International Transport Forum

# Statistics Brief

March 2011

▶ Global Trade and Transport

## Recovery Continues in Global Freight Transport - Uncertainties Remain

**The latest update of global freight data collected by the International Transport Forum at the OECD shows that since the financial crisis of 2008:**

- **The recovery was labelled "uncertain" in our previous brief. New data do little to reduce the uncertainty, especially when considered in combination with the risks posed by geopolitical events for the global economy, according to preliminary data.**
- **Road, rail, and sea freight transport levels remain below pre-crisis volumes in December 2010, by 5-15%;**
- **Air cargo has fully recovered from the crisis, but the latest data show slower growth and even declines in some markets;**
- **Road and rail freight show improvements and the road freight trend in the EU is upwards, with quarterly tonne-km growth of 1% for Q1 through Q3 of 2010.**

The overall picture for global freight is positive and freight transport volumes continue to improve, according to preliminary data. In the EU area, total external trade (in tonnes) by sea and air grew compared to our previous briefing while in the United States growth was less marked. However, the latest monthly data (December 2010) show also that for total exports and imports by sea, the recovery is still weak in the sense that the volumes are below their pre-crisis levels (EU27 -4%; USA -5%) measured in tonnes of goods carried, according to preliminary estimates (Figures 1 and 3).

▶ **Sea freight tonnes still below pre-crisis levels in Dec 2010**

External trade by sea shows variations by region. United States' trade by sea has stagnated since September 2010 in tonnes goods moved and fell in the last quarter of 2010 especially for Latin America compared with the previous quarter. Data for EU27 are more dynamic although trends for some segments (notably imports from China by sea) show a slowing down and even a decline, measured in tonnes of goods transported (Figures 3, 5, 7, 9).

Recovery also remains uncertain. While air cargo has fully recovered from the crisis, external trade in tonnes of goods moved by air in the United States has now fallen for five consecutive months when measured using seasonally adjusted data. Both the EU27 and the United States' external trade by air shows slower growth or declines in nearly all markets in the last quarter 2010 compared with growth in the previous quarter (Figures 4, 6, 8, 10).

▶ **Uncertainty in air freight volumes**

OECD

More regional inland transport by rail and road shows improvements. Growth in road freight in the EU area has picked up in the third quarter of 2010, when measured using seasonally adjusted data on tonne kilometers performed. The positive trend in rail freight continues as well. In the United States, the rail freight volume is now only 5% below pre-crisis levels. In the EU area, where rail fell more during the crisis, the volume is still 14% below the peak attained in the second quarter of 2008 (Figures 2, 11-13).

**Road and rail t-km grew Q3/2010**

Figure 1. **External trade, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Jun-08**
(Tonnes, monthly trend)

