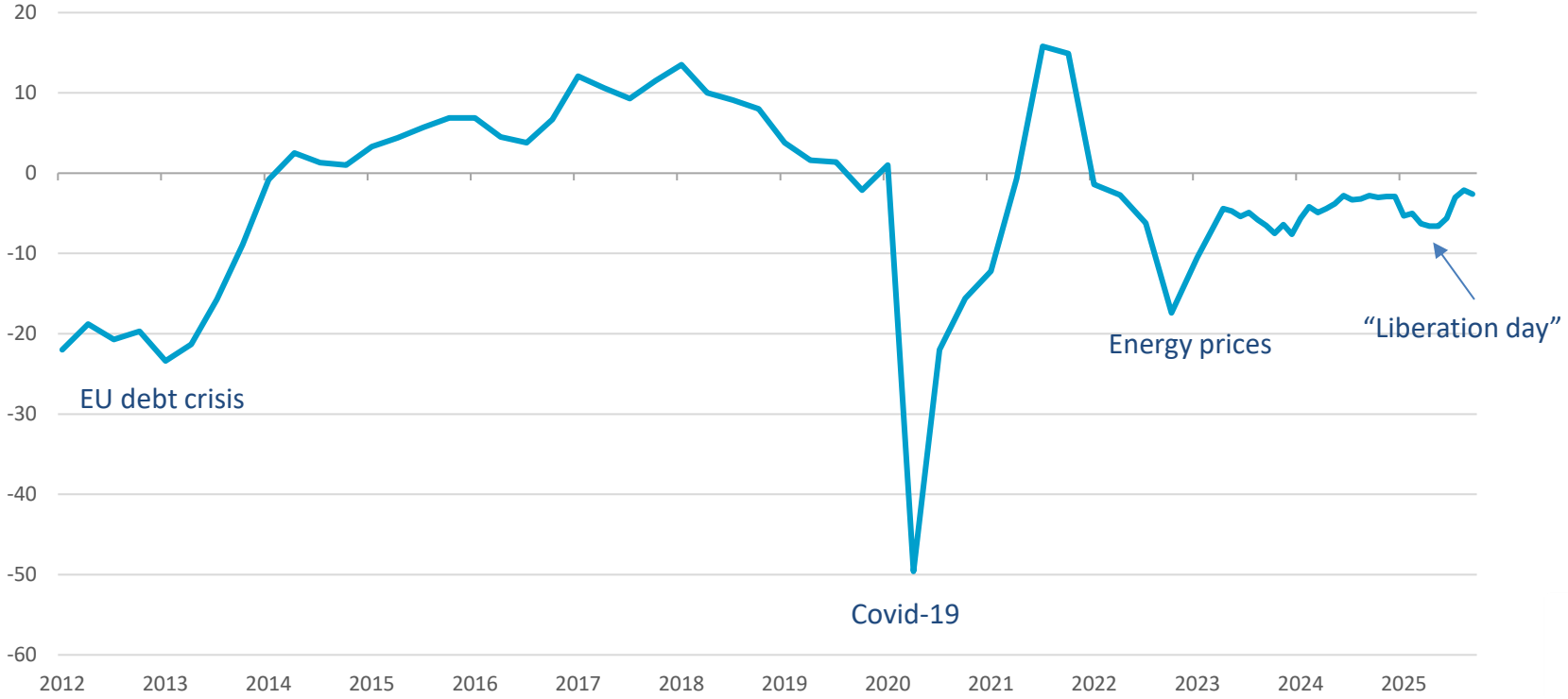
Businesses expecting a decrease in their freelance hiring



Businesses expecting a decrease in their freelance hiring



Business sentiment indicator – NL



Trade tensions

Three ad hoc questions related to trade tensions:

1. What is the main advantage of exporting for your company?

2. Which aspect of trade policy is the greatest concern for your company's export activities over the next 12 months?

3. What would the main consequence of changes in trade policy be for your company's export activities?

Uncertainty

Three ad hoc questions related to uncertainty:

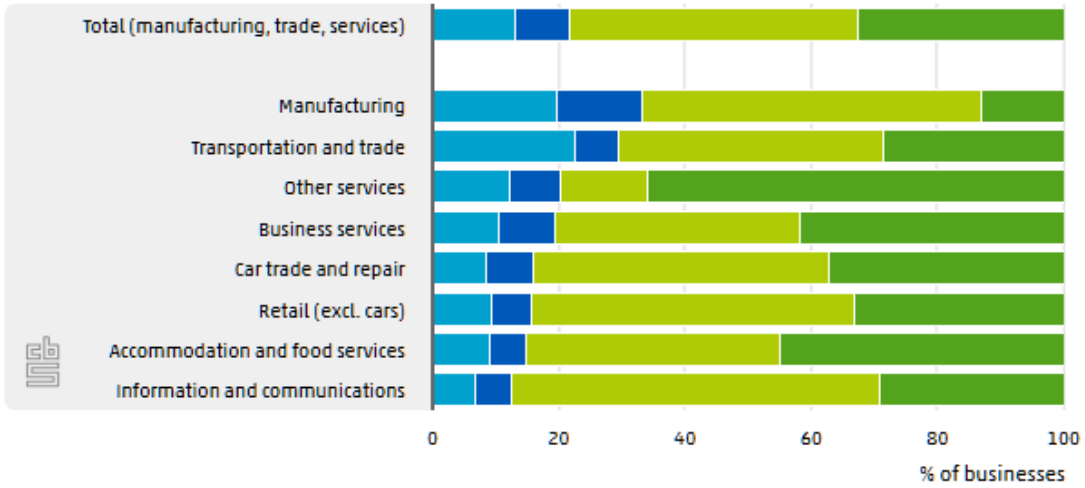
1. What are the main causes of increased economic uncertainty that your company has experienced in the past 12 months?

2. What are the main consequences of increased economic uncertainty that your company has experienced in the past 12 months?

