World direct investment patterns

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in January 2026
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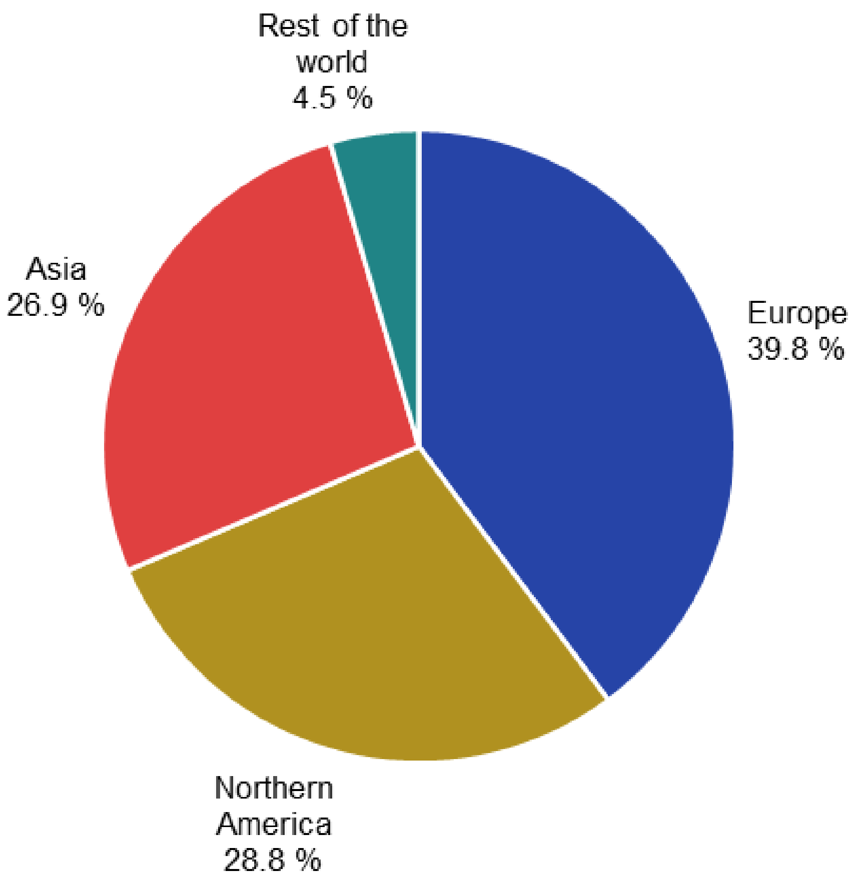
Highlights

In 2024, Europe was the second largest location of foreign direct investment stocks in the world, accounting for almost a third (31.4%) of the world's inward investment positions.

In 2024, Europe was the leading outward investor in the world, accounting for almost two fifths (39.8%) of the world's outward investment stocks.

Stocks of foreign direct investment, by continent, 2024
(% of world total)



Source: UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

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Globalisation patterns in EU trade and investment is an online Eurostat publication presenting a summary of recent European Union (EU) statistics on economic aspects of globalisation, focusing on patterns of EU trade and investment.

In an attempt to remain competitive, business relationships may extend well beyond international trade in goods and services. Indeed, there is a growing reliance upon different forms of industrial organisation, including the ownership of foreign affiliates, overseas investment, mergers, joint ventures, subcontracting, offshoring or licensing agreements. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is one such economic strategy and is the subject of this article.

Data for the world aggregate and data for non-EU countries have been converted from United States dollars to euro. Annual average exchange rates have been used for FDI flows and end-of-year rates for FDI stocks (positions).

Stocks of foreign direct investment

In 2024, Europe accounted for 39.8% of the world's outward investment positions

The international investment position of a country details its stock of financial assets and liabilities; for the purpose of this article these stocks are measured at the end of each year (although more detailed statistics are collected at the end of each quarter). FDI stocks reflect the accumulated value held at the end of the reference period, reflecting the value of stocks at the start of the year, adjusted for any transactions (flows) which take place during the year and any changes in the value of positions other than transactions (for example, revaluations due to exchange rates or other price changes).

In 2024, the global stock of FDI was valued at € 45.5 trillion (€ 45 482 billion), based on an average of inward and outward positions. Europe was the largest source and second largest destination of FDI stocks in the world. According to the United Nations, almost a third (31.4%) of global inward investment was located in Europe (€ 15.4 trillion), while it accounted for almost two fifths (39.8%) of the world's outward investment stocks (some € 16.7 trillion).

Between 2014 and 2024, Northern America became a more common location for foreign investment

There was a relatively strong decline between 2014 and 2019 in the share of global FDI stocks that were located in Europe, its share of the world total falling 2.3 percentage points (pp) . However, there was a considerable change in 2020, in part reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, as investment stocks in Europe grew rapidly – the share of Europe rose 2.5 pp between 2019 and 2020, reversing the losses recorded over the previous 5 years. However, the long-term development returned, as Europe's share dropped at an even more rapid pace – down 3.6 pp – between 2021 and 2024, when it stood at 31.4%. The overall fall in the share of global FDI stocks that were located in Europe between 2014 and 2024 was the largest (at 7.8 pp) recorded among any of the continents during the period under consideration.

The share of FDI stocks located in Latin America and the Caribbean fell (down 1.2 pp between 2014 and 2024), with falls also recorded in Africa (down 0.9 pp) and Oceania (down 0.8 pp). By contrast, the share of global direct investment located in Northern America increased at a rapid pace, up 9.7 pp. There was also a modest increase in the share of Asia, its share rising 1.0 pp.

In 2024, Europe's outward stocks of FDI were greater than the value of inward FDI stocks held by the rest of the world within Europe; as such, Europe was a net investor. Europe was the only continent that reported being a net investor at the end of the period under consideration.

Between 2014 and 2024, Asia increased its share of the world's outward stocks of foreign investment

The second part of Figure 1 shows relatively large fluctuations in Europe's share of the world's outward stocks of FDI between 2014 and 2024. In the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis, Europe's share had stood at close to half of the global total. From a relative high of 45.5% in 2015, it subsequently fluctuated with an overall downward development that accelerated in 2023 and 2024. Europe's 39.8% share of the world's outward stocks of FDI (as recorded in 2024) was its lowest share during the period under consideration.

