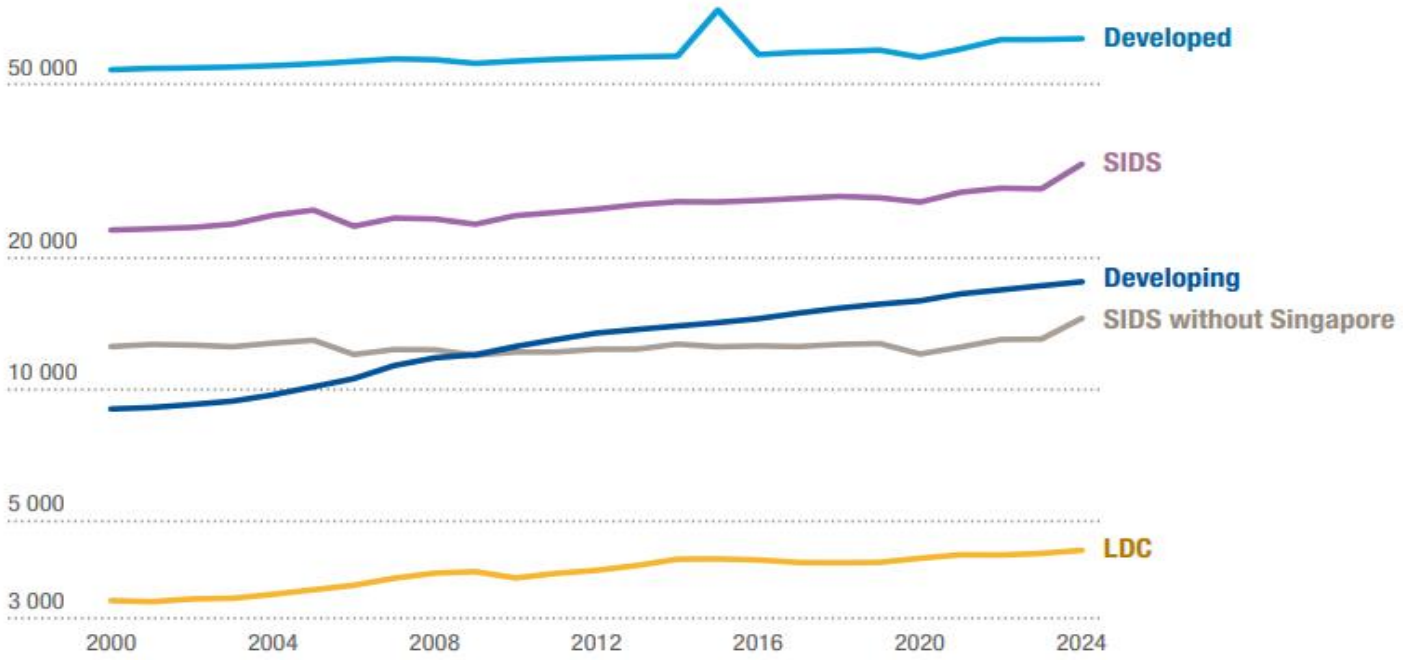
More services trade or greater services/GDP share do not automatically mean higher productivity

Figure 3
There has been a steady increase in services sector labour productivity in developing countries, contributing to a gradual narrowing of the gap with developed countries
Services sector labour productivity, constant 2015 US$ per worker, 2000-2024



Source: UNCTAD based on World Development Indicators. Country groupings are based on UNCTAD classifications.

