



Trade Policy and Trade Performance in Emerging Markets

Call for Conference Papers

Economic Research Southern Africa (ERSA) is pleased to announce a two-day conference bringing together academics, policymakers, and subject-matter experts to explore trade policy and performance in emerging markets. The conference will address the central questions: **what has worked, what has not, and how should countries respond to new global challenges?**

Background and Motivation

Export growth remains a central pillar of economic development in emerging markets. As small and medium-sized open economies, many emerging countries rely on exports to drive productivity growth, employment creation, and structural transformation. Yet, despite sustained policy attention, export growth and diversification in many emerging markets have underperformed relative to global peers. Exports often remain concentrated in a narrow range of commodities or low-complexity products, with limited movement into higher value-added goods and services.

At the same time, the global trade environment is becoming increasingly complex. The green transition, digitalisation, and rising geopolitical fragmentation are reshaping trade policies, market access, and global value chains. These developments present both risks and opportunities for emerging market exporters and raise important questions about the effectiveness, design, and distributional consequences of trade and industrial policies.

Focus Areas

ERSA invites submissions that contribute to a deeper understanding of trade policy and export performance in emerging markets, with a strong emphasis on rigorous empirical research that can inform policy design and evaluation.

The conference aims to:

- Understand why export performance has lagged in many emerging markets;
- Identify which trade and industrial policies have been effective—and which have not;
- Explore how emerging markets can adapt their trade strategies in response to global economic, technological, and geopolitical shifts.

Submitted papers should align with one or more of the following themes:

- 1. Understanding Export Underperformance at the Firm Level**
Analyses of exporter behaviour and constraints using firm-level or other micro data.
- 2. Trade and Industrial Policy: Effectiveness and Distributional Impacts**
Evaluations of trade, industrial, and export promotion policies, including their distributional and inclusion-related effects.
- 3. New Trade Challenges: Green Transition, Digital Trade, and Geopolitics**
Research on climate-related trade measures, digital trade, geopolitical fragmentation, and their implications for emerging market exporters.

Submission Guidelines

Submissions should be original research papers or advanced working papers. There are no restrictions on data sources or empirical methods; however, papers using **novel data**, including firm-level or survey data, and those **providing credible causal evidence** will be prioritised. All submissions must be explicitly relevant to trade policy in emerging markets.

We also invite **PhD students from South African universities** to showcase their research through a poster session at the conference. Posters will be selected from individual paper submissions via the conference submission link.

Submission deadline:	1 May 2026
Notification of acceptance:	14 May 2026
Submission link:	visit website

Funding

Travel and accommodation expenses will be covered for all participants based in South Africa. Participants from outside South Africa are also encouraged to apply. For international participants, accommodation and domestic travel will be covered, and international airfare will be covered up to a maximum of **R15,000**.

If applicants are able to contribute to fund their flights and accommodation from an available research grant, this will allow ERSA to support a larger number of participants. Please indicate in your application whether you will require funding from ERSA or will be able to cover some or all of your travel costs.

Organising Committee

- Lawrence Edwards, University of Cape Town, PRISM, ERSA fellow
- Steve Koch, University of Pretoria, ERSA Academic Director
- Fouché Venter, ERSA Executive Director
- Jing Chien, University of Cape Town, PRISM