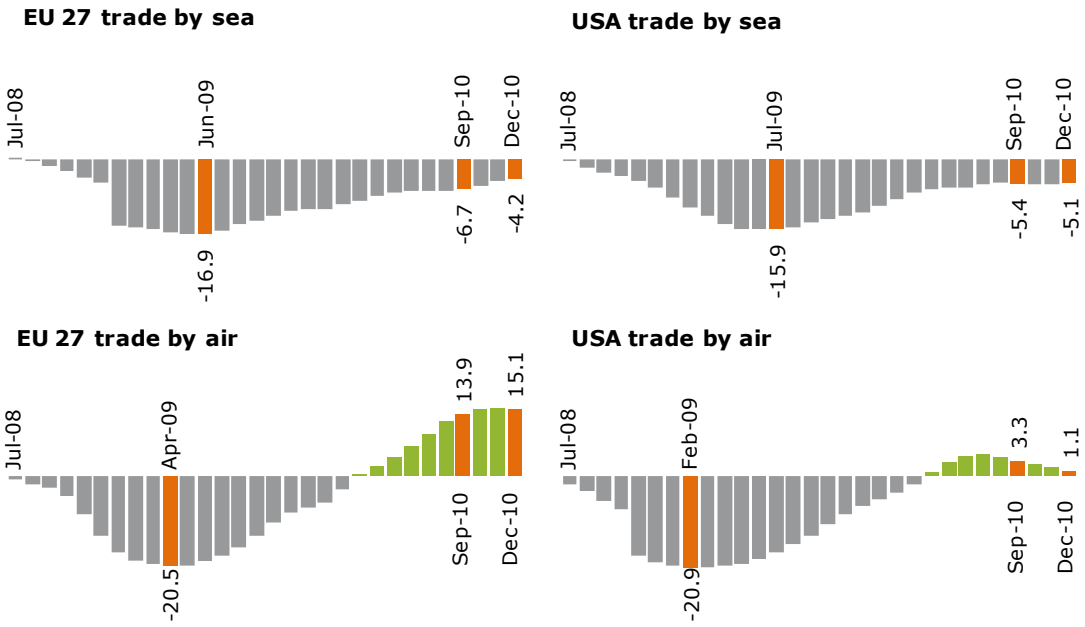



Figure 2. **National and international rail and road freight, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Q2/08**
(Tonne-km, quarterly trend)

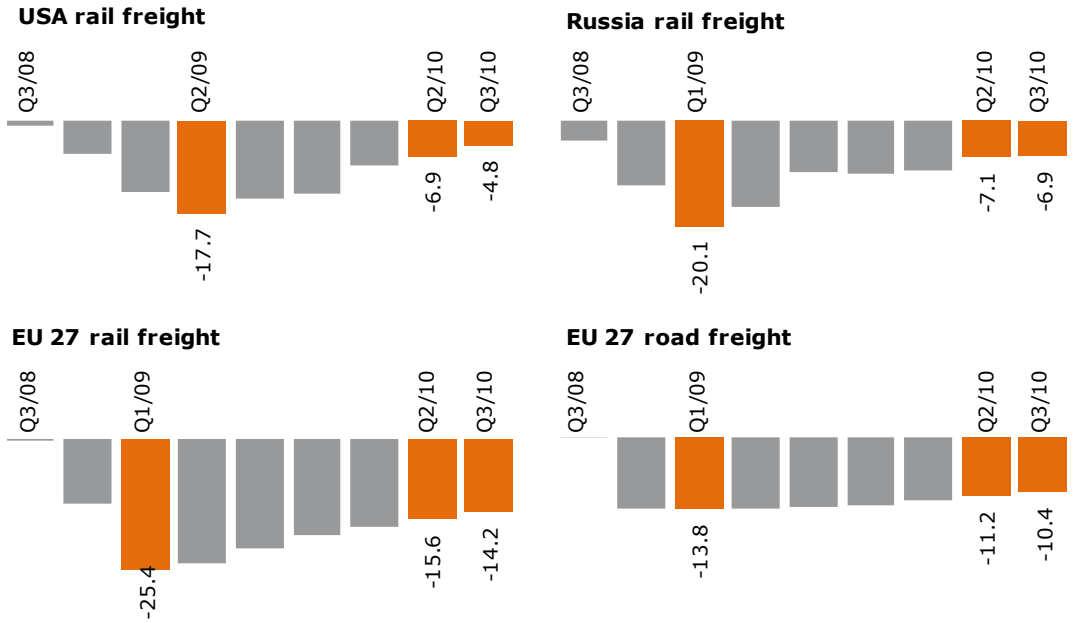


Figure 3. **EU27 and United States external trade by sea**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted [sa] and trend)

