dun & bradstreet

Q1 2026 REPORT

Global Business Optimism Insights

Contents

Introduction

Dun & Bradstreet's Global Business Optimism Insights (GBOI) is a quarterly report that aims to gauge the optimism levels of businesses globally and provides a unique and comprehensive view into the thinking behind the growth, operational, and investment expectations of business leaders.

The GBOI is an amalgamation of five indices: Global Business Optimism Index, Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index, Global Business Financial Confidence Index, Global Business Investment Confidence Index, and Global Business ESG Index. The first four indices capture business expectations for the coming quarter, while the ESG index captures the sentiments on key ESG attributes in the current quarter.

All five indices are constructed for 32 economies across 17 sectors and 3 business sizes, synthesized from a survey of approximately 10,000 businesses. The findings from the survey are supplemented with insights from Dun & Bradstreet's proprietary data and economic expertise. An index reading above 100 indicates an improvement in optimism relative to the base year (Q3 2023 to Q2 2024), while an index reading below 100 signifies a deterioration.

Key Findings

↑ 3.5%

Optimism Index

The Global Business Optimism Index rose by 3.5% q/q in Q1 2026 after four consecutive quarterly declines. A higher share of respondents reported optimism across parameters, signaling a broad-based upturn in business confidence — anchored by clearer policy paths, steadier financing, and supply chain normalization — with services and small businesses leading across most economies, even as large firms and a few economies remain cautious.

↑ 6.6%

Supply Chain Continuity Index

The Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index registered a gain of 6.6% q/q for Q1 2026, marking the first meaningful rebound after a challenging 2025, where we saw declines for Q1, Q3, and Q4 and only a modest gain for Q2. Emerging economies led with an 8.0% rise, while advanced economies posted a gain of 6.2%. This optimism reflects early signs of stabilization in freight and energy costs after the commodity price spikes that characterized much of 2025, alongside reduced tariff-related frictions, industrial recovery, and strategic supply chain initiatives across key economies.

↑ 6.2%

Financial Confidence Index

The Global Business Financial Confidence Index rebounded 6.2% q/q for Q1 2026, likely reflecting improved demand, disinflation, and clearer policy signals following late-2025 trade realignments, tariff rollbacks, and easing monetary conditions. Improved margins, stronger liquidity buffers, and disciplined cash flow management — especially in the information and communication sectors — enhanced resilience.

↑ 6.2%

Investment Confidence Index

The Global Business Investment Confidence Index rose 6.2% q/q, marking the first expansion in over a year. However, the index remains below 2024 highs, signaling cautious optimism after a challenging 2025. To fund such investments, businesses seem willing to deploy internal cash flows instead of relying on new debt, making central bank policy rates less impactful for returns on investment. Further, technological innovation emerged as the top driver of growth opportunities, emphasizing that businesses are focused on unlocking productivity gains rather than capacity expansion from capital expenditure.

↑ 5.1%

ESG Index

The Global Business ESG Index improved sharply by 5.1% q/q in Q4 2025, reversing the contraction in Q3, driven by strong gains in select economies despite uneven regional performance. Advanced economies (+5.9%) rebounded more sharply after three consecutive quarters of decline, while emerging economies improved by 2.9%. Businesses in advanced economies demonstrated greater commitment to ESG integration, with the governance dimension driving momentum. However, participation in social initiatives fell in emerging markets, highlighting regional divergence. Green initiatives, such as renewable energy, emerged as a top avenue of near-term growth opportunities at a global level, reiterating that energy-efficiency investments are being pursued not only to meet regulatory and stakeholder expectations but also to unlock productivity gains.

Executive Summary

The Q1 2026 Global Business Optimism Insights survey shows that external confidence is improving on the back of enhanced clarity on tariff-related policies. Businesses exhibit higher optimism for export orders, smoother supply operations, and stronger financial planning than the earlier quarters, allowing them to prepare for Q1 2026 with more confidence. This shift is supported by a more positive assessment of the global macroeconomic environment.

Consumer-facing sectors are seeing a clear tailwind from the return of international travel. This mobility is lifting sales and export optimism in hospitality and retail, despite uneven domestic demand. Businesses report the same trend developing in logistics and sourcing as well. Optimism for sales and export orders in automotives, one of the sectors most impacted by trade-related uncertainty and that showed early improvement for Q4 2025, is now looking stronger across more economies. However, supply chain continuity risks persist for auto manufacturers reliant on rare earths, which have been facing intermittent export restrictions.

Across sectors, operational expectations are improving in three core areas — delivery lead times, supplier cost control, and sourcing diversification — central to business continuity. Clearer tariff policies and fewer trade route disruptions are also supporting margins and strengthening cash flow planning.

Liquidity and investment choices add to this story. Businesses feel more comfortable with cash buffers; consequently, the preference is to fund new CapEx via internal cash, with the focus on sustainability and product/service innovation. As a sidenote, AI is a visible driver within this pattern: information and communications businesses are leading the way in investment optimism, and metals are positioned to benefit from infrastructure build outs linked to computing and energy needs.

Monetary policy is a supportive but lagged factor. The survey captures this timing gap: in several consumer-facing economies, notably the U.S., domestic orders are still soft even as external channels firm up. Corporate borrowing confidence is improving on a longer horizon, but refinancing risk will remain in focus as rate cuts do not pass through immediately to borrowing costs or demand. This may also be why many businesses prefer internal funding for now.

The Business ESG Index for Q4 2025 also shows positive, but uneven, momentum across economies. Advanced economies report stronger integration, especially in governance; while the narrative across Europe is mixed, with some economies easing reporting standards and others still adapting to new rules. Businesses are increasingly tying growing traceability demands from consumers, financing benefits, and ongoing efforts to strengthen brand reputation as the core reasons for ESG adoption, in addition to regulatory requirements.

For Q1 2026, Businesses Should Look To:

- Lean into export-led growth; look to improve capacity, sales plans, and shipping schedules in sectors with rising export-order optimism (automotives, capital goods, hospitality, retail, food manufacturing, and textiles).
- Reinforce cost discipline, recalibrate inventory cycles and pricing, and leverage tax incentives if available (e.g., in the U.S.) to preserve cash in economies with lower domestic order optimism.
- Prioritize capital expenditures focused on product/services innovation; take advantage of easing financial conditions through 2026 if unable to leverage internal cash to fund investment opportunities.

GLOBAL BUSINESS

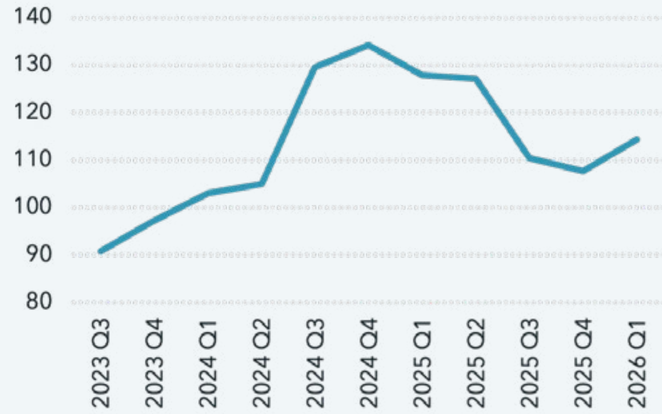
Optimism Index

GLOBAL BUSINESS

Financial Confidence Index

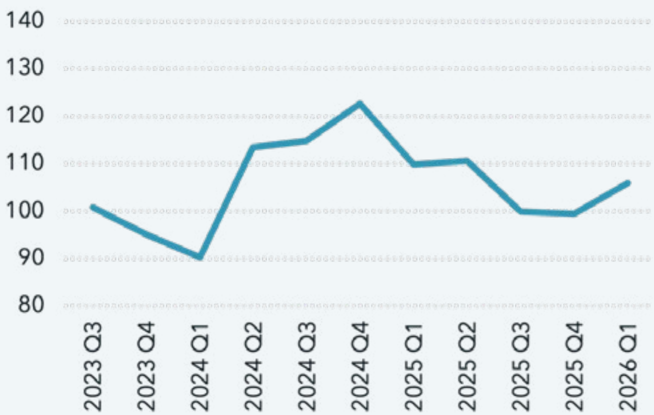
GLOBAL BUSINESS

Investment Confidence Index



GLOBAL BUSINESS

Supply Chain Continuity Index



GLOBAL BUSINESS

ESG Index

Global Business Sector	Optimism Index	Supply Chain Continuity Index	Financial Confidence Index	Investment Confidence Index	ESG Index
Accommodation and Food Service	110	109	107	116	112
Construction	106	107	108	114	114
Financial and Insurance	106	100	103	114	111
Information and Communications	107	107	108	119	120
Manufacturing: Automotive	110	100	106	115	115
Manufacturing: Capital Goods	109	103	105	116	119
Manufacturing: Chemicals, Rubber, Plastics, and Pharma	109	103	107	111	111
Manufacturing: Electricals, Electronics, and Hardware	107	103	109	112	112
Manufacturing: Food, Beverages, and Tobacco	108	111	104	113	115
Manufacturing: Metals	112	109	113	123	121
Manufacturing: Textiles, Wood, Paper, and Leather	115	114	113	116	120
Mining	105	104	103	107	114
Other Services: Professional and Administrative	103	100	105	111	114
Real Estate	109	108	107	115	116
Transportation and Storage	111	109	108	117	115
Utilities	106	106	107	112	117
Wholesale and Retail Trade	111	111	110	115	116

