



Trade Trends Estimates

Latin America and The Caribbean

2026 Edition - Q1 Update



TRADE TRENDS ESTIMATES

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

2026 EDITION

Q1 UPDATE

Coordinated by
Paolo Giordano



This report provides estimates of Latin America and the Caribbean's international trade flows for 2025 and the first quarter of 2026. The data it contains was prepared by the Productivity, Trade, and Innovation Sector (PTI) at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), under the overall supervision of Fabrizio Opertti, Sector Manager, and the technical supervision of Christian Volpe Martincus, Sector Economic Advisor.

This edition was coordinated by Paolo Giordano, Principal Economist at PTI, and written in collaboration with Kathia Michalczewsky, consultant at PTI. Jesica De Angelis, Carolina Barco, Noralí Spohn Marin, and Ceferino Dome assisted with data processing.

Andrés Cavelier, Matthew Shearer, María Alejandra Peña, and María Lidia Viquez provided support for the team during the production and publication process. The publication was designed and typeset by Word Express and translated into English by Victoria Patience.

The estimates in this report are based on quarterly and monthly data reported by national and international sources for 21 Latin American and Caribbean countries, covering 2025 and the first quarter of 2026. The information included is current as of May 21, 2026.

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EXPORT THERMOMETER FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

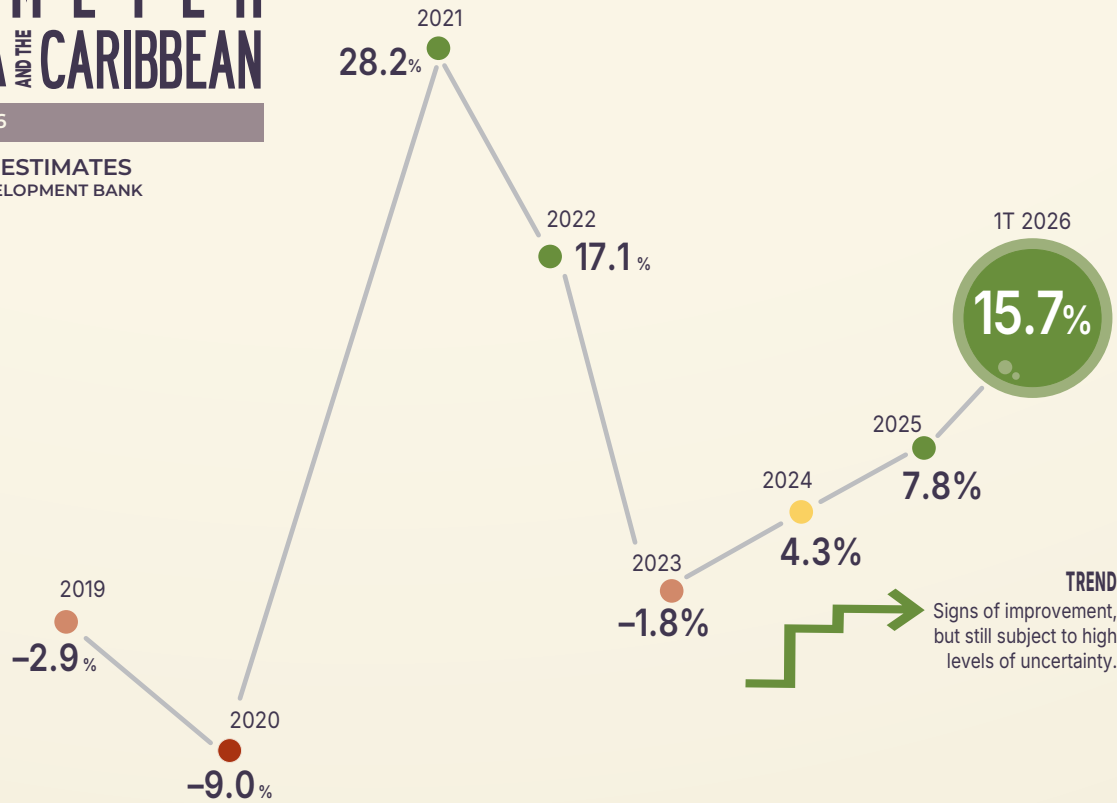
Q1 2026

TRADE TRENDS ESTIMATES
INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

THE REGION'S EXPORTS ACCELERATED

The value of goods exports from Latin America and the Caribbean grew by 15.7% in the first quarter of 2026.

Year-on-year growth rate, Q1 2026.



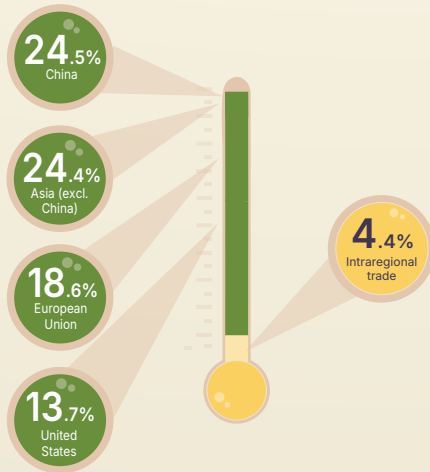
TREND

Signs of improvement, but still subject to high levels of uncertainty.

DEMAND GREW ACROSS ALL PARTNERS

The demand from major trading partners expanded strongly.

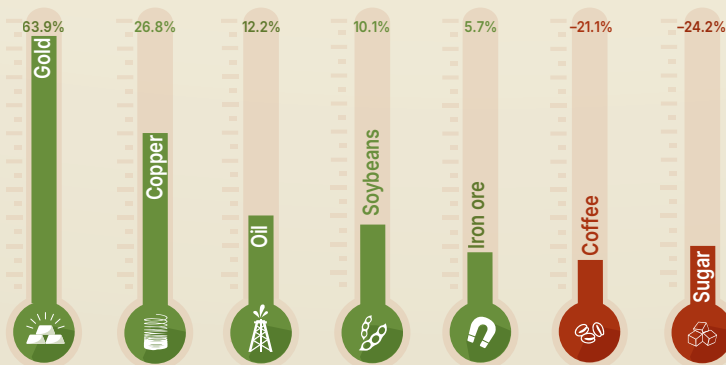
Year-on-year growth rate, Q1 2026.



COMMODITY PRICES UNDERWENT A MAJOR RECONFIGURATION

Extractive commodity prices rose sharply, while agricultural commodity prices followed divergent trends.

