International Transport Forum

Statistics Brief

December 2012

► Global Trade and Transport

Global Freight Data Show Trade Slowing Down

The latest update of global freight data collected by the International Transport Forum at the OECD shows global trade volumes are slowing down:

- **USA and EU27 external trade, measured in tonnes of goods moved, remain stagnant and indicate further decline since the previous quarter;**
- **EU27 imports by air fall below pre-crisis levels for the first time since Q1/2010, suggesting weakening domestic demand;**
- **Trade by value shows a more mixed picture;**
- **China's external trade, by value, remains flat;**
- **Road and rail freight decline in the EU area, further indicating weak domestic performance.**

► **Sea freight volumes stagnant below pre-crisis levels**

The overall picture for global freight movement shows no improvement since the previous brief. Total external trade by sea (in tonnes) has remained stagnant below pre-crisis levels in EU27 and the United States (-2% and -10%) according to our seasonally adjusted preliminary estimates of goods carried until August 2012. Exports and imports by sea display different patterns. Total exports remain above pre-crisis levels (USA 8%; EU27 23%) although exports to Asia show signs of slowing down. Total imports have stagnated below pre-crisis levels (Figures 1-3).

► **Air freight tonnes continue to decline**

Air freight tonnes, considered a lead indicator, show further decline since the previous quarter. USA total external trade by air fell to below pre-crisis levels, with exports at 4% above and imports at 5% below the pre-crisis peak. EU27 exports fell to 6% below the pre-crisis peak, while imports fell below the pre-crisis level for the first time since the recovery in Q1/10. This reflects the on-going economic hardship faced by many European economies and overall weakening conditions globally. However, considering values instead of freight tonnes transported produces a more mitigated picture (Figures 1-3).

► **China shows resilience with strong market demand**

China continues to show resilience with external trade by sea and air (measured in values) reaching 38% and 34% above the pre-crisis peak, although growth levelled off over the last year. Overall external trade for both modes showed spectacular recovery through August 2011, with import growth outpacing export growth considerably. This reflects rising domestic consumption and the gloomy global economic situation reducing external demand for Chinese goods (Figures 4-6).

OECD

Inland transport continues to reflect weak domestic demand in the EU area. EU road freight declined to 11% below the pre-crisis peak and rail freight volume was 13% below pre-crisis levels in Q2/12. Rail freight volume in the USA also shows signs of a slowdown. Growth in Russia has been stronger with rail freight volumes reaching 2% above the pre-crisis peak (Figures 7-8).