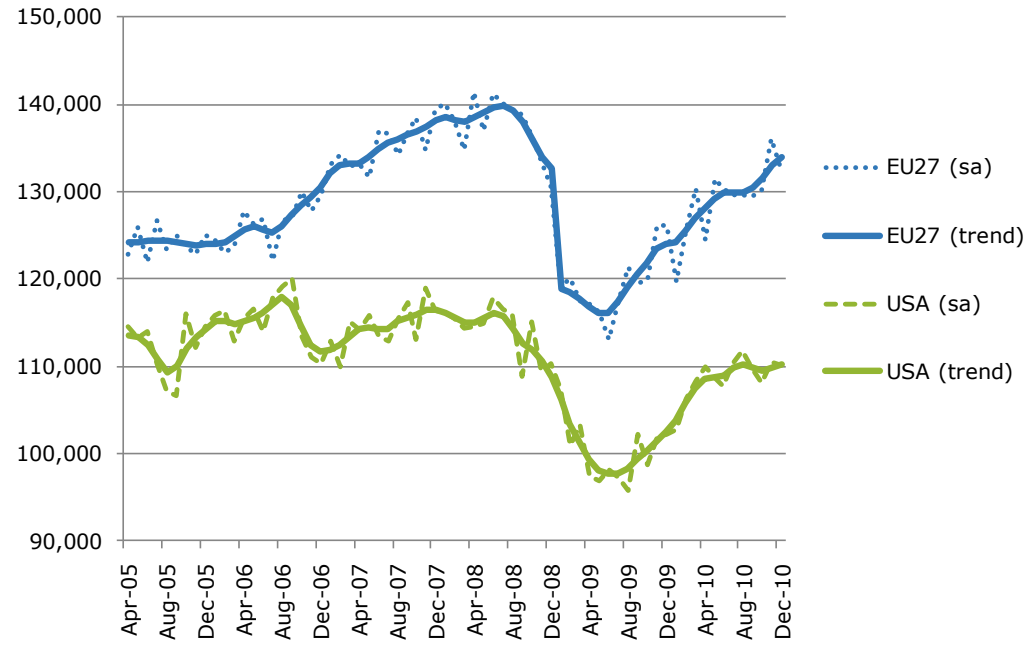



Figure 4. **EU27 and United States external trade by air**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted [sa] and trend)

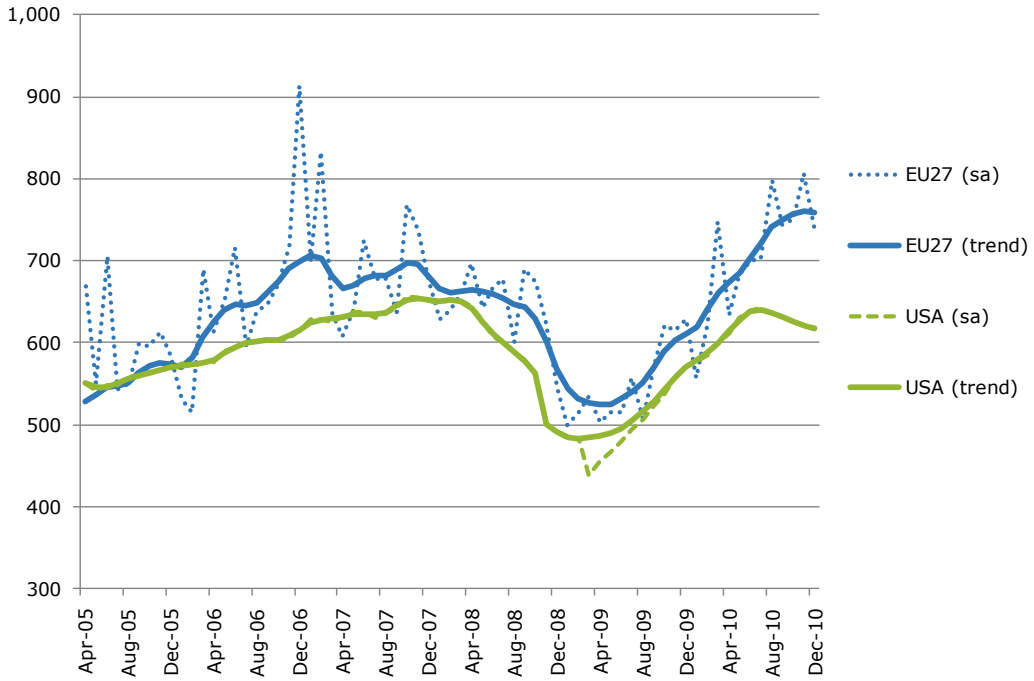


Figure 5. **EU27 and United States trade with China by sea**
(1 000 tonnes, trend)