North America had the second highest share (28.8%) of the world's outward FDI stocks in 2024, closely followed by Asia (26.9%). Between 2014 and 2024, Europe's share of the world's outward FDI stocks declined considerably (down 5.3 pp), while there were much smaller decreases observed for Africa (down 0.2 pp), Oceania, and Latin America and the Caribbean (both down 0.1 pp). By contrast, there was a sizeable increase in the share of the world's outward FDI originating from Asia (up 5.1 pp), with a more modest gain for North America (up 0.5 pp).

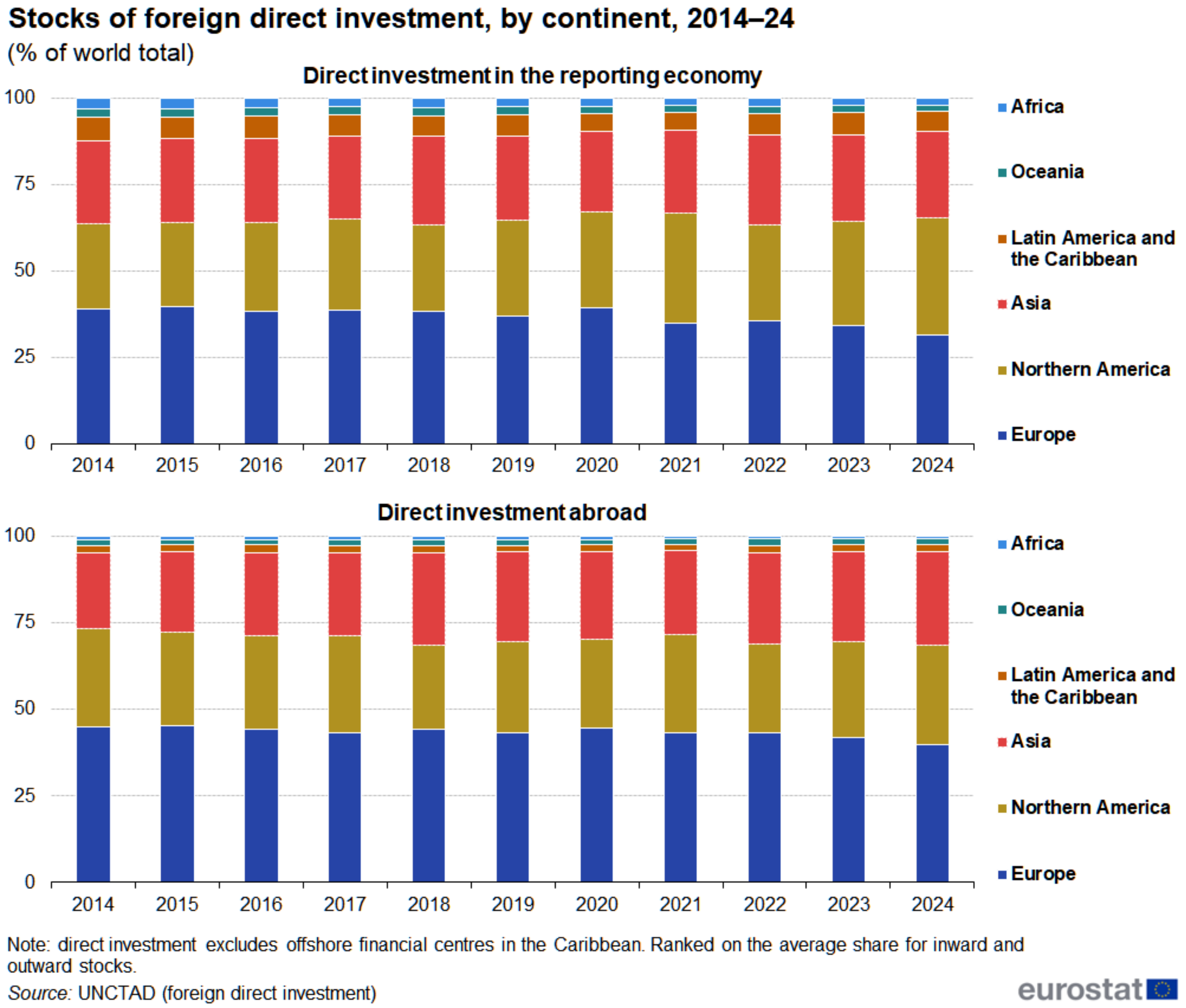

Figure 1: Stocks of foreign direct investment, by continent, 2014–24 Source: UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

Stocks of foreign direct investment represent almost 40% of the world's annual economic output

Figure 2 presents information on the size of FDI stocks relative to the size of each economy (as measured by gross domestic product (GDP)). In 2024, the ratio of the world's outward stocks of FDI to GDP was 39.5%, while the ratio of the world's inward stocks of FDI to GDP was 46.1%.

In 2024, the Asian economies of Hong Kong and Singapore reported particularly high degrees of 'openness', insofar as inward FDI stocks in both these reporting economies were valued considerably higher than their levels of GDP; the values of direct investment stocks in Hong Kong and Singapore were 5.7 and 4.1 times as high as their GDP, respectively. In all of the remaining economies presented in Figure 2, the value of inward FDI stocks was less than the economic output of the country / geographical aggregate concerned; the next highest shares were recorded in the United Kingdom (where inward FDI stocks represented 89.0% of GDP) and Canada (82.4%).

Direct investment stocks in the EU were valued at 39.1% of GDP in 2024, which was somewhat lower than the global average. Aside from Hong Kong, Singapore, the United Kingdom and Canada (all mentioned above), the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Brazil were the only other global competitors (among those shown in Figure 2) that recorded a higher ratio than the EU. At the other end of the scale, inward stocks of FDI represented 20.0% of GDP in China, with lower ratios recorded in South Korea (15.4%), India (14.1%), Türkiye (13.6%), Russia (10.3%) and Japan (5.5%). This relatively low ratio in Japan resulted from an absence of foreign investment in most economic activities, aside from the manufacture of machinery and motor vehicles.

Most ’open’ economies have considerable stocks of both inward and outward investment

Reversing the analysis and considering the relative importance of outward stocks of FDI from each economy, a general pattern emerges whereby many of those countries which were ’open’ to a high degree of market penetration in the form of inward FDI were also found to have high ratios of outward FDI relative to GDP. This supports a view that some economies seek to gain a competitive advantage by encouraging free trade and investment opportunities, whereas other countries are more ’inward-looking’.