3. What are the main steps that your company has taken to deal with increased economic uncertainty?

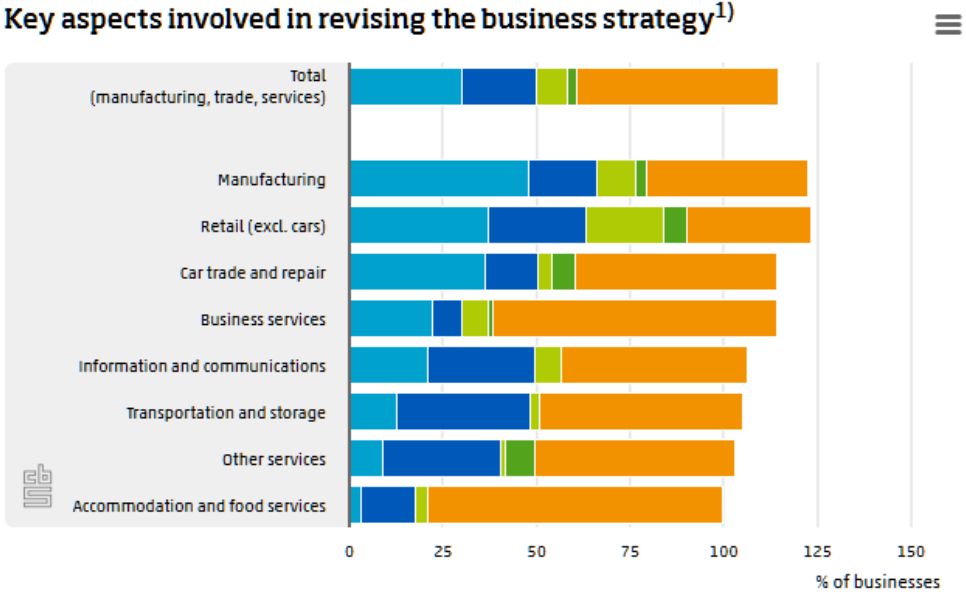
Harmonized ad hoc questions

Changed business strategy in response to tensions, disruptions or policy changes in overseas markets



- Yes, we have made changes to our business strategy
- Yes, we plan to make changes to our business strategy
- No, we have not made any changes to our business strategy and do not plan to do so
- Not applicable, operations are entirely domestic

Harmonized ad hoc questions



Other aspect includes among other things:

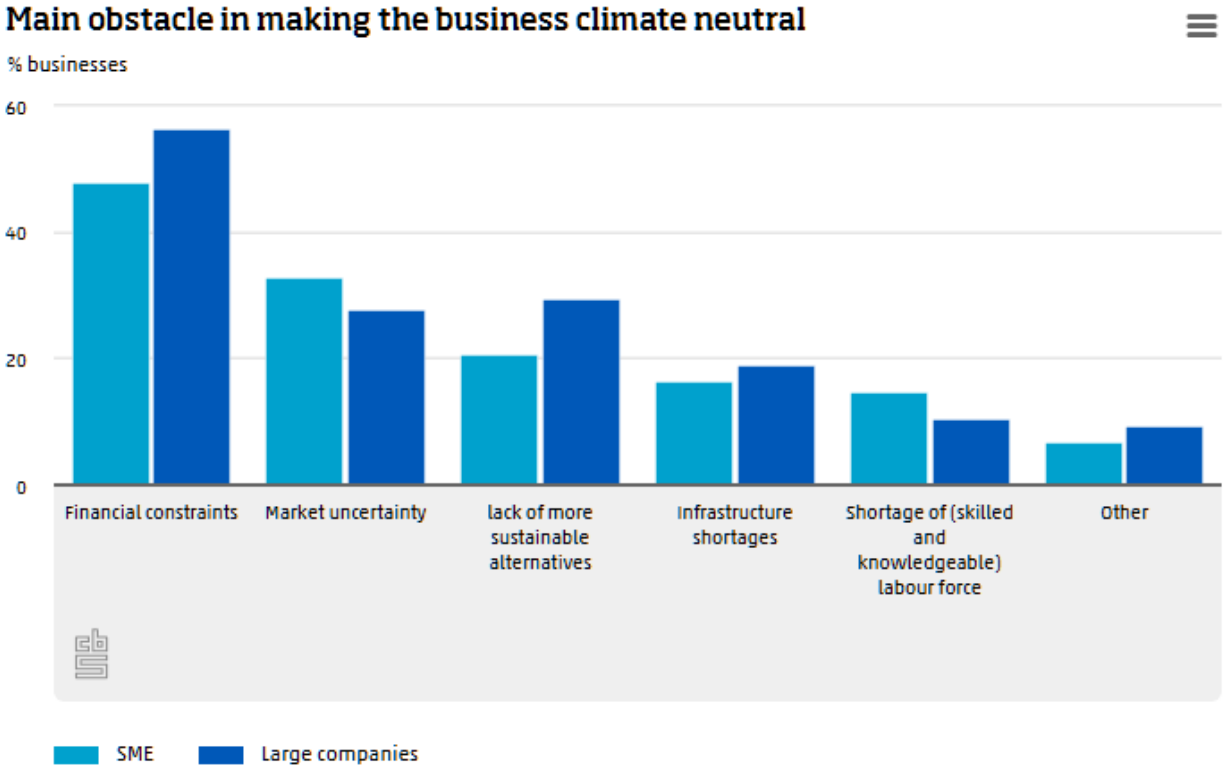
- More efficiency
- Lowering costs
- Digitalization