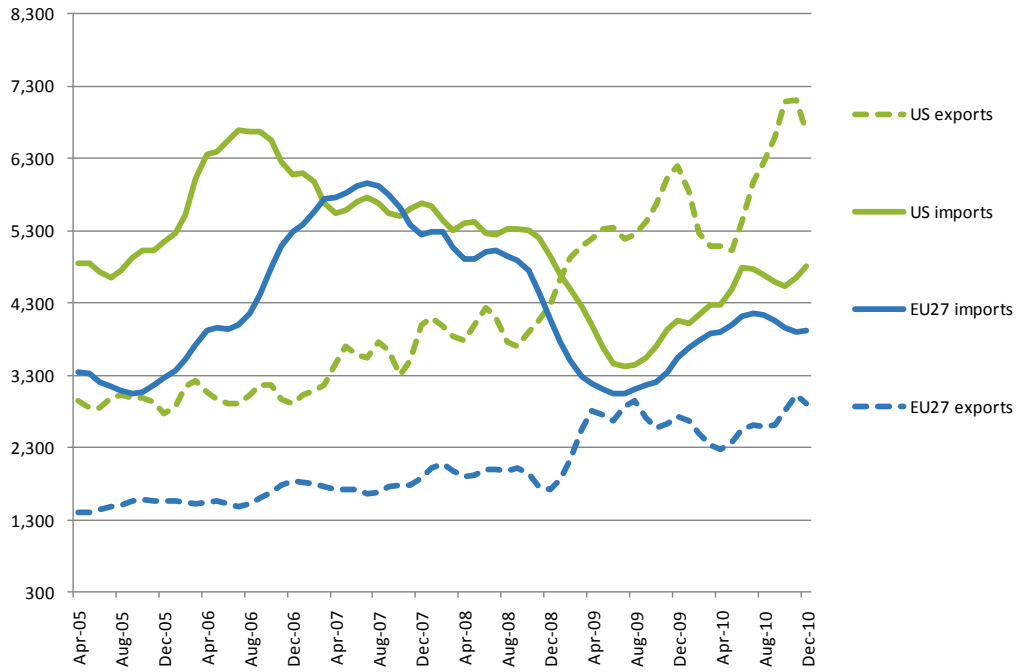



Figure 6. **EU27 and United States trade with China by air**
(1 000 tonnes, trend)

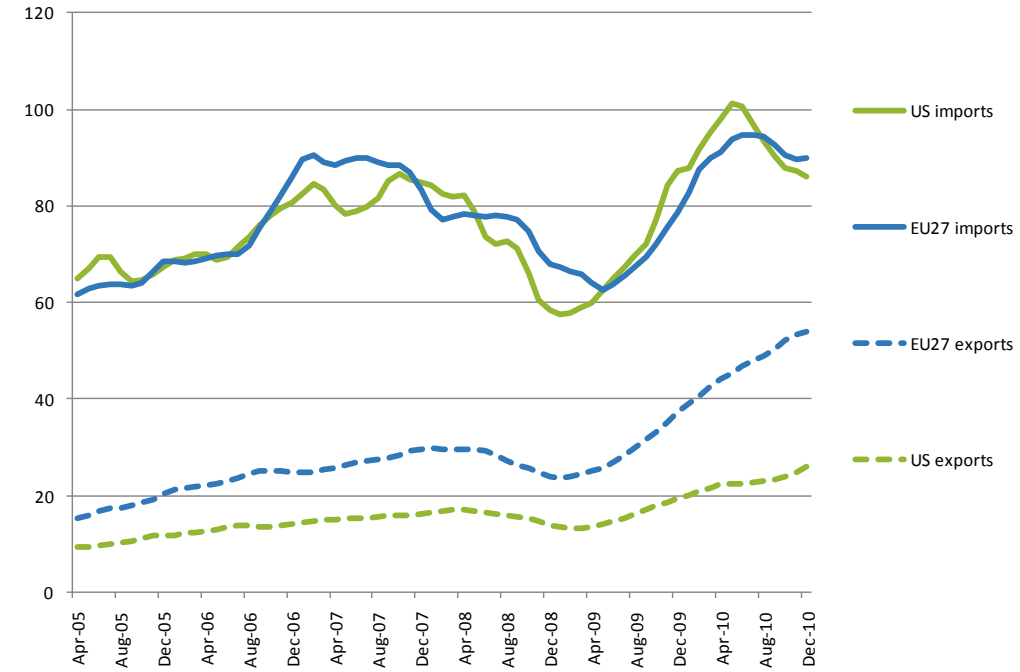


Figure 7. **United States external trade by sea in 2010, percentage change over the previous quarter**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted)