Nevertheless, there were some exceptions: for example, the ratio of stocks of direct investment abroad relative to GDP was 53.6% for Japan in 2024 (almost 10 times as high as its ratio of inward FDI stocks relative to GDP) – suggesting that while it was relatively commonplace for Japanese enterprises to invest in foreign countries, it was far less common for foreign enterprises to invest in Japan. A similar pattern was observed in South Korea (where the ratio for outward investment was almost 3 times as high as that for inward investment). By contrast, the value of stocks of direct investment abroad from Mexico, Türkiye, Brazil and India was relatively low (both in relation to GDP and in relation to the value of stocks of inward investment).

These differences between ratios for inward and outward stocks of FDI may also be used to identify which economies were net investors in
2024; this was the case for the EU, Japan, Canada, South Korea, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and Russia.

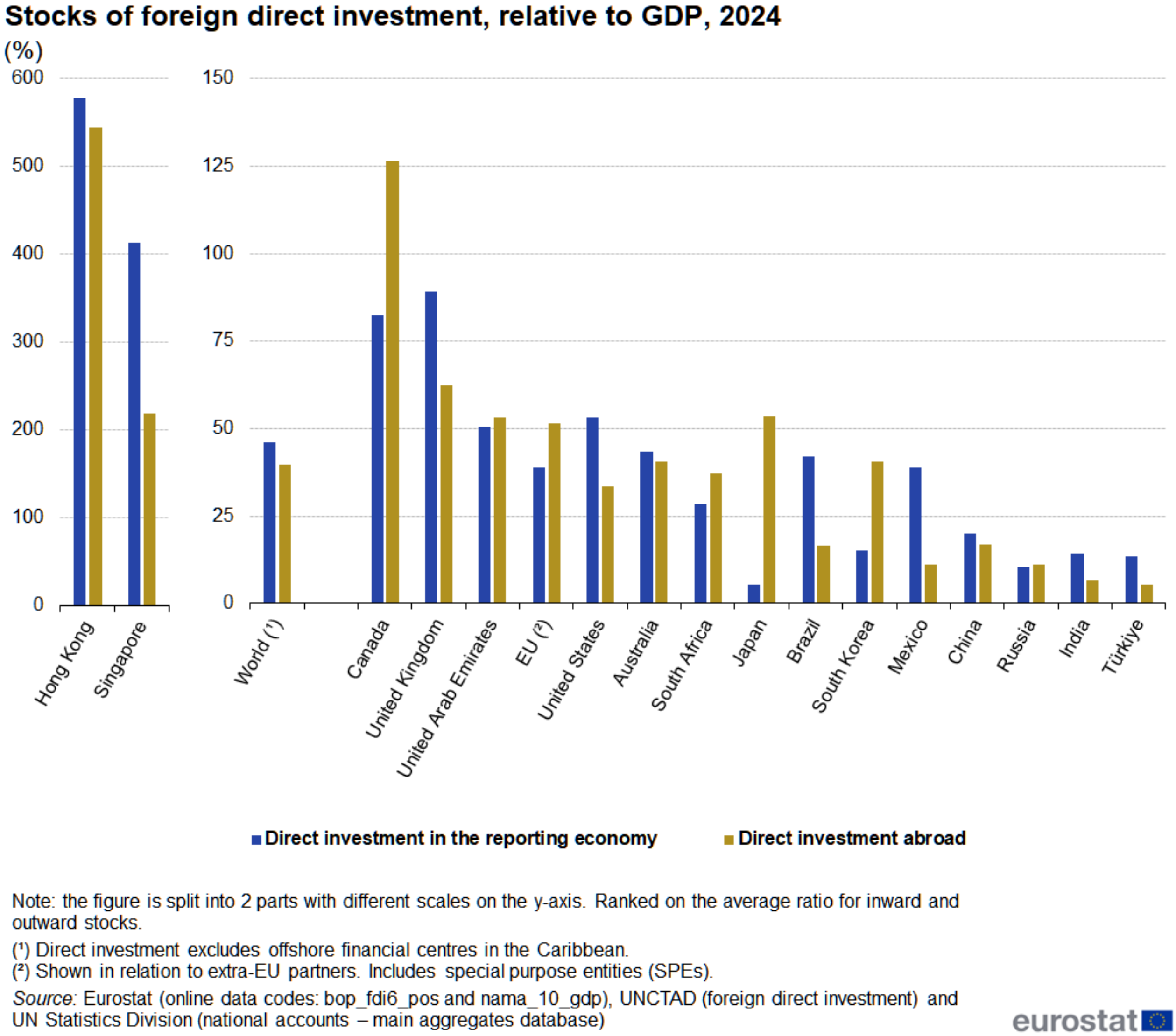

Figure 2: Stocks of foreign direct investment, relative to GDP, 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_fdi6_pos and nama_10_gdp), UNCTAD (foreign direct investment) and UN Statistics Division (national accounts – main aggregates database)

Table 1 provides details relating to the size of the top 20 non-financial multinational enterprise groups in the world in terms of their foreign assets. The information comes from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) .

In 2024, half (5 out of 10) of the world's leading multinational enterprise groups in terms of foreign assets had their headquarters in the EU: the Volkswagen Group (Germany) and Stellantis NV (the Netherlands) were specialised in the manufacture of motor vehicles, Deutsche Telekom AG (also Germany) was specialised in information and communication services, TotalEnergies SE (France) was specialised in energy activities, while Anheuser-Busch InBev NV (Belgium) was specialised in the manufacture of beverages (principally the brewing of beer).

Looking more widely across the top 20 non-financial multinational enterprise groups in 2024, there were 9 located in the EU (4 from Germany, and 1 each from Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands). There were also three multinational enterprise groups from each of Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, alongside a single group from each of China and Hong Kong.

The share of foreign assets in total assets was generally very high for most multinationals shown in Table 1. In 2024, foreign assets accounted for more than four fifths of all assets in 9 out of the top 20 enterprises, with shares rising to more than 90.0% for CK Hutchison, British American Tobacco, Shell and Stellantis. By contrast, in 5 of these 20 multinational enterprises, a majority of assets were located in the domestic economy: Mercedes-Benz

Group (52.1%), Exxon Mobil (60.7%), Volkswagen Group (61.1%), Microsoft (61.8%) and China National Petroleum Corp (75.8%).