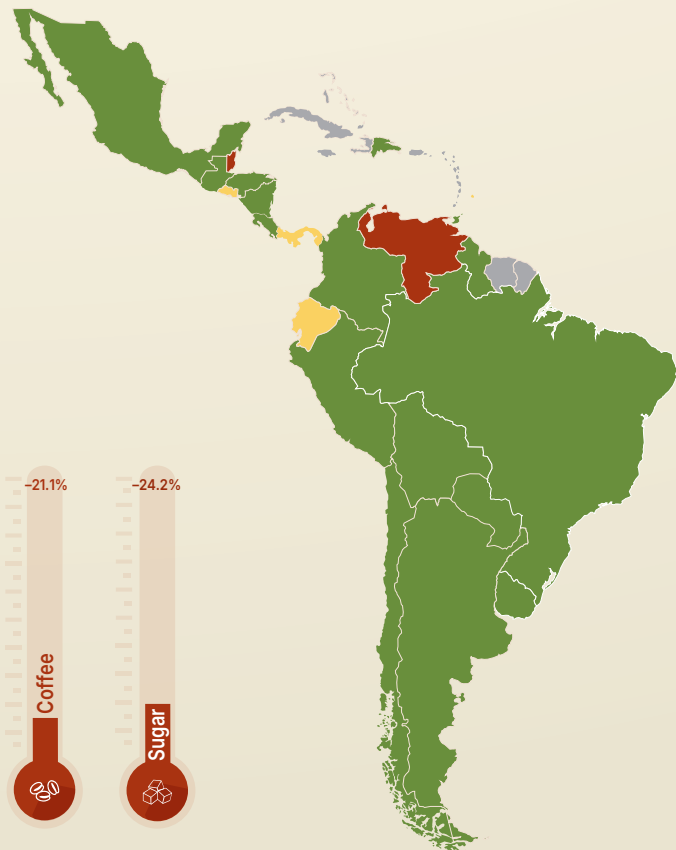
Year-on-year growth rate, January-April 2026



PERFORMANCE BY COUNTRY

Export growth was broad-based.

Annual growth rate, 2025.



EXPORT SURGE AMID SHIFTS IN TRADE POLICIES AND PRICE SHOCKS

Highlights

The value of exports from Latin America and the Caribbean grew an estimated 15.7% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, following growth of 7.8% in 2025.

Export performance improved in every subregion, driven by higher export volumes amid accelerating prices.

Extractive commodity prices rose sharply, while agricultural commodity prices followed divergent trends.

The region remains on a path of sustained trade growth, although the outlook continues to be highly uncertain.

Exports from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) accelerated significantly in recent months, accumulating nearly two years of uninterrupted growth. Despite uncertainty in the global trading environment, the region's exports remained relatively stable in the first half of 2025 and gained momentum in the second half, outpacing global trade growth. Both exports and imports increased in the first quarter of 2026 at a faster pace than the average for 2025.

LAC exports accelerated primarily due to faster growth in export volumes, although rising prices also contributed positively during the period.

Export performance improved across all subregions. In South America, gains were due mainly to higher prices, with volume growth slowing slightly. In Mesoamerica, volumes accounted for most of the momentum. Preliminary data for a subset of Caribbean countries also point to marked acceleration in export growth in this subregion during the first quarter.

While LAC is experiencing sustained trade growth, the balance of risks facing regional trade remains highly uncertain. On the one hand, changes in global trade policies may redirect trade flows away from countries facing high tariffs toward third markets. This reconfiguration could intensify competition for LAC exporters in key destinations while simultaneously creating opportunities to replace other suppliers in markets where the region is able to position itself as a competitive source of goods. On the other hand, the escalation of the war in Iran is affecting LAC primarily through the price channel. For LAC countries, which are net importers of energy and food, rising oil and some agricultural commodity prices are worsening terms of trade and increasing inflationary pressures. In contrast, these developments are providing a significant boost to South American exporters of these products, which are also benefiting from the surge in the prices of certain metals. However, even in these countries, second-round effects warrant caution: higher oil prices translate into higher fertilizer and transport costs, which in turn raise agricultural sector costs, partially offsetting price gains and increasing uncertainty about export performance in the coming quarters.

Overview



The value of LAC goods exports is estimated to have risen by a remarkable 15.7% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026 (Figure 1),¹ following average growth of 7.8% in 2025. This doubling of the export growth rate was due to both expanding volumes and accelerating prices.

FIGURE 1 • VALUE OF EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND WORLD TRADE
(Year-on-year growth rate, three-month moving average, percentages, 2024–2026)



Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector with data from official sources and from the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) for global trade.

Note: LAC includes 18 countries in Latin America—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela—and 3 countries in the Caribbean—Barbados, Belize, and Guyana. World trade is the average of global imports and exports.

Against a backdrop of volatility in global trade and escalating geopolitical conflicts, the region’s exports accelerated throughout 2025 and into the first few months of 2026. In South America, exports increased in 2025 on the back of higher export volumes, a trend that continued in early 2026, in tandem with rising prices. Mexico’s export dynamics were similar, with growth accelerating from mid-2025 as shipment volumes increased, before gaining further momentum in early 2026. In Central America and the Caribbean, exports were more volatile, slowing in mid-2025 before rebounding between late 2025 and the early months of 2026.

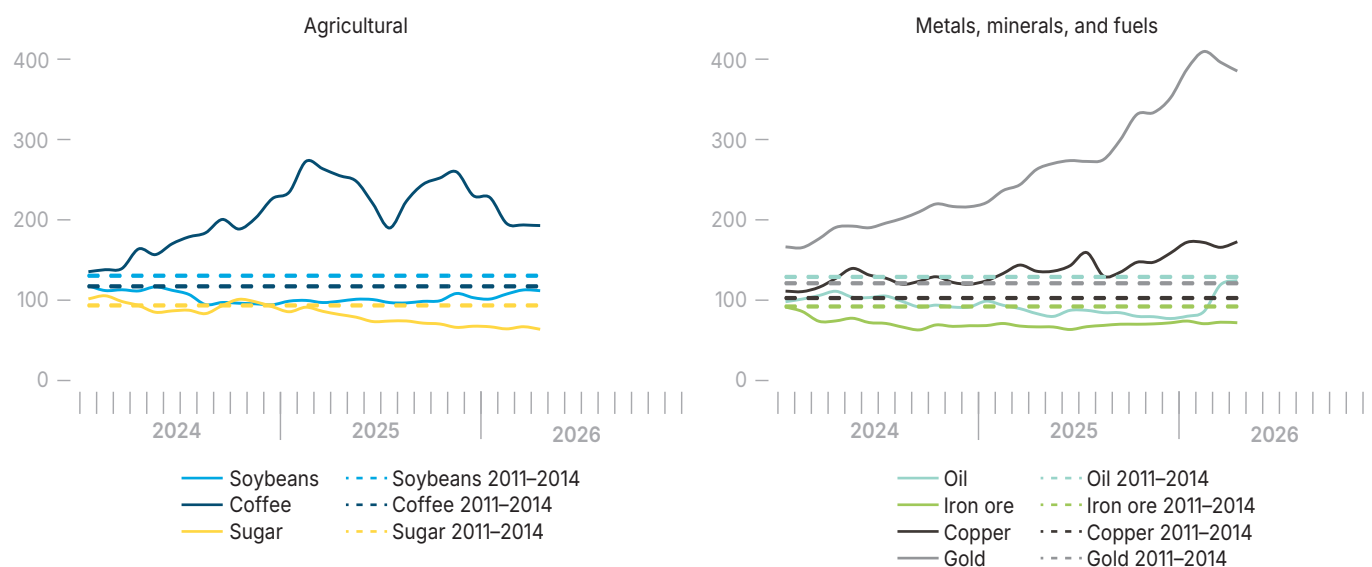
Total regional imports grew by an estimated 6.7% in 2025 and 9.7% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026. This acceleration was driven primarily by extraregional purchases.