Green deal survey module

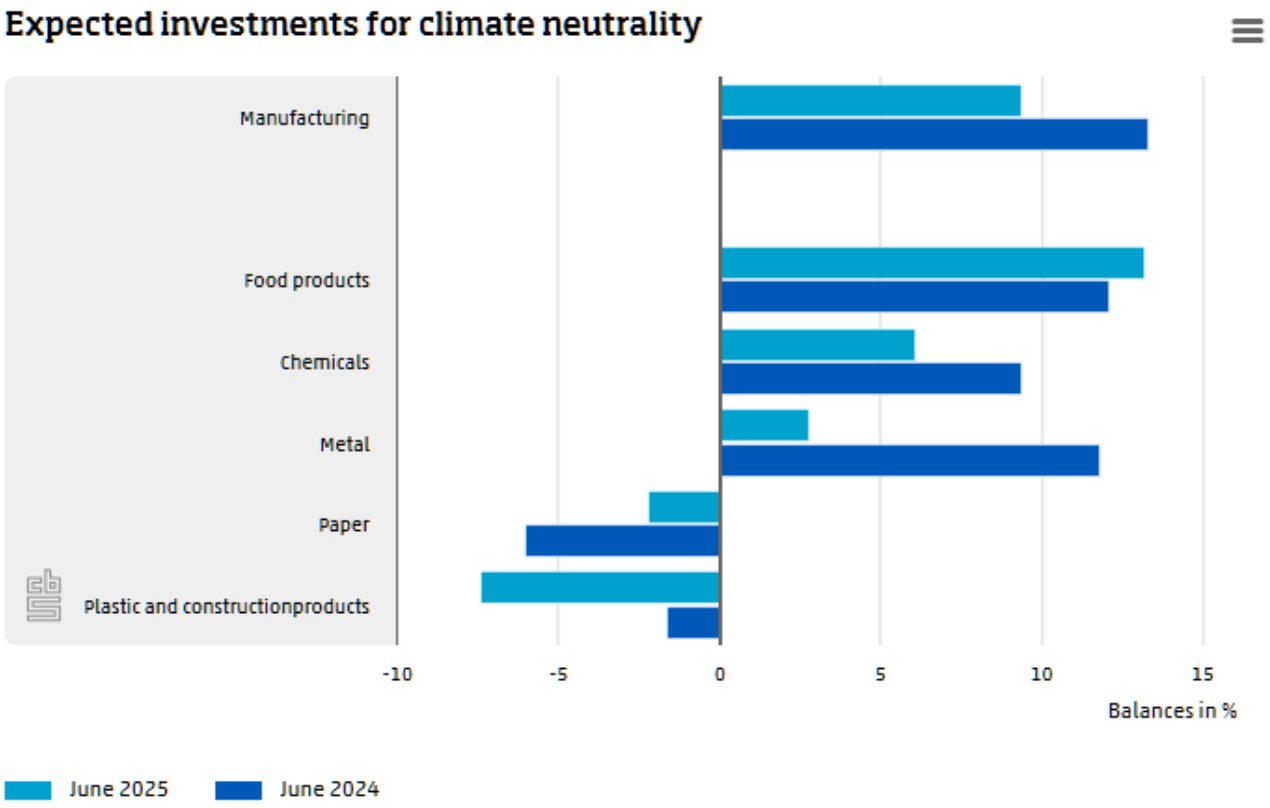
- The green transition requires enterprises to make different investment, procurement and resource-efficient decisions
- Developed five questions which are included yearly or half-yearly as ‘ad hoc’ questions in the survey
  - Change in investments
  - Change in procurement
  - Greening constraints
  - Type of investments
  - Climate neutrality of business operations

https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/longread/rapportages/2024/measuring-the-green-transition-with-business-tendency-surveys

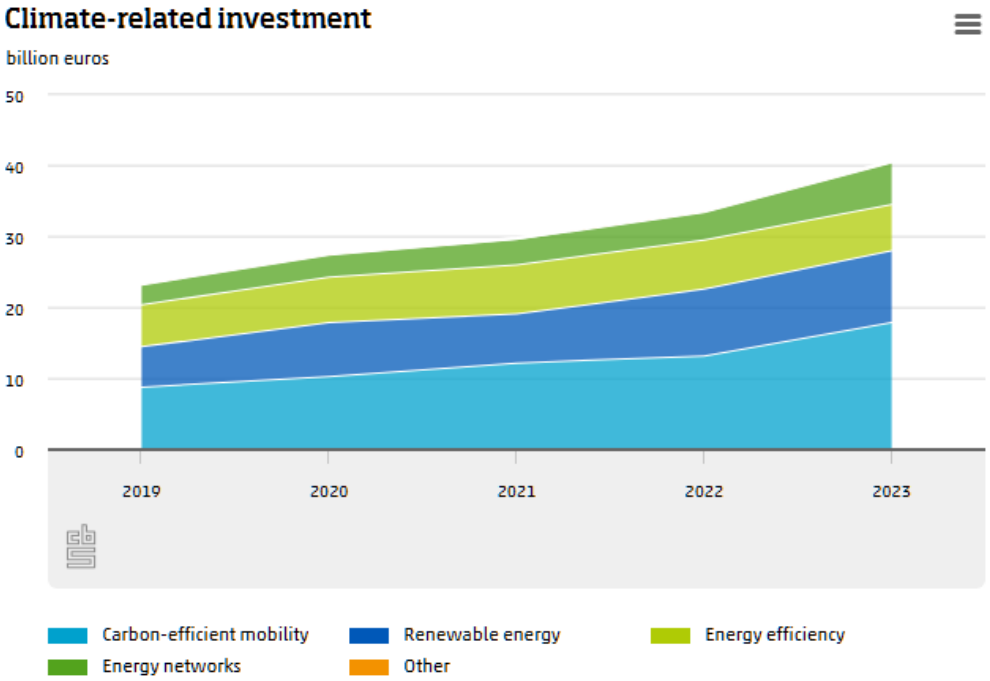
Greening constraints



Change in investments



Value added of the green deal module



Actual figures about climate-related investments of businesses came in the same month as our results

Actual figures til 2023, our results about 2024/2025

Future of ad hoc questions

Suggestion to harmonize ad hoc questions more across member states

- Increase the use of ad hoc questions in the business survey by encouraging partners to contribute more actively

- Develop a shared database where each partner can propose new questions, accessible to all members of the collaboration → Maintained by DG EcFin

- Tag each question by topic and contact person, enabling easy filtering, coordination, and follow-up

2: Linking microdata with other statistics

Introduction: motivation

- Research Question: Do firms with different main trading partners respond differently to our business tendency survey?

