TRADE TRENDS ESTIMATES

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

2024 EDITION

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Coordinated by
Paolo Giordano

This report provides estimates of Latin America and the Caribbean's international trade flows for 2023. It was prepared by the Integration and Trade Sector (INT) at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in partnership with its Institute for the Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean (INTAL), under the overall supervision of Fabrizio Opertti, Sector Manager, Pablo García, Regional Integration Unit Chief, and Ana Basco, Director of INTAL. Technical supervision was provided by Mauricio Mesquita Moreira, INT's Principal Economic Advisor a.i.

This edition was coordinated by Paolo Giordano, INT Principal Economist, and written in collaboration with INT consultant Kathia Michalczewsky. Jesica De Angelis, Carolina Barco, Aitana Endara, Facundo Rodríguez, Francisco Temossi, Ivo Varela, Luisina Patrizio, and Valentina Paguegui provided assistance with data processing.

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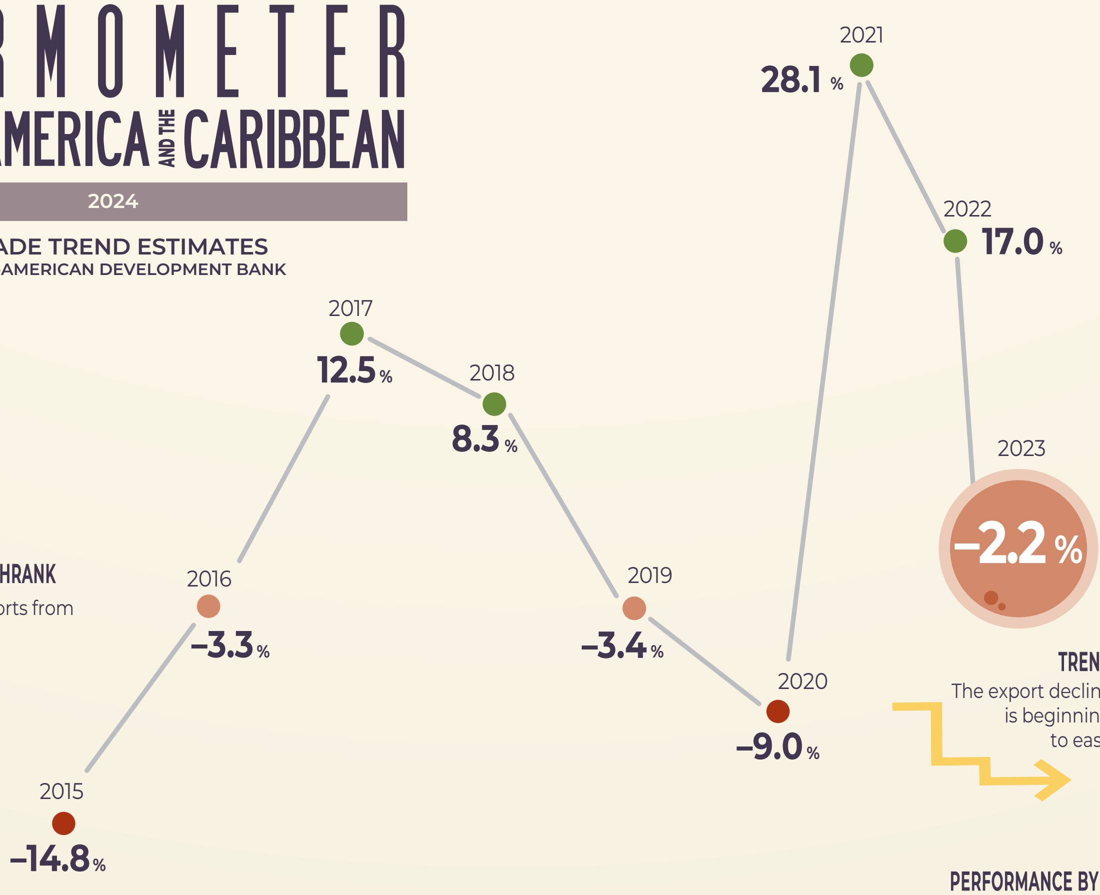
The estimates in this report are based on the quarterly and monthly data for 2023 available from official national and international sources for 24 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The information included in the report is current as of January 10, 2024.