¹ This estimate draws on data from 18 countries in Latin America—Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela—and 3 countries in the Caribbean—Barbados, Belize, and Guyana. The records for Panama do not include special trade regimes (STRs), which account for about 80% of the country’s total exports. See the Methodological Note for further information on the procedures, time periods, and data sources used in these estimates.

Prices

The first few months of 2026 brought a substantial reconfiguration in the prices of the region's main export commodities compared with the trends observed throughout 2025 (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 • PRICES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN'S MAIN EXPORT PRODUCTS
(Index 2010=100, 2024–2026)



Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector based on data from Bloomberg.

Note: These seven products represented approximately 32% of the region's total exports in 2022–2024, and 51% if Mexico is excluded. The 2011–2014 averages are included as benchmarks because they correspond to the period when commodity prices reached their highest levels on record.

The outbreak of the war in Iran in March 2026 triggered a shock of historic proportions, abruptly altering the outlook for several markets, particularly energy markets. The war-induced supply shock reversed the bearish trend in oil prices seen in 2025, while iron ore remained affected by weak demand from China. Copper and, even more notably, gold continued to post exceptional price gains. Among agricultural commodities, coffee prices reversed their upward trend in response to improvements in global supply. In contrast, soybean prices showed signs of a partial recovery after three consecutive years of decline, while sugar prices continued to trend downward.

Gold consolidated its position as the fastest-growing commodity exported by the region, recording a year-on-year increase of 63.9% in January–April 2026 compared to the same period in 2025. This performance built on gains of 44.1% in 2025 and 22.9% in 2024, marking three consecutive years of exceptional growth. The main drivers continue to be demand for a safe-haven asset amid extreme geopolitical tensions, fueled by sustained purchases by central banks, among other factors.

Copper prices continued to rise, accumulating a year-on-year increase of around 26.8% in January–April 2026 compared with the same period a year earlier, consolidating the average 14.4% gain recorded in 2025. Prices remained high, driven by a combination of factors. First, disruptions to sulfur exports from the Middle East—a key input in copper ore processing—increased refining costs. Second, operational disruptions at several large mines in Asia and South America constrained supply growth. Finally, uncertainty over potential US tariffs on refined copper imports prompted precautionary stockpiling. On the demand side, growth in sectors associated with the energy transition, including renewable energy capacity, electricity grids, and data center infrastructure for artificial intelligence, continued to serve as a structural driver.

Oil prices experienced the most dramatic reversal of the period. The market shifted abruptly following the outbreak of armed conflict in Iran in March 2026. In cumulative year-on-year terms, crude oil prices² stood 12.2% higher in January–April 2026 than in the same period of 2025, decisively reversing the downward trend that had prevailed throughout the previous year. The conflict generated the largest oil supply shock on record, reducing supply by an estimated 10 million barrels per day in March 2026.³ This shock also spilled over into other closely related markets: there were sharp increases in the price of natural gas, which is often produced alongside oil, and fertilizers, for which gas is a key input. The World Bank fertilizer price index increased by 30.5% year-on-year in the first four months of 2026.

Soybean prices rose 10.1% year-on-year in January–April 2026 compared to the same period in 2025, ending the three consecutive years of decline that characterized the market between 2023 and 2025. This recovery reflects a combination of demand-side factors. On the one hand, adjustments in trade flows resulting from tariff policies between the US and China helped ease the downward pressures that had previously dominated the market. On the other hand, the rise in oil prices since March 2026 has indirectly favored demand for vegetable oils.

Iron ore prices posted a slight year-on-year increase of 5.7% in January–April 2026, following a 6.7% decline in 2025. However, the broader trend continues to reflect the same structural factors seen in recent years: the prolonged contraction of China’s real estate sector (the world’s largest source of demand),⁴ weak construction activity in advanced economies, and sustained supply from Brazil and Australia.

The weighted average price of arabica and robusta **coffee**⁵ fell 21.1% year-on-year in January–April 2026, partially reversing the extraordinary 39.0% average increase⁵ recorded in 2025. This contraction reflects a recovery in global supply. Improved production conditions in Brazil and Vietnam, the world’s leading suppliers, solidified in the first quarter of 2026, easing the upward price pressure that had supported the market since late 2023.

Sugar prices continued their downward trend, falling by 24.2% year-on-year in January–April 2026 compared to the same period in 2025, after dropping an average of 18.2% over the course of that year. The market has now recorded three consecutive years of decline. Global supply conditions remain ample amid sustained production in India, Brazil, and Vietnam.

Volumes

Latin American export volumes are estimated to have increased by 10.5% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, accelerating from the 6.6% average recorded in 2025 (Figure 3).⁶

In South America, export volumes are estimated to have slowed their growth rate slightly in the first quarter of 2026 relative to the average for 2025 (from 6.6% to 5.2%). The largest increases were recorded in Paraguay (15.2%), Colombia (13.6%), Argentina (12.8%), and Brazil (6.7%). In Peru, export volume growth slowed (from 11.5% to 3.2%), while Chile, Venezuela, and Uruguay were the only countries to record declines (–4.6%, –3.2%, and –2.5%, respectively). Growth accelerated to 17.1% in Mexico, while in El Salvador volumes remained relatively stable (1.4%).

² Simple average of Brent Blend, Dubai Crude, and WTI benchmark crudes.

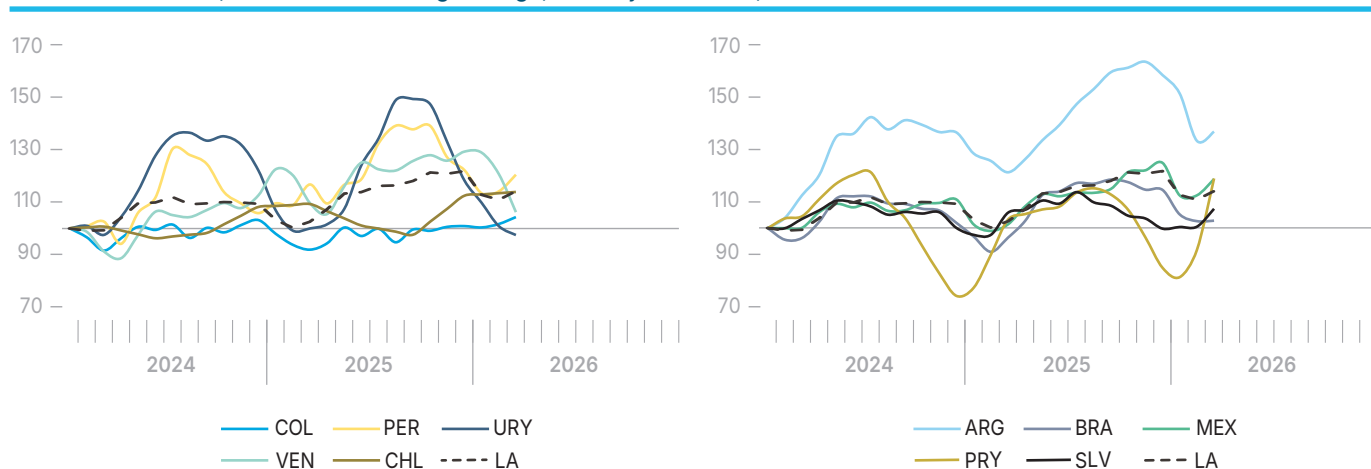
³ International Energy Agency (March 12, 2026), *Oil Market Report: March 2026*, Paris: IEA.