- Firms with different trading partners face different markets and risks, that may influence their response to business sentiment surveys

- Policies and economic shocks hit firms differently depending on their trading partners

Introduction: research scope

- Firm-level export data by destination country
- Industrial sector only
- Exporting firms only (including two-way traders)

	Industry	Service	Retail
Amount of firms	1818	2768	575
Amount of exporting firms	28	98	5
Amount of importing firms	196	725	182
Amount of two-way traders	1483	693	243
Amount of domestic firms	72	710	76
Amount of firms with missing export data	39	542	69
% of missing export data	2%	20%	12%
% exporting firms (including two-way traders)	83%	29%	43%

Introduction: main assumptions

- Export data for 2024 is still applicable for 2025

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Amount for exporting firms (t)	1648	1654	1601	1559
Exporting firms (t-1) and in sample (t)	NA	1335	1382	1332
Exporting firms (t-1 & t) and in sample (t)	NA	1291	1341	1292
Retention rate (%)	NA	96,70%	97,03%	97,00%

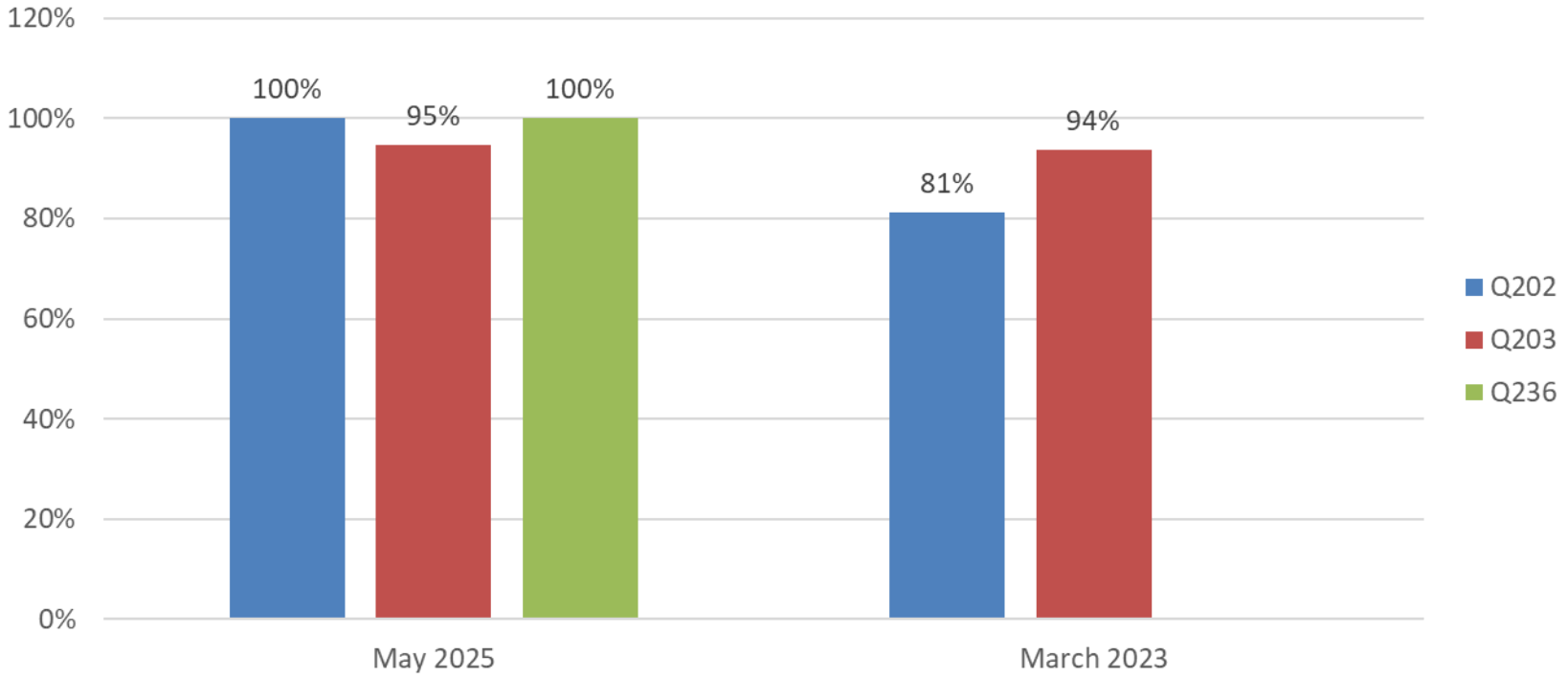
Introduction: main assumptions

- Ad hoc questions May 2025 & March 2023:

- *Question 202; Which element of trade regulation (sanctions, import tariffs, tade agreements) presents the most significant risk to your export strategy over the next 12 months?*
- *Question 203; What is the main export-related consequence of trade regulation changes?*
- *Question 236; What is the primary benefit of exporting for your company?*

Introduction: main assumptions

"Not applicable, we do not export any products or goods"



Methodology

Methodology: binary method

Firm	Weight (fte)	Export will increase	Export will stay the same	Export will decrease	Most Important Export Country
A	50	1	0	0	US
B	10	1	0	0	China
C	10	0	1	0	China

Country	Export will increase	Export will stay the same	Export will decrease
US	100%	0%	0%
China	50%	50%	0%

