

The Business of Expansion

How international businesses are harnessing growth and building resilience in an uncertain world

HSBC's report **'The Business of Expansion: How international businesses are balancing resilience and ambition in an uncertain world'** shows firms are still pushing international growth despite trade, tariff and geopolitical uncertainty. Based on a survey of **2,700 financial decision-makers** across **18 markets** (Dec 2025–Jan 2026), **77%** plan to expand overseas in the next two years and **48%** say tariffs have accelerated their plans. Growth (**38%**) and supply chain resilience (**35%**) lead the drivers, while economic conditions (**35%**), regulation / trade policy (**34%**) and political factors are the biggest barriers. Read the full report to learn more.

Key findings

Expansion intent:

81% of ASEAN-headquartered international businesses intend to expand overseas within the next two years

Tariffs accelerating plans:

56% of international businesses reported accelerating overseas expansion due to tariff changes

In 2026, ASEAN (Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines) decision-makers' international expansion is driven primarily by strategic growth ambition: **41%** cite expansion as part of broader international ambitions. With operational support—especially supply chain management (**35%**)—and people resources to manage overseas operations (**35%**) both key triggers, signalling a focus on scaling in a controlled, operationally resilient way.

Inbound interest is led by intra-ASEAN nations, reinforcing strong regional integration. Beyond the bloc, Australia stands out as a major source of inbound interest (**74%**), followed by India (**61%**) and Japan (**58%**), highlighting ASEAN's role as a hub connecting Asia-Pacific growth corridors.

The biggest barriers are largely macro and structural: economic factors (**36%**) and regulatory / trade agreements (**35%**) lead, with financial barriers and political factors also significant (**32%**). Together, these suggest that clearer regulatory pathways and improved access to financing could materially accelerate cross-border expansion across the region.

Top triggers for international expansion

41%

Growth in line with overall International ambitions

35%

Operational support (Supply chain management)

35%

Resources in terms of people support (local team managing overseas operations etc)

34%

Expecting overseas demand

33%

Financial support and funding

33%

Sector is expected to grow

Top considerations for market selection

Economic stability

26%

Technology and infrastructure readiness

24%

Market size and growth potential

22%

Key corridors

Inbound*

(International enterprises plan to expand to ASEAN)

74%
AU

61%
IN

58%
JP

57%
HK

51%
UAE

Outbound

(To expand into)

20%
AU

17%
KR

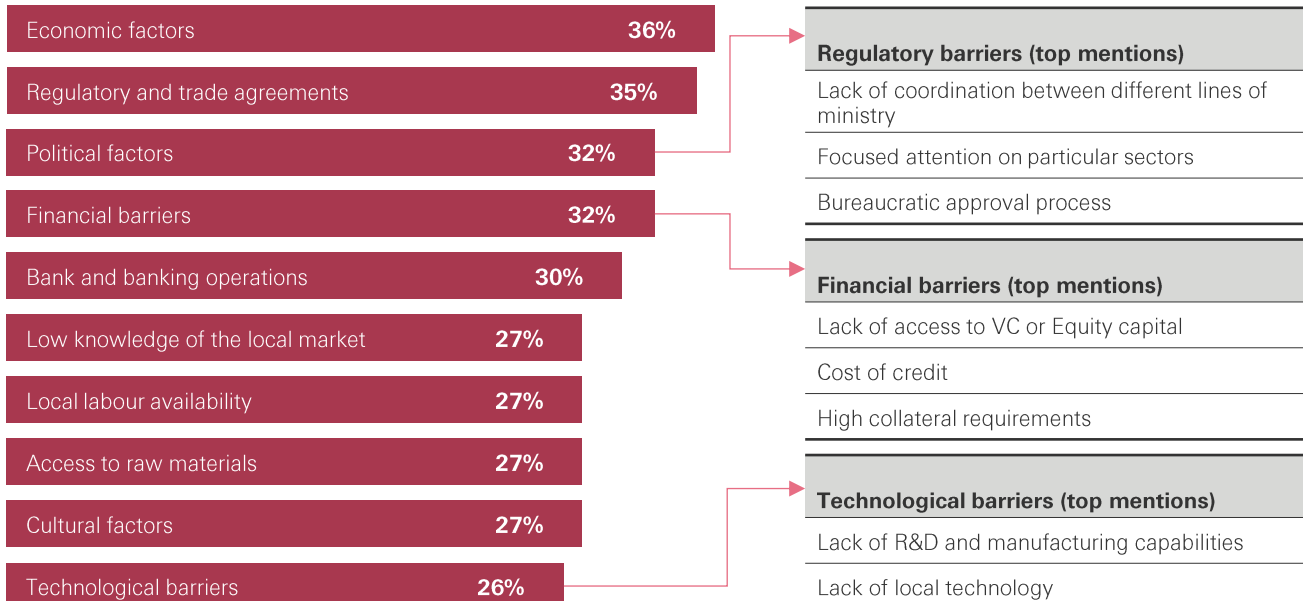
16%
NZ

16%
HK

15%
JP

*Markets in the respective region (ASEAN) are excluded from inbound / outbound figures

Barriers to international expansion for businesses



This study, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, was conducted over a period of 18 months across 18 markets, concluding in Q1 2026, with over 2,700 mid-market companies. This study is not a product of HSBC Global Investment Research.

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