Top 20 non-financial multinational enterprise groups ranked by foreign assets, 2024

Name (code of domestic economy)	Assets (€ billion)		Number of employees (1 000)	
	Foreign	Total	Foreign	Total
Shell (UK)	436	467	66	96
Toyota Motor (JP)	433	603	180	384
Volkswagen Group (DE)	246	633	388	683
TotalEnergies (FR)	246	276	67	103
Deutsche Telekom (DE)	246	305	124	198
BP (UK)	225	272	80	91
Stellantis (NL)	193	208	122	248
Microsoft (US)	189	493	102	228
Exxon Mobil (US)	172	436	37	61
Anheuser-Busch InBev (BE)	169	200	124	144
Honda Motor (JP)	160	198	134	195
BMW (DE)	152	268	65	159
Sony Group (JP)	151	227	57	113
China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) (CN) (¹)	147	605	70	1 026
Chevron (US)	143	247	24	45
British American Tobacco (UK)	135	143	45	49
CK Hutchison (HK)	131	138	293	309
Mercedes-Benz Group (DE)	127	265	61	175
Iberdrola (ES)	124	158	32	42
Enel (IT)	123	187	29	60

Note: preliminary results based on data from the companies' financial reporting; corresponds to the financial year from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 (converted to euro using end-of-year exchange rate for 2024). In some cases, foreign employment data were estimated by applying the share of foreign employment in total employment from the previous year to total employment.

(¹) Number of employees: 2023.

Source: UNCTAD (World Investment Report 2025)

Table 1: Top 20 non-financial multinational enterprise groups ranked by foreign assets, 2024 Source: UNCTAD (World Investment Report 2025)

The stock of foreign investment in China was 3.9 times as high in 2024 as it had been in 2014

Developments for both inward and outward stocks of FDI are shown in Table 2. There were 7 countries where the value (in current prices) of inward FDI stocks more than doubled between 2014 and 2024; the highest growth rates were recorded in China, the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Singapore (where inward stocks of FDI were more than 3 times as high in 2024 as they had been in 2014).

The pace of change was even more rapid concerning the level of FDI stocks abroad: in 2024, outward stocks from China and from the United Arab Emirates were 4.1 times as high as they had been in 2014. It should be noted that the total value of these stocks had been, in 2014, still relatively small (compared with the levels recorded for the EU or the United States). The next highest growth was recorded for South Korea (where the value of outward stocks of FDI was 3.4 times as in 2024 as it had been in 2014).

Stocks of foreign direct investment, 2014–24
(€ billion)

	Direct investment in the reporting economy										
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
World (1)	21 743	24 861	27 280	27 972	28 977	32 931	33 639	41 064	41 003	43 527	49 001
EU (2)	5 506	6 915	7 307	7 356	7 152	7 442	7 518	7 728	7 876	7 219	7 038
Australia	480	520	580	584	611	646	642	683	735	732	766
Brazil	495	395	535	519	497	628	485	644	823	998	880
Canada	819	741	857	803	843	1 235	1 057	1 432	1 461	1 600	1 751
China	893	1 121	1 284	1 242	1 422	1 575	1 564	3 208	3 278	3 198	3 514
Hong Kong	1 232	1 462	1 543	1 621	1 715	1 663	1 509	1 728	1 883	1 923	2 263
India	208	260	302	315	337	380	391	454	479	486	527
Japan	141	160	187	169	179	199	204	213	213	202	212
Mexico	376	395	412	415	451	505	444	523	621	722	693
Russia	239	241	374	368	356	439	366	439	338	253	208
Singapore	693	824	887	975	1 106	1 264	1 308	1 609	1 818	1 951	2 147
South Africa	114	116	129	130	121	129	108	154	156	101	109
South Korea	148	165	179	191	207	215	213	247	260	279	276
Türkiye	151	146	142	164	126	142	186	121	242	174	173
United Arab Emirates	84	101	113	101	112	117	123	151	182	204	260
United Kingdom	1 303	1 406	1 386	1 569	1 744	1 916	2 099	2 375	2 549	2 720	3 133
United States	4 495	5 264	6 169	6 509	6 416	7 968	8 264	11 554	9 808	11 572	14 984
	Direct investment abroad										
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
World (1)	21 818	24 755	26 830	27 906	27 926	31 930	32 637	37 283	37 027	38 549	41 963
EU (2)	7 050	8 401	9 020	8 824	8 758	9 193	8 918	9 554	9 725	9 168	9 309
Australia	385	383	413	420	435	516	493	553	618	645	718
Brazil	173	170	193	203	186	220	226	267	281	284	346
Canada	963	1 062	1 224	1 319	1 230	1 708	1 689	2 136	2 091	2 390	2 688
China	727	1 008	1 288	1 508	1 731	1 957	2 103	2 459	2 583	2 675	3 001
Hong Kong	1 194	1 407	1 467	1 512	1 598	1 606	1 565	1 765	1 852	1 845	2 133
India	108	128	137	129	145	160	156	184	209	214	251
Japan	949	1 129	1 248	1 249	1 370	1 585	1 536	1 709	1 839	1 842	2 071
Mexico	125	132	142	150	139	155	154	172	179	192	200
Russia	274	266	325	324	303	363	311	331	280	235	221
Singapore	406	473	566	584	594	722	731	870	1 026	1 045	1 130
South Africa	120	142	167	228	215	191	205	198	195	136	142
South Korea	215	263	294	301	354	406	420	534	646	667	734
Türkiye	33	33	37	38	39	44	41	45	50	57	67
United Arab Emirates	67	90	105	104	146	164	157	190	225	237	275
United Kingdom	1 385	1 475	1 488	1 542	1 611	1 929	1 917	2 098	2 033	2 011	2 199
United States	5 206	5 566	6 067	6 558	5 564	6 717	6 690	8 479	7 340	8 319	9 392

(1) Excludes offshore financial centres in the Caribbean.
(2) Shown in relation to extra-EU partners. Includes special purpose entities (SPEs).
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_fdi6_pos) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

Table 2: Stocks of foreign direct investment, 2014–24 Source: Eurostat (bop_fdi6_pos) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

The final presentation of information concerning inward and outward stocks of FDI presents the share of world investment stocks among the leading global players (see Figure 3). In 2024, some 14.4% of global inward investment stocks were located in the EU; its share of global outward investment was considerably higher, reaching 22.2%. The EU recorded the second highest shares of outward and inward investment in 2024, with the United States accounting for a higher share of the world's FDI: 30.6% of the world's FDI was located in the United States, while the United States held 22.4% of the world's stock of FDI abroad. China accounted for the third highest share of global FDI stocks both for inward and for outward investment.