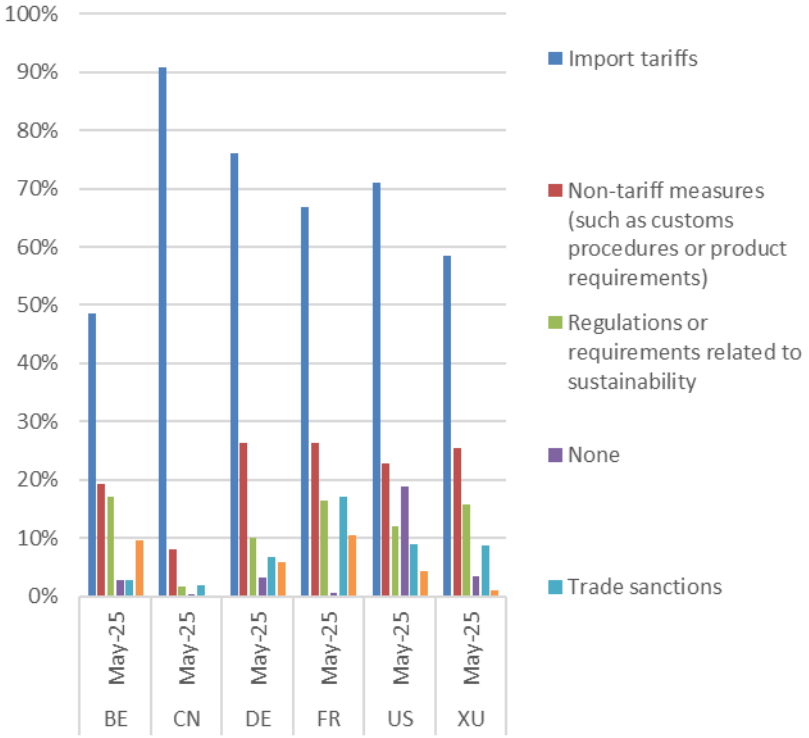
Methodology: continuous method

Country	Share Export Volume
Us	50%
China	25%
Belgium	25%

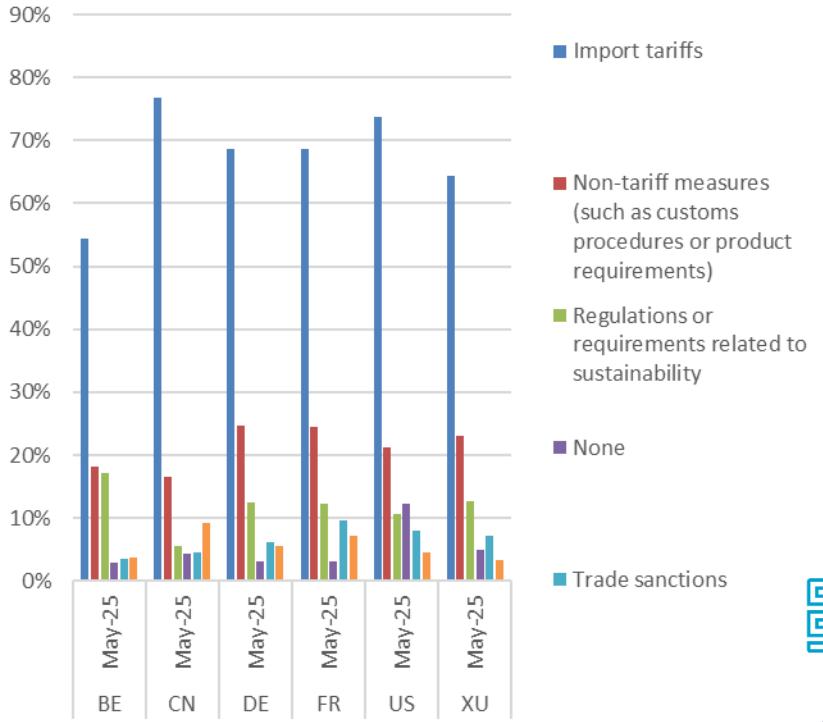
Firm	Export will increase	Export will stay the same	Export will decrease	Export Country	Weight (fte) x Export Volume (%)
A	1	0	0	Us	50 * 0,5 = 25
A	1	0	0	China	50 * 0,25 = 12,5
A	1	0	0	Belgium	50 * 0,25 = 12,5