▶ **Inland freight remains weak in EU**

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

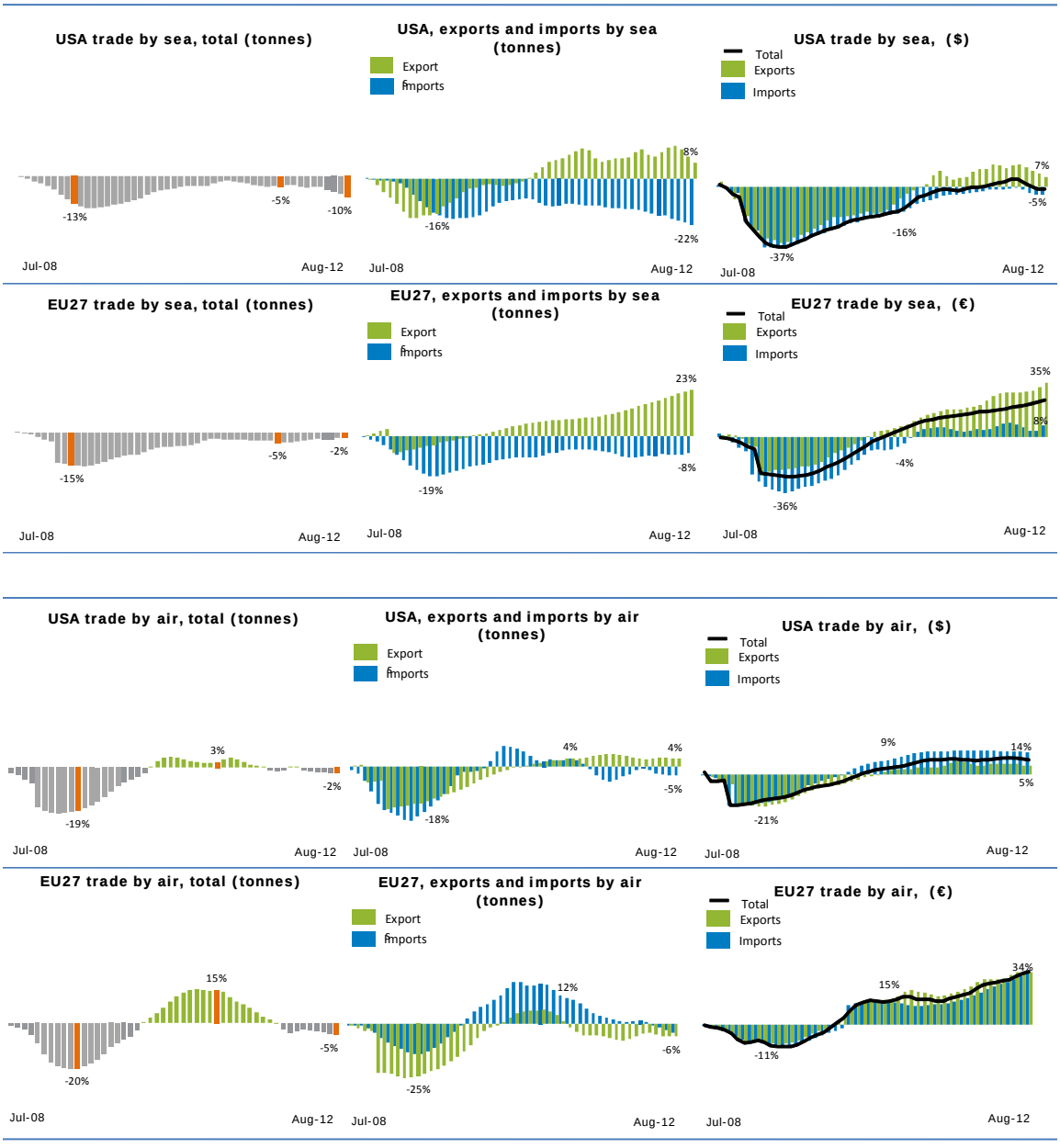


Figure 2. **United States and EU27 external trade by sea, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Jun-08**
(Tonnes, monthly trend, seasonally adjusted)