INDEX VALUE 108.3

D&B Global Business Optimism Index

Key Findings

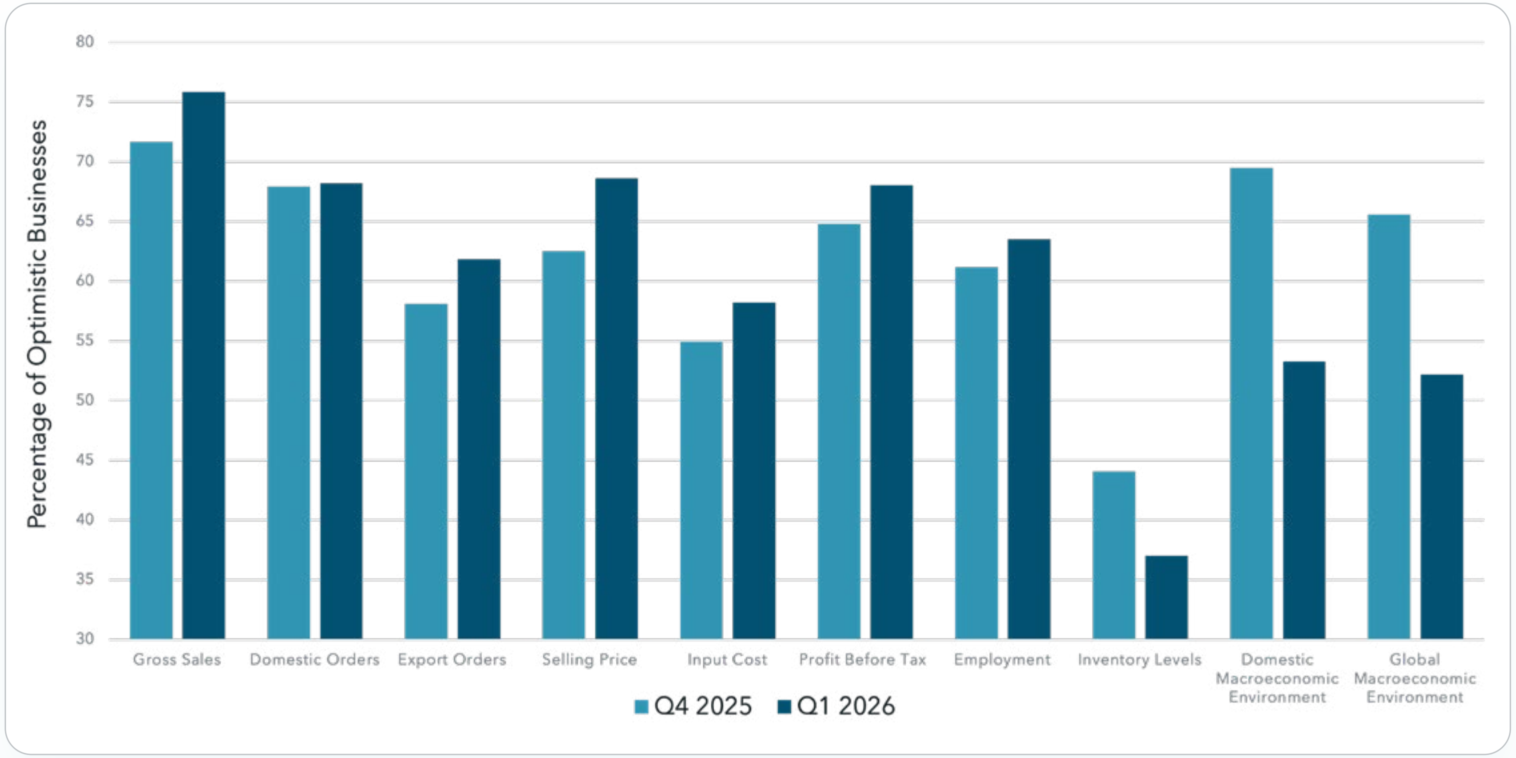
- The Global Business Optimism Index rose by 3.5% q/q for Q1 2026 after four consecutive quarterly declines, indicating that demand is picking up.
- A higher share of respondents reported optimism about stronger sales (+4.2pps), higher orders (domestic +0.3pps; export +3.7pps), higher profits before tax (+3.3pps), better margins (selling price +6.1pps; input costs +3.3pps), and a better macroeconomic scenario (domestic +1.3pps; global +5.4pps).
- Optimism was led by small businesses (+11.4%), with optimism among medium-sized businesses also rising (+3.4%), while large businesses (-3.2%) reported a fall. The Global Business Optimism Index for large businesses fell because a lower share reported optimism about how quickly they could turn over their inventory (days of inventory outstanding: DIO), which dropped by 23.5pps. Moreover, large businesses seem more cautious about supply chain conditions than their small and medium-sized counterparts, as evidenced by their Supply Chain Continuity Index remaining practically unchanged from Q4. This trend may have incentivized large businesses to build up extra inventory, which in turn contributed to reduced optimism about DIO.
- Optimism across emerging economies increased by 4.8%, outpacing advanced economies (+3.1%). The gap is consistent with stronger cross-border travel and investment flows and continued supply chain adjustments that might have lifted order visibility and confidence among emerging economies.
- Optimism in 87.5% of economies surveyed improved for Q1 2026 (versus 31.3% for Q4 2025). Notable changes included the U.S. (+0.2%), where optimism increased after declining for four consecutive quarters in 2025; France (+17.4%); the U.K. (+14.3%); and Taiwan Region (+12.4%). However, optimism declined in India (-6.1%) and Indonesia (-2.2%).
- Services sector optimism increased 4.2%, outperforming manufacturing (+2.5%). Out of 17 sectors, 13 reported improved optimism. Wholesale and retail (+9.0%), automotives (+8.7%), and hospitality (+7.8%) led the increases in optimism, while mining (-2.4%), electrical manufacturing (-1.2%), and construction (-0.5%) softened.
- Globally, businesses see trade protectionism and exchange rate volatility as the most likely risks in 2026. By contrast, supply chain disruptions and a global economic slowdown, though less likely, are expected to have the greatest impact.

Chart 1: Quadrant of Optimism — Global Business Optimism Index

Table 1: Business Size — Global Business Optimism Index

Period	Small	Medium	Large
Q2 2025	113.6	112.7	112.5
Q3 2025	103.9	106.1	106.8
Q4 2025	96.5	107.0	110.2
Q1 2026	107.4	110.6	106.7

Chart 2: Sub-Indices — Global Business Optimism Index



The Q1 2026 Global Business Optimism Insights survey reinforces our observation from the Q4 2025 report, in which we noted that clearer policy signals, despite tariffs being higher than a year earlier, were supportive of businesses' confidence. Globally, external confidence for Q1 2026 appears to be firming up, with export order optimism rising across half the economies surveyed (both emerging and advanced), which had seen two consecutive quarterly declines. This was accompanied by a stronger assessment of the global macroeconomic environment, which is consistent with the broader macro backdrop. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the OECD have highlighted that more transparent trade actions, clearer fiscal guidance, and AI-related investment have lowered planning uncertainty. With supply chain conditions normalizing and financial markets less volatile, businesses appear more optimistic about external opportunities.