SIDS excluding Singapore

+16%

Developing countries

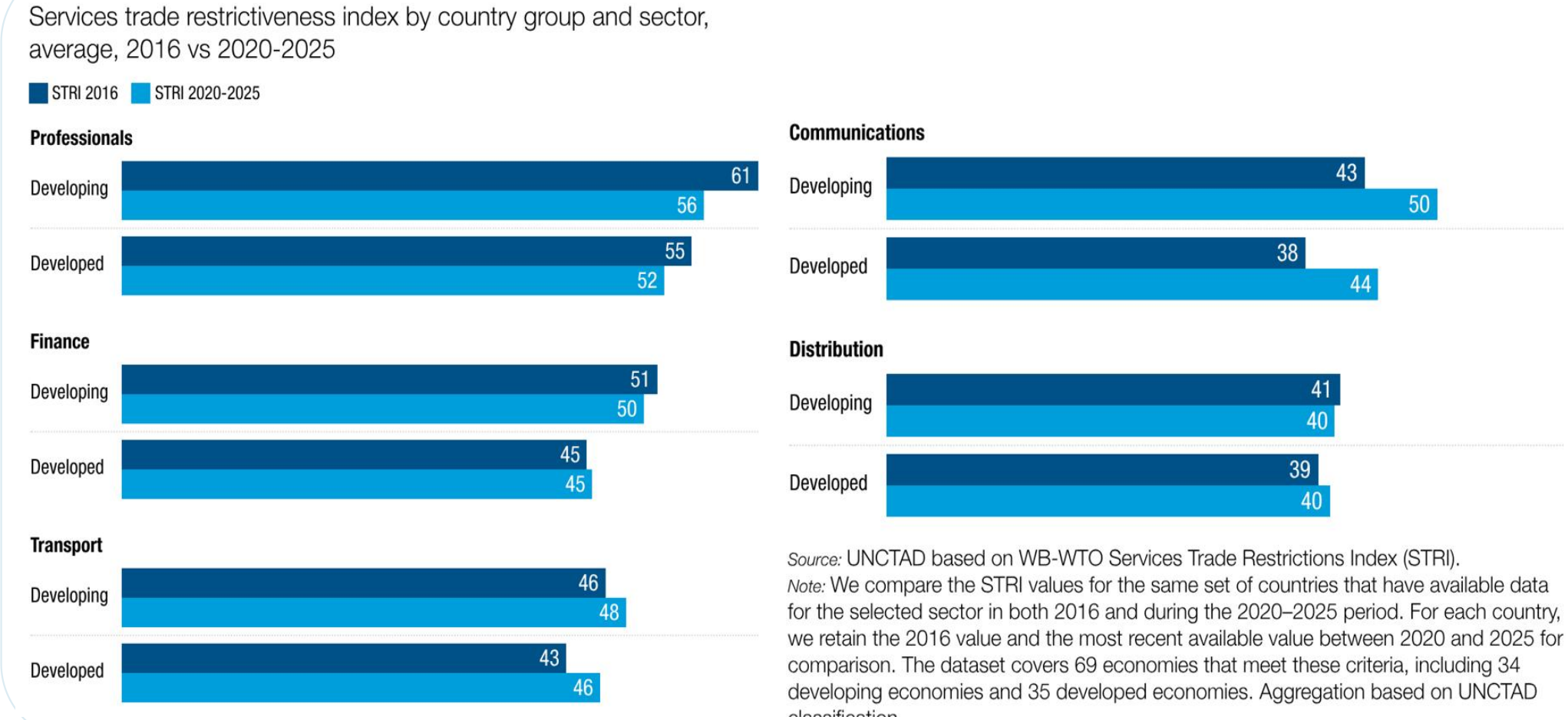
+95%

Labour productivity growth, 2000–2024

Focus on development outcomes such as productivity and jobs. Not only the (relative) size of services

Source: UNCTAD (2026), Measuring servicification and impacts of services trade and policy, Figure 3.

Services trade restrictiveness: limited movement, with exceptions



Professional services (developing economies) ↓ Communications (both developed and developing economies) ↑

Source: UNCTAD (2026), Measuring servicification and impacts of services trade and policy, Figure 9. Matched sample of 69 economies; index scores, not percentages.

Diversification and resilience objectives: analysis of the role of services in international production networks

> “The international rules-based order is under threat. The open global trading system is deeply challenged. What were once strengths—our strong connections and deep integration with other countries—have become vulnerabilities.”
> Prime Minister of Canada, The Plan for a Stronger Canada, October 2026

SUPPLY SIDE · CANADA

Reliance of services industries on foreign production

8% → 12%

Top-three partner share

69.6% → 60.6%

POLICY QUESTION

Which foreign inputs matter most? Where are alternatives?

DEMAND SIDE · MEXICO → KOREA

Korea among the top three foreign final-demand partners

0 → 4

Services industries, 2013–2022 (of 19)

Sept 2026: joint study for possible FTA

POLICY QUESTION

Which growing market links merit a cooperation review?

Informal working group on data for services, trade and development policies, 23 Nov

Source: calculations based on OECD gross-output measures, not direct bilateral services trade or evidence of vulnerability/causation

Building on the publication: measuring what matters for policy

01

Measure development outcomes, not just trade growth

Understand why services trade translates into productivity, jobs and diversification in some economies more than others.

02

Go beyond measuring trade restrictiveness

Better measure regulatory heterogeneity, implementation and economic effects, including opportunities for regulatory cooperation in digital services trade.

03

Strengthen international production-network analysis

Measure foreign supply and demand exposure to inform diversification, resilience and international cooperation.