

# TRADE IN SERVICES AND EMPLOYMENT: HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

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*Abstract: Considering the recent trends in international business, influenced by the new opportunities offered by increasing digitalization, as well as challenges generated by the post-pandemic economic and geopolitical pressures, this paper investigates the impact of recent developments in services and trade in services on employment. The starting point of this research is the statistical evidence highlighting the contribution of service activities to economic development and, implicitly, employment, as revealed by their high share in GDP and the labour market, globally. The paper is focused on the analysis of trade in services, with its particularities in terms of modes of supply and increased ability to use digital technologies, from the perspective of its capacity to create opportunities and also challenges on employment, depending on service industries as well as the level of development and market openness of countries. The research methodology combines a qualitative analysis of studies and empirical evidence in the field of services, trade in services and employment, accompanied by statistical data, covering the last three decades, available in the databases of international organizations. The main conclusion is that, despite the economic, geopolitical, technological or regulatory challenges, the strength of the services sector, due to the diversity of services, the dependence on services of all economic activities, the favourable service regulations, as well as the resilience of service industries in recent years, will continue to sustain the growth of trade in services and, implicitly, employment, thereby ensuring improvements in quality of life and economic development in all countries.*

*Key-Words:* trade in services, employment, modes of supply, digital services, artificial intelligence.

*JEL Classification:* F13, F23, J24, L8, O11, O24.

## 1 Introduction

Over the last decades, the developments in service business models have generated significant economic effects, mainly highlighted by the increasing share of services in gross domestic product, employment and international trade and investments (WBG, 2025). Given the growing role of services in economy, the concept of servicification<sup>1</sup> has emerged, services having an essential contribution in all economic activities (June Dong, 2019), and thus being able to indirectly support jobs in other sectors as well. Therefore, nowadays, service activities employ the most jobs at global level (WBG, 2025), generating an increase in productivity in all industries, as well as significant improvements of the quality of life in all countries (Hofmeister et al., 2023). The high number of jobs in services has been sustained by the rapid expansion of trade in services, due to many determining factors, among which the implementation of favourable regulatory measures in many countries and the extensive processes of liberalization of trade in services, supporting the international business opportunities, over the last three decades (UNCTAD, 2020). The recent service developments have been also related to technological advances (WEF, 2025) and the increase in digital service business models, all conducting to positive effects on the economy, in general, and on employment, in particular.

Despite all these positive developments, employment remains a major challenge in many economies, from the perspective of insuring well-being and social inclusion (WTO, 2024a), jobs created in the service sector failing to solve the major social and economic problems in some countries and regions. A recent challenge is related to the intensive implementation of new technologies, especially artificial intelligence in service industries

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<sup>1</sup> **Servicification** refers to the growing role and integration of **services in manufacturing and other traditionally non-service sectors**. It captures how firms increasingly **buy, produce, use, and sell services** as part of their overall production process—even when their final output is a good, not a service.

(WTO, 2024b). At the same time, the persistence of uncertainty regarding the future economic developments - fuelled by increasingly global challenges - is likely to remain a major concern. Geopolitical tensions driving economic fragmentation, alongside the urgency of measures to address climate change are expected to reshape the global labour market in the coming years (WEF, 2025). In the context of a fractured multilateral trade system with increasing market instability and asymmetries in trade benefits (UNCTAD, 2025a), the prospects of service industries and trade in services can offer an encouraging employment perspective, due to the wide variety of domains covered by this sector and the crucial role of some services in economic and social areas (e.g. medical, educational or environmental), although some of them could be partially affected by other trade restrictive measures (as is the case of transport and logistics services affected by the import tariffs imposed by the United States in 2025).

## 2 Literature review

The effects of service developments, including trade in services, on employment have been extensively analysed in reports and studies conducted by international organizations and academic researchers, highlighting the relevant trends in this area. Besides the main trends in trade in services, World Trade Organization also examined the impact of the trade openness and technological progress on employment and economic well-being (WTO, 2017), underlying also even the role of trade in services in sustaining the inclusiveness (WTO, 2024a) and reducing the gender inequality (WTO, 2019). The International Labour Organization's experts analysed the multiple effects of international trade and trade policies on labour market and the specific characteristics of employment related to trade activities, in this regard identifying the role of trade in facilitating the diffusion of new technologies, underling the increasing need for superior professional skills (ILO & WTO, 2017), as well as the relationship between trade and decent work (Corley-Coulibaly et al. (eds.), 2023).

The economic benefits of trade in services have been also highlighted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in this regard being underlined the role of further liberalization of services trade policies in creating new employment opportunities. However, the persistence of trade barriers and inequalities hinder the positive effects of trade in service on job market (OECD, 2025a). At the same time, World Economic Forum's experts investigated the current world trends in jobs and skills amid increasing geoeconomic fragmentation landscape and the widespread of smart technologies, where service industries are affected especially by artificial intelligence tools (WEF, 2025).

All the international organizations' reports have gone together with the academic researches revealing particular evidences related to the impact of the increasing of services and trade in service on the labour market. In this context, Schwarzer (2015) made a comprehensive investigation related to the service sector as the largest employer worldwide, including the specific analyses related to the job quality and gender equality, the services trade having direct and indirect effects on employment. Baldwin & Forslid (2020) identified a major trend of developing countries in global service exports, given their comparative advantage of low-cost labour in services. Recently, as the use of artificial intelligence has intensified, the research on labour market in the service sector underlined the way this sector is facing new challenges (Georgieva, 2024), with smart technologies having a great potential to substitute professionals in many service industries, from IT to legal or cultural services (Dell'Acqua et al., 2023; WTO, 2024b). Given the fastest growth in trade in services and particularly in digital services, experts underline that the good jobs in the future economy are going to be in highly specialised services, with the deepening wage gaps between different skilled service workers in different countries (Wolf, 2025).