Sectors that were most exposed to tariff uncertainty or regulatory ambiguity appear to be stabilizing; for example, automotives showed the strongest improvement in the manufacturing sector for Q1 2026. The auto sector was among the few sectors to show an uptick in optimism for Q4 2025, reinforcing our view that tariff-related clarity is producing global green shoots. In Q1 2026, the gains are stronger and more widespread across economies, further validating that narrative. Profit expectations rose sharply (+6.6pps), supported by higher sales (+3.9pps) and stronger export order optimism (+8.7pps). Unlike in previous quarters where the gains were more concentrated, this momentum is geographically diverse, extending across Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Mexico. One of the factors influencing optimism in European auto firms may have been the European Commission's shift from temporary to definitive five-year countervailing duties on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs), effective 2025. This transition has reduced regulatory volatility and established a clearer pricing environment, helping European producers safeguard margins and plan production cycles more efficiently. The capital goods manufacturing sector shows a similar pattern. Respondents report higher optimism for export orders (+4.1pps), domestic orders (+7.5pps), sales (+5.6pps), and profits (+2.8pps).

Consumer-facing sectors appear to be benefiting from increasing international travel, which has nearly normalized, with UN Tourism reporting that tourism receipts are rising and that 2025 arrivals reached 99.0% of 2019 levels. More businesses in accommodation and food services report higher optimism in sales (+14.8pps) and export orders (+15.0pps), although optimism softened slightly (-3.5pps) for domestic orders. Optimism for businesses engaged in wholesale and retail activity similarly reflects strengthening external demand — more firms expect sales to improve (+5.9pps), export orders to rise (+10.4pps), and profits to grow (+5.3pps), while domestic orders held broadly stable (-0.2pps). Central banks, including the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank (ECB), note that real wage gains and targeted public outlays are expected to lift household consumption. According to the OECD Employment Outlook 2025, real wages are growing across most OECD countries, though in about half they remain below early-2021 levels. Rising consumer mobility, improving income dynamics, and a rebounding services sector seem to be supporting sentiment, even if domestic demand remains uneven across markets.

The Business Optimism Index for the U.S. showed encouraging signs for Q1 2026, having weighed on global sentiment through 2025; however, the rebound is narrowly based, with export-oriented categories seeming to be driving the improvement. Overall, more businesses expect higher profits (+2.1pps), supported by higher sales (+4.7pps), export orders (+3.4pps), and selling prices (+3.2pps), while domestic orders lag (-2.0pps). Among the sectors surveyed, automotives, accommodation and food services, and wholesale and retail trade follow this pattern. Part of the uplift may reflect bilateral frameworks the U.S. concluded in late 2025 with several partners. In September, U.S. exports rose to $289.3 billion (+$8.4 billion m/m), with goods exports higher by $8.8 billion and record consumer goods exports, consistent with stronger external demand. This divergence points to an economy where external channels offset domestic constraints. However, a higher share of respondents expect the domestic macroeconomic environment to improve for Q1 2026 (+1.6pps), which may translate into higher domestic orders further down the line.

For now, elevated inflation appears to be a concern in the U.S., consistent with a 2.1pps drop in the share of respondents optimistic about lower raw material costs. Survey responses reinforce this view of risk: 35.4% of U.S. respondents cite inflation as the primary concern for 2026, 28.9% fear a global slowdown, and nearly half believe such a slowdown would be highly consequential. Net-net, the U.S. data depict a narrow, externally led rebound coexisting with domestic fragility.

Across economies, the survey shows that optimism is improving but conditional — businesses welcome tariff-related clarity but remain vigilant about inflation and patchy demand. Where policy signals are clearer, financing steadier, and demand anchored by travel normalization and cross-border services, sentiment is higher, reflected in gains for autos, capital goods, and consumer-facing segments. However, businesses remain cautious where input-cost volatility or discretionary domestic spending weighs on demand (e.g., chemicals).

For Q1 2026, Businesses Should Look To:

- Strengthen export market positioning where sentiment is clearly improving. The broad-based rise in export order optimism — spanning automotives, capital goods, hospitality, and retail — indicates that businesses can plan capacity deployment, sales, and logistics alignment for externally driven growth.
- Exercise tighter oversight of domestic-demand exposure and cost structures. Declining domestic orders in key markets, particularly in the U.S., highlight ongoing price sensitivity. Businesses should reinforce cost discipline, adjust inventory cycles, and recalibrate domestic pricing strategies.
- Advance planned CapEx and supply chain decisions in sectors where policy is stable. Businesses should prioritize investments where visibility on returns has improved and regulatory risk has measurably declined, e.g., the European automotive sector.

After four consecutive quarterly declines, export order optimism increased in 7 out of 10 surveyed economies (across both advanced and emerging economies), alongside a stronger global macro assessment — signaling increased confidence in external conditions as policy clarity and supply chain normalization reduce planning uncertainty.

INDEX VALUE 106.0

D&B Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index

Key Findings

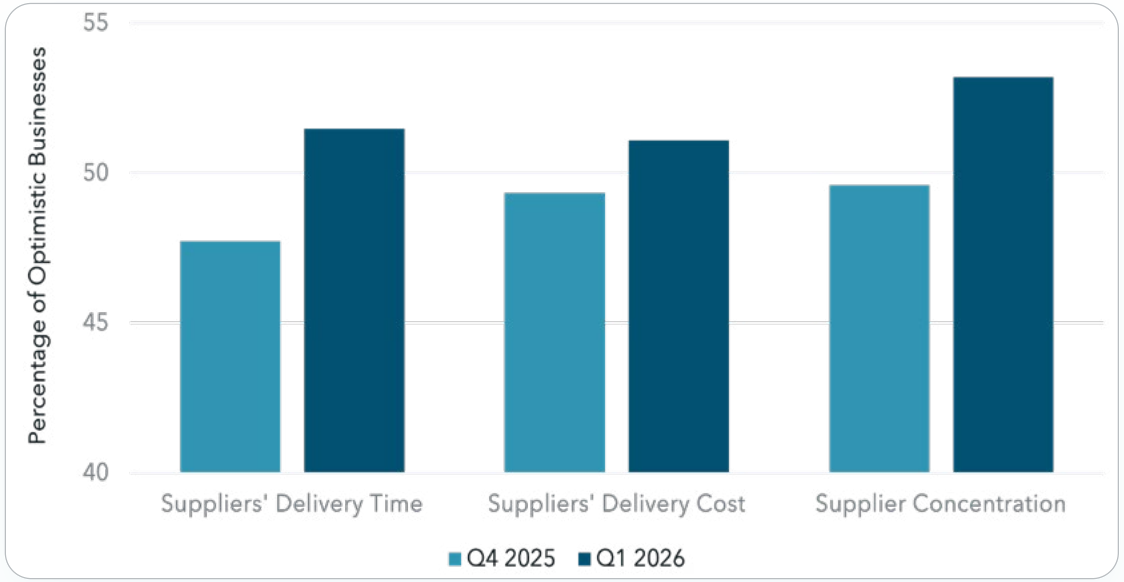
- The Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index rose 6.6% q/q for Q1 2026, with 28 out of 32 economies surveyed recording positive changes, signaling a broad-based rebound. Emerging economies (+8.0%) slightly outpaced advanced economies (+6.2%).
- Standout performers included Taiwan Region (+33.2%), Egypt (+28.2%), France (+25.5%), and Japan (+24.8%), supported by industrial recovery and strategic supply chain initiatives. In contrast, a few economies saw negative shifts in optimism, including India (-10.3%), Mexico (-3.4%), and Italy (-1.4%), reflecting some country-specific challenges.
- At a regional level, the breakdown is uneven but broadly positive. Sub-Saharan Africa (+13.4%) and Europe (+12.9%) led improvements in optimism, reflecting late-2025 efforts to deepen trade integration. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region followed with a 10.4% rise, while Asia Pacific posted an 8.3% increase. By contrast, the Nordics (+4.7%) and North America (+2.8%) saw only modest gains amid slower demand normalization.
- Optimism was notably stronger among small and medium-sized businesses — with both recording a 10.0% gain in optimism — than large businesses (+0.3%), which posted a flat movement. This likely reflects the ability of small and medium-sized businesses to capitalize on recent improvements in supply chain conditions following a year of structural challenges in 2025.
- Optimism was broad-based across the manufacturing and services sectors, led by food manufacturing (+13.5%) and textiles (+11.3%), alongside strong gains in wholesale and retail trade (+10.7%), real estate (+10.0%), and information and communications (+10.0%).
- Electricals (-1.2%) and automotives (-0.4%) were the only manufacturing subsectors to record modest declines in optimism for Q1 2026, largely reflecting rare-earth supply disruptions and concentrated sourcing risks that persisted into late 2025, even though earlier tariff-related clarity had provided some relief.
- More businesses anticipate improved delivery lead times (+3.6pps), lower supplier costs (+2.5pps), and reduced supplier concentration risks (+3.6pps) for Q1 2026. These expectations reinforce the positive outlook on managing core supply chain challenges.
- However, although there is a meaningful rebound in supply chain optimism for Q1 2026, businesses still perceive supply chain disruptions — such as logistical bottlenecks and material shortages — as a risk that could unsettle progress that began toward the end of 2025 following easing of tariff and trade uncertainty. This underscores that optimism and risk awareness coexist, reflecting a pragmatic outlook rather than complacency.