EXPORT THERMOMETER FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

2024

TRADE TREND ESTIMATES
INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK



THE REGION'S EXPORTS SHRANK

The value of goods exports from LAC fell by 2.2% in 2023.

Annual growth rate, 2023

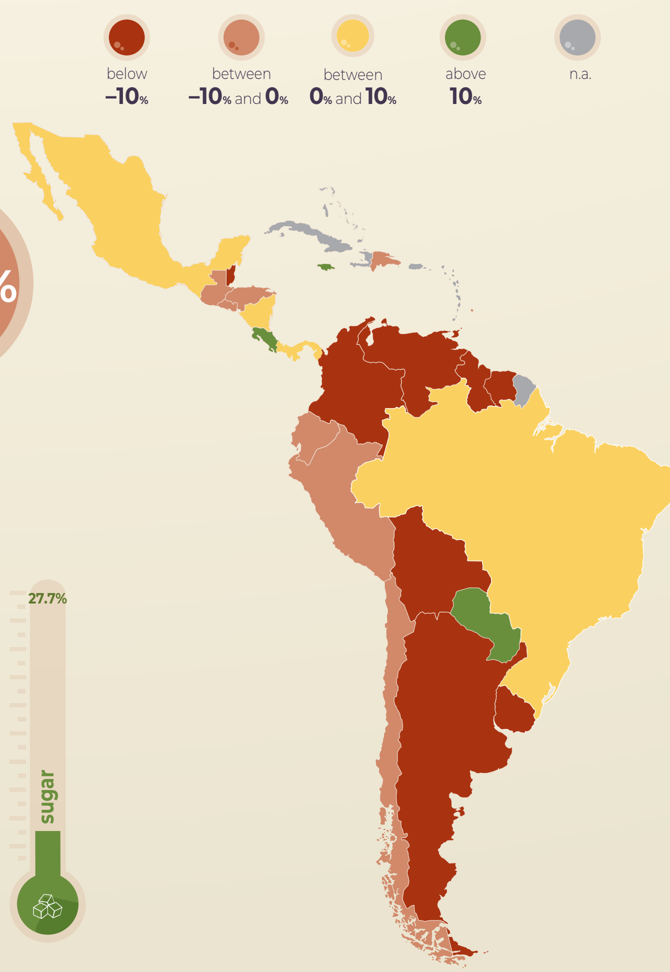
TREND

The export decline is beginning to ease

PERFORMANCE BY COUNTRY

The export slump affected the entire region, but was much more pronounced in several South American and Caribbean economies.

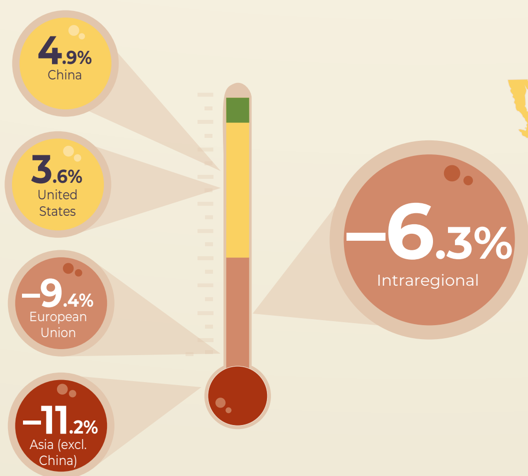
Annual growth rate, 2023



DEMAND WEAKENED

Demand from LAC's main trading partners lost momentum and, in some cases, contracted.

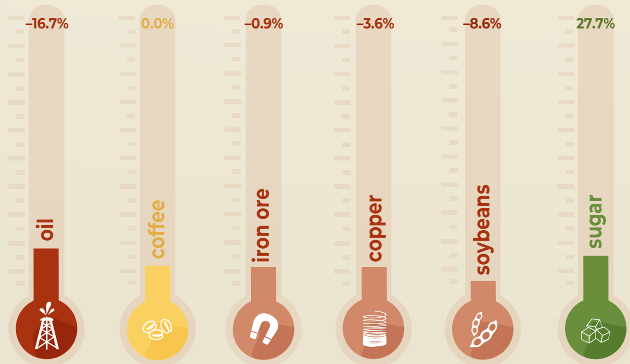
Annual growth rate, 2023



PRICES DROPPED

In 2023, the price of LAC's main export commodities fell, with the exception of sugar and coffee.