⁴ The weakness in China’s construction sector stems from a structural crisis in the real estate market that began in 2020, when the government introduced borrowing limits for developers, triggering a wave of defaults starting in 2021 (IMF, People’s Republic of China: 2025 Article IV Consultation, February 2026).

⁵ The weighted average price was calculated based on each variety’s share in Latin America’s total coffee production in marketing years 2023–2024, with arabica accounting for 78% of production, according to data from the US Department of Agriculture.

⁶ Estimates of the volumes exported by Latin America are based on official data for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay. In-house estimates were calculated for El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Venezuela, as discussed in the Methodological Note.

FIGURE 3 • EXPORT VOLUMES FOR SELECTED COUNTRIES
(Indices, three-month moving average, January 2023=100, 2024–2026)



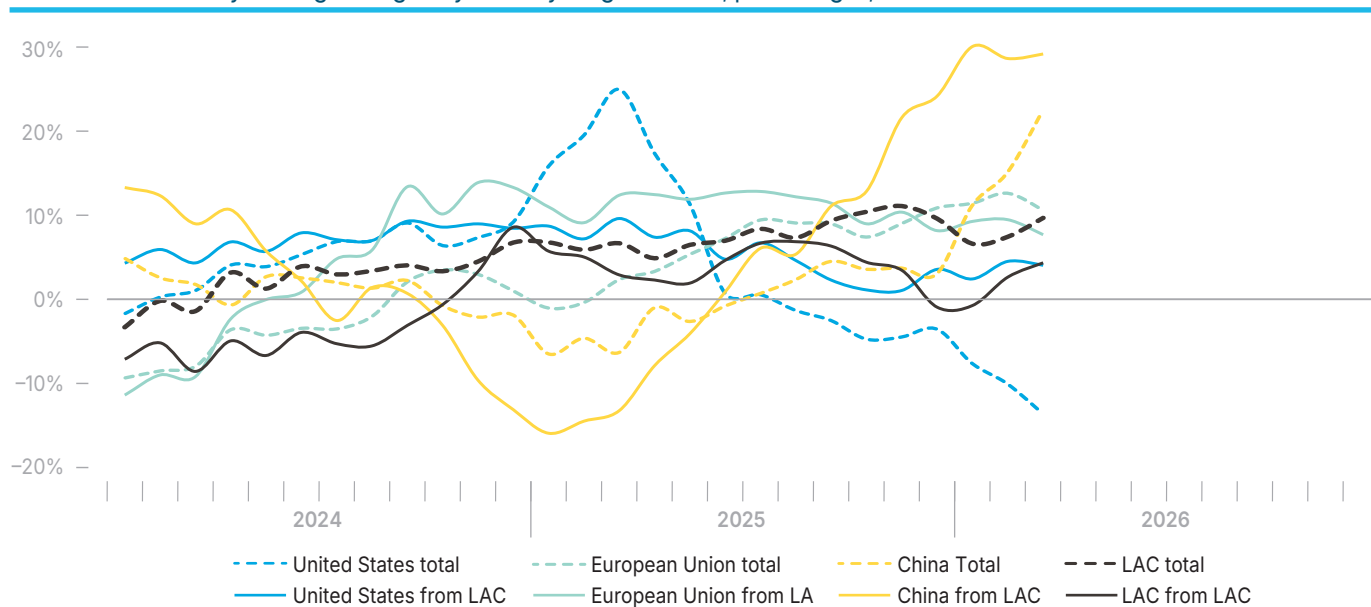
Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector with data from official sources, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Note: The values of exports from Mexico and El Salvador were deflated using BLS indices, and the volume of Venezuela’s exports was estimated using OPEC data. LA is the average of national indices weighted by the value of each country’s exports in 2015; the sample represents 92% of Latin America’s exports that year. See the Methodological Note for more details.

Markets

Demand from LAC’s main trading partners has been volatile in recent months (Figure 4).⁷ European Union imports from the region grew steadily throughout 2025 before easing slightly in early 2026. Chinese imports

FIGURE 4 • VALUE OF MAIN TRADING PARTNERS’ IMPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND THE WORLD
(Quarterly moving average of year-on-year growth rate, percentages, 2024–2026)



Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector based on data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), United States International Trade Commission (USITC), Eurostat, China Customs, and national sources.

Note: The import series for all economies are expressed in US dollars.

⁷ This section is based on an analysis of the totals imported by trading partners, as reported by destination country statistical authorities. Exports recorded by national sources in LAC countries for bilateral flows are analyzed in the next section. Any discrepancies are due not only to the sources used but also to the lag between the times that exports and imports are recorded. This section includes data for all LAC countries as reported by trading partners.

from LAC experienced a sharp rebound in the second half of 2025 that continued into the first quarter of 2026. US imports from the region lost some momentum toward the end of 2025 but recovered slightly in the early months of 2026, as did intraregional imports.

European Union imports from LAC increased by an average of 10.7% in 2025, compared to 2024. The bloc's total imports also grew, albeit at a slower rate (7.3%). In the first quarter of 2026, however, growth moderated slightly, with imports from LAC increasing by 7.6% compared to the same period in 2025. In contrast, total EU imports accelerated by 10.7% year-on-year over the first quarter. As a result, LAC's share in the European Union's extrabloc imports declined from 5.3% to 5.1%.

China's imports from LAC are estimated to have increased by 5.1% on average in 2025 compared to 2024 as a result of a strong recovery in the second half of the year. In contrast, total Chinese imports remained virtually flat throughout 2025 (0.1%). In the first quarter of 2026, the country's imports from LAC expanded by an extraordinary 29.3% year-on-year, while its total imports also grew vigorously (22.7%). LAC's share in China's imports reached 9.6% in the first quarter of 2026, slightly below the 2025 average of 9.8%.⁸

US imports from LAC remained relatively stable in 2025, increasing by an average of 4.9% compared to 2024. Total US imports grew at a similar rate (4.4%). However, the first quarter of 2026 constituted a stark contrast: while total US imports contracted by 13.6% year-on-year, imports from LAC grew by 4.0%, raising the region's market share from 20.2% in 2025 to a record high of 21.8%.

Finally, estimates suggest that **LAC's** intraregional imports grew by 3.1% on average in 2025, below the pace of the region's total imports (6.7%). In the first quarter of 2026, intraregional trade accelerated slightly to 4.4% from the same period in 2025, but remained well below the growth rate of total imports (9.7%), thereby reducing the region's intraregional trade coefficient from 13.2% to 12.5%.

Performance by subregion

Overall, exports from LAC accelerated between late 2025 and early 2026 (Table 1), rising 15.7% year-on-year in the first quarter. The largest contribution to growth came from shipments to the United States, China, and the rest of Asia. However, performance varied considerably across LAC subregions and countries.