Chart 3: Quadrant Of Optimism — Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index

Table 2: Business Size — Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index

Period	Small	Medium	Large
Q2 2025	120.0	94.1	117.7
Q3 2025	101.5	96.5	101.6
Q4 2025	93.0	101.6	103.5
Q1 2026	102.2	111.8	103.9

Chart 4: Sub-Indices — Global Business Supply Chain Continuity



The Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index for Q1 2026 points to a meaningful rebound in supply chain optimism after a challenging 2025, echoing the stabilization in broader business optimism captured in the Global Business Optimism Index. Nearly 88.0% of the economies surveyed reported gains in optimism — evidence of a broad-based, cross-market improvement. The momentum came from economies that had laid strategic foundations in late 2025: Taiwan Region's optimism reflects its Q4 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)-led push to strengthen semiconductor resilience; Egypt's gains stem from progress on the Sokhna-Alexandria-Cairo logistics corridor and upgrades in the Suez Canal Economic Zone, which promise smoother trade flows; while France benefited from clearer EU tariff frameworks. Among the few economies that reported weaker optimism, India stands out, with supply chain optimism likely weighed down by ongoing tariff uncertainty and prolonged trade negotiations with the U.S.

The core operational levers of supply chain continuity — delivery lead times, supplier cost management, and supplier concentration risk — all reported improved optimism for Q1 2026. Businesses anticipate better control of lead times as logistics bottlenecks recede, alongside firmer ability to contain supplier costs and diversify sourcing. This triad of improvements supports the theme of a broad-based rebound in supply chain optimism and helps explain why the headline index strengthened meaningfully after 2025's swings. Optimism appears to be widely shared across sectors, but the strongest lift comes from consumer-facing segments such as food manufacturing, textiles, and wholesale and retail trade. These gains suggest that domestic demand is rebounding across many surveyed economies, feeding into higher import requirements and reinforcing global supply chain flows. However, the picture is not uniformly positive: certain manufacturing areas, notably electricals and automotives, continue to face supply-side headwinds. Persistent rare-earth supply constraints and the cost pressures of the EV transition weigh on these sectors, serving as a reminder that although the overall outlook is constructive, structural vulnerabilities remain.

Business size dynamics add another layer to the rebound in optimism for Q1 2026. Small and medium-sized businesses report a sharp improvement in supply chain continuity optimism, outpacing the near-flat optimism among large corporates. This reversal — particularly for small businesses after a year of contraction in 2025 — underscores how agility is becoming a differentiator. Smaller businesses appear to be leveraging localized sourcing and flexible supplier arrangements to capitalize on easing bottlenecks and cost normalization, a marked contrast to Q4 2025, when persistent external pressures — such as trade uncertainty and geopolitical instability — strongly limited the scalability of these strategies. This agility likely amplifies the improvement in lead time and cost containment expectations noted earlier.

While businesses expect improvement in core supply chain parameters, they remain skeptical of unexpected shocks that could unsettle the recovery path. Supply chain disruption is one of the top three anticipated risks for 2026 according to our survey respondents, with many businesses continuing to view the likelihood and severity of such disruptions as significant concerns.

Taken together, the picture for Q1 2026 is of meaningful optimism built on firmer operational foundations with some external risks. Tariff clarity, trade agreements, and infrastructure developments are broadening regional linkages; digital investment is improving planning and execution; tourism and services are reviving demand; and easing freight and energy costs (after the commodity price spikes that characterized much of 2025) are helping businesses plan with greater confidence. At the same time, businesses remain pragmatic about geopolitically sensitive inputs (e.g., rare earths) and the residual complexity of global networks, highlighting that long-term stabilization is still a work in progress.

For Q1 2026, Businesses Should Look To:

- Capture growth from rising export demand. With optimism improving across most economies, align production capacity, sales plans, and shipping schedules to tap sectors showing strong momentum, such as food manufacturing, textiles, and retail.
- Accelerate technology adoption and nearshoring. Use digital tools to improve visibility and speed, while diversifying sourcing closer to end markets to reduce lead times and cost volatility.
- Build resilience against disruption risks. Logistical and material shortages remain possible — reduce supplier concentration, diversify sourcing across regions, and establish contingency plans for shipping delays or input shortages.

The Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index signals a strong rebound for Q1 2026, but optimism is tempered by caution. While firms anticipate smoother operations and improved lead times, supply chain disruptions are anticipated as one of the top three risks — underscoring that sustained stability is not yet assured.

INDEX VALUE 107.2

D&B Global Business Financial Confidence Index

Key Findings

- The Global Business Financial Confidence Index improved 6.2% q/q for Q1 2026 on the back of reduced near-term bankruptcy risks in many regions.
- Emerging economies rose 8.0% and advanced economies 5.6%, reflecting broad-based, credible yet cautious optimism and a meaningful reduction in systemic solvency risk.
- Of the 32 surveyed economies, 30 indicated a rise in financial confidence, with the largest improvements in France (+24.8%), Taiwan Region (+19.7%), and Poland (+16.9%).
- The Global Business Financial Confidence Index improved slightly more for services (+6.4%) than manufacturing (+5.7%), but both were driven by resilient demand, easing monetary policy, and reduced supply chain exposure.
- The improvement of the Global Business Financial Confidence Index for Q1 2026 was widespread, with all sectors reporting improvements. The largest rise in confidence was in manufacturers of textiles (+10.9%), followed by metals manufacturers (+9.9%) and utility businesses (+9.0%).
- Globally, businesses are more optimistic on paying suppliers more quickly (days payable outstanding, DPO, rose to 69.0%, from 63.0% in Q4 2025), likely a reflection of improved optimism about their liquidity positions.
- Globally, small businesses, responding quickly to operational improvements and policy clarity and benefiting from localized demand recovery, recorded the strongest gain in financial confidence (+9.4%), while medium-sized businesses (+6.7%) saw a more moderate improvement and large businesses (+2.7%) experienced a smaller gain.

Chart 5: Quadrant Of Optimism — Global Business Financial Confidence Index

Table 3: Business Size — Global Business Financial Confidence Index

Period	Small	Medium	Large
Q2 2025	114.9	96.2	109.4
Q3 2025	103.8	100.9	105.1
Q4 2025	94.0	103.5	105.3
Q1 2026	102.9	110.4	108.2

The Global Business Financial Confidence Index for Q1 2026 rebounded 6.2% q/q, with emerging economies rising 8.0% and advanced economies 5.6%. Financial confidence improved in 30 of the 32 economies covered. The recovery was driven by sustained demand, disinflation, and clearer policy signals after months of uncertainty.

Late 2025 signaled a turning point for global business financial confidence as easing trade tensions and targeted tariff rollbacks began to restore stability across supply chains and markets, providing the environment for selective recalibration. The U.S. rolled back steep duties — previously set at 40.0% — on Brazilian agricultural products in November and removed tariffs on coffee, beef, and other goods from other Latin American economies, including Argentina. These moves, aimed at stabilizing food prices and easing supply chain pressures after months of elevated costs, created breathing space and lifted financial confidence among businesses in Brazil (+5.4%) and Argentina (+8.5%). U.S. tariffs on Switzerland were also lowered in November, to 15.0% from 39.0%, and financial confidence among Swiss firms for Q1 2026 rose 8.4%. Parallel negotiations between the U.S. and Latin American countries introduced trade frameworks toward lower barriers on machinery and chemicals. Optimism rose sharply among manufacturers in these sectors in Brazil (capital goods, +17.6%; chemicals, +8.0%) and Argentina (+12.2% for capital goods and +10.4% for chemicals). Meanwhile, the EU imposed safeguard measures on ferroalloy imports, creating tariff rate quotas to protect its domestic industry and lifting financial confidence among manufacturers of metals in Germany (+6.2%), France (+71.9%), and Spain (+17.6%). These realignments matter for financial planning and risk management because they reflect a shift toward managed trade arrangements and reduce uncertainty for businesses that have been grappling with unpredictable costs. At a global level, 63.0% of businesses surveyed had favorable expectations for financial risk compared with 58.0% in Q4 2025.