A significant and positive impact of trade in services on employment across various economies, industries and social categories has been demonstrated in many previous researches. In this respect, Maliszewska & Winkler (2024) confirmed that international trade is associated with higher employment levels, increased labour earnings, higher labour productivity and better job quality, but with differences across countries depending on their level of development. Based on some empirical analyses, Lassmann (2020) concluded that foreign trade activities are positively associated with employment in advanced economies, but with differences in the emerging economies, in terms of job quality, wage levels, skills and gender. An Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's study found that growth in service exports is linked with increased employment, particularly in business-to-business services sectors (OECD, 2025a). Summarising, these studies collectively have highlighted the beneficial role that trade in services plays in fostering employment growth, enhancing earnings, and improving job quality, emphasising also the differences between sectors, regions and countries.

### 3. Methodology of research

This study aims to explore the effects of trade in services expansion on employment, underlying also their recent opportunities and current challenges, depending on the service industries, modes of supply on international markets and technological influence. The starting point of this paper is the analysis of the specific developments in the service sector over the past few years. The research is conducted on three major directions, in this regard three hypotheses are formulated and tested assumptions, as follows: (i) trends in services developments emphasised by the contribution of services to GDP and employment, as well as the evolution of trade in services in order to demonstrate the hypothesis that trade in services have the potential to create economic benefits and jobs, in number, quality and inclusiveness (H1); (ii) the positive influence of trade in services on employment based on detailed analysis of the four modes of services supply, in order to demonstrate the hypothesis according to which service business openness favours job creation in service industries, especially those intensive in technology and knowledge with influence on economic development (H2); (iii) the potential of new technologies to create jobs in innovation-intensive services in order to demonstrate the hypothesis according to which employment in service businesses are not at risk considering the recent progress in implementation of artificial intelligence that facilitate trade in services (H3).

The research methodology is designed to evaluate the capacity of the service sector, and particularly of trade in services, to sustain the labour market, in the context of opportunities but also challenges related to market access and the implementation of digital technologies. In this regard, a mixed approach is envisaged that combines qualitative analysis of existing studies in the field of services, trade in services and employment, with quantitative analyses based on statistical data, covering the last three decades, published by international organizations, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as International Labour Organization.

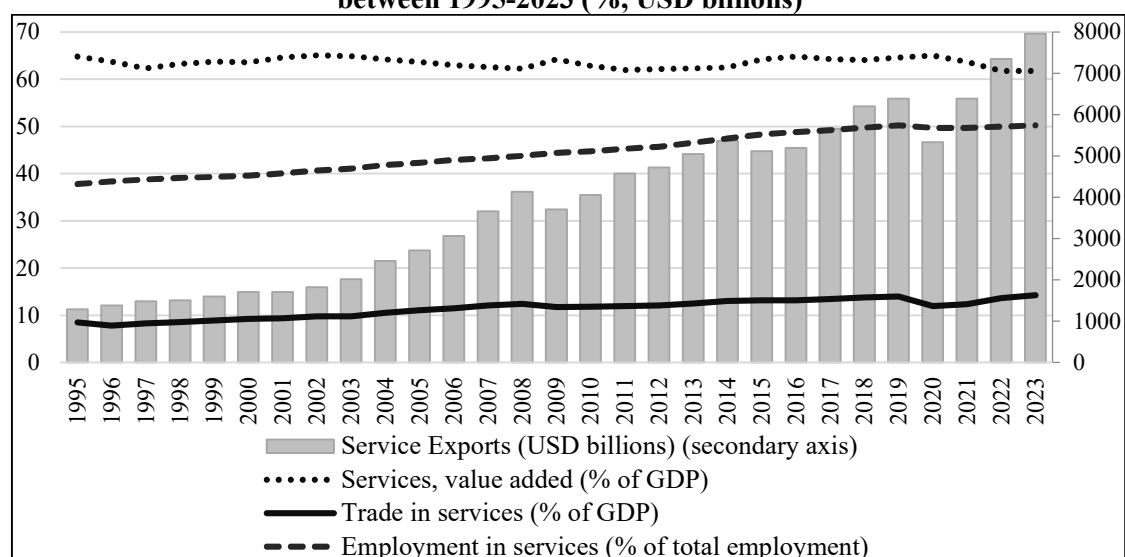
This allows us to make some relevant correlations between trade in services and employment, not only in numbers, but also by categories and quality of jobs, emphasising the differences by countries according to their level of development. The main limitation of this study is related to the lack of aggregate statistical data, so it fails to carry out a more detailed specific analysis to provide a global picture of how trade in services has supported employment, this being partially covered depending on the data available in certain fields and countries.

## 4. Research results

### 4.1. Trends in services developments: value added of GDP, trade and employment

In recent decades, the service sector has experienced notable developments, its expansion generating major economic and social benefits, in the overall context of the dynamic forces reshaping global economy (e.g. globalization, climate change, and digitalization). As revealed in Chart 1, the key trends in services are demonstrated by the evolution of the main indicators over the last three decades. Accordingly, services have contributed two-thirds of the value added of global GDP and have provided half of global employment, reflecting the dominance of the service sector over other economic sectors, and for some categories of services even their resilience in times of crisis (such as financial crisis in 2008 and pandemic crisis in 2020). Also, for three decades, service exports have continued to reach records year after year, culminating in 2024, at USD 8,687 billion, according to WTO (2025a), their overall growth rate managing not to be affected by unfavourable global economic conditions during the post-pandemic years. At the same time, all economies have confirmed a high level of openness to trade in services, emphasised by the share of services trade of GDP reaching 14.24% in 2023. The development of service sector has created new job opportunities, generating a positive trend of labour market, nowadays this sector providing more than 50% of total employment at the global level (WBG, 2025).