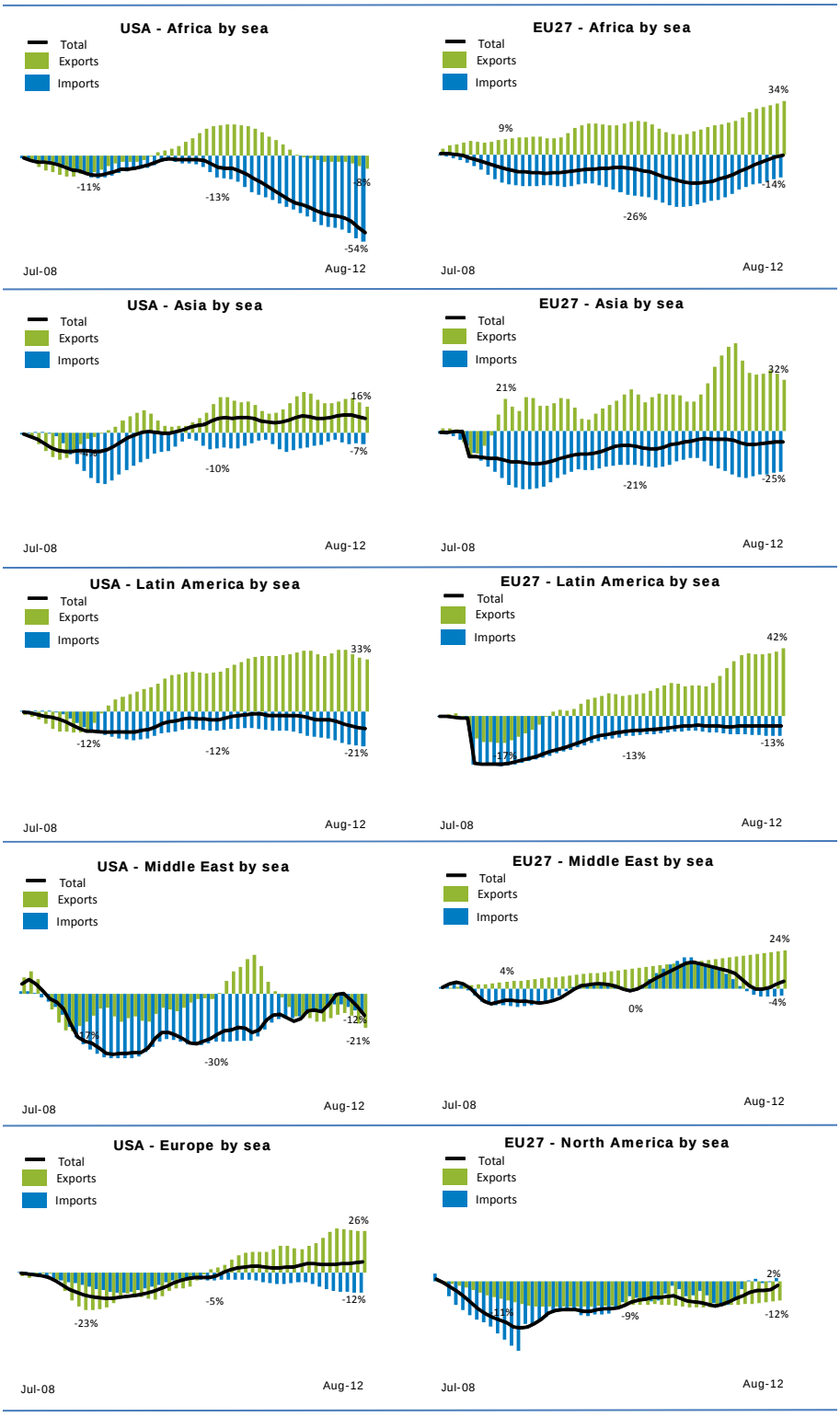


Figure 3. **United States and EU27 external trade by air, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Jun-08**
(Tonnes, monthly trend, seasonally adjusted)