For global manufacturers, this trade-related clarity not only stabilized operating margins but also enhanced their ability to negotiate supplier terms and manage payables — critical levers for maintaining solvency. The latter part of 2025 was pivotal for margin dynamics. Earlier tariff shocks had compressed expected operating margins (in Q3 2025, favorable expectations of operating margins globally fell to 67.0%), but the partial normalization of trade arrangements has raised projected margin performance, with 71.0% of businesses globally reporting favorable profitability metrics. Lower input costs and easing pricing uncertainty have strengthened cost structures for manufacturers and exporters, reinforcing solvency buffers and improving financial resilience. This margin recovery, observed in businesses in three-quarters of the economies covered in the survey, is significant because it not only boosts cash flow but reduces reliance on short-term borrowing. Across sectors globally, operating margins are the highest among textile manufacturers because of lower electricity costs and tariff relief in some locations, with 78.0% of businesses expecting favorable margins for Q1 2026, compared with the global average of 71.0% across all other sectors.

While improved margins signal resilience, they do not eliminate exposure to financial risk, which remains elevated. For many businesses, this has made refinancing risk a central concern. Treasury teams must remain vigilant — even modest improvements in confidence do not eliminate refinancing risk. The timing of pass-through from a change in monetary policy to the real economy is not well understood and so businesses with weaker balance sheets still face heightened vulnerability. Against this backdrop, although favorable expectations of the need for raising short-term funds have increased (rising to 61.0% at a global level, from 56.0%), they remain low overall — suggesting that while liquidity contingency planning is on the radar, it is not yet a widespread concern.

Financial conditions improved in late 2025. Central banks, while maintaining vigilance, began to ease policy in select markets — importantly, including in the U.S. — and inflation trends softened globally, creating space for more predictable credit pricing. Businesses are responding by pivoting strategically; cash reserves remain a priority and confidence about liquidity improved at a global level to 65.0%, from 63.0% in the previous quarter (though this remains below the 70.0-80.0% of firms that stated they were confident over Q2 2024-Q1 2025). This improvement matters because liquidity strength is a direct safeguard for solvency. This higher liquidity confidence (in businesses in 72.0% of economies included in the survey) means businesses can withstand refinancing pressures even as sovereign yields and corporate spreads remain elevated. Globally, businesses are paying suppliers more quickly (DPO rose to 69.0% from 63.0% in Q4 2025), improving trust, which may lead to better terms and the offer of flexibility during disruptions; however, in the near term it reduces available working capital.

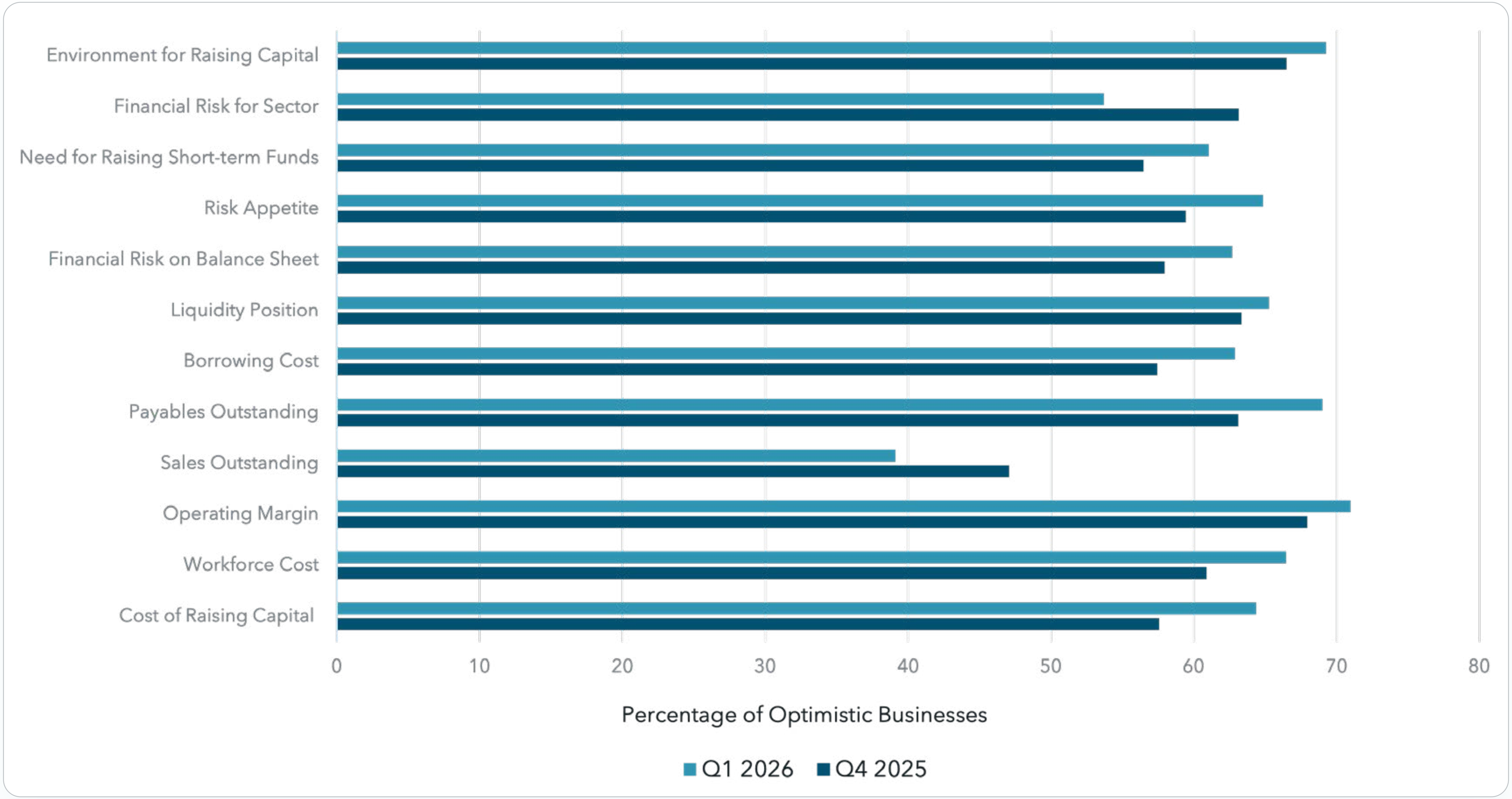
After quarters of decline, global business financial confidence is turning positive. The combination of trade normalization, easing inflation, and selective policy support in late 2025 has improved margin outlooks and strengthened liquidity buffers. The current improvement does not eliminate vulnerabilities, but it marks a decisive step away from survival mode, creating space for businesses to manage refinancing risk, protect margins, and pursue selective expansion without compromising balance sheet integrity.

Globally, expectations for business solvency have improved in large part because of stronger cash flow management, which has enhanced liquidity and expectations of better operating margins.

For Q1 2026, Businesses Should Look To:

- Leverage tax incentives, especially in the U.S., such as full expensing provisions to ensure liquidity optimization, reduce taxable income, and preserve cash as part of continued efforts to improve working capital efficiency.
- Invest in AI and digital tools for cash flow forecasting and inventory optimization; the largest improvement in cash flow management has been in the information and communications sector, which has attracted strong investor sentiment.
- Maintain robust cash reserves to safeguard against refinancing risk and volatile credit conditions.