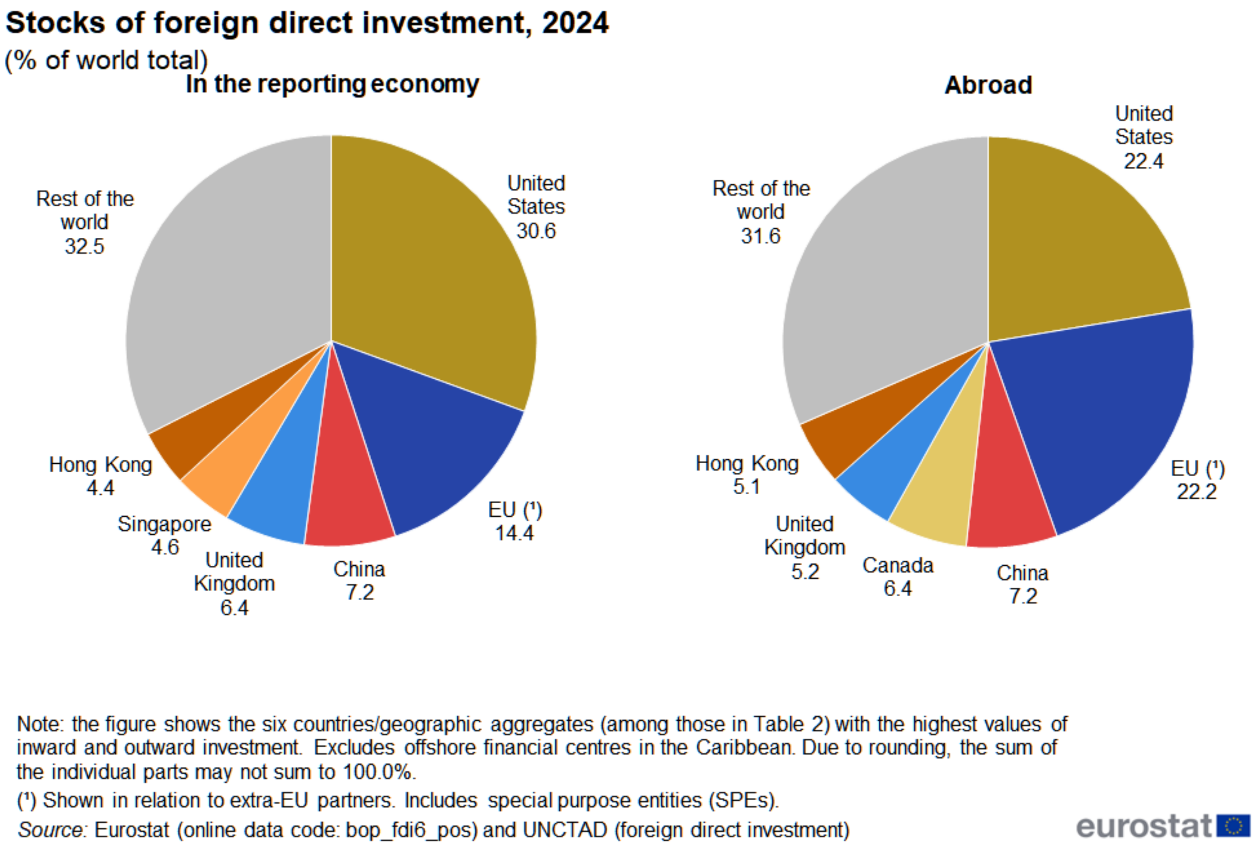

Figure 3: Stocks of foreign direct investment, 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_fdi6_pos) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

Foreign direct investment flows

FDI flows comprise capital provided by a foreign direct investor to an FDI enterprise, or capital received from an FDI enterprise by a foreign direct investor. These flows are composed of 3 components: equity capital, reinvested earnings and intra-company loans. Global flows of FDI were valued at € 1 440 billion in 2024, based on an average of inward and outward flows.

In 2024, Europe was the world's second largest source of foreign direct investment, behind Asia

Figure 4 shows the share of global flows of FDI accounted for by each continent during the period 2014 to 2024. Note the sudden change in the geographical structure of investment flows since 2018 that may be attributed, at least in part, to recent crises. There was a dramatic fall in the world's inward investment flows in 2020 (down 48.7%), while outward flows fell slightly more (down 52.2%). The recovery in 2021 was larger in terms of outward flows (up 185.1%) than inward flows (up 86.4%), with more subdued changes from 2022 to 2024 (less than +/-10.0% for global inward and outward flows).

Global FDI developments followed a fluctuating pattern, with a restructuring of investment flows resulting in generally less investment being directed towards Europe and more towards other continents, particularly Asia. While Europe's share of the world's inward investment fell from a high of 40.5% in 2015 to 12.6% by 2024, Asia saw an increase in its share, rising from 25.4% in 2015 to a peak of 55.0% in 2022 before falling somewhat to 43.6% in 2024.

A similar pattern was observed for direct investment abroad (outward investment). Europe's share of the global total fell rapidly from 48.2% in 2018 to -6.1% at the start of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 (the negative share reflecting net outflows). It subsequently rebounded to 40.1% in 2021 before declining again in 2022. In the following 2 years, Europe's share of the world's direct investment abroad increased at a steady pace, reaching 30.3% of the global total in 2024.

Asia (36.8%) had an almost identical share of the world's flows of FDI abroad in 2017 as did Europe (36.6%), but accounted for more than half of the world's outward investment flows between 2018 and 2020. Despite its share of outward investment falling, Asia reclaimed its position (from Europe in 2021) as the world's leading foreign investor from 2022 to 2024, with shares in the range of 44.6% to 45.2%.