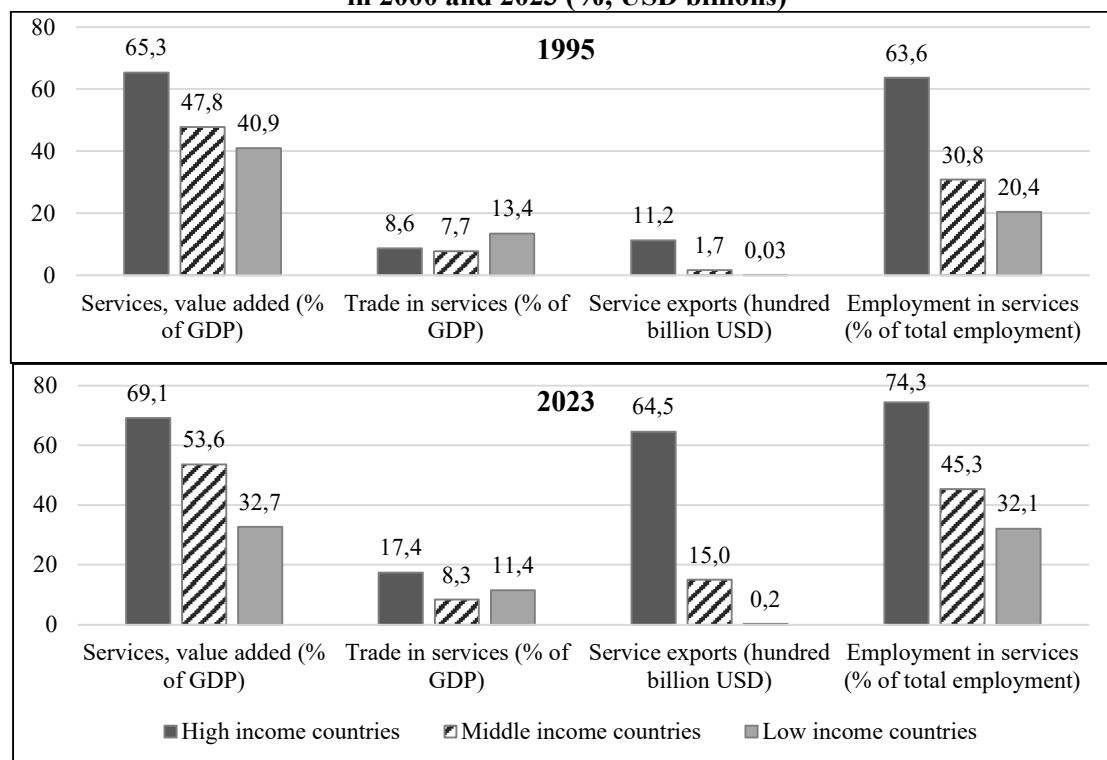
**Chart 1: Global trends in services: value added of GDP, employment, and trade, between 1995-2023 (% , USD billions)**



Source: Author's representation based on WBG (2025).

The contribution of different categories of countries to the global service positive trends is, however, uneven, the data in Chart 2 highlighting the differences between countries depending on their level of development, data comparing 2023 and 1995 reflecting the maintenance of the gap between countries. Therefore, the high-income countries perform best on all indicators of service developments, due to their specialization in high-performance international services, while low-income countries achieve modest results, according to their limited economic capacities, these latter countries being specialized in services such as tourism or transport that capitalize on their geographical advantages. The differences between countries are also justified by numerous factors, mainly those related to the different capacity of countries to ensure adequate infrastructure, skilled labour and human capital, appropriate regulations and institutions, access to financing and technology, and ensuring market and structural conditions (UNCTAD, 2020; WTO, 2017; WTO, 2019). Considering that high-performance services are associated with a high level of economic development, over 70% of multinational companies that provide international services are headquartered in developed countries, compared to 30% in developing ones, of which China takes 20% (UNCTAD, 2024b), this particular situation explaining also the differences in Chart 2.

**Chart 2: Service developments indicators by categories of countries, in 2000 and 2023 (% , USD billions)**



Note: The countries classification is based on WBG (2024).

Source: Author's representation based on WBG (2025).

The recent performance of service sector is sustained by the high-performance service sectors, experiencing a rapid growth, strong productivity, high value-added output, and significant contributions to exports and employment. These sectors are often supported by technology, innovation, digital infrastructure and skilled labour, generating high value-added per employee, being intensive in innovation and knowledge and predominantly oriented to export. Consequently, the key service sectors that correspond to these characteristics are: information and communication technology (ICT) services, financial services, professional and business services, transport and logistics, health and education services, tourism as well as environmental services (WTO, 2025; UNCTAD, 2025b; UNCTAD, 2024a; OECD, 2025b; ITC, 2025).