Chart 6: Sub-Indices — Global Business Financial Confidence Index



INDEX VALUE 114.3

D&B Global Business Investment Confidence Index

Key Findings

- The Global Business Investment Confidence Index rose 6.2% q/q for Q1 2026, the first growth in over a year.
- A clear pattern in the funding of investment has appeared; businesses are increasingly focused on redeploying internal cash instead of taking on new debt. The survey showed 70.3% of respondents were expecting to increase capital expenditure in Q1 2026, but just 59.0% reported a need for raising long-term funds.
- The AI-driven investment cycle has further to run as tech leaders in the U.S. and the Chinese Mainland push for market share, late adopters play catch up, data and energy infrastructure is built out, and agentic automation perforates throughout the global economy. The Global Business Investment Confidence Index for the information and communications sector is 119.4 for Q1 2026, second only to manufacturers of metals at 122.6.
- When asked what will drive growth opportunities in 2026, the most common response was technological innovation, cited by 60.3% of respondents. Capital availability ranked fourth out of six responses, cited by just 35.9% of respondents.
- U.S. capital expenditure continues to be focused on the ICT sector; in H1 2025, U.S. private investment grew by $160.4 billion, of which $89.7 billion was specifically for information and processing equipment. This looks set to continue; ICT sector investment confidence rose 20.6% for Q1 2026, but the index for the mining sector fell 20.3% to its lowest level since the survey began.
- With interest rates in many key markets expected to fall in 2026, the environment for investment and M&A activity should improve. Q1 2026 could provide an opportunity for acquisitions in tech, sustainability, and supply chain resilience — areas ranked by businesses surveyed as top opportunity drivers.
- Businesses are stepping into 2026 with caution in the face of higher tariffs, diverging monetary and fiscal policy, and the unwinding of regulation; at 114.3, the Global Business Investment Confidence Index for Q1 2026 is below every quarter between Q3 2024 and Q2 2025. This means investment behavior will likely be cautious and focused on productivity enhancing technologies rather than substantially expanding capacity.
- Despite investment confidence improving q/q in 27 of 32 economies surveyed, just 5 reported confidence above that recorded in Q1 2025: Argentina, Brazil, Hungary, Germany, and South Korea. The latter is likely benefiting from the accelerating use of AI and the subsequent demand for semiconductors, which require substantial investment to build out manufacturing capabilities.

Chart 7: Quadrant Of Optimism — Global Business Investment Confidence Index

Table 4: Business Size — Global Business Investment Confidence Index

Period	Small	Medium	Large
Q2 2025	137.6	109.0	134.7
Q3 2025	107.9	112.1	111.3
Q4 2025	96.9	113.5	112.5
Q1 2026	110.8	118.3	113.9

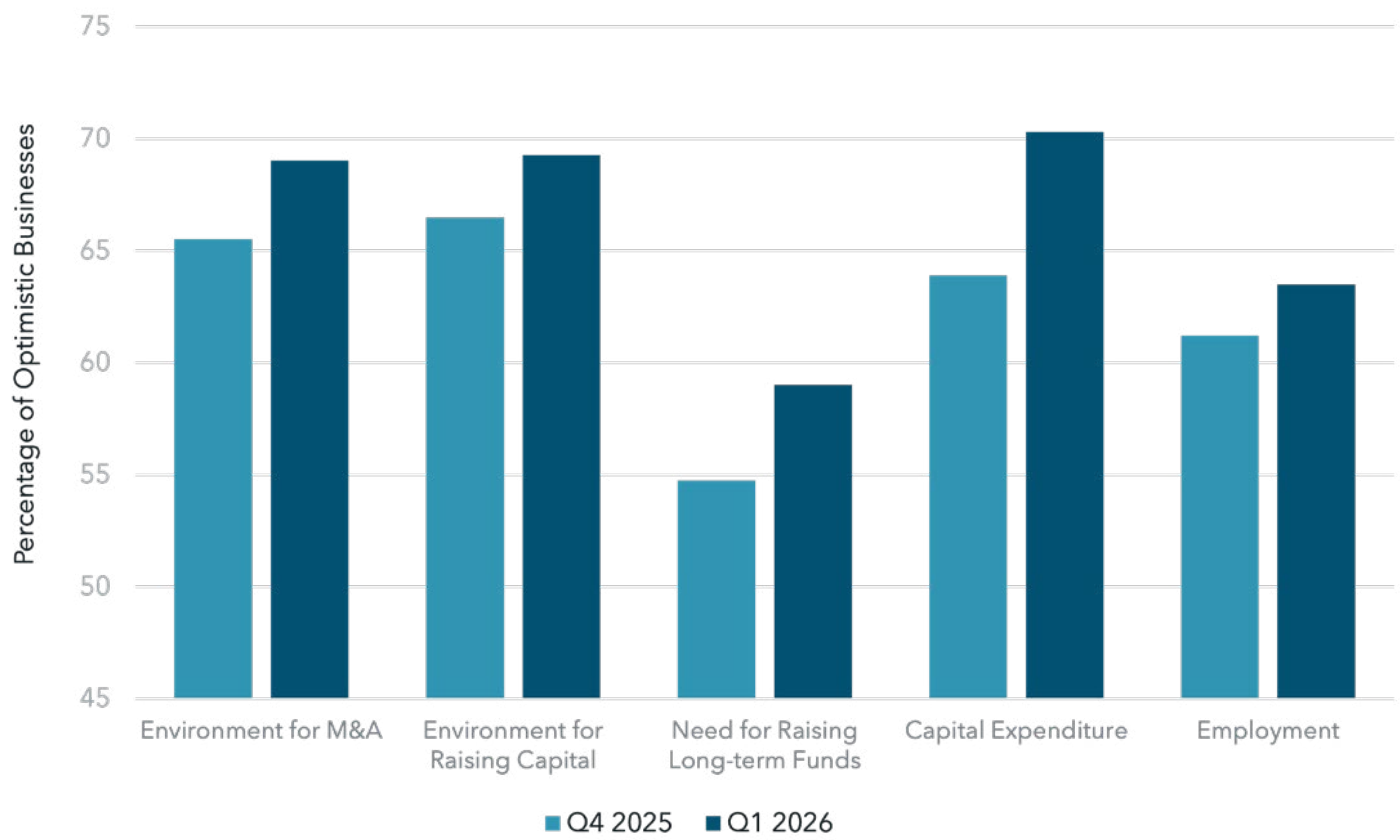
Some 59.0% of businesses reported a need for raising long-term funds for Q1 2026, compared with 54.7% in Q4 2025; moreover, the share of businesses anticipating increased capital expenditure for Q1 2026 rose even higher, up from 63.9% in Q4 2025 to 70.3%, suggesting some businesses may be drawing on available cash. This difference is particularly noticeable in the Netherlands, with 73.4% of businesses expecting to increase capital expenditure for Q1 2026, compared with 54.7% expecting to raise long-term funds. The Netherlands has strong domestic savings and corporate profitability, reflected by persistent current account surpluses (9.1% of GDP in 2024), which facilitates internal financing of investment. Further, Dutch companies are playing catch-up after the Amsterdam Stock Exchange recorded the second-smallest year-to-date (YTD) gains among eurozone markets in 2025. With businesses indicating a faster return of capital expenditure than demand, it could mean that they have built up cash reserves during a volatile 2025 and do not need to take on new debt to finance investment plans.

Despite an increase in cash-funded investment, businesses are still planning to take on some debt for Q1 2026 and will, therefore, remain sensitive to interest rate changes. In 2026, major central banks are expected to diverge on policy:

- Financial markets expect the ECB and the Bank of Canada to leave their key interest rates unchanged, following significant loosening of policy over 2024-25. With rates low and unlikely to be cut further, now would be an opportune moment to lock in long-term funding rates but business appetite to do so is mixed: 73.1% of German businesses expect to raise long-term funding in Q1 2026, compared with just 54.7% of businesses in the Netherlands and 58.9% in Canada.
- The Reserve Bank of Australia and the Bank of Japan are expected to tighten monetary policy, as inflation is likely to be significantly above target in 2026. Again, this creates an opportunity to lock in rates before they rise in 2026; this appears to be the case in Australia, where 72.4% of businesses expect to raise long-term funding in Q1 2026. Conversely, just 54.6% of businesses in Japan expect to raise long-term funding in Q1 2026, as the Bank of Japan has been tightening monetary policy since March 2024 and, therefore, Japanese businesses have likely been locking in lower rates for some time; indeed, the share of businesses expecting to secure long-term funding was much higher in Q3 2024, at 88.2%.
- Only the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Bank of England are expected to cut interest rates in 2026, with slack in the labor market constraining demand. Businesses in the U.S. and the U.K. are, therefore, more cautious about securing long-term funding, at 52.5% and 62.9%, respectively.
- Despite the Central Bank of Brazil maintaining very high interest rates since June 2025, 75.6% of businesses in the country said they expected to raise long-term funding in Q1 2026, the highest share of 32 economies surveyed. This may create concern regarding the sustainability of such investments, given that the cost of debt servicing will be locked in high when the central bank is expected to cut interest rates starting in Q1.