Annual growth rate, 2023



THE CONTRACTION IN EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN HAS BEGUN TO EASE

Highlights

The value of exports from Latin America and the Caribbean contracted by 2.2% in 2023, after having grown by 17.0% in 2022.

The fall in export prices explained the decline in foreign sales, while volumes slowed.

Exports continued to grow in Mexico, driven by shipments to the United States, but were flat in Central America and decreased in South America.

Although there are some signs of a slowdown in the rate of decline, exports are not expected to move into a recovery in the short-term.

Slow global economic growth limits the potential for a recovery in real demand for the region's exports, while commodity prices are highly volatile.

Exports from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) entered a contractionary phase in 2023 after two years of expansion as they recovered from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. The reversal in commodity prices and the slowdown in the growth of export volumes accounted for the drop in the value of external sales.

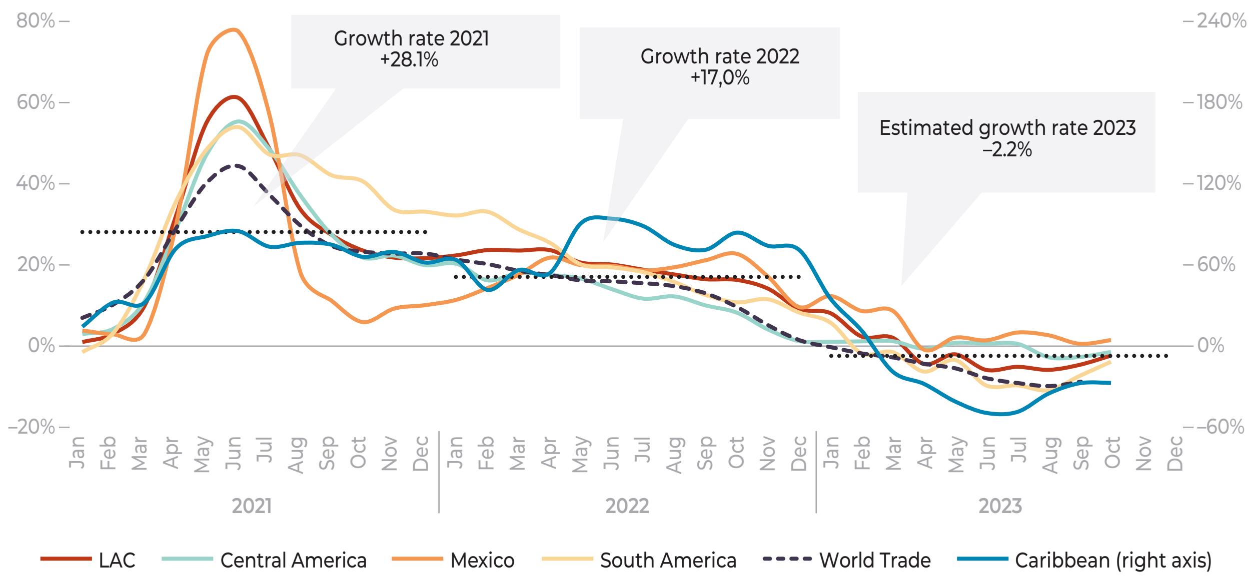
The contraction in commodity prices mainly affected South America and the Caribbean. In Mesoamerica, exports increased overall, although the performance was mainly explained by Mexico, as external shipments in Central America remained flat.

Although the rate of decline in LAC's external sales slowed in the last quarter, the outlook remains skewed to the downside. The continued tightening of monetary policies to contain inflation, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the emergence of new armed conflicts in the Middle East, against a backdrop of increasing geo-economic fragmentation, are constraining economic growth and thus reducing opportunities for expanding demand for the region's exports. At the same time, the increased frequency of extreme weather events could make prices more volatile, escalating the uncertainty around the overall evolution of the global trading environment.