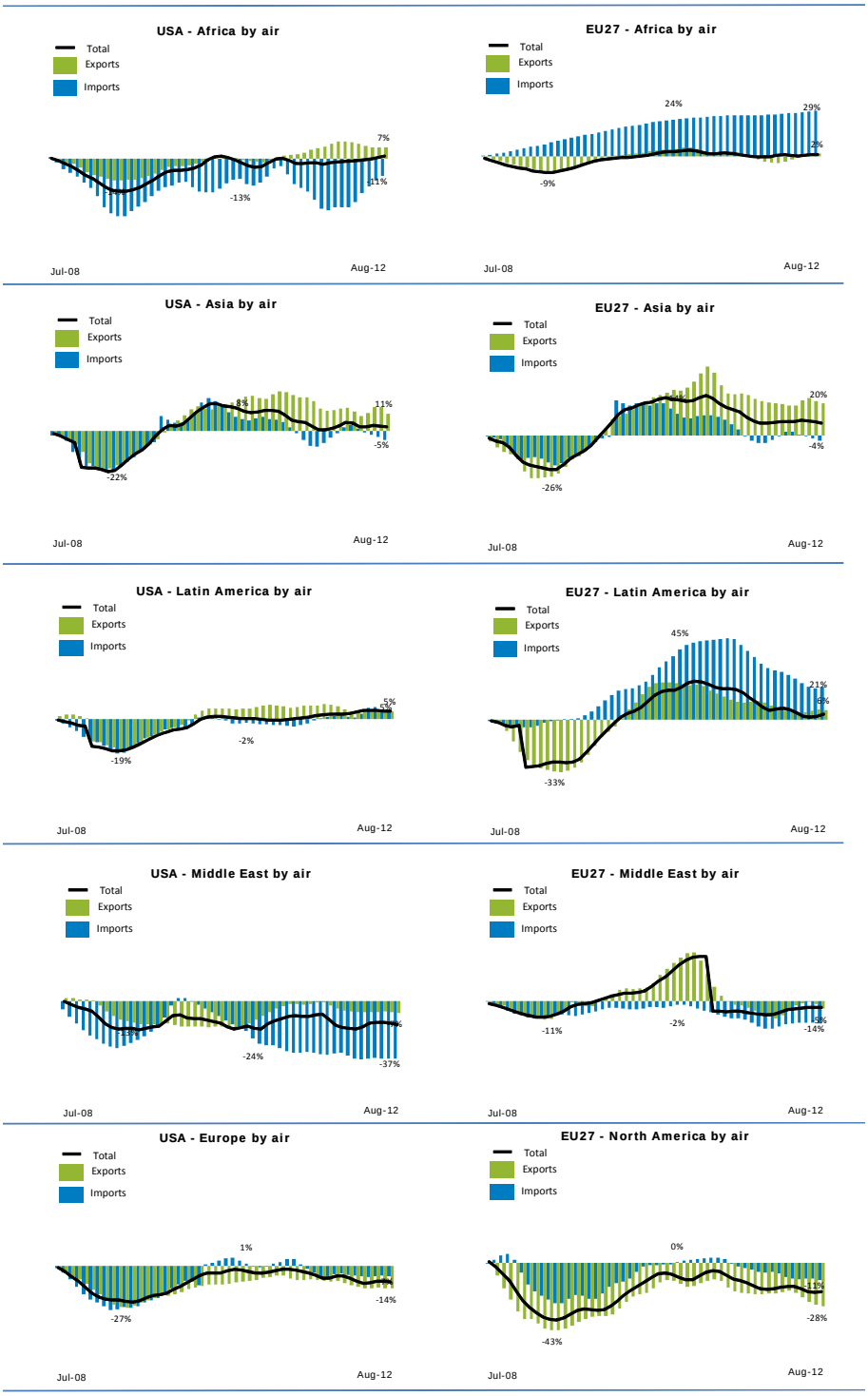


Figure 4. **China external trade by sea, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Jun-08**
(*Current value in USD*, monthly trend, seasonally adjusted)