The following section analyzes the primary factors and destination markets that shaped export performance in the different LAC subregions in the first quarter of 2026 (Figure 5). The Annex contains detailed country-level data by major product categories.

In **South America**, exports are estimated to have grown by 13.2% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, following 7.2% growth in 2025. This improvement was observed across most of the subregion, except Ecuador and Venezuela. In the early months of 2026, the growth in export volumes slowed slightly (from 6.6% to 5.2%), while export prices rose substantially (from an average 0.3% in 2025 to 7.1% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026). China and the rest of Asia made the largest contribution to export growth in South America, together accounting for 70% of the total increase. Exports to the European Union, the United States, and destinations within the subregion also increased, although their contribution was smaller.

Exports from **Mesoamerica** accelerated sharply, growing by an estimated 17.3% in the first quarter of 2026, more than double the growth rate recorded in 2025 (8.0%). This acceleration was driven almost entirely by **Mexico**, where exports increased by an estimated 17.9% year-on-year in January–March 2026, following 7.6% growth in 2025. Export volumes accelerated from 6.5% to 17.1%. The United States accounted for three-quarters of the total increase in Mexican exports.

⁸ Although China's imports from LAC grew faster than its total imports in the first quarter of 2026, LAC's share in total Chinese imports during this period remained below the 2025 average, which was boosted by quarters with higher shares, particularly during the second half of the year. In the first quarter of 2025, LAC's market share was 9.1%, lower than the most recent period (9.6%).

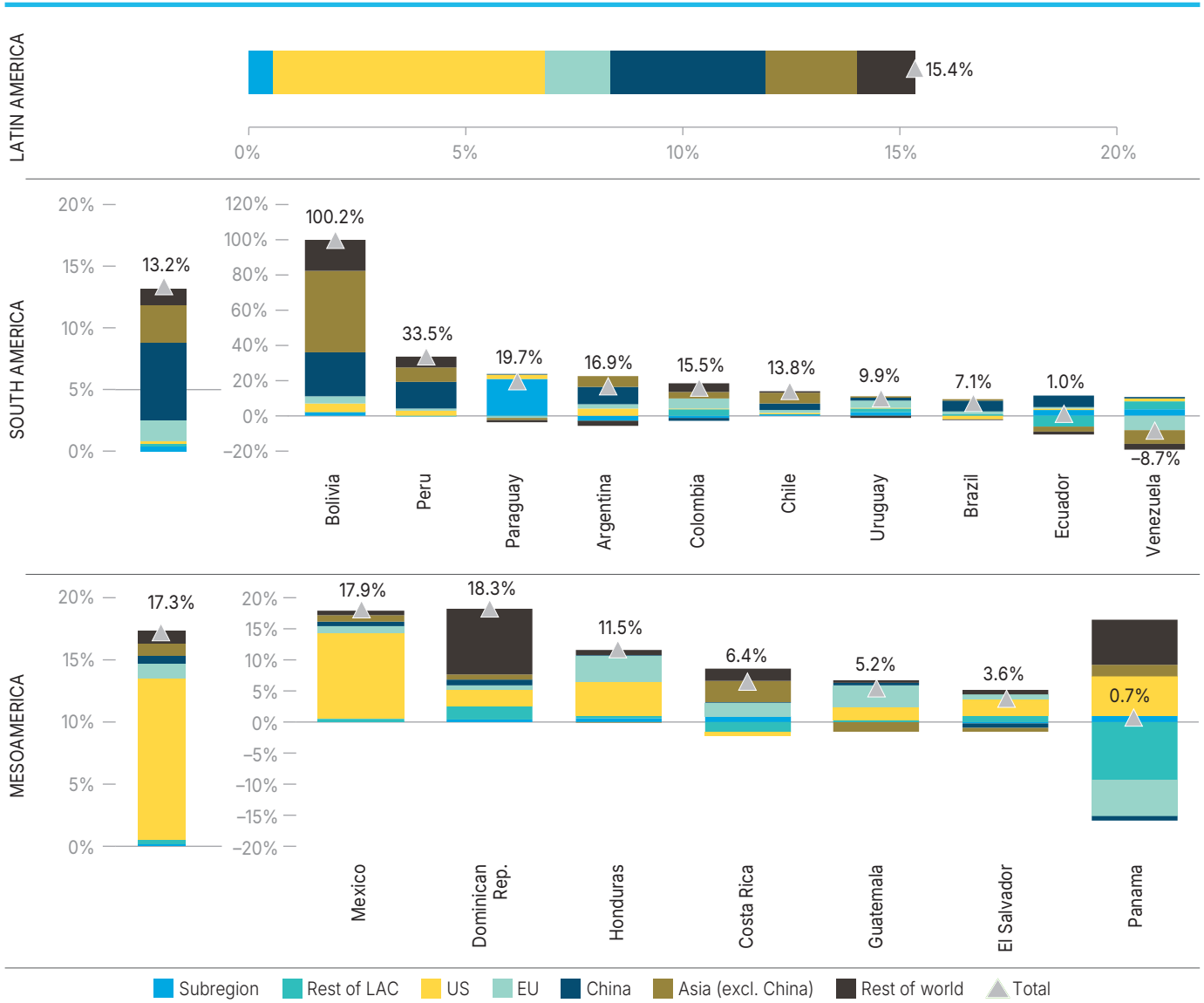
TABLE 1 • VALUE OF GOODS EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN BY SELECTED DESTINATIONS
(Annual growth rate, percentages, 2025 and Q1 2026)

Subregions/ countries	Q1 2026 vs. Q1 2025							2025 vs. 2024
	Subregion	Latin America and the Caribbean	United States	Asia (excl. China)	China	European Union	World	World
SOUTH AMERICA	2.4	3.1	1.5	22.3	23.3	13.0	13.2	7.2
Argentina	-8.7	-8.7	41.0	40.4	86.0	28.6	16.9	9.3
Bolivia	6.7	6.5	114.2	217.6	129.1	36.7	100.2	8.3
Brazil	0.9	4.8	-18.7	5.5	21.1	12.1	7.1	3.3
Chile	6.2	7.1	4.0	33.5	9.3	18.8	13.8	11.6
Colombia	-7.6	6.1	13.8	90.0	-57.5	45.5	15.5	1.3
Ecuador	38.8	-8.6	2.9	-35.8	24.9	4.2	1.0	7.9
Paraguay	28.2	27.1	45.7	-17.2	29.9	-23.6	19.7	1.5
Peru	2.3	-0.2	24.2	44.0	42.0	9.8	33.5	22.1
Uruguay	8.5	15.9	3.5	36.1	9.9	36.7	9.9	9.2
Venezuela	52.2	78.5	3.8	-66.0	5.2	-60.7	-8.7	0.3
MESOAMERICA	3.6	7.5	16.1	30.5	36.9	25.8	17.3	8.0
Mexico	3.8	14.3	16.8	36.2	37.6	28.5	17.9	7.6
Central America	2.1	1.2	5.1	7.6	21.8	18.9	12.6	11.0
Costa Rica	7.5	-3.1	-1.2	50.8	57.7	11.3	6.4	13.8
Dominican Republic	25.3	16.8	5.0	7.2	39.4	7.5	18.3	11.3
El Salvador	1.2	1.4	8.4	-44.4	-84.8	18.0	3.6	1.9
Guatemala	1.7	0.6	7.1	-44.1	115.1	40.8	5.2	7.1
Honduras	3.3	3.4	11.6	-8.5	23.4	29.5	11.5	10.4
Nicaragua	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	42.3	15.4
Panama	-0.5	-37.2	57.2	9.2	-15.4	-35.0	0.7	36.9
CARIBBEAN	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	17.9
The Bahamas	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	-3.2
Barbados	8.1	6.6	-28.5	-39.2	n.d.	122.8	0.1	-6.5
Belize	-27.0	-21.2	-1.9	n.d.	-100.0	81.5	-9.1	-15.2
Guyana	288.6	20.8	20.2	n.d.	128.7	65.1	37.0	20.8
Haiti	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Jamaica	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	-11.6
Suriname	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	136.8
Trinidad and Tobago	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	5.1
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	4.4	4.4	13.7	24.4	24.5	18.6	15.7	7.8

Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector based on official sources, except for Venezuela, which is based on estimates using data from OPEC and the IMF.

Notes: The table does not include growth rates or absolute changes for nonselected destinations. As a result, the sum of the absolute changes for the selected destinations does not match the total. The data for Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua include exports under special trade regimes (STRs). For individual Central American countries, the subregional growth rates are for Mesoamerica. Mexico is excluded from the aggregate for Central America. The subregional total therefore represents trade within Central America only. See the Methodological Note for additional information on the procedures, time periods, and data sources used in the estimates. The abbreviation "n.d." indicates that no data were available.

FIGURE 5 • CONTRIBUTION OF MAIN TRADING PARTNERS TO THE TOTAL VARIATION IN THE VALUE OF LATIN AMERICAN GOODS EXPORTS
(Year-on-year growth rate and percentage points, Q1 2026)



Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector based on official sources.

Notes: The figure does not include Caribbean countries because insufficient disaggregated data were available to create a representative sample.

In **Central America**, the situation was more uneven: while Nicaragua posted a strong upsurge, almost tripling its export growth rate in the first quarter, El Salvador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic recorded only modest improvements. By contrast, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama lost momentum in the first quarter relative to their average performance in 2025. All destination markets contributed to the overall increase, with the United States and the European Union accounting for the largest shares.

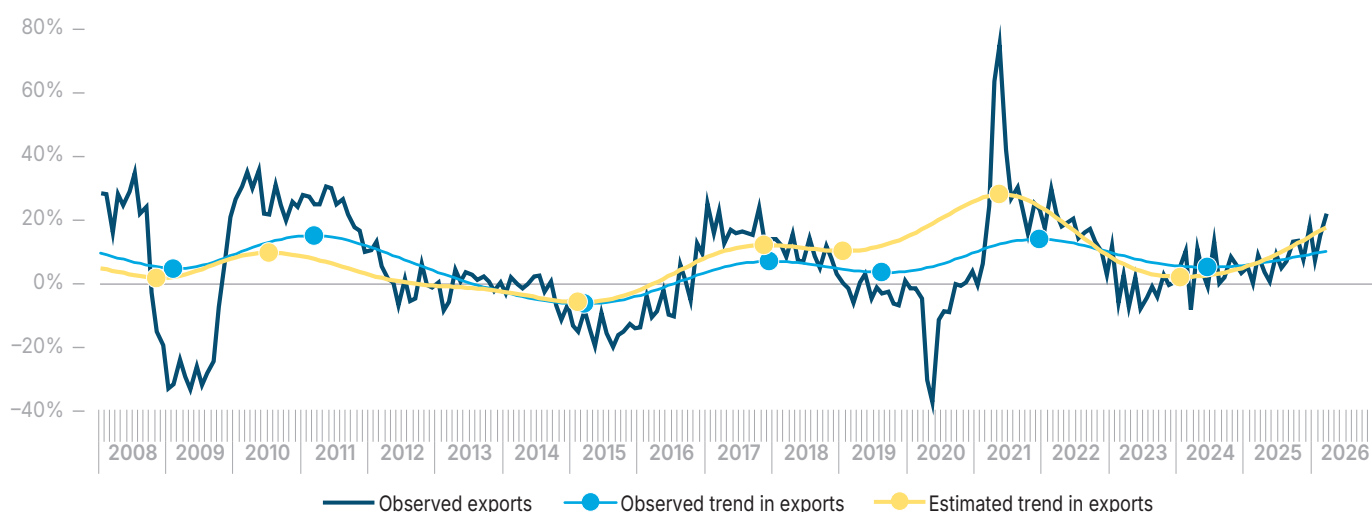
In the **Caribbean**,⁹ the available data indicate stagnation in Barbados and a contraction in Belize. In contrast, Guyana continues to show strong export growth driven by the oil sector.

⁹ At the time of publication, no up-to-date 2026 export data was available for the remaining Caribbean countries.

Prospects

Instability in global trade policies and the proliferation of geopolitical conflicts are creating significant uncertainty around the short-term outlook. Amid this highly volatile environment, two complementary synthetic indices provide insights into export trends for LAC in the coming months, assuming no major unforeseen shocks occur. First, the Latin American Trade Leading Index (LATLI) is designed to anticipate potential turning points in the growth trend for Latin American export values (Figure 6). Second, the Latin American Trade Nowcasting Index (LATNI) uses a prediction methodology known as nowcasting to provide real-time estimates of export growth rates.¹⁰

FIGURE 6 • CHANGES IN THE TREND IN THE VALUE OF GOODS EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA
(Year-on-year growth rate and LATLI index, 2008–2026)



Source: IDB Productivity, Trade and Innovation Sector.

Note: The LATLI series only shows the trend after the Hodrick-Prescott filter was applied. The dots indicate turning points in the estimated trend and the observed value of exports from Latin America.

According to the LATLI, no change in the trend of export values is expected. The index correctly predicted the end of the downward phase in the cycle in early 2024. The latest estimate does not point to a new turning point in five months after the most recent official data observation in April 2026.¹¹ In other words, the region's exports are expected to remain on a path of sustained expansion during that period.

The LATNI provides an estimate of the year-on-year growth rate for Latin American exports for April 2026, even though complete official data for the month were not available at the time of publication. This estimate places year-on-year export growth in April 2026 at 22%–28%, indicating further acceleration relative to previous months.

¹⁰ For a detailed description of the two indicators, the data used, and the estimation methodology, see Giordano et al. (2021), "Metodología de las estimaciones de las tendencias comerciales de América Latina," IDB Technical Note IDB-TN 02223, Inter-American Development Bank.

¹¹ The model is implemented using various methodologies for weighting the variables (principal components and simple averages). In the estimation used in this publication, neither of the two models signaled a turning point in the five months following the most recent official data observation in April 2026.

Conclusions



Exports from LAC accelerated significantly in the first quarter of 2026, extending a period of nearly two years of uninterrupted growth. The value of the region's exports increased by an estimated 15.7% year-on-year during the period, more than doubling the 7.8% average growth recorded in 2025. This dynamic performance was driven by a substantial increase in export volumes, combined with an improvement in prices.