General Outlook

The value of goods exports from LAC is estimated to have contracted by 2.2% in 2023 (Figure 1).[1] This was mainly due to a deterioration in export prices as volume growth slowed. In 2022, foreign sales had increased by 17.0%.

FIGURE 1 • VALUE OF EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND WORLD TRADE
(Year-on-year growth rate, three-month moving average, percentages, 2021–2023)



Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector with data from official sources and the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis (CPB) for world 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 6 countries in the Caribbean: Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. World trade is the average of global imports and exports.

Although the deterioration in export performance affected all LAC subregions, it evolved differently throughout the year. External sales from South America and the Caribbean moved into negative territory in the second quarter, but the rate of decline slowed in the second half of the year. Conversely, after growing in the first quarter, exports from Mexico slowed sharply and remained stagnant for the rest of the year, as did exports from Central America.

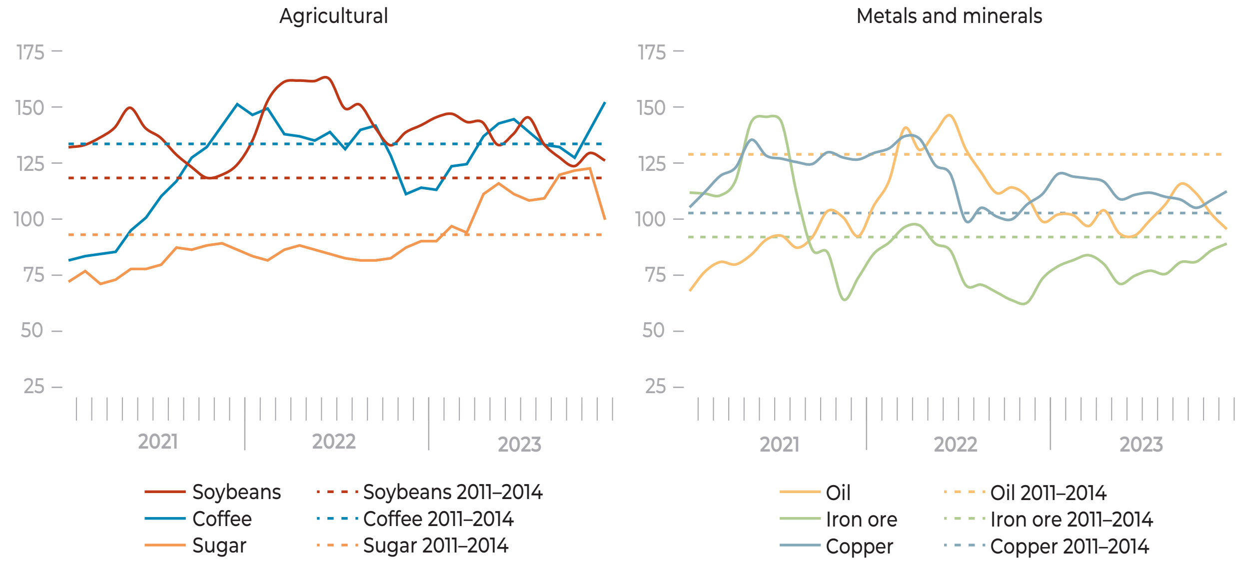
The region's total imports are estimated to have fallen by 5.9% in 2023 after increasing by 20.9% in 2022.

[1] This estimate draws on data from 18 Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela; and 6 Caribbean countries: Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. The data for Honduras and Panama do not include special trade regimes (STRs), which account for around 50% of total exports from Honduras and 80% of those from Panama. See the Methodological Note for additional information on the procedures, time periods, and sources for the data used in these estimates.

Prices

The prices of LAC's main export commodities rose sharply in the first half of 2022 due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but this trend then reversed, leaving them at lower average levels in 2023 than in the previous year (Figure 2). However, most prices stabilized in 2023 and are still at historically high levels.

FIGURE 2 • PRICES OF MAIN LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EXPORT PRODUCTS
(Index 2010=100, 2021–2023)



Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector with data from Bloomberg.

After plummeting at the end of 2022, **oil** prices remained relatively stable until the third quarter of 2023, when they increased due to the conflict in the Middle East. Even so, average prices in 2023 were still 16.7% lower than in 2022. In response, member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agreed to new production cuts starting in January 2024 to limit falling prices amid waning demand.