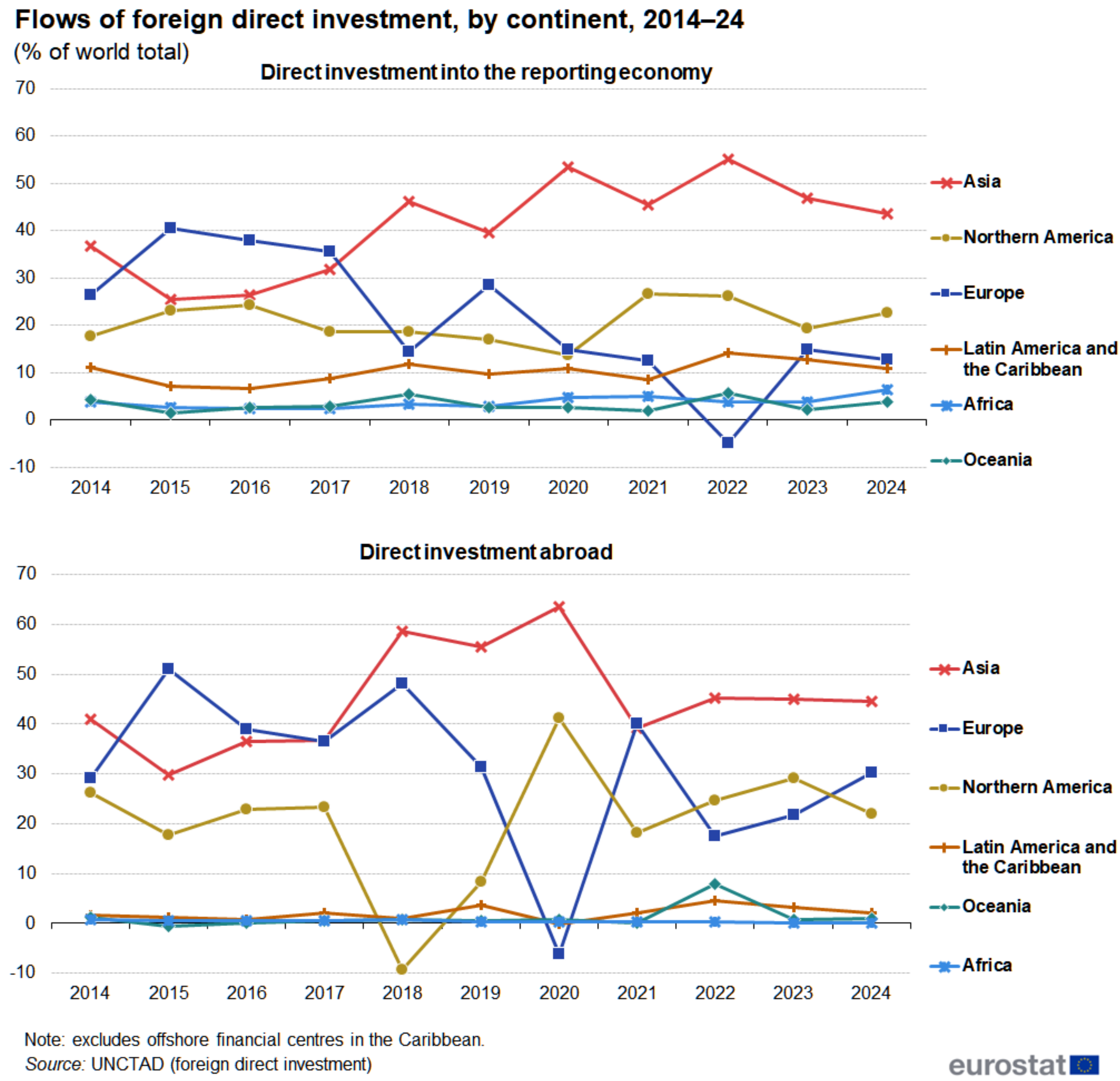

Figure 4: Flows of foreign direct investment, by continent, 2014–24 Source: UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, developments for FDI flows were quite irregular (similar to the pattern observed for international trade in goods). Large increases in investment flows were observed in 2015, 2019 and 2021. By contrast, there was a large fall in global investment flows in 2018, with an even greater contraction in 2020 (coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis).

Developments of global FDI flows are often strongly influenced by particularly large changes observed for just 1 or 2 countries / geographical aggregates.

- Looking at inward flows, the large increase observed in 2015 reflected considerable changes in the level of FDI flows into the EU and the United States, while the large decrease observed in 2020 reflected very large reductions in the level of FDI flows into the United States, Brazil, Canada and Singapore.

- Turning to outward flows, the large increase in 2015 mainly reflected changes reported for the EU, while the large decrease observed in 2020 reflected changes for Japan and the United Kingdom. The rebound in investment abroad in 2021 largely reflected increased levels of investment abroad from the EU and the United Kingdom.

FDI flows entering the United States were considerably higher in 2024 than they had been in 2014

Among the economies presented in Table 3, the highest increases in absolute terms for inward flows of FDI between 2014 and 2024 concerned investment in the United States, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (with increases of € 105.8 billion, € 77.3 billion and € 33.8 billion, respectively). By contrast, the highest relative growth was recorded in the United Arab Emirates, as its inward flows of FDI in 2024 were 5.1 times as high as in 2014. Among the remaining countries, Singapore and South Korea were the only other countries to report inward flows of FDI more than doubling between 2014 and 2024.

Between 2014 and 2024, Japan and China became increasingly important investors in the global economy

The largest absolute increases in outward FDI flows between 2014 and 2024 were observed for Japan (€ 90.3billion higher) and China (€ 57.7billion higher). There was also a marked increase in investment from the United Kingdom, although this from a position in 2014 when net capital movements were largely negative, as withdrawals, repayments, and/or divestments exceeded new investments. The highest relative growth rates were recorded for India, the United Arab Emirates and South Korea; in these countries, outward flows of FDI more than doubled between 2014 and 2024.

Another interesting aspect of the information presented in Table 3 is the transformation of the balance between inward and outward flows of FDI to/from certain countries. For example, Brazil, India, Mexico, Singapore and Türkiye were consistently net recipients of investment during the period 2014 to 2024; this was also the case in Australia (except in 2022) and in Hong Kong (except in 2014). By contrast, Canada, Japan and South Korea were net investors; this was also the case for the EU (except in 2020). The picture was more varied for China (which was frequently a net investor) and the United States (which was more often a net recipient). South Africa turned from being a net investor up to 2017 to a net recipient thereafter, while the United Kingdom was a net recipient in most years before 2021 and a net investor thereafter.

Geopolitical concerns may also impact on the development of investment flows. For example, there was a considerable decrease in flows of inward and outward investment to and from Russia between 2014 and 2015, reflecting the introduction of economic sanctions and restrictions on access to capital markets for the Russian banking sector (which may have impacted this sector in the form of capital flight). Inward flows to Russia turned negative in 2022 (reflecting divestment) and were at relatively low levels thereafter, while outward flows fell substantially from their record level in 2021 (consistent with the broader impact of sanctions, corporate retreats and reduced access to western capital markets).