ICT services are the leading high-performance segment, including software development, cloud services, data processing and telecommunications, their latest advances being driven by the digital transformation, cloud computing, remote work and lately artificial intelligence. The main performers in this field are Ireland (with 22.1% of global ICT service exports, in 2023), followed by India (15.58%) and the United States (6.35%) (ReportLinker, 2023). Financial services, with their large variety of domains covering banking, insurance, investment and fintech services, have been sustained by global capital flows supported by favourable regulations and the general international expansion of businesses for which financial services are indispensable, as well as the recent digital banking and blockchain. The top countries in this field are the United Kingdom (with USD 98.1 billion financial service exports, in 2023), followed by the United States (USD 73.1 billion), Singapore, Switzerland and Luxembourg (The Global City, 2024). Professional and business services, represented by legal, consulting, engineering, accounting and marketing services, have been facilitated by business globalization, outsourcing and the complexity of business environment (as in the case of legal services). The international market in these areas is dominated by the United States (with USD 189 billion, professional service exports in 2019), the United Kingdom, Germany and Netherlands (ITA, 2025a). Transport and logistics, covering mainly freight, warehousing and supply chain management services, have been considerably sustained by global trade, investment in infrastructure and recently e-commerce, the major hubs being located in China, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, and Netherlands. In 2023, the leading exporters of transportation services were Germany (with USD 334 billion), China (USD 219 billion) and the United States (USD 218 billion) (OEC, 2025). Another services segment is represented by health and life sciences services, with medical diagnostics, biotechnology and

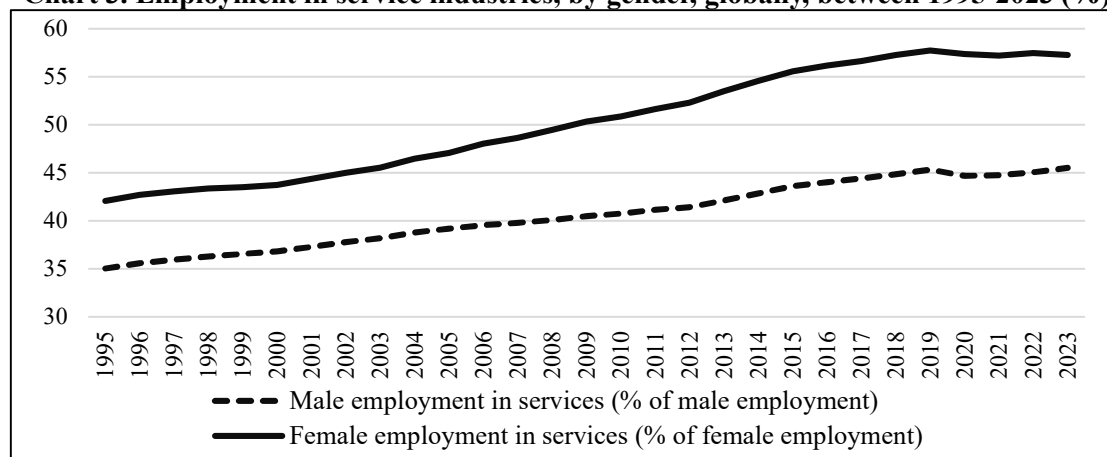
telemedicine services, driven by research and development as well as technological innovations, the top countries in this area being the United States, Germany, Japan and South Korea. The upskilling needs, global student mobility and lately e-learning are the major drivers of the latest developments in education services, with their main segments of online learning platforms and international education services. The main providers are the United States (with 33.7% of global exports of educational services), the United Kingdom (22.6%), Australia (16.9%) and Canada (12.3%) (ITC, 2025; SEPC, 2024). In recent years, the high-performance service sectors have been added with tourism and creative services, where cultural, digital content, gaming and design services stand out, driven by the global digital distribution, worldwide audiences and streaming platforms, the key players being South Korea, the United States, France and Japan. Environmental, social and governance regulations, climate transition and sustainability goals have generated a new category of services, namely environmental and green services, including renewable energy consulting, environmental impact analysis and waste management services. The main exporters of environmental technologies are Canada, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Japan (ITA, 2025b).

The determinant factors influencing the latest developments of the best performing services, which as presented are mainly concentrated in high-income and emerging countries, provide arguments that support the data presented in Chart 2. In recent years, in addition to traditional service sectors, namely tourism and transport, many middle-and even low-income countries have increasingly capitalized on their comparative advantages to export high-performance services. This trend creates significant employment opportunities, generating higher-quality jobs in developing countries as well. A relevant example is India, which, in the last decade, due to its integration into global service value chains, IT service exports have contributed to economic growth and numerous and well-paid jobs (in 2024, India's technology sector contributed 7.3% to GDP, with 5.8 million jobs, and USD224.4 billion exports) (Times of India, 2025). Similarly, the IT and business process management sector is the largest employment source in the Philippines, the “Industry Roadmap 2028” projecting to reach 2.5 million employees and USD59 billion in annual revenues by 2028) (Business World, 2025). The development of the service industries in India and the Philippines is strongly related to their participation in the global services value chains, with the strategies of delocalization and outsourcing of business processes of many multinational companies, attracted by low costs, the availability of human capital and the attractive business environment for the service sector in these countries. The experience of these countries shows that participation in the global services value chains stimulates economic growth and generates a considerable number of well-paid jobs, data revealing that employment in the service sector has increased more than tenfold over the last 15 years, as well as significant increases in income, no other sector having the capacity to generate comparable results in recent years (Nano & Stolzenburg, 2022).

Although the growth of service exports presents vast opportunities for job creation and economic diversification in developing and emerging countries, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to these jobs, continuously improving skills to maintain competitiveness in the global market, and managing the impact of automation and smart technologies (UNCTAD, 2024a).

The recent trends have also demonstrated that the service sector can have a contribution to solving gender inequalities, the large variety of activities of services and export openings providing significant employment opportunities for women. Consequently, the growth in services trade can contribute to enlarged female workforce participation (WB & WTO, 2020; Sauvé, 2024; APEC, 2023). Data in Chart 3 emphasises that the share of women employed in the services sector has increased since 1995, in 2023 services accounting for 57% of total female employment globally, with major differences between countries according to their level of development (82% for high-income countries, 51% for middle-income countries and 32% for low-income countries, in 2023 (WGB, 2025).

**Chart 3. Employment in service industries, by gender, globally, between 1995-2023 (%)**



Source: Author's representation based on WBG (2025).