Copper prices began 2023 on the rise as the Chinese economy rallied following the lifting of Covid-related mobility restrictions. However, this trend reversed as economic activity in the country slowed, compounded by weak global growth: by the end of the year, copper prices had fallen by 3.6% compared to the 2022 average. Even so, they remain above their historical highs.

Iron ore prices increased in the first quarter of 2023, also driven by the recovering Chinese economy. However, weakness in China's real estate sector temporarily slowed the trend. Over the rest of 2023, prices were partially supported by the Chinese government's stimulus measures, which included loosening monetary policy, easing restrictions on housing purchases, and the decision not to cap steel production in 2023. As a result, the cumulative decline in iron ore prices averaged only 0.9% compared to 2022.

The main agricultural products exported by the region were subject to greater volatility. Throughout the year, **soybean** prices fluctuated due to several conflicting factors: drought-related reductions in supply in Argentina and Uruguay, the bumper crop in Brazil, increased demand from China, the volatility of Argentina's exchange rate policy, and the late arrival of the US harvest to market. On average, soybean prices in 2023 were 8.6% lower than in 2022, when they hit record highs following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

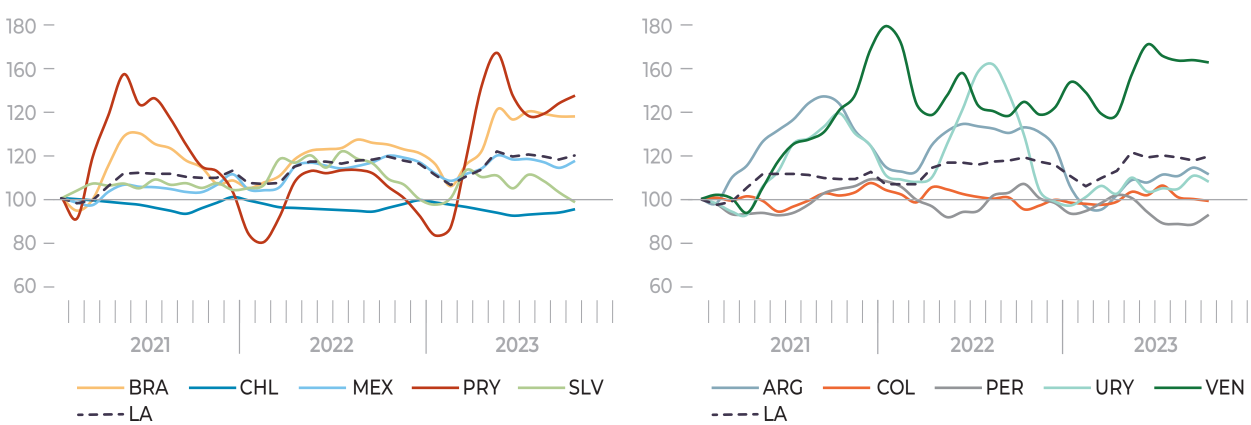
Arabica and Robusta **coffee** prices average remained largely stable in 2023 compared to 2022. However, the average price was driven by a decrease in the former, offset by an increase in the latter. The drop in the price of the Arabica variety was due to better harvests in Brazil and Colombia, which together account for more than 60% of world supply. Conversely, trade in Robusta was limited by poor weather conditions in Uganda and Indonesia, the main exporters of the variety, which explains the increase in its price. Tensions in the Red Sea put upward pressure on the prices of both varieties toward the end of 2023, as freight rates rose following the decisions by some shipping lines to divert vessels. This pushed coffee prices to record highs.

Unlike other commodities, **sugar** prices in 2023 increased by 27.7% compared to the 2022 average, sending it well above historical highs. This performance was driven by a reduction in global supply caused by several factors. Production was lower in Thailand and India, the world's second- and third-largest producers, respectively, as a result of severe droughts associated with the El Niño phenomenon. At the same time, there were delays in shipments from the world's largest producer, Brazil, compounded by the strengthening of the real against the US dollar. Toward the end of the year, the increase in production and the 2024 forecasts for Brazil reversed the price trend.