Flows of foreign direct investment, 2014–24
(€ billion)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Direct investment into the reporting economy										
World (1)	1 108.6	1 999.7	1 846.2	1 567.0	1 095.9	1 481.7	760.4	1 417.5	1 319.6	1 345.6	1 393.9
EU (2)	146.4	771.7	297.3	170.8	-231.1	91.9	297.2	-122.1	-171.6	-415.0	-205.0
Australia	44.0	26.7	43.7	40.8	57.2	34.4	14.4	22.8	62.6	28.3	49.4
Brazil	48.1	45.0	48.5	58.9	50.7	58.4	24.8	42.8	69.7	59.2	54.7
Canada	44.4	39.5	32.6	20.2	31.9	45.1	22.4	52.0	43.5	43.0	59.2
China	96.7	122.2	120.8	120.7	117.1	126.1	130.7	153.0	179.6	151.0	107.4
Hong Kong	85.1	157.1	106.1	98.0	88.3	65.8	117.9	118.5	104.2	113.7	116.6
India	26.0	39.7	40.2	35.3	35.7	45.2	56.1	37.8	46.9	26.0	25.5
Japan	9.1	2.7	17.5	8.3	8.4	12.3	10.3	29.0	32.5	19.3	12.3
Mexico	22.8	32.4	28.2	30.1	28.9	30.9	24.7	28.3	34.5	33.7	34.1
Russia	21.9	10.7	33.6	23.0	11.2	28.7	9.1	32.7	-14.4	8.3	3.1
Singapore	55.2	53.8	61.0	75.6	63.0	87.6	62.6	110.7	135.0	124.9	132.4
South Africa	4.3	1.6	2.0	1.8	4.6	4.6	2.7	34.0	8.8	3.2	2.3
South Korea	7.0	3.7	10.9	15.9	10.3	8.6	7.7	18.7	23.8	17.6	14.1
Türkiye	9.8	17.1	12.3	9.8	10.6	8.5	6.6	9.5	12.7	9.8	9.8
United Arab Emirates	8.3	7.7	8.7	9.2	8.8	16.0	17.4	17.5	21.6	28.4	42.2
United Kingdom	18.6	35.3	233.7	85.3	74.4	48.2	38.9	-60.9	14.2	48.3	-37.0
United States	151.9	421.5	415.1	273.5	172.1	205.4	81.7	326.5	300.9	215.6	257.6
	Direct investment abroad										
	2014	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
World (1)	1 127.8	1 679.9	1 398.1	1 533.4	901.3	1 187.8	567.8	1 618.7	1 489.7	1 439.1	1 486.4
EU (2)	209.3	1 003.8	518.6	180.2	-149.3	143.0	62.4	204.4	-1.2	-380.5	58.8
Australia	13.7	-8.4	2.1	6.9	6.6	7.8	4.8	2.4	113.5	10.6	13.0
Brazil	-2.5	-10.5	-5.3	16.9	-13.8	17.0	-11.7	17.3	30.5	24.7	11.5
Canada	45.4	60.8	62.8	67.4	49.2	69.2	38.2	89.6	79.8	86.3	79.5
China	92.7	131.3	177.2	140.1	121.1	122.3	134.6	151.2	154.9	164.0	150.4
Hong Kong	93.4	64.7	53.9	76.7	69.6	47.5	88.2	81.5	100.9	89.8	80.6
India	8.9	6.8	4.6	9.9	9.7	11.7	9.7	14.6	13.9	12.8	22.0
Japan	98.5	122.8	140.9	145.7	122.8	207.8	87.3	176.7	154.0	181.9	188.8
Mexico	5.7	9.6	0.1	3.5	7.2	9.6	1.5	-1.8	13.8	6.1	5.3
Russia	48.3	24.4	24.3	30.2	30.3	19.7	5.9	54.2	10.9	27.5	10.8
Singapore	39.5	40.8	35.7	58.7	20.3	60.5	34.8	51.9	49.6	58.3	51.1
South Africa	5.8	5.2	4.0	6.5	3.5	2.8	-1.7	0.1	2.3	-2.6	-1.2
South Korea	21.1	21.3	27.0	30.2	32.4	31.5	30.5	55.8	62.5	29.8	44.9
Türkiye	5.0	4.3	2.7	2.3	3.1	2.7	2.8	4.3	4.3	5.4	5.5
United Arab Emirates	8.8	15.0	14.2	12.4	12.8	19.0	16.6	19.1	23.6	20.6	21.6
United Kingdom	-113.9	-60.2	-34.0	126.0	70.2	10.5	-83.9	71.6	90.6	62.1	23.4
United States	250.7	238.3	257.0	290.1	-133.3	31.3	196.5	204.5	287.7	333.3	246.1

(1) Excludes offshore financial centres in the Caribbean.
(2) Shown in relation to extra-EU partners. Includes special purpose entities (SPEs).
Source: Eurostat (online data code: bop_fdi6_flow) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

eurostat

Table 3: Flows of foreign direct investment, 2014–24 Source: Eurostat (bop_fdi6_flow) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

In 2024, the United States was the world's largest outward investor and also the largest recipient of inward investment

Among the selected economies for which data are shown (see Figure 5), the United States was the host economy that received the highest level of inward FDI in 2024, with an 18.5% share of the world total. The economy of Singapore received 9.5% of the world's FDI, while Hong Kong (8.4%) and China (7.7%) received somewhat smaller shares. Inward FDI into the EU was negative, due to disinvestment exceeding new investment by an amount equivalent to -14.7% of the world total for inward investment.

The United States was also the leading outward investor among those economies for which information is presented; it accounted for around a sixth (16.6%) of the world's FDI flows abroad in 2024. The next highest shares were registered for Japan (12.7%) and China (10.1%). Outward FDI originating from the EU accounted for 4.0% of the world total in 2024.