Methodology: difference in results

Binary method



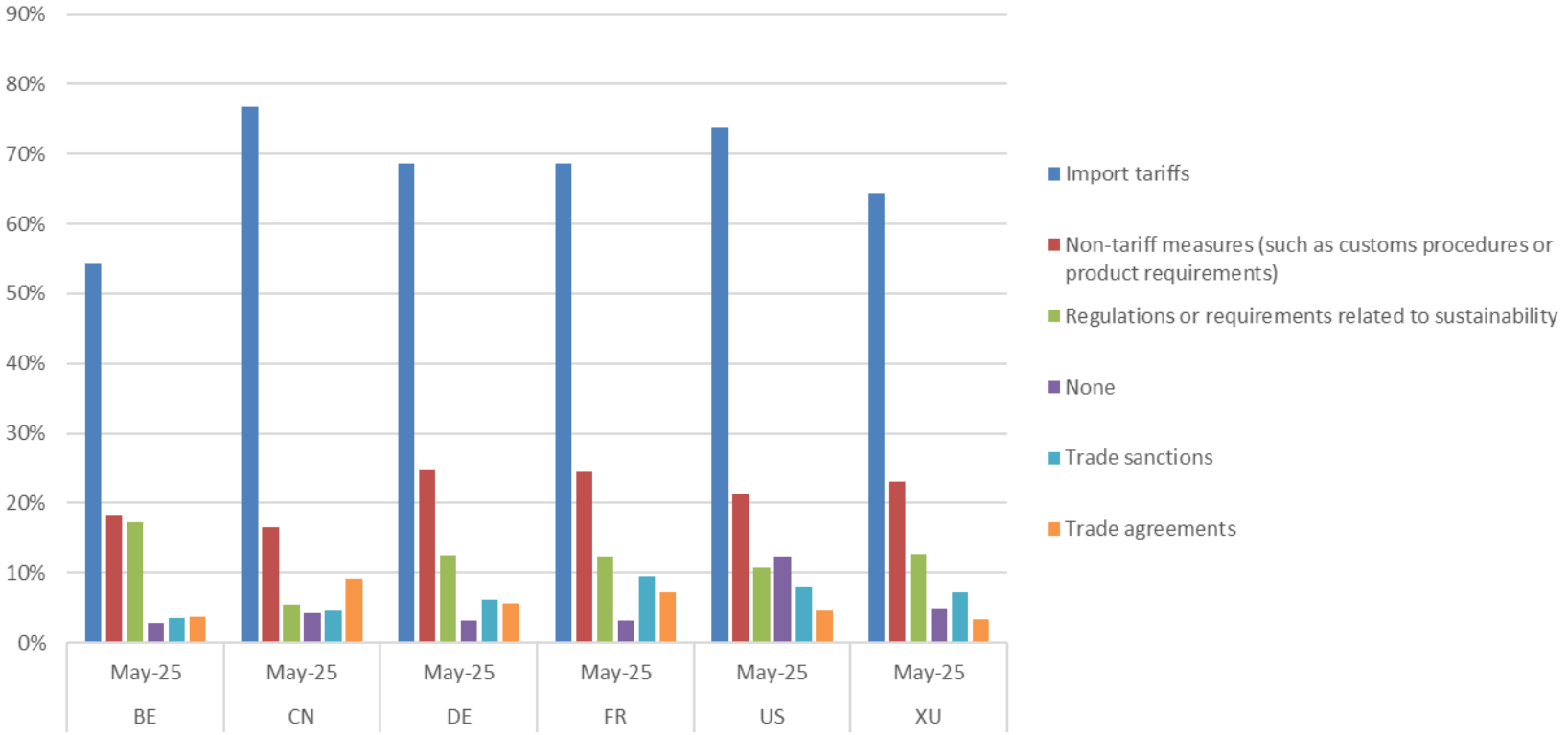
Continuous method



Results ad hoc questions

Ad hoc questions May 2025

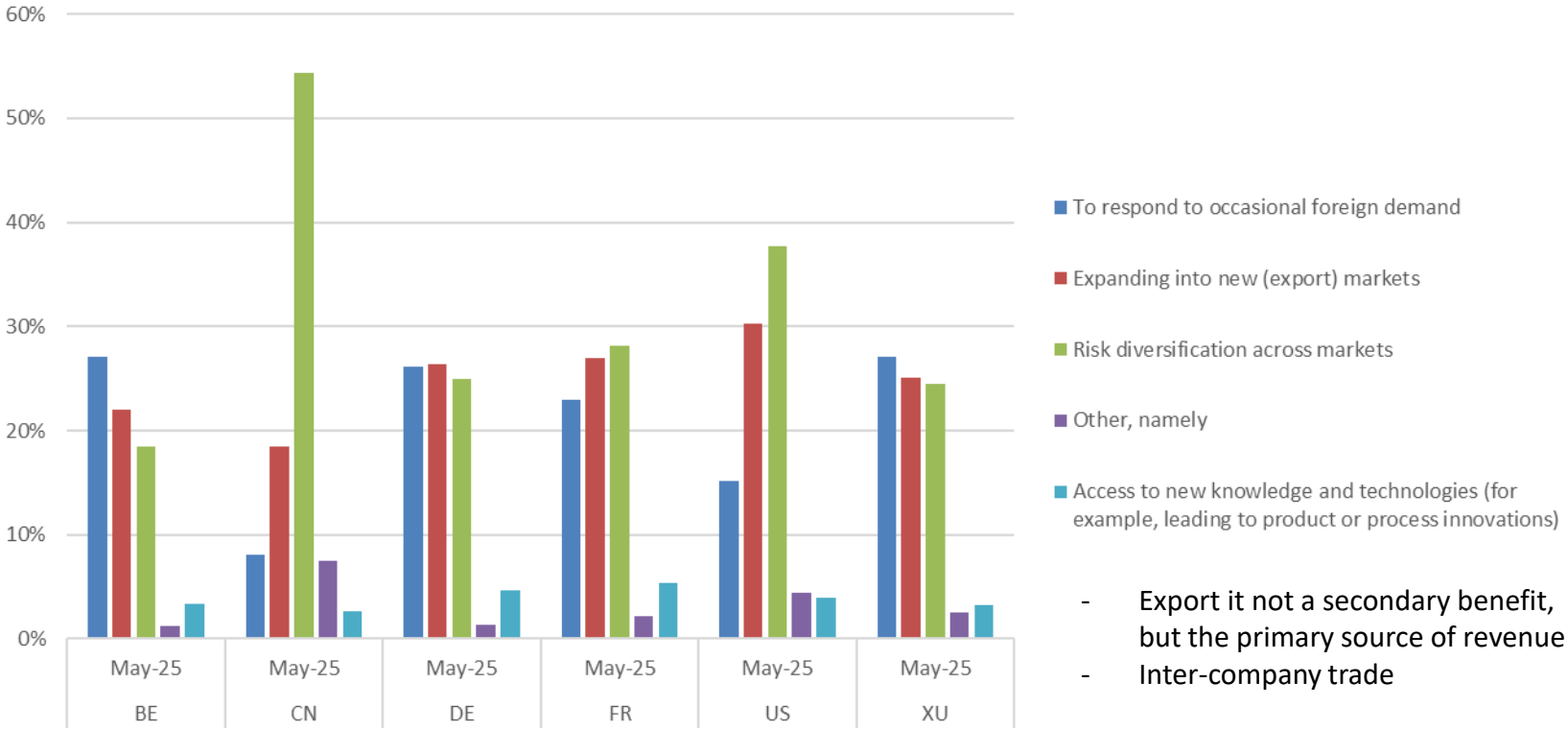
Which element of trade regulation presents the most significant risk to your export strategy over the next 12 months?



What is the main export-related consequence of trade regulation changes?