With many economies enjoying lower interest rates than the peaks in 2023, the impact of these previous rate cuts will support demand growth through 2026; typically, the pass-through to retail rates, such as mortgage rates, consumer loans, and deposit rates, can take up to 18 months in some economies.

Chart 8: Sub-Indices — Global Business Investment Confidence Index



For 2026, technological innovation was identified as the top growth driver among businesses surveyed, ahead of capital availability. With strong cash reserves in place, funding new opportunities is not a constraint. The focus will be on investing in (a) sustainability and green initiatives and (b) product/service innovation, with 56.8% and 52.1% of businesses surveyed identifying these as the top growth opportunities in 2026, respectively.

Although uncertainty has eased, identifying the right investment opportunities in 2026 remains difficult. Hence, businesses are targeting tech-enabled, productivity-enhancing capital expenditure, drawing on internal cash flows rather than external borrowing.

Manufacturers of metals and utility providers should benefit indirectly from the AI investment drive. For the former, increasingly specialized metals with lower environmental impact are needed to build out AI infrastructure and facilitate the transition to green technologies. For the latter, demand for energy, particularly electricity, will increase substantially to match the exponential capabilities of AI models. However, our index suggests differing preparedness for this:

- Among manufacturers of metals, investment confidence grew the most of any sector globally, at 15.1% q/q for Q1 2026. This optimism assumes sustained demand from the tech and green sectors; if demand from either dwindles, capital expenditure by metals manufacturers could overshoot requirements.
- Investment confidence in the utilities sector improved by 3.6% q/q but remains subdued compared with confidence levels in H2 2024 and early 2025. South Korea was the only economy surveyed to report higher confidence in the utilities sector for Q1 2026 compared with Q1 2025, with 95.8% of utilities companies in the country reporting that they expected to increase hiring, and 83.3% expecting to increase capital expenditure. This is in line with South Korea's 11th Basic Plan for Electricity Supply and Demand, which aims to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 to meet electricity demand. This is substantially ahead of utilities companies in the U.S., where just 62.5% of businesses reported that they expected to increase hiring and 55.0% said they expected to increase capital expenditure. Though U.S. demand for AI is growing exponentially, it is behind on developing the necessary energy infrastructure, meaning supply chain difficulties could emerge. In November, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation warned that power demand from data centers risks creating energy shortages in the event of extreme winter weather.

For Q1 2026, Businesses Should Look To:

- Prioritize capital expenditure that leads to innovation of processes and products, rather than expanding existing capabilities.
- Take advantage of easing finance conditions in many markets through 2026 if unable to leverage internal cash to fund investment opportunities.

INDEX VALUE 115.1

D&B Global Business ESG Index

Key Findings

- The Global Business ESG Index surged by 5.1% q/q in Q4 2025, reversing the 5.0% decline seen in Q3, as strong gains in some economies offset uneven regional trends. Advanced economies rebounded by 5.9% after three straight quarters of contraction, while emerging economies recovered with a 2.9% increase following a setback in Q3.
- Businesses, primarily in advanced economies, recorded an increased appetite toward participation in, and integration of ESG practices into decision-making. However, the share of businesses participating in social activities fell to 65.6% (-0.9pps from Q3) among emerging economies, reflecting a growing regional divergence.
- Large (+8.9%), small (+7.5%), and medium-sized (+1.6%) businesses in advanced economies all saw improvements, possibly reflecting easing reporting burdens due to deregulation and increasing customer pressure to adopt sustainability practices. In emerging economies, survey data showed a different trend: small (+8.8%) and medium-sized (+4.6%) businesses expressed greater optimism, driven by their agility, while large businesses recorded a 3.3% decline in ESG initiatives.
- Sectoral trends show a broad-based recovery in ESG activity across industries. Manufacturing (+6.7%) outperformed services (+4.3%), with strong gains in metals (+15.7%), capital goods (+15.2%), and textiles (+10.2%), while sectors such as automotives (+5.2%) and food (+3.3%) posted moderate improvements. In the services sector, momentum was led by information and communications (+8.6%), wholesale and retail trade (+7.5%), and real estate (+6.8%). Transportation and storage bucked the trend, recording the only sector-level contraction in ESG activity (-0.3%) in Q4 2025, reflecting the sector's high carbon intensity and costly compliance requirements.
- Country-level trends, however, reveal an uneven recovery, with sharp contrasts noted across advanced and emerging economies. Among advanced economies, South Korea (+13.8%), the U.S. (+12.9%), and Japan (+6.0%) posted the strongest gains, while several European economies, including Germany (-5.4%) and Italy (-1.5%), remained in negative territory. In emerging economies, Mexico (+16.3%), Nigeria (+10.5%), and Taiwan Region (+9.2%) led improvements, whereas the Czech Republic (-9.8%) and Indonesia (-8.9%) recorded steep declines.
- The U.S. posted a strong rebound in Q4 2025 (+12.9%), outperforming the global average, with gains across manufacturing and services. ESG-linked activity improved in 16 of 17 U.S. sectors, led by metals (+37.6%), textiles (+35.2%), and capital goods (+32.7%).
- Sustainability and green initiatives emerged as the top perceived growth opportunities for businesses in 2026, reiterating that energy-efficiency investments are being pursued not only to meet regulatory and stakeholder expectations but also to accelerate productivity gains and unlock new funding opportunities.

Chart 9: Quadrant Of Optimism — Global Business ESG Index

Table 5: Business Size — Global Business ESG Index

Period	Small	Medium	Large
Q1 2025	127.6	94.8	123.1
Q2 2025	113.9	116.5	115.4
Q3 2025	103.8	112.7	112.0
Q4 2025	111.9	115.2	118.3

The Global Business ESG Index rose 5.1% q/q in Q4 2025, driven by strong gains in some economies despite uneven regional performance. Sharp improvements in South Korea (+13.8%), the U.S. (+12.9%), Mexico (+16.3%), and Nigeria (+10.5%) were strong enough to lift the global average despite declines elsewhere. Despite this improvement, only 12 of 32 economies reported higher ESG activity, underscoring a persistent gap in ESG maturity, particularly in emerging economies. Social activity participation among businesses surveyed in emerging economies fell to 65.6% (-0.9pps from Q3), even as participation in environmental- and governance-related activity improved. Moreover, at the global level, surveyed businesses identified sustainability and green initiatives, such as carbon reduction and renewable energy, as the top growth opportunity for 2026 (56.8%), signaling strong appetite for ESG adoption.

The overall positive trend indicates that ESG adoption among businesses surveyed is increasingly tied to growing traceability demands from consumers, financing benefits, and ongoing efforts to strengthen brand reputation. In Q3 2025, ESG-related initiatives were largely driven by external and strategic pressures. Nearly half of survey respondents (46.6%) identified customer or supply chain requirements, such as buyer-imposed ESG standards and traceability demands, as the primary motivator. Investor expectations and improved access to capital ranked close behind at 40.0%, while 39.2% cited brand visibility and reputation enhancement as key drivers. Alongside these drivers, stakeholder participation in ESG initiatives rose to an average of 68.5% globally, with more businesses also integrating ESG considerations into decision-making. These improvements partly reflect gains from clearer regulations and the rollback of complex rules, especially in advanced economies.

In Europe, most countries, including Germany (-5.4%) and Italy (-1.5%), recorded contractions in their ESG indices, while the U.K., Norway, and Poland showed improvements, reflecting differences in regulatory requirements across the region. In the U.K. (+3.8%), regulatory momentum on sustainable finance continues. On December 1, 2025, the U.K.'s Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) launched a consultation to bring ESG rating providers under its regulatory purview, aiming to improve transparency, governance, and conflict-of-interest management. Meanwhile, the Transition Finance Council opened its second consultation on draft guidelines for credible transition plans, due to close on January 30, 2026, supporting positive sentiment.