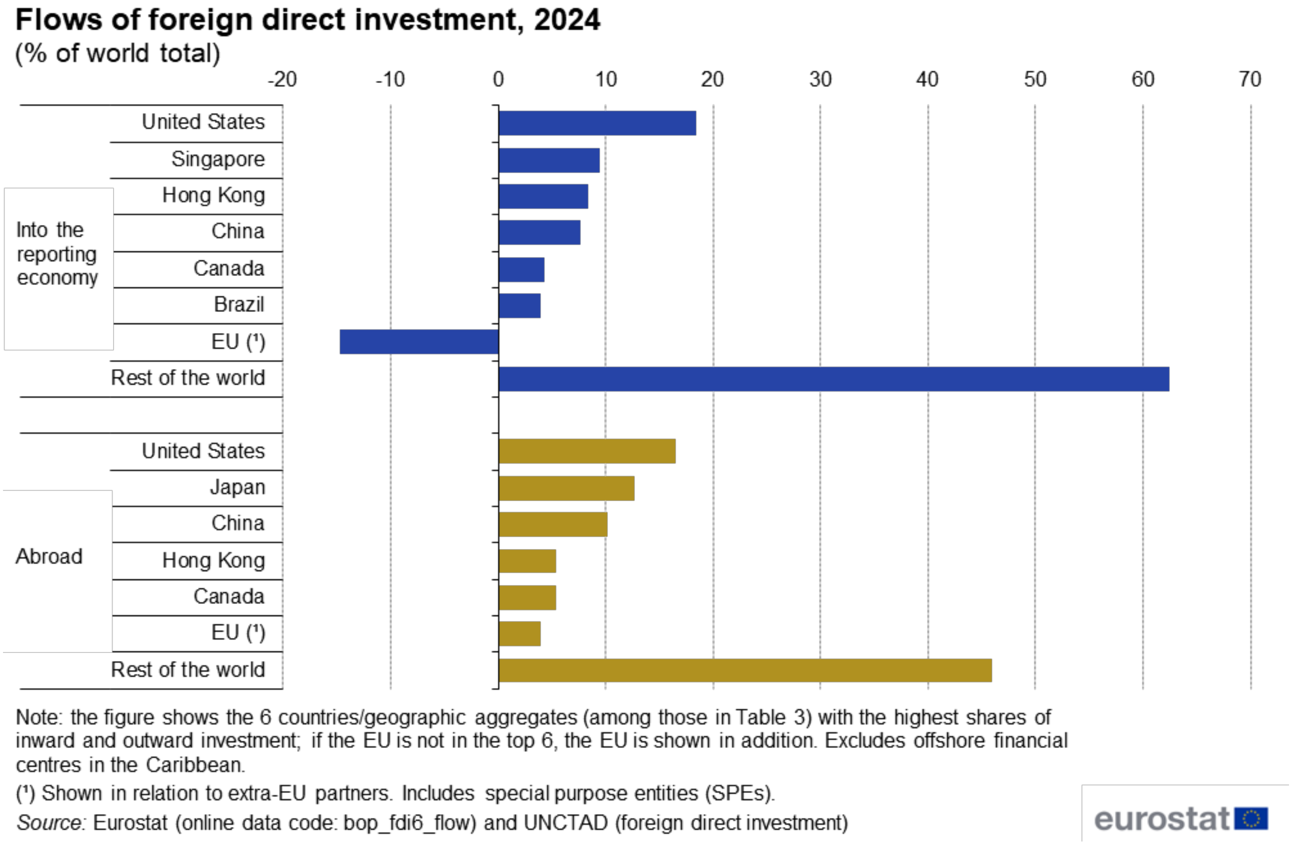

Figure 5: Flows of foreign direct investment, 2024 Source: Eurostat (bop_fdi6_flow) and UNCTAD (foreign direct investment)

Source data for tables and graphs

- World direct investment patterns: tables and figures

Context

Statistics on foreign direct investment

FDI is an investment made by a resident enterprise in an economy (direct investor or parent enterprise) with the objective of establishing a lasting interest in an enterprise that is resident in another economy (direct investment enterprise). This implies the existence of a long-term relationship between the direct investor and the direct investment enterprise, as well as the ability to exercise some form of control/influence over business decisions. Indeed, this effective voice in the management of the foreign enterprise is one of the principal differences between FDI and other forms of investment, such as portfolio investment (where the investor does not seek to control the foreign enterprise) or other assets (for example, intellectual property rights).

FDI data are based on international standards: since 2013, these data follow the standards laid out in the IMF's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual, 6th edition (BPM6) and the OECD's Benchmark Definition of Foreign Direct Investment, 4th edition (BD4) . Within the financial account of the balance of payments, a positive sign represents an increase in an asset or a liability to which it relates, while a negative sign represents a decrease. Therefore, a plus sign denotes a net increase in financial assets or liabilities, while a minus sign refers to a net decrease in financial assets or liabilities.

There are 4 broad types of FDI:

1. the creation of productive assets, for example, establishing a new plant/office abroad (so-called 'greenfield investment')

2. the purchase of existing assets abroad through acquisitions, mergers or takeovers ('brownfield investment')
3. the extension of capital, which relates to additional investments being made to expand an established business
4. financial restructuring, which refers to investments for debt repayment or loss reduction

Important : note that the data presented for the EU include special purpose entities (SPEs) , while those for the rest of the world exclude SPEs. From an economic standpoint, the inclusion of SPEs may distort the geographic distribution of FDI statistics as it can appear that countries receive or make investments when in reality the funds are simply being passed through holding companies and other similar structures. For this reason, statistics excluding SPEs should generally be preferred for economic analyses of FDI, as they remove those flows of FDI that have little or no impact on 'real' economies. On the other hand, as part of the balance of payments, the inclusion of SPEs should generally be favoured insofar as the main objective for this type of analyses is to measure all (direct) cross-border monetary transactions, irrespective of whether these are through SPEs or not.

Multinational enterprises

A wide range of factors may influence an enterprise when it decides if it wishes to (re)locate (some) production abroad, including the size and distance of the foreign market, its growth prospects, wage and productivity levels, or regulatory and legal regimes. However, investment decisions are often focused on profits. As the relative price of transport and communications fell, it became considerably easier for multinational enterprises to consider moving their production locations across the globe. For example, this may lead to benefits from cost savings that may be linked to lower labour costs or local resource endowments of raw materials. In a similar vein, the provision of some services has also been affected, as witnessed by the concentration of call centres / helpdesks and software developers in some countries. Furthermore, FDI provides enterprises with the possibility of accessing protected and regulated service markets through the establishment of a commercial presence in the host economy.

Data sources

Some economists argue that, compared with international trade, FDI creates deeper links between economies, thereby stimulating technology transfers and fostering the exchange of know-how, which in turn drives productivity and makes economies more competitive. Governments often use economic arguments as a reason for seeking to attract FDI, based on the premise that it can help generate economic growth and provide jobs.

On the other hand, other economists provide a range of counter arguments, highlighting the role played by some multinational enterprise groups in 'stripping' resources or exploiting lower labour and environmental standards in host economies. Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of literature around corporate responsibility, ethics and tax-optimisation/avoidance techniques that may be adopted by multinational enterprise groups. As such, there remains a sizeable debate over the motives and redistributive effects of FDI.

Within this article the analyses of FDI are based on the following continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America (composed of Central America and South America) and the Caribbean, Northern America and Oceania. The composition of each continent is defined according to a classification provided by the the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) .

Within this article the analyses of FDI are based on a fixed list of countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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External links

- European Commission – A global Europe: leveraging our power and partnership
- European Commission – Reflection paper on harnessing globalisation (COM(2017) 240)
- International Monetary Fund – data
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development – World investment report
- United Nations Statistics Division – national accounts data