Volumes

The volume of Latin American exports is estimated to have risen by 1.8% in 2023 after growing by 5.5% in 2022 (Figure 3).[2] This year's increase was mainly explained by the volumes shipped by Brazil and Mexico.

FIGURE 3 • EXPORT VOLUMES FOR SELECTED COUNTRIES
(Indices, three-month moving average, January 2021=100, 2021–2023)



Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector with data from official sources, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).
Note: The value of exports from Mexico and El Salvador were deflated using BLS indexes, 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 LA's external sales for that year. See the Methodological Note for more details.

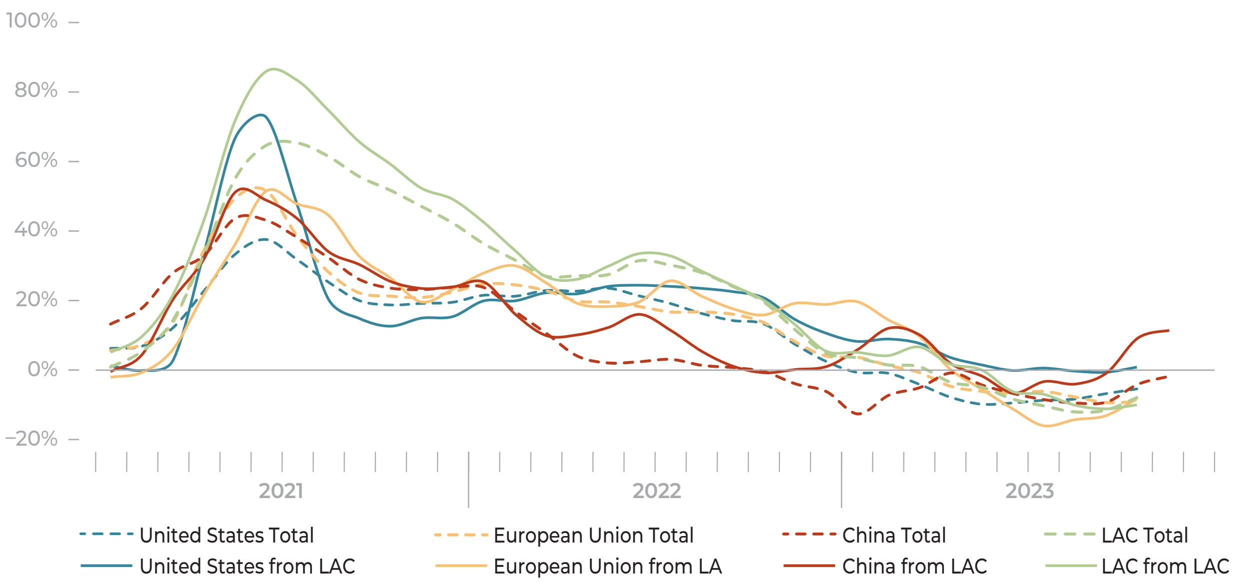
[2] Estimates of the volumes exported by Latin America are based on official data for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and Uruguay. In-house estimates were calculated for El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Venezuela, as detailed in the Methodological Note.

Mexico's real exports grew by an estimated 2.0% in 2023. The estimate for El Salvador points to an 8.4% drop. The performance of South America's exports was very uneven. Although in the aggregate they are estimated to have increased by 1.7% in 2023, growth was only observed in Paraguay (33.1%), Brazil (9.1%), Venezuela (7.9%), and Colombia (0.4%). Conversely, export volumes contracted in Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, and Chile (–19.4%, –16.9%, –5.4%, and –1.1%, respectively).

Markets

Demand from LAC's main trading partners slowed markedly from the start of 2022 (Figure 4) before turning negative in 2023. However, the pace of decline eased in the second half of the year.

FIGURE 4 • VALUE OF MAIN TRADING PARTNERS' IMPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND THE WORLD
(Quarterly moving average of the year-on-year growth rate, percentages, 2021–2023)



Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector with data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the US International Trade Commission (USITC), Eurostat, China Customs, and national sources.
Note: The import series for all economies are valued in US dollars.

After decelerating dramatically toward the end of 2022, the **United States'** imports from the region stagnated from mid-2023 onward. US purchases from LAC are estimated to have grown by 2.4% in 2023, in contrast to its total imports, which