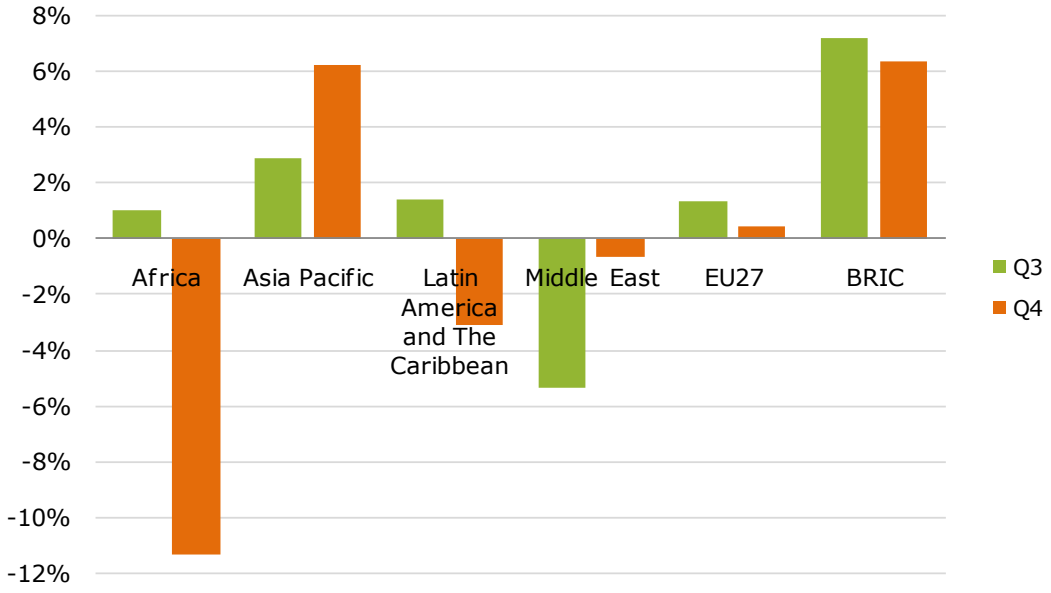



Figure 8. **United States external trade by air in 2010, percentage change over the previous quarter**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted)

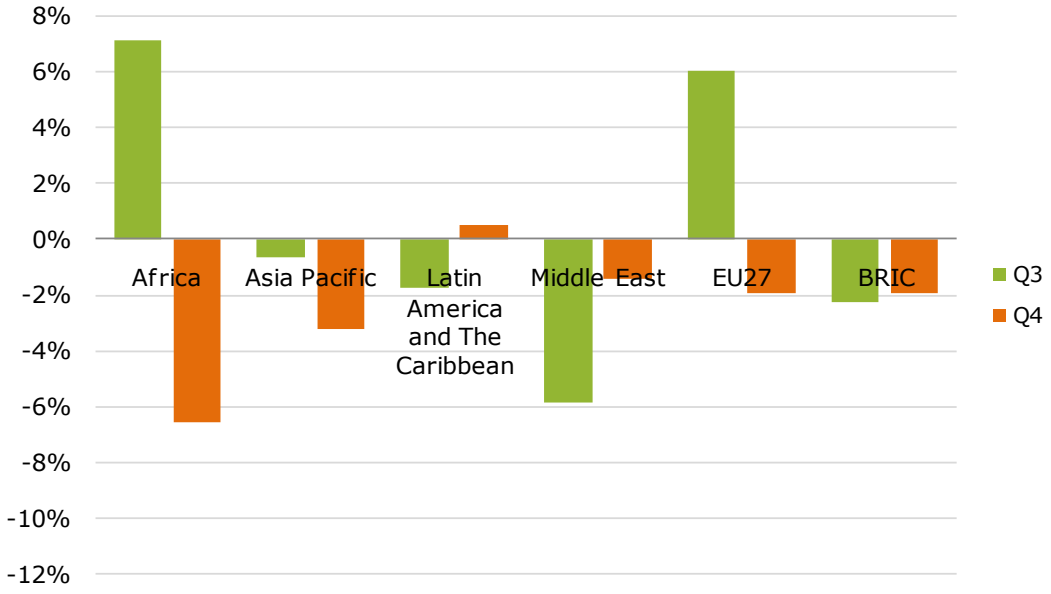


Figure 9. **EU27 external trade by sea in 2010, percentage change over the previous quarter**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted)

