

Which companies are investing in France?

By [Sarah Guillou](#)

At a time when investment has become a priority for the [European Union](#), [the IMF](#) and [France](#), at a time when the French government is preparing legislation to boost business investment, it is urgent to look into who is actually investing in France's physical capital^[1].

Physical investment in France's commercial sector is concentrated in certain sectors: manufacturing, trade, transport, real estate, information and communication, along with the generation of electricity and gas. These "big contributors" totalled 72% of all tangible investment in 1997, and 70% in 2011. This temporal stability obscures two major changes: the manufacturing and real estate sectors saw their contribution to investment change dramatically. The decline in manufacturing's share of GDP has resulted in a decline in the share of investment in machinery and tools. However, this type of investment includes investments in automation and computerization, which are major vectors for boosting productivity. Nor was this decline offset by investment in the information and communication sector, which also invests heavily in machine tools.

The steep rise in real estate and construction prices inflated construction's share of investment. It is particularly noteworthy that the increase in construction prices has captured a large share of business spending on capital investment, thereby diverting financial capital from productive destinations. While this dynamic growth in investment in construction has indeed positively influenced investment trends in physical assets, it mainly explains the dynamics of investment in the property sector. Construction

prices have not fallen since the crisis, even though the volume of investment has fallen sharply.

The resilience of the investment rate France's non-financial companies is due in part to investment in construction, but this holds true especially for the real estate sector and the transport sector.

The highest investment rates are on the part of the big corporations and firms with the highest profit rates. Furthermore, the rate of investment is positively correlated with the debt ratio, exporter status, export intensity and R&D intensity. In contrast, human capital indicators such as labour productivity or average hourly earnings tend to be negatively correlated with the investment rate.

The continuation of deindustrialization and the outsourcing of manufacturing could accelerate the decline in investment in machine tools and equipment. The development of information and communication technology and of this sector more generally could offset the decline in manufacturing. Given that investment in machine tools is a source of higher productivity, maintaining a solid level of activity in the manufacturing sector and the information and communications sector is imperative.

[\[1\] Note de l'OFCE no. 50 of 22 April 2015 \[in French\]](#) characterizes the sectors and companies that invest in France.