Although Norway's ESG Index improved for the third consecutive quarter, the pace slowed to +0.8% in Q4 2025, compared with +10.8% in Q2. This moderation reflects sustained ESG appetite among medium-sized businesses, offset by contractions among larger businesses. The slowdown likely stems from the rollout of Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)-driven reporting mandates, as larger businesses adapt to expanded European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) requirements. Sweden's ESG Index, meanwhile, contracted for the second consecutive quarter in Q4 2025, declining 2.7%, driven by broad-based declines across manufacturing (-3.9%) and services (-2.1%).

By and large, the EU is recalibrating its sustainability rules to make them more efficient, cost-effective, and growth-friendly, without compromising ESG objectives. In early December, a provisional agreement between the European Parliament, European Commission, and Council was reached on the Omnibus I simplification package, with final approval of amendments to the CSRD and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) expected by year-end. Separately, the CSRD 'Quick Fix' delegated act came into effect in November, providing immediate relief for wave one companies (those already reporting for the 2024 financial year under the prior rules) by simplifying reporting requirements for financial years starting January 2025.

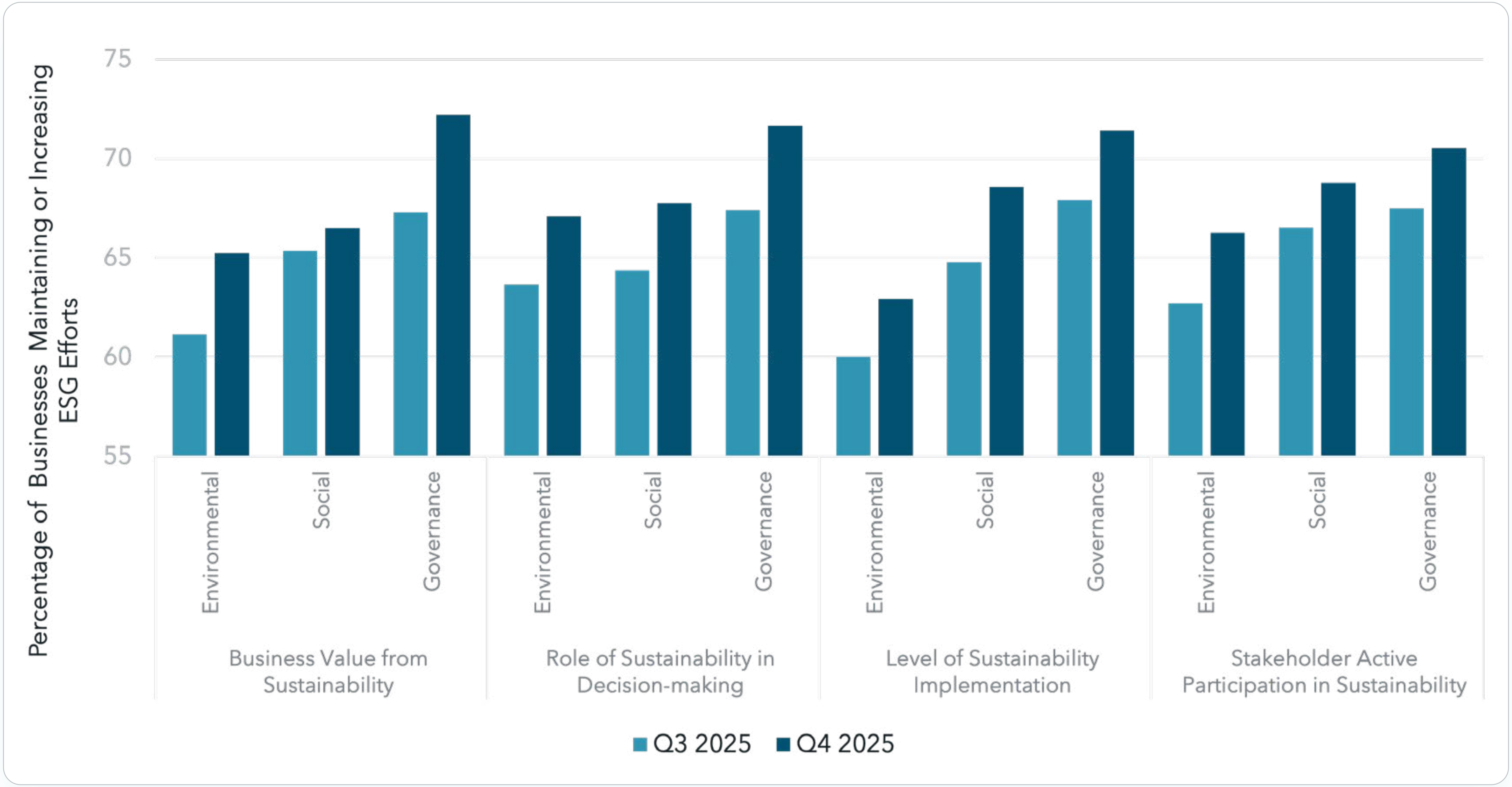
The picture becomes even more nuanced for emerging economies. Of 17 emerging economies, only 7 recorded improvements in the ESG Index, led by Mexico (+16.3%) and Nigeria (+10.5%). Regulatory support has been pivotal in these gains. Nigeria stands out as a regional leader, becoming the first African country to adopt International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB)-based standards, with mandatory disclosures scheduled for 2028. Complementing this, the Nigerian Bank of Industry is actively promoting ESG integration among MSMEs through funding, training, and partnerships. Improvements in the ESG Index for Mexico are complemented by mandatory adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) S1 and S2 for listed companies, with the first mandatory sustainability reports due in 2026.

In Q4 2025, We Saw Businesses:

- Integrate greater environmental considerations into decision-making to enhance competitiveness, financing access, and stakeholder trust.
- Prioritize traceability and buyer-imposed ESG standards, as customer and supply chain requirements have emerged as the leading drivers of sustainability-standard adoption.

Two in five businesses identified a focus on ESG and sustainability as a primary growth catalyst, only behind technological innovation and shifting consumer demand preferences.

Chart 10: Sub-Indices — Global Business ESG Index



Appendix

Methodology

Dun & Bradstreet conducted a survey of business leaders in their operating markets. The survey was conducted on a stratified random sample of around 10,000 businesses, from varying sectors and size segments. Responses pertain to businesses' own operating markets. A diffusion index is calculated for each parameter and normalized against base year values (Q3 2023 to Q2 2024). An index reading above 100 indicates an improvement in optimism relative to the base year, while an index reading below 100 signifies a deterioration. The composite index at size and sector level is calculated using factor-weighted averages of the parameter-level indices. Economy-level indices are weighted averages of sector-level indices by their contribution to GDP. Global indices are weighted averages of economy-level indices with their GDP weights.

Economies Covered in the Survey			
Argentina	Hungary	Netherlands	Spain
Australia	India	Nigeria	Sweden
Brazil	Indonesia	Norway	Switzerland
Canada	Israel	Poland	Taiwan Region
Czech Republic	Italy	Russian Federation	Türkiye
Egypt	Japan	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates (U.A.E)
France	Kenya	South Africa	United Kingdom (U.K.)
Germany	Mexico	South Korea	United States of America (U.S.)

THE INDICES

Dun & Bradstreet Global Business Optimism Index provides valuable insights on the global growth cycle. It serves as a tool to identify turning points in the global economy.

Dun & Bradstreet Global Business Supply Chain Continuity Index monitors the efficiency of suppliers' deliveries in terms of both time and cost. The index enables businesses to optimize their supply chain management by identifying potential bottlenecks, streamlining operations, and mitigating risks.

Dun & Bradstreet Global Business Financial Confidence Index serves as an early warning signal for bankruptcies, enabling stakeholders to anticipate financial distress in various sectors of the economy.

Dun & Bradstreet Global Business Investment Confidence Index provides vital cues about investment rates across different industries and regions. By tracking this index, stakeholders can gain insights on the sentiments and willingness of businesses to invest in new projects, expand operations, and drive growth.

Dun & Bradstreet Global Business ESG Index provides a comprehensive assessment of companies' performance in implementing ESG initiatives. By tracking the ESG index, investors, regulators, and the public can evaluate the sustainability efforts of organizations, encourage responsible business practices, and promote transparency and accountability.

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Our experienced country-intelligence specialists use Dun & Bradstreet's proprietary data, supplemented by secondary data from the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other multilateral organizations, to provide unique analysis to drive sound business decisions.

Updated frequently — and monthly for our most requested countries — our data and analysis are presented in a format that facilitates the comparison of economic, political and commercial conditions on a country, regional and global level.

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