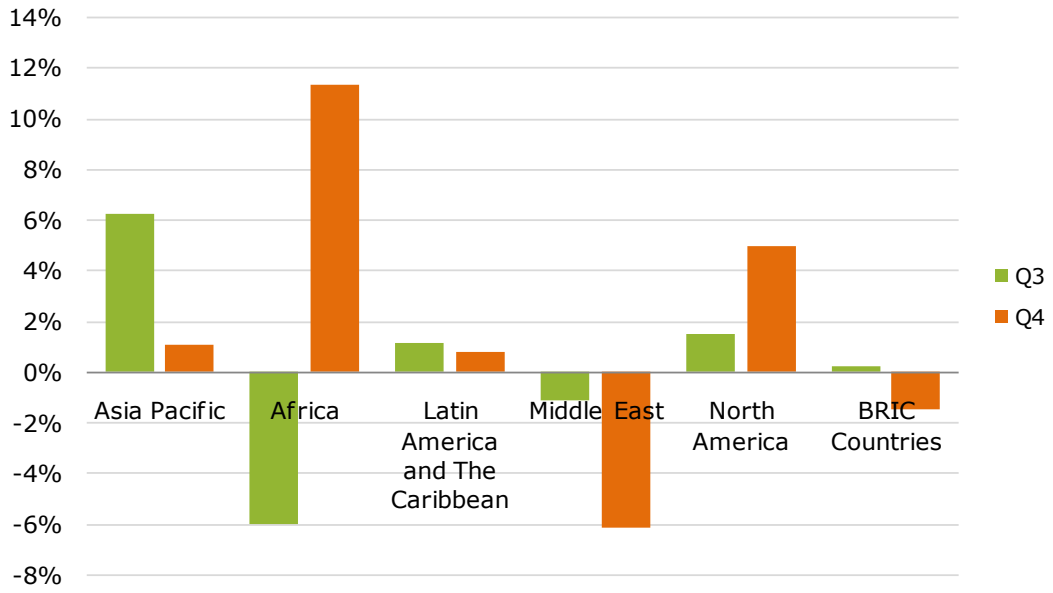



Figure 10. **EU27 external trade by air in 2010, percentage change over the previous quarter**