Growth was broad-based across LAC subregions, although intensities varied. In South America, it was driven mainly by prices, with China and the rest of Asia acting as the main drivers. Mesoamerica recorded the strongest acceleration, explained primarily by Mexico, whose exports to the United States increased sharply from the start of the year. Central America's performance was more varied, with growth decelerating in some countries. In the Caribbean, growth remained concentrated in Guyana, driven by the oil boom.

Commodity markets were abruptly reshaped during this period by the outbreak of the war in Iran in March 2026. The downward trend in oil prices was reversed. Gold and copper continued to build on their exceptional price gains, and soybeans showed signs of a partial recovery, while coffee and sugar prices declined amid increasing supply.

Demand for the region's exports increased across the board in destination markets. The United States made the largest contribution to overall export growth in LAC, while China and the rest of Asia recorded the strongest growth.

Looking ahead, the leading indicators do not point to a turning point in the current upward trend in the coming months. However, the global trade environment remains highly uncertain due to volatile trade policies and ongoing geopolitical conflicts, which the energy supply shock in the Middle East has now compounded.

Changes in global trade policies are reshaping global trade flows, creating both risks and opportunities for LAC. The diversion of trade flows away from countries facing high tariffs toward third markets may intensify the competition facing LAC exporters in key destination markets, putting pressure on both prices and export volumes. At the same time, in markets where the region manages to establish itself as an alternative supplier, this diversion could create opportunities for import substitution and gains in market share, although capturing these will require sufficient installed export capacity and favorable market access conditions.

The escalation of the war in Iran is affecting LAC primarily through commodity prices, with impacts varying across subregions according to their production structures and international integration patterns. For the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, which are net importers of energy and food, the rising prices of oil and some agricultural commodities are worsening terms of trade and increasing inflationary pressures. In contrast, for South American exporters of commodities such as metals, fuels, and agricultural products, the price shock has significantly boosted the value of exports. However, even for these countries, second-round effects merit caution. Increases in oil prices feed into fertilizer and transport prices, raising costs in the agricultural sector and partially undermining gains via the price channel, in a context of high volatility.

The current favorable conditions are an opportunity for LAC to advance reforms that diversify its trade ties and make its export sector more resilient to increasingly severe and unpredictable external shocks.

Annex: Export Performance by Country



This annex analyzes the growth in export values for each country in LAC for which data are available (Table 1). It assesses how trading partners contributed to this performance (Figure 5) and describes the main determinants in each sector.

South America

Bolivia recorded the sharpest growth in the region in the first quarter of 2026, posting a year-on-year increase of 100.2% after averaging 8.3% growth in 2025. China and the rest of Asia explained more than 70% of the total gain, contributing 25.1 percentage points (p.p.) and 46.2 p.p., respectively. Shipments to the United States and the European Union also played a positive, albeit smaller, role (4.9 p.p. and 3.9 p.p., respectively). This dramatic growth was driven by the mining sector: the value of Bolivia's silver exports tripled, while gold exports increased tenfold.

Peru posted the second-highest growth rate in South America, with exports increasing 33.5% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, up from the 22.1% average recorded in 2025. Asia was the main driver of growth, with China contributing 15.3 p.p. and the rest of Asia 8.0 p.p. Exports to the United States and the European Union also contributed 2.7 p.p. and 1.1 p.p., respectively. The most notable performance at the product level was gold, followed by copper ores and concentrates, both of which were buoyed by higher international prices. Iron ore, silver, and lead also contributed positively.

Paraguay posted strong export growth of 19.7% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, a sharp acceleration from the 1.5% average in 2025. This increase was almost entirely explained by higher exports within South America, which contributed 20.8 p.p. The destination market experiencing the strongest growth was Argentina. The United States also contributed positively (2.4 p.p.). In contrast, exports to the European Union, Asia, and the rest of the world contracted. The products driving growth were soybeans, which rebounded after declining in 2025, along with soybean oil and beef.

Argentina's exports grew by 16.9% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, up from the 9.3% average seen in 2025. This growth was driven by higher exports to Asia: China contributed 9.7 p.p., and the rest of Asia 6.1 p.p. Exports to the United States and the European Union represented 3.9 p.p. and 2.8 p.p., respectively. In contrast, there was a downturn in exports within South America—particularly Chile and Brazil—and to the rest of the world. Wheat, gold, and sunflower seeds and oil were the products that contributed most to the increase.

Colombia's exports increased by 15.5% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, a notable acceleration from the 1.3% average recorded in 2025. The European Union was the main destination market driving this increase, contributing 5.7 p.p., followed by Asia (excl. China) (3.9 p.p.) and the rest of LAC (3.5 p.p.). In contrast, exports to China reduced total growth by 1.9 p.p. Gold accounted for nearly two-thirds of the increase, followed by bananas and bituminous coal.

Chile maintained strong export momentum, with year-on-year growth of 13.8% in the first quarter of 2026 after averaging 11.6% in 2025. Asia was the primary source of growth: China contributed 3.4 p.p. and the rest

of Asia 6.3 p.p., together accounting for nearly 70% of the total increase. Shipments to the European Union and the United States also increased, although their contributions were more modest (1.8 p.p. and 0.6 p.p., respectively). Mining products—particularly copper, gold, and lithium—accounted for most of the increase in export value, supported by higher metal prices.

Uruguay's exports posted 9.9% year-on-year growth in the first quarter of 2026, in line with the 9.2% average of 2025. This growth was distributed across its destination markets: 4.2 p.p. of the increase came from LAC, particularly Mexico and Brazil, followed by the European Union with 3.9 p.p. Rapeseed and carinata, and beef were the main drivers.

Brazil's exports grew by 7.1% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, accelerating from the 3.3% average recorded in 2025. China was the main destination market behind this increase, contributing 6.1 p.p., followed by the European Union (1.9 p.p.). In contrast, exports to the United States subtracted 2.0 p.p. from overall growth. The products contributing most to the year-on-year improvement were oil, gold, beef, soybeans, and copper ores, while exports of sugar and coffee fell significantly.

Ecuador recorded marginal export growth of 1.0% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, a sharp slowdown from its 7.9% average in 2025. Positive contributions came from China (6.5 p.p.) and South America (3.4 p.p.), while the rest of LAC reduced growth by 6.0 p.p. and Asia (excl. China) did so by 3.1 p.p. Declines in the export value of cocoa and crude oil were partially offset by higher exports of shrimp, bananas, some mining products, and vegetable extracts and oils.

Venezuela is estimated to have been the only South American country to post negative export growth in the first quarter of 2026, posting a year-on-year decline of 8.7% after stagnating in 2025. Intraregional exports within LAC made a positive contribution (8.3 p.p.), as did sales to the United States (1.6 p.p.). In contrast, the European Union subtracted 8.1 p.p. from Venezuela's export growth and the rest of Asia, another 7.9 p.p. The increase in oil prices from March onward was not enough to offset the low prices seen in the early months of the year, which, compounded by lower production, placed first-quarter estimates on negative ground.