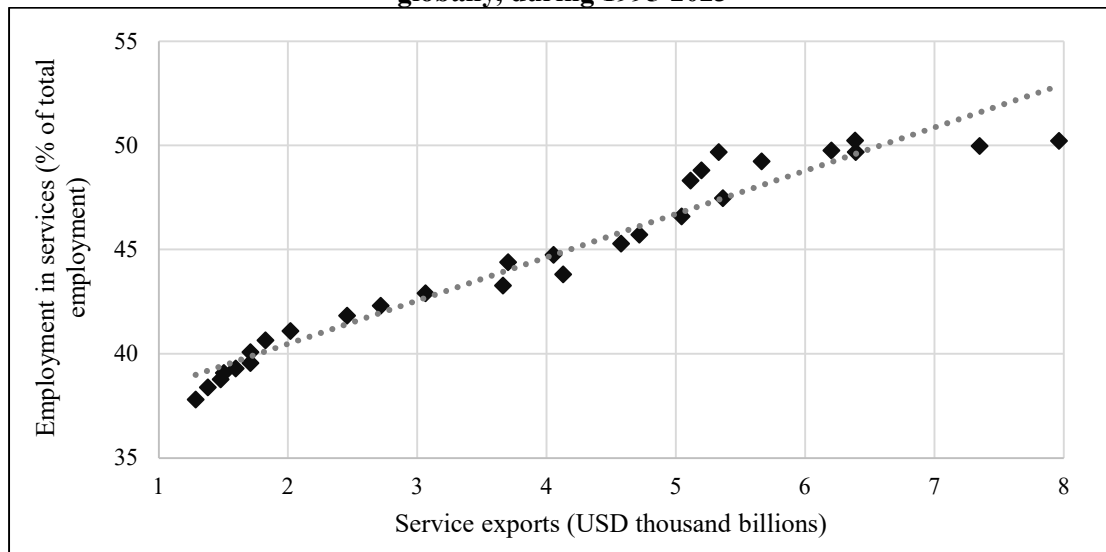
Considering the positive trends in services developments emphasised by the major contribution of services to GDP and employment, as well as the expansion of trade in services and its contribution to GDP, the detailed analysis of the job categories created by the best performing service industries, the first hypothesis (H1), according to which trade in services has the capacity to create numerous and good quality jobs and sustain inclusiveness all generating positive influence on economic development, is demonstrated.

## 4.2. Service exports and employment, supporting economic development

Among the positive effects of service sector and trade in services expansions, those on employment are considered the most significant, due to the capacity of service industries not only to create jobs and consequently improve living standards, but also to provide good quality jobs, generating a better quality of life. However, the relationship between trade in services and employment is complex and varies across industries and economies, depending especially on their level of development associated to the physical infrastructure, telecommunications and digital infrastructure, technological equipment, education, national regulations, financial resources and market conditions. Beside the favourable conditions of national economies sustaining the expansion of service exports, their contribution to increased employment depend on the international economic conditions, mainly at the level of partner countries.

The positive correlation between service exports and employment in the service sector is confirmed by data represented in Chart 4, where it can be observed that an increase in service exports often leads to job creation and enhanced economic activities. In this regard, three particular examples can be relevant: (i) The United Kingdom is highly specialised in professional business services, where consulting services account for a significant share of service exports. Between 2016 and 2024, the total service exports grew of 74%, with management consulting service exports increasing by 114%, this international success contributing to the expansion of the consulting sector, and supporting employment and UK's economic growth (Middlehurst, 2025). (ii) For many years, the services sector in Spain has recorded robust growth driven by growing external demand, mainly for tourism services, but also for other services with a positive impact on employment and the national economy. In 2024, the Spanish tourism sector generated the most dynamic job growth rate in the economy, with 3.6% (Alvarez Ondina, 2025), this sector continuing to be the major driving force behind Spain's economy, contributing significantly to GDP and regional development, fuelling small businesses, promoting cultural exchange and enhancing Spain's global reputation. The Spain's non-tourism service exports are primarily driven by business services (36%), transportation (24%), and telecommunications, IT, and information services (17%), the firms exporting non-travel services tending to be larger, invest more in research and development, have more qualified employees and be more productive in terms of workforce (Martín Machuca, C. & García Esteban, 2023). (iii) The services sector is a major source of jobs in Romania, with 54.9% of employees working in service industries in 2023 (NISR, 2024). The increase in external demand and exports of services have contributed to job creation, especially in IT (this sector is in the top employers at national level), finance and accounting, as well as business services, these demonstrating Romania's level of specialization in these fields in recent years and its role as an important destination for outsourcing services, mainly from Western Europe (RAIFT, 2023).

**Chart 4: Correlation between service exports and employment in services, globally, during 1995-2023**



Source: Author's representation based on WBG (2025).

The relationship between trade in services and employment is better highlighted from the perspective of the four modes of service supply, as defined by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (WTO, 1995). Each mode of supply creates specific jobs, with different opportunities and challenges, in the broader context of globalization, in which trade in services has evolved over the recent years (Mann, 2019). Therefore, the analysis of the four modes of supply of services reveals the following particular developments of trade in services and employment.