- Lower profit(margin)
- Not yet know, currently investigating impact

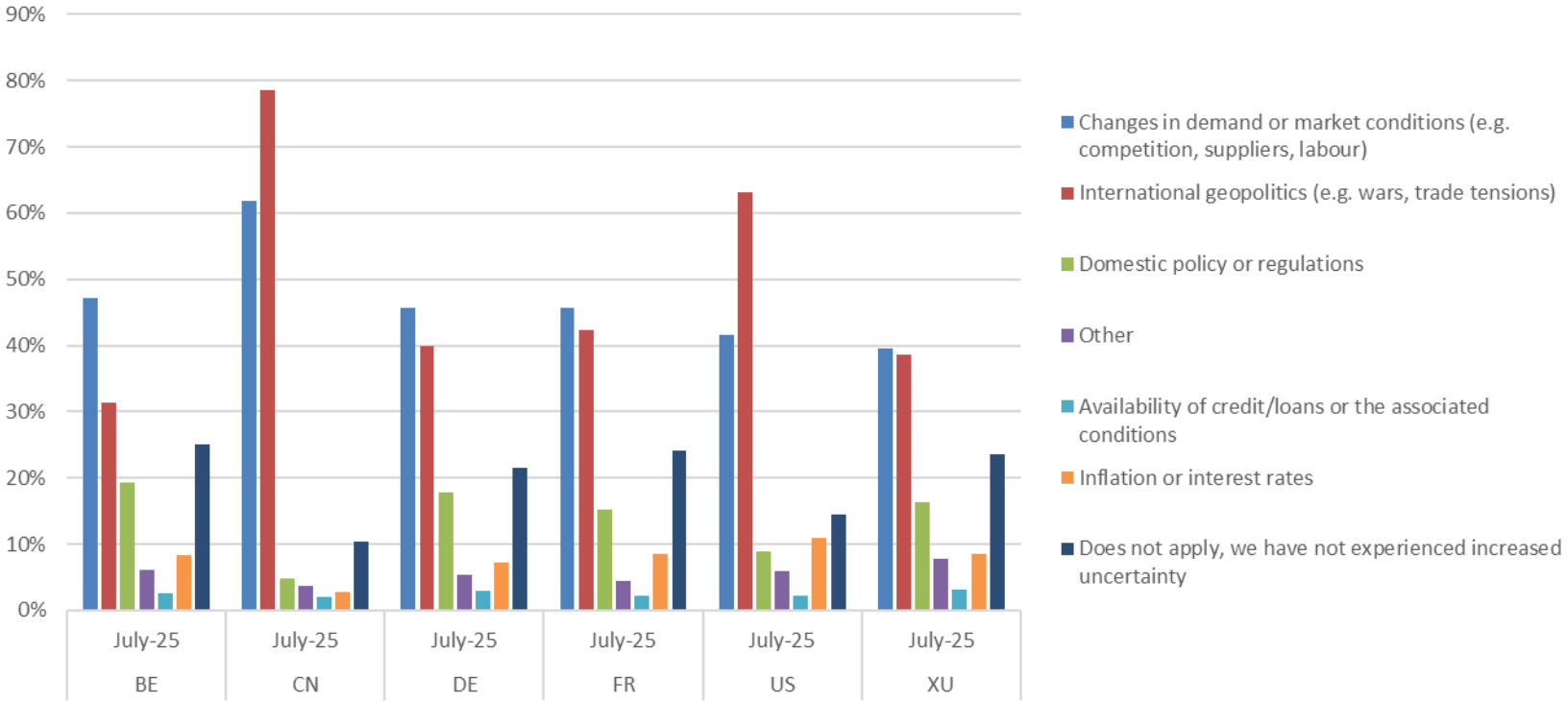
What is the primary benefit of exporting for your company?



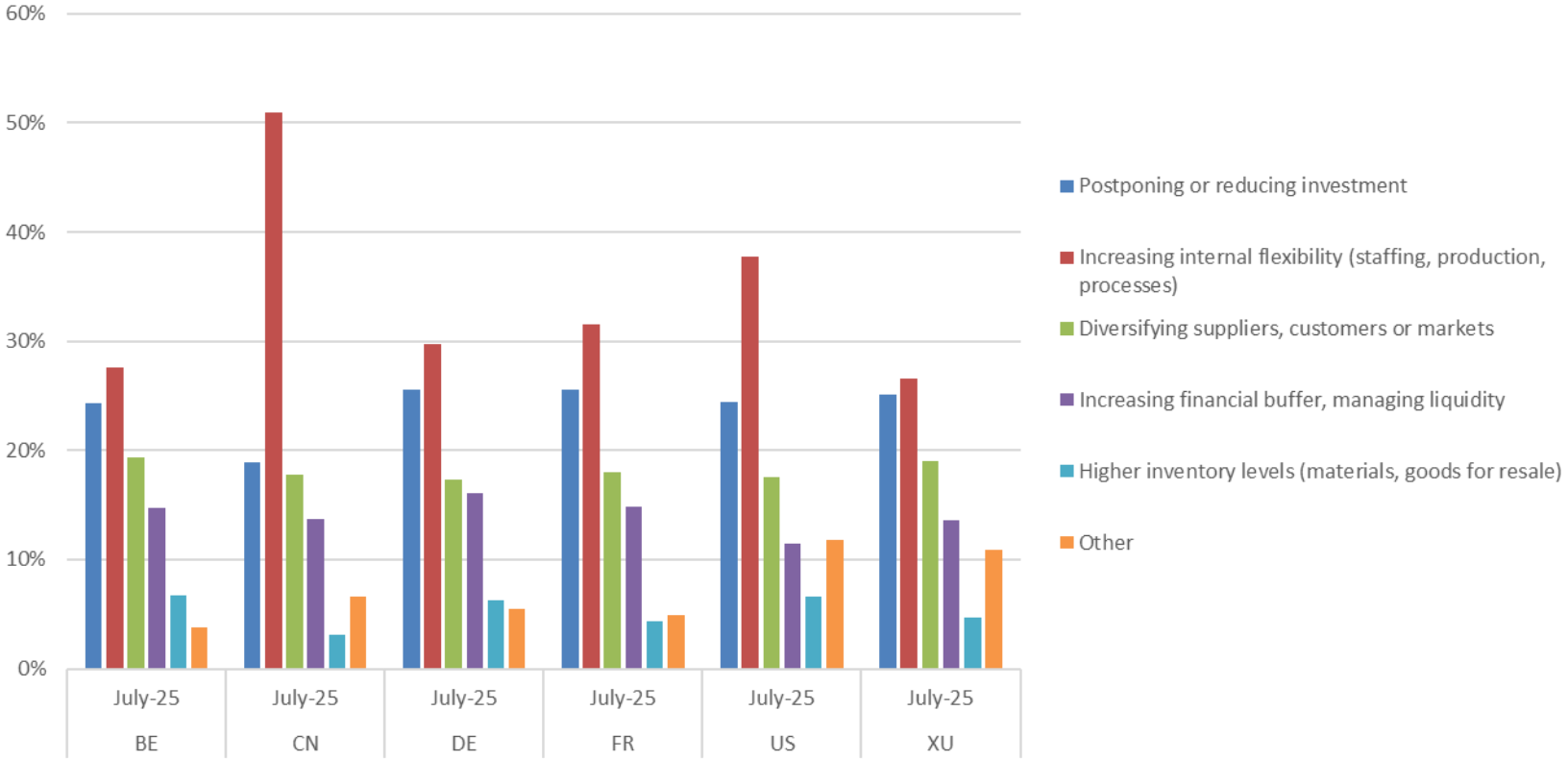
- Export it not a secondary benefit, but the primary source of revenue
- Inter-company trade