Mesoamerica

Exports from **Mexico** grew by an estimated 17.9% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, more than double the 7.6% average recorded in 2025. This increase was driven almost entirely by stronger exports to the United States, which contributed 13.9 p.p., or almost three-quarters of total growth. Exports to all other destination markets also expanded, albeit on a considerably smaller scale. Data-processing machinery remained the primary driver of exports.¹²

The **Dominican Republic** led export growth in Mesoamerica, posting a year-on-year increase of 18.3% in the first quarter of 2026, up from the 11.3% average growth recorded in 2025. Canada explained almost half of the increase, with smaller contributions from the United States (2.7 p.p.) and other LAC markets (2.6 p.p.). Exports under special trade regimes (STRs) increased by 42.8%, while sales through the national customs territory (NCT) grew by just 4.6%. Precious metals were the main drivers of year-on-year export growth, followed by electrical machinery, medical instruments, and tobacco.

Exports from **Honduras** grew by 11.5% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, a slight acceleration from the 10.4% average recorded in 2025. This growth owed primarily to exports from the NCT, especially coffee. These exports rose by 22.6%, while those from STRs fell by 5.5% due to lower textile and apparel sales. The destination that contributed most to growth was the United States, with 5.5 p.p., followed by the European Union, with 4.1 p.p.

¹² The marked increase in exports of electronics and data-processing components may reflect the expansion of semiconductor and artificial intelligence server assembly operations by Asian and Mexican firms, amid the reconfiguration of technology value chains and the growing attractiveness of North America as a production location.

Costa Rica's exports grew by 6.4% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, slowing from the 13.8% average recorded in 2025. The largest contribution to growth came from the rest of Asia (excluding China), with 3.4 p.p., followed by the European Union, with 2.2 p.p. In contrast, exports to the United States and the rest of LAC reduced overall growth. STR exports grew by 7.3%, while NCT sales increased by 5.7%. Medical and dental instruments and supplies remained the leading export category and the primary driver of growth, followed by machinery, auto parts, and measuring equipment.

Guatemala posted year-on-year growth of 5.2% in the first quarter of 2026, a slight slowdown from the 7.1% average recorded in 2025. The European Union was the main factor underlying this increase, contributing 3.4 p.p., followed by the United States with 2.2 p.p. In contrast, Asia (excluding China) reduced growth by 1.5 p.p. STR exports expanded by 12.8%, while those from the NCT rose by just 2.9%. Growth was driven primarily by coffee, edible fats and oils, cardamom, and apparel.

El Salvador's exports grew by 3.6% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, up slightly from the 1.9% average recorded in 2025. Growth rates were similar for exports under STRs and those originating in the NCT (3.7% and 3.6%, respectively). The United States accounted for most of this increase, contributing 2.7 p.p. Exports to Asia, however, weighed down overall growth. Higher exports of coffee, sweaters, capacitors and electrical cables, apparel, and herbicides offset declines in those of other apparel products and nonalcoholic beverages.

Panama¹³ recorded marginal export growth of 0.7% year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026, contrasting with the exceptional 36.9% average recorded in 2025, when sales were dramatically boosted by the authorization to ship copper inventories from the mine that closed in 2023. The absence of this factor in the first quarter of 2026 led to a sharp downturn in growth. Positive contributions came from the United States (6.4 p.p.) and less traditional destinations such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and New Zealand, which together accounted for 7.3 p.p. of growth. Sales to the rest of LAC and the European Union reduced growth by 8.3 p.p. and 5.8 p.p., respectively. Exports of unrefined sugar increased significantly, but this was not enough to offset declines in sales of bananas, shrimp, and fish.

According to estimates based on incomplete data, **Nicaragua**¹⁴ recorded estimated year-on-year growth of 42.3% in the first quarter of 2026, almost tripling the 15.5% average recorded in 2025.

Caribbean¹⁵

Guyana continued to post strong export growth in the first quarter of 2026. Exports grew by 37.0% year-on-year, accelerating from the 20.8% average recorded in 2025, and continued to be driven by the oil boom. The European Union accounted for more than 20 p.p. of the increase, followed by China and the rest of Asia, which contributed 8 p.p.

Estimates for **Barbados** suggest flat export growth in the first quarter of 2026 following a 6.5% decline in 2025. The drop in shipments to the United States and Asia (excluding China) was offset by rising exports to the European Union and the rest of LAC.

Belize's exports continued to decline, posting a year-on-year drop of 9.1% in the first quarter of 2026 after falling by an average 15.2% in 2025. The sharpest reductions in trade were with Jamaica, Mexico, The Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago. Exports to the European Union increased significantly but fell short of offsetting the broader decline. The change was concentrated mainly in food and live animals, as well as manufactured goods.

¹³ STR exports are not included in these figures.

¹⁴ A complete breakdown by products and destination markets was not available for the first quarter of 2026.

¹⁵ At the time of print, up-to-date official data for the first quarter of 2026 was unavailable for the remaining Caribbean countries—the Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Methodological Note



The estimates of exports from LAC for the first quarter of 2026 were calculated using data available through May 21, 2026.

The data used were for the following periods: January–March for Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay; and January–February for Barbados and Nicaragua. The figures for Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua include STR exports. Venezuela’s exports were estimated using a combination of Mery oil price series and data from its main trading partners.

The aggregate export volume index for Latin America comprises ten countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The export volume indices were calculated based on data from official sources for Argentina (National Institute of Statistics and Censuses), Brazil (Ministry of the Economy), Chile (Central Bank of Chile), Colombia (Bank of the Republic), Peru (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism), and Uruguay (Central Bank). Paraguay’s export volumes were calculated using Central Bank data for the country’s main export products, weighted by the 2023 export structure. For Mexico and El Salvador, export series denominated in US dollars were deflated using the import price index published by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Venezuela’s export volumes were calculated using OPEC data on Mery oil prices and production volumes. The national series were aggregated based on each country’s share in total exports valued in 2015 US dollars.

The official data sources used were as follows: Argentina: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses; The Bahamas: Bahamas National Statistical Institute; Barbados: Barbados Statistical Service; Belize: Statistical Institute of Belize; Bolivia: National Institute of Statistics; Brazil: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade, and Services; Chile: Central Bank of Chile; China: China Customs Statistics; Colombia: National Administrative Statistics Department; Costa Rica: Central Bank of Costa Rica; Dominican Republic: Directorate General of Customs; Ecuador: Central Bank of Ecuador; El Salvador: Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador; European Union (27 countries, excl. the United Kingdom): Eurostat; Guatemala: Bank of Guatemala; Guyana: Bank of Guyana; Honduras: Central Bank of Honduras; Jamaica: Statistical Institute of Jamaica; Mexico: Bank of Mexico; Nicaragua: Central Bank of Nicaragua and Ministry of Development, Industry, and Commerce; Panama: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses; Paraguay: Central Bank of Paraguay; Peru: Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism; Suriname: Ministry of Trade and Industry; Trinidad and Tobago: Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago; United States: US Census Bureau; Uruguay: Central Bank of Uruguay; Venezuela: OPEC and IMF.

The following abbreviations are used in this document: BLS—US Bureau of Labor Statistics; CPB—Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis; IMF—International Monetary Fund; LA—Latin America; LAC—Latin America and the Caribbean; NCT—national customs territory; OPEC—Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries; STRs—special trade regimes; USITC—US International Trade Commission.