(i) The cross-border supply of services (mode 1 of GATS) has been supported by technological advancements, nowadays being intensively used in the context of the digital services and artificial intelligence expansion. The recent growth of mode 1 services (Chart 4) has stimulated the direct job creation in sectors such as telecommunications and IT infrastructure, the increased cross-border data flows sustaining new jobs in building and maintenance of internet infrastructure, data centres and telecommunications networks. As well as, the demand for efficient and secure digital platforms for service delivery drives innovation and job creation in software development and cybersecurity. As industries expand and new technologies emerge, more specialized training programs and educational institutions are needed to equip the workforce with the necessary skills for cross-border delivery of services. At the same time, mode 1 has an important impact on smaller businesses, the digital tools allowing them to reach international clients without a physical presence abroad (implying high investments and complex management capacities), the lower barriers to entry foreign markets and sustain trade in services, enabling more businesses to grow and eventually create jobs. Nowadays, there are well-known examples of countries and companies where mode 1 has created numerous jobs such as call centre operations, back-office functions and a large variety of IT services within the business process operations sector offering services to worldwide clients, individuals or companies (Rippling, 2023). The online platforms connecting freelancers (such as programmers, graphic designers or content creators) from different countries with global clients demonstrate that the mode 1 has an important potential for creating jobs for individuals. Companies providing cloud infrastructure and software services to businesses globally, enabling client companies to operate more efficiently, are able to create more jobs. In essence, by removing geographical barriers and leveraging technology, mode 1 facilitates a significant expansion of service markets, which in turn leads to increased investment and innovation, creating jobs in export and import economies.

(ii) The movement of people as services consumer (mode 2 of GATS, known as consumption abroad) is predominantly related to the exports of services such as tourism and hospitality, education, health and maintenance services, generating jobs in the countries where the services are consumed. Tourism and hospitality stand out as the most significant sector, sustaining employment in accommodation, food and beverage, transportation, recreation, entertainment and retail. This is mainly the case for low-income countries that have natural and geographical advantages, where tourism services play an important role in their economies and support jobs. It is well recognized that the tourism sector is a major job generator globally, supporting



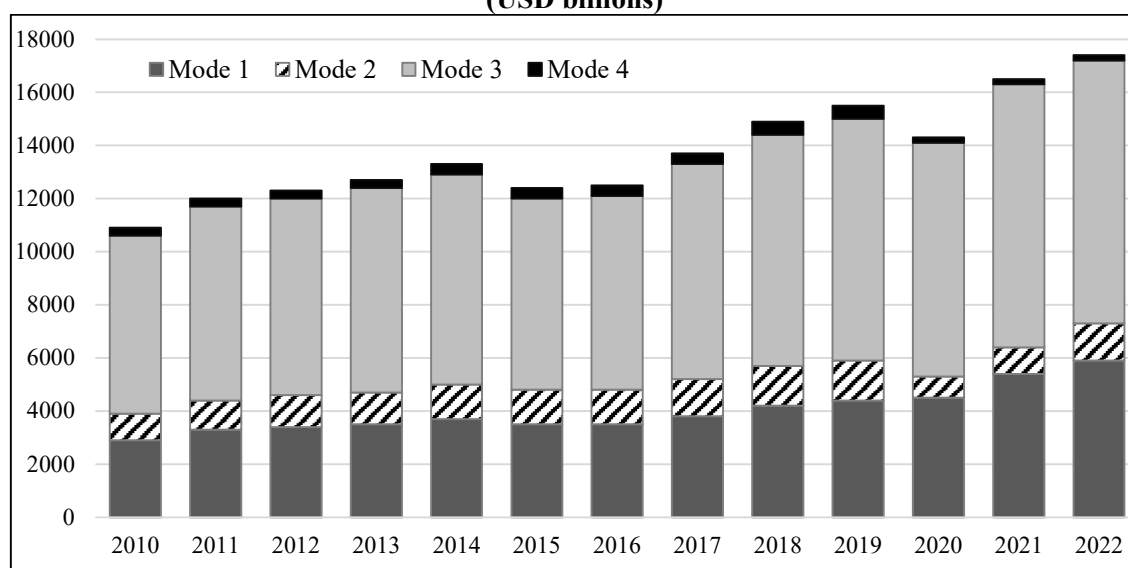
approximately 1 in 10 jobs worldwide, not only within the sector itself but also in related industries (WTTC, 2024). Travel abroad for educational, healthcare or professional purposes offers the possibility of creating a considerable number of highly skilled jobs, such as teachers, doctors or engineers, as well as supporting staff. However, job creation in services provided through mode 2 faces challenges related to employment instability caused by seasonal services (the case of tourism) and missing employment opportunities caused by regulatory barriers (such as visa restrictions limiting the access of foreign consumers) or economic vulnerabilities (such as the sensitivity to global economic instabilities).

(iii) The commercial presence (mode 3 of GATS, known as foreign direct investment/ FDI), where a service provider establishes a business in another country to offer services, significantly contributes to job creation, as foreign companies set up offices, factories, or subsidiaries, leading to employment opportunities in the host countries. Developing countries often benefit from FDI, which brings in capital, technology and expertise, fostering economic growth and job creation especially in services industries due to the fact that investment into services accounts for 72% of the total FDI stock in the world (Zhan, 2024). In developed countries, mode 3 enhances competition and innovation, leading to more specialized job opportunities, their activities creating a need for local expertise and people who can work in multinational environments. The challenges associated with mode 3 of GATS, such as regulatory barriers, high entry costs, and market competition, gave significant effects on global job markets: related to uneven job distribution, skill gaps, market disruptions and economic dependence on foreign companies.

(iv) The movement of natural persons as services providers (mode 4 of GATS) is associated mainly to the very specific skill sets and high level of expertise. This mode supports in job creation, particularly in sectors such as IT, consulting, healthcare and construction. As revealed in Chart 4, in recent years, trade in services by mode 4 has been shrinking, partly due to the expansion of digital methods of delivering services abroad. However, mode 4 employment opportunities are associated to access to global talent (by hiring skilled professionals from other countries and filling gaps in specialized industries), knowledge transfer (foreign professionals bring expertise that can enhance local workforce skills), boost to service sectors (industries such as finance, engineering and education benefiting from temporary foreign workers) and increased economic activity (temporary workers contributing to local economies through accommodation, transport and other services expenses). The challenges in job creation by mode 4 are related to strict regulations on temporary workers, limiting job opportunities (in the case of visa, strict rules on work permits and immigration restrictions), employment instability (mode 4 jobs are often short-term), local workforce competition (foreign professionals may compete with domestic workers, sometimes causing tensions) (OECD, 2025c).