Results ad hoc question July

The main causes of increased economic uncertainty in the past 12 months

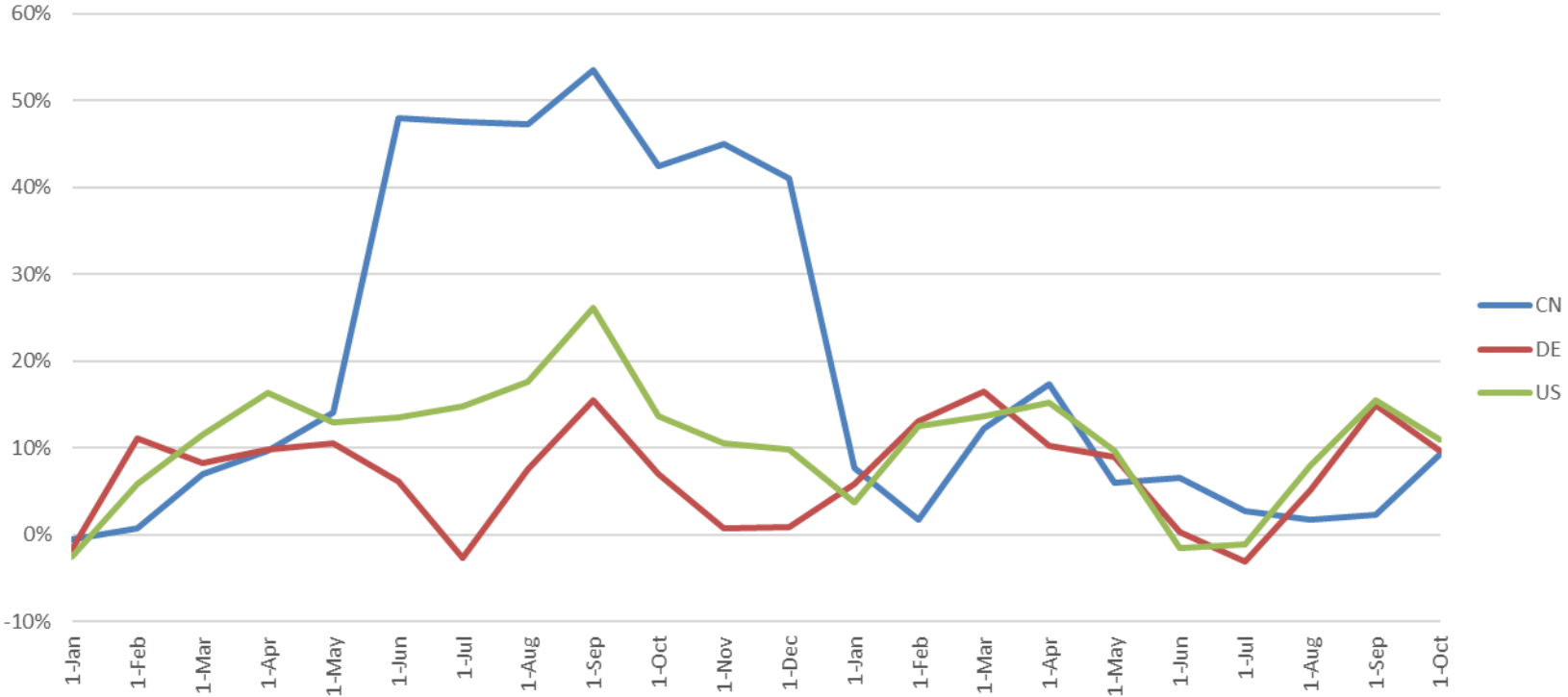


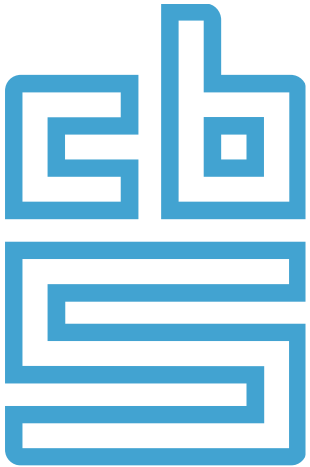
The main steps that companies haven taken to deal with increased economic uncertainty



Results regular questions

Expected production in the next three months





Facts that matter