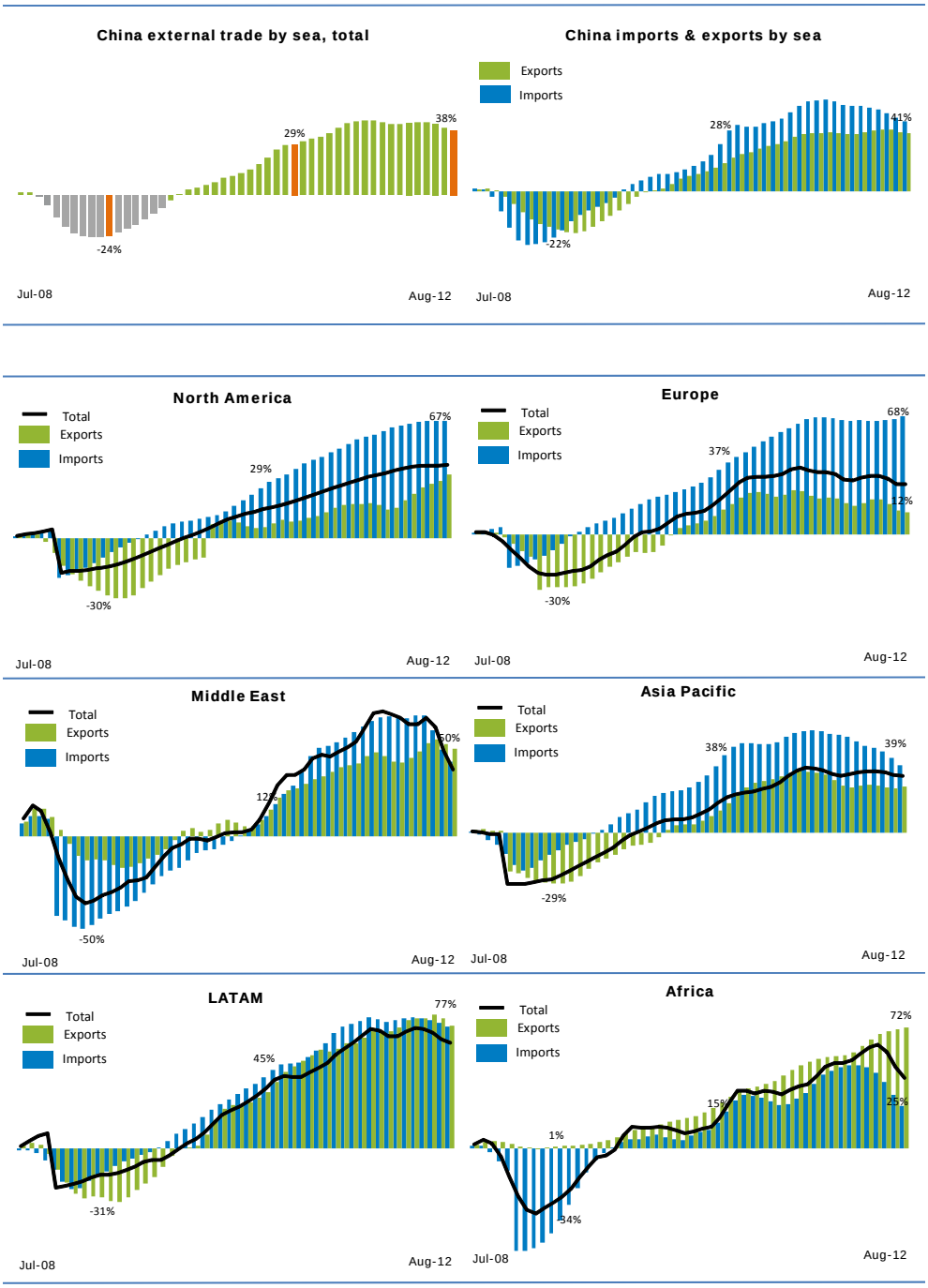


Figure 5. **China external trade by air, percentage change from pre-crisis peak Jun-08**
(*Current value in USD*, monthly trend, seasonally adjusted)