(1 000 tonnes, seasonally adjusted)

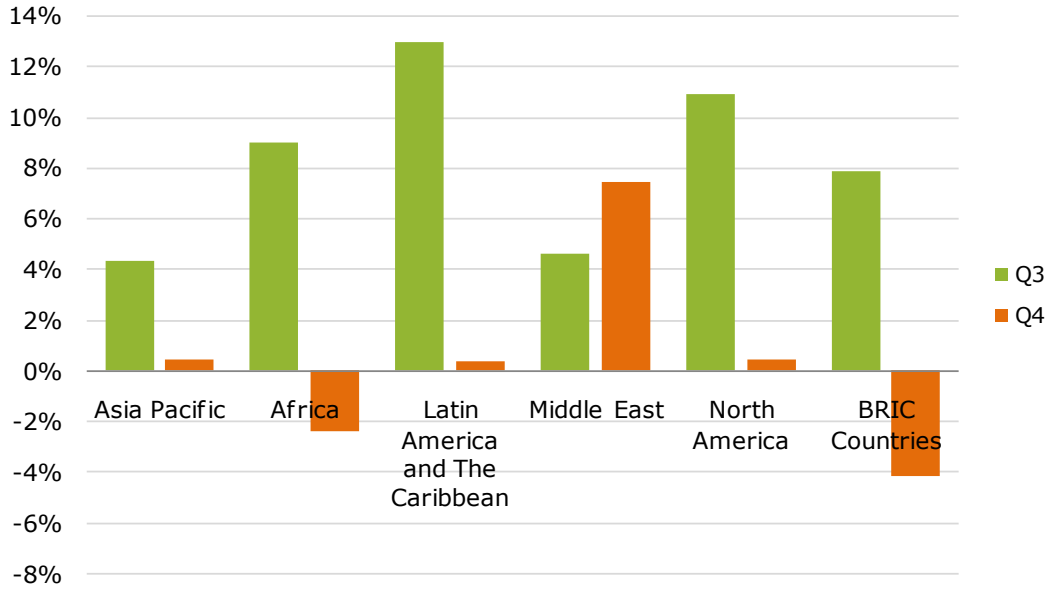
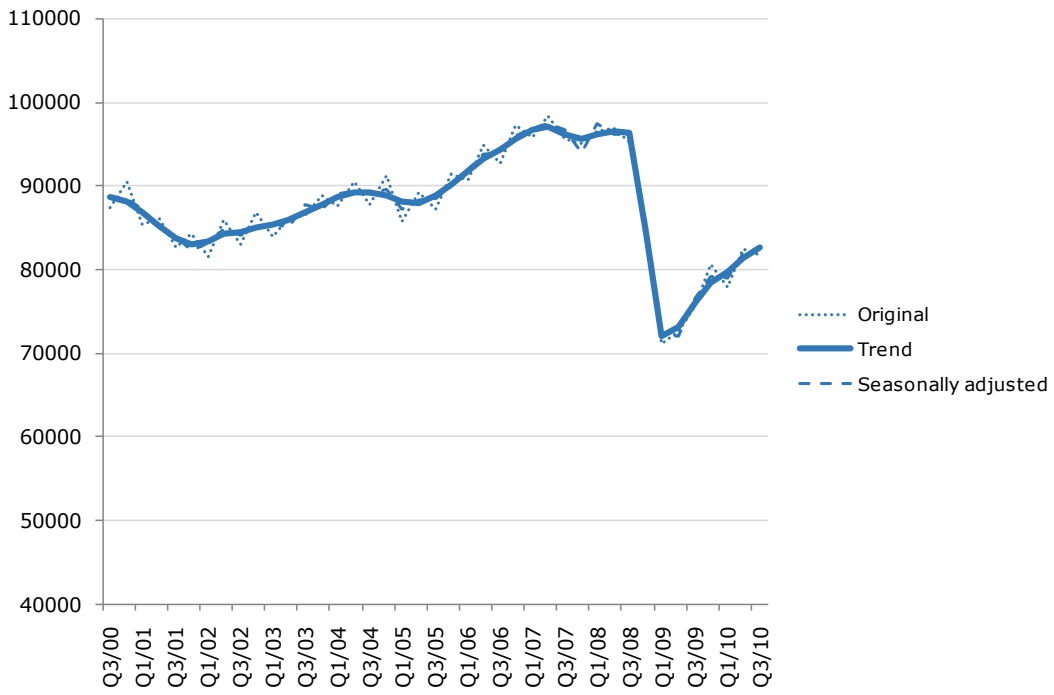