Summarising, the recent positive developments of trade in services are able to generate a large variety of jobs as identified within the analysis on modes of supply, sustained by the favourable regulations and trade policies as well as the capacity of services to use new technologies in trading them on foreign markets (OECD, 2022). The diversity of service fields and types of providers, from individual professionals or online providers to companies, their complexity and the interrelationship of service areas, rise some statistical challenges in collecting data on jobs created by each mode of service provision in foreign markets. However, the commercial presence (mode 3) could be considered the most rigorously monitored segment from the perspective of jobs created in the service sector through foreign direct investment (FDI) and associated with trade in services. For example, in 2022, at the global level, FDI in software and IT services created 556,183 jobs (the highest of any industry and 5.7 times more than in 2010), in business services 243,647, in transportation and warehousing 119,503, in financial services 57,243, and in hotels and tourism 25,077 (Irwin-Hunt, 2023). The data presented in Chart 5 highlights that mode 3 has continued to hold the largest share among the modes of supply of services for many years, while mode 1 has grown in recent years due to the increase of trade in digitally delivered services. This representation can provide an insight into the jobs created by each mode of supply, considering that a higher volume of trade in services is associated with a greater number of jobs created.

**Chart 5: The evolution of trade in services by modes of supply, worldwide, between 2013-2022 (USD billions)**



Source: Author's representation based on WTO (2025a).

The positive developments of trade in services have been sustained by the favourable regulations and trade policies under the trade agreements. Trade in services regulations play a crucial role in shaping employment opportunities across different sectors. Although these regulations are often governed by international agreements (as GATS), the recent regional partnerships such as Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (Crivelli et al., 2022) or the European Union and United Kingdom trade and cooperation agreement (EC, 2021) have proved a greater influence on the businesses operating on international markets and consequently on employment. At the beginning of 2025, WTO's members with different levels of development from all regions were signatories to 201 regional trade agreements with preferential status that jointly regulate trade in goods and services and 3 exclusively for trade in services, all being engaged in processes of opening up their national regulatory framework for trade in services (WTO, 2024b). The main aspects of trade in services regulations with impact on employment in services are related to market access rules, national conditions related to the establishment of foreign service providers, all impacting job availability for local and international workers. In terms of trade in services regulatory framework, the most relevant aspects are related to services domestic regulations (WTO, 2024c), affecting job accessibility and employment opportunities for foreign workers by licensing, certification and professional standards (especially in sectors like healthcare, finance and education), as well as labour mobility policies with regulations on the movement of professionals (in the case of mode 4 of GATS). FDI policies affect job creation and the provision of fair employment opportunities through a wide variety of regulations such as those regarding the establishment and operation of foreign companies, as well as competition in domestic markets.

Despite the positive developments, trade in services has encountered a number of obstacles, the global barriers to services trade remaining high in 2024, generating significant fragmentation across countries and sectors, leading to an uneven playing field (OECD, 2025c). Even the recent developments of services have been sustained by the rise of digital technologies, mainly in information and communication technology (ICT), financial and professional services, contributing significantly to the growth in service exports (WTO, 2025; García Guzmán et al., 2024), trade in services faces specific barriers, mainly related to cross-border data transfers. The persistence of specific obstacles, mainly derived from national regulations, can also hinder opportunities in service labour markets.

The importance of external economic policies in creating employment related to service exports can be exemplified by the recent tariff measures adopted by the United States (US) administration affecting trade in goods. These measures could affect trade in services (Ossa, 2025), given that many service segments are dependent on trade in goods, or if the trade in services is used as part of retaliatory measures against the US, both situations affecting economic growth and employment. In this case, a relevant example is Ireland, an economy heavily relied on US multinational companies in the technology sectors, facing some vulnerabilities due to

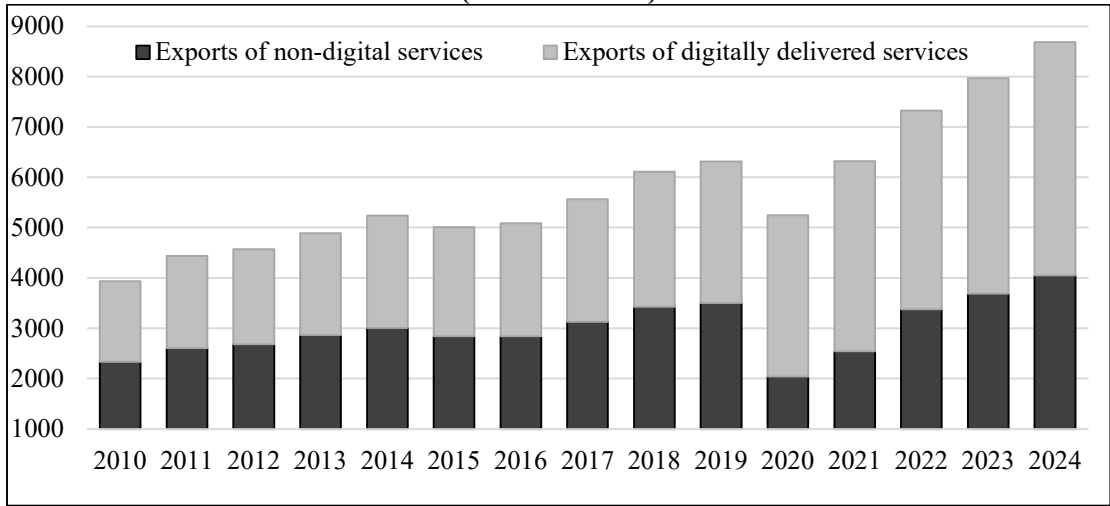
potential changes in US economic policies, with the potential to influence both service exports and employment in this country (Reuters, 2025).