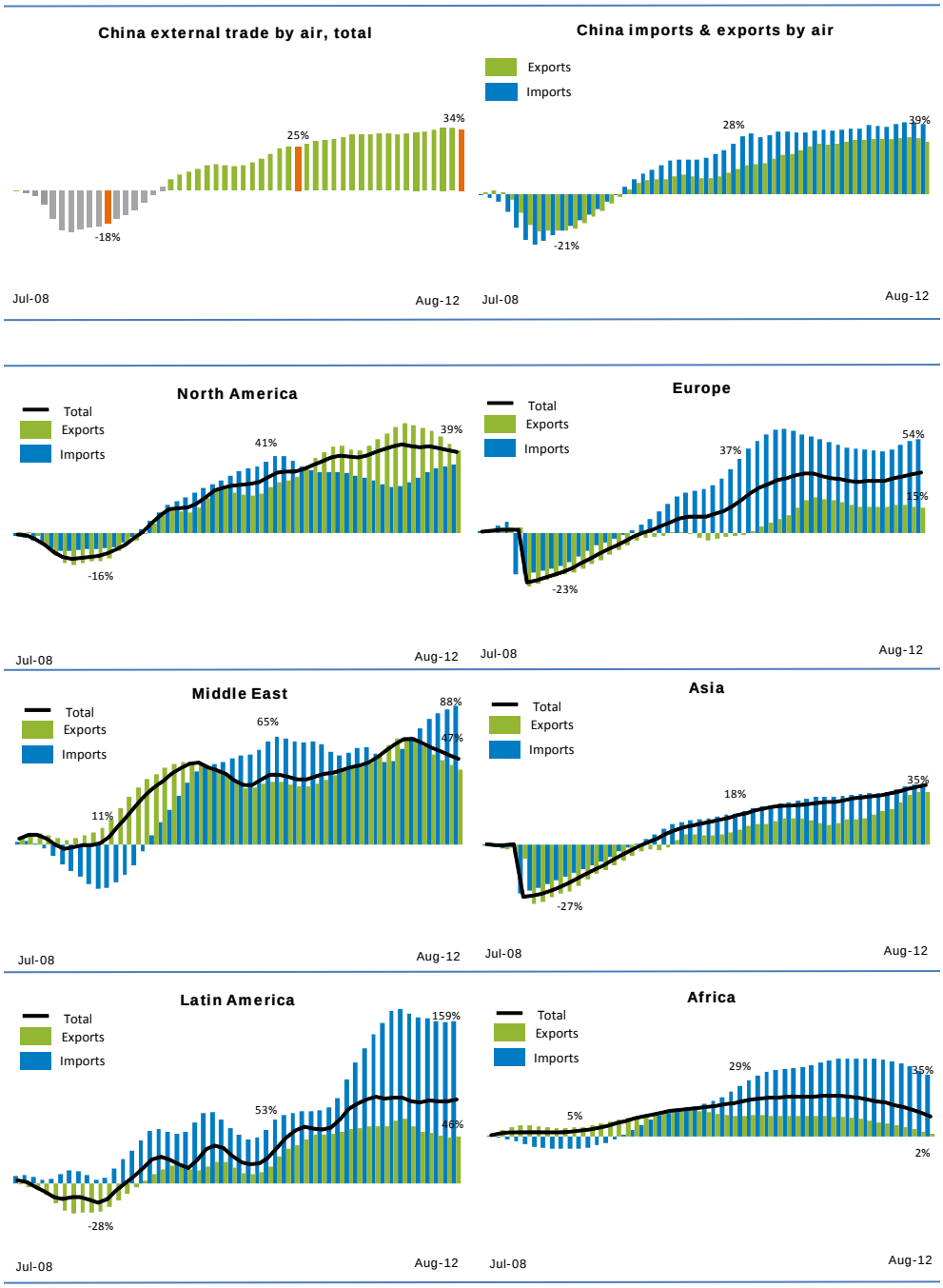
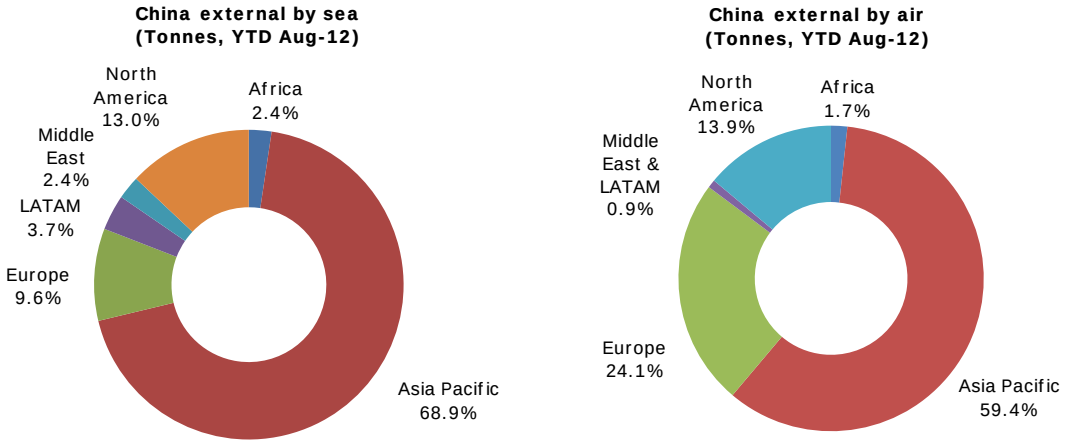