Figure 11. **National and international rail freight in the EU**
(Million tonne-km)




**Note**: Data on rail freight in the EU area exclude Austria, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Romania.

Figure 12. **National and international rail freight in the United States and Russian Federation**
(Million tonne-km)

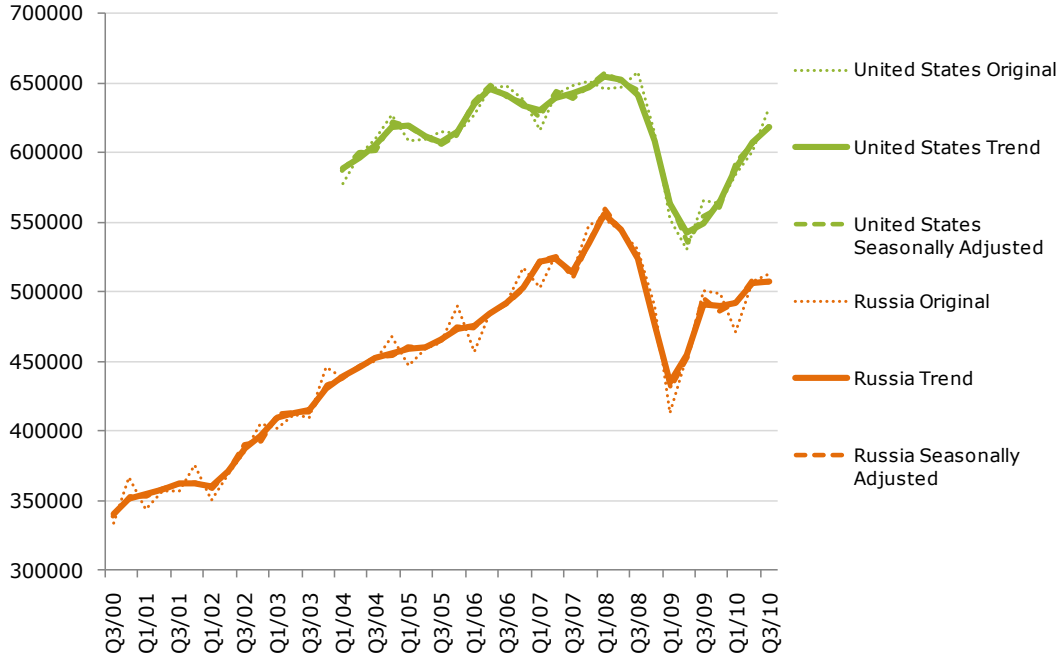
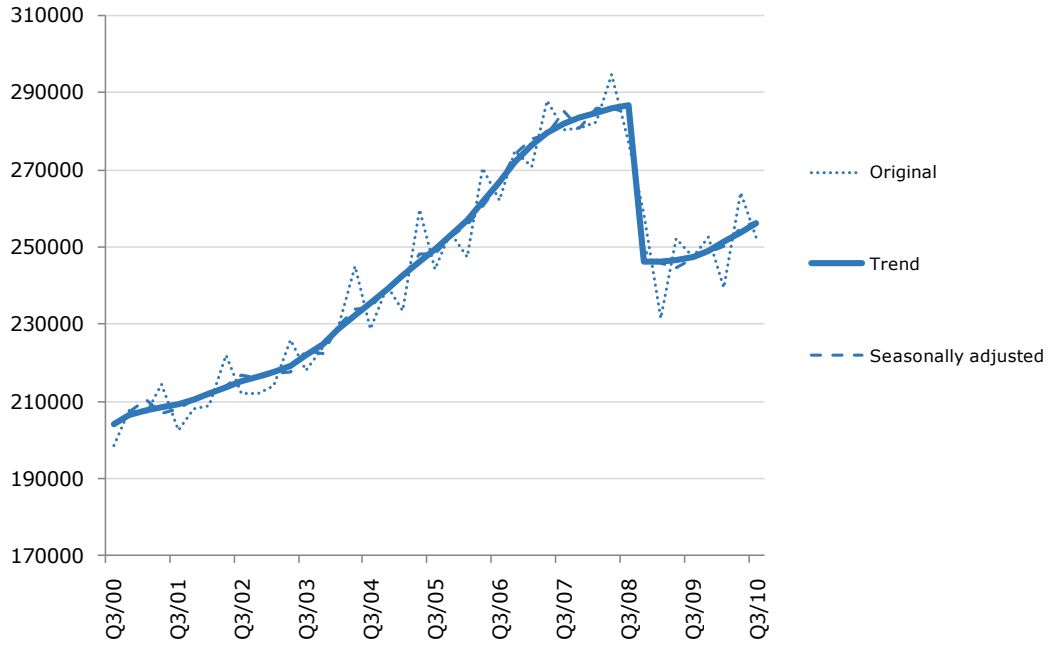


Figure 13. **National and international road freight in the EU**
(Million tonne-km)




**Note**: Data on road freight in the EU area include Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden. These cover around 65% of total road freight in the EU27.

**Methodological note**

The International Transport Forum Statistics Brief on Global Trade and Transport presents the latest global freight transport trends based on the Global Trade and Transport Database and the ITF Quarterly Transport Statistics. These data are collected by the Secretariat through a questionnaire and from external sources, including Eurostat, US Census and Japan Customs. National data are seasonally adjusted by the International Transport Forum Secretariat for analytical purposes.

Short-term data is normally compiled to allow timely identification of changes in any indicator and especially to identify possible turning points. However, monthly or quarterly transport statistics are often characterized by seasonal patterns. Seasonal adjustment filters out usual seasonal fluctuations that recur with similar intensity in the same season every year. Trend, in turn, excludes also other irregular factors (such as strikes and impact of weather) from a time series. A time series from which the seasonal variations have been eliminated basically allows for the comparison of data between two quarters for which seasonal patterns are different, also helping to identify turning points and the underlying direction of the change.

Seasonal adjustment is carried out with the Demetra program using the TRAMO/SEATS adjustment method. Seasonally adjusted estimates may differ from those produced by national authorities due to differences in the adjustment methodology.

For more detailed description of methodology, click here.

The next brief is scheduled for release the first week of May 2011. If you would like to receive further issues of the Statistics Brief or more information, please contact: Mr Jari Kauppila (jari.kauppila@oecd.org).

For additional information on transport statistics, go to www.internationaltransportforum.org/statistics/shortterm/index.html.