Summarising, the impact of service exports on employment is influenced by international demand and the specific services characteristics of economies, as well as the external economic environment. Considering the direct correlation between service exports and employment, given the specificity of the four modes of service supply, where the role of trade in services favourable regulations on employment is critical, the second hypothesis (H2), according to which services businesses openness favours job creation, is demonstrated.

### 4.3. The effects of new technologies on employment related to trade in services

During the recent years, trade in services has been favoured by the implementation of technologies, generating a large variety of services, and an easiness in their international tradability and creating new categories of jobs, but also replacing others, especially considering the latest developments in smart technologies. Data represented in Chart 6 demonstrates the new development of trade in digitally delivered services, where the latest statistics are sustained by the intensification of services based on digital and smart technologies. At the same time, the data reveals that this category of services proved resilience against global shocks, as pandemic crisis, especially due to sectors such as software, consulting and online education.

**Chart 6. The exports of digitally and non-digitally services, globally, during 2010-2024**  
(in USD billion)



Source: Author’s representation based on WTO (2025)

The digital services are associated to increased productivity, trade in services driving efficiency growth by fostering competition and innovation, facilitating the access to services as intermediate inputs enhancing the efficiency in other sectors and leading to job creation. At the same time, the increased trade in services can lead to a shift towards higher value-added activities and better-paid jobs, especially in emerging and developing economies, their participation in global value chains contributing also to their employment and in this way supporting economic and social national policies. Despite these, the growth in trade in digitally delivered services is accompanied by some challenges, mainly related to job displacement, caused by the competition from foreign service providers, as well as the automation and technological advancements facilitated by international trade, contributing to job losses and exacerbating wage inequality, with differences across skill levels and services sectors (OECD, 2024). Researchers underline the disruptive potential and also the need for adaption of industries and jobs according to the expanding use of artificial intelligence (Klein & Gattegno, 2025). As artificial intelligence is expected to affect nearly 40% of jobs around the world, some of them being replaced and others requiring skills improvement, a careful balance of policies is needed (Georgieva, 2024).

To the point, the rise of digital trade is transforming the services sector, creating new job opportunities while also posing challenges related to automation and skill requirements. Therefore, national authorities play a crucial role in mitigating the negative impacts of services trade and maximizing its benefits, an important role here being attributed to promoting education, training, and labour market flexibility.

Considering that the developments in trade in digital services have the potential to create significant employment opportunities and enhance job quality, but also posing challenges that require careful policy

attention, the third hypothesis (H3) is demonstrated according to which technological innovations in services businesses favour the creation of new categories of jobs and enhance the efficiency in all economic sectors, given their intensive use in all industries. At the same time, fears regarding the loss of traditional jobs in some service industries due to the rapid pace of evolution and their replacement by technologies (with artificial intelligence being considered the main disruptive factor for the labour market) can be balanced by new, higher quality and better paid jobs, this type of effect being specific to all previous technological revolutions.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The analysis of the relationship between trade in services and employment emphasises the direct correlation between them, the globalization of service industries generating significant opportunities in creating jobs, improving the quality of life and sustaining economic development. The investigation of any type of trade in services effect imposes taking into account the specific characteristics of each service industry strongly related to the four modes of service supply, in the particular case of employment, each mode fuelling specific categories of jobs with specific abilities and skills. Nowadays, the employment associated to trade in services is increasingly related to the international demand for services, the more or less favourable service policies of some countries and the increasing implementation of digital technologies in service industries, all of them generating new opportunities and facing various challenges for job markets. The impact of trade in services on employment is influenced by a variety of determinant factors, creating also many vulnerabilities, as demonstrated during the pandemic crisis (for services involving personal contact, such as tourism) or geopolitical tensions (as the maritime transport services disruptions caused by the Russian - Ukrainian conflict, since 2022, or Red Sea instability, since 2023). The recent developments in smart technologies are going to reconsider the job market perspective in many service businesses, with creating new types of jobs, but replacing other, in order to sustain their economic efficiency, as it has happened in all previous technological revolutions. In view of all the analyses carried out in this paper, the three main hypotheses were demonstrated through statistical evidence, detailed descriptions and examples of service industries and countries involved in the service export, to highlight the relationship between trade in services and employment.

Summarising, the impact of trade in services on employment is a multifaceted issue with significant implications for economies worldwide. The positive impact of trade in services on employment is mainly supported by its capacity to create jobs, with exports of services growth leading to increased employment, particularly in sectors such as information technology, finance and professional services, but also tourism and transport. At the same time, the expansion of global value chains in services is creating new employment opportunities for various skill levels in many emerging economies. However, the trade in services does not automatically create jobs, a series of challenges being generated by the particularities of service industries (such as shortages in qualified labour, due the rapidly evolving service sectors, or displacement of lower-skilled workers, caused by automation or outsourcing), and the differences between countries (with the dominance of high-income countries in exports of high value-added services, while developing economies may struggle to compete on traditional services, such as tourism and transport). Despite all the current challenges, the diversity of services, the dependence of all economic and social activities on services, as well as the resilience due to the innovative capacity of some service industries in recent years, will support the further growth of trade in services and, implicitly, employment, in number and quality, capable of sustaining the well-being and economic development.

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