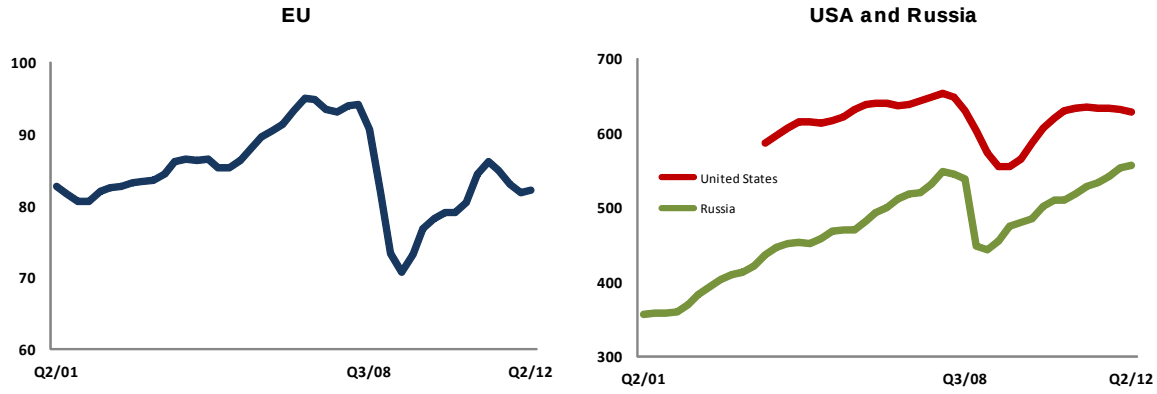
Figure 6. **China external seaborne and airborne trade by regions**
(Tonnes, year to date: Jan – Aug 2012)



Note: Data above represents partial China's external trade in weight tonnes given that 16% of commodities by HS codes are not measured in weight. These are mainly commodities within HS 84-97. The Customs of China continues to work on adding weight as a unit of measurement for all commodities.

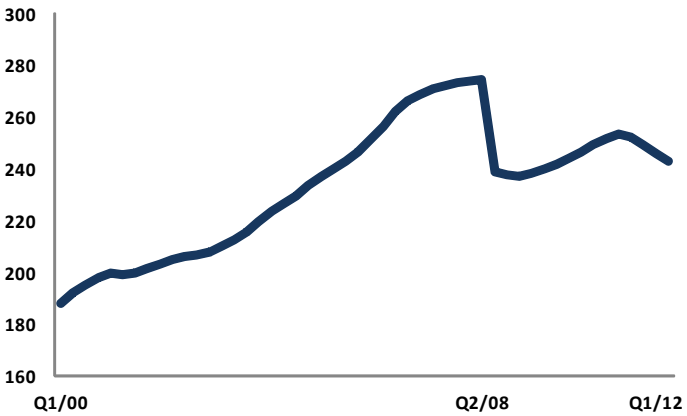
Source for data on China: Statistics Department, General Administration of Customs of China

Figure 7. **National and international rail**
(Billion tonne-km, trend, seasonally adjusted)



Note: Data on rail freight in the EU area include Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom. These cover around 95% of total rail freight in the EU.

Figure 8. **National and international road freight in the EU**
(Billion tonne-km, trend, seasonally adjusted)



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

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 characterised 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.

If you would like to receive further issues of the Statistics Brief or more information, please contact: Mr Edouard Chong (edouard.chong@oecd.org) or Mr Jari Kauppila (jari.kauppila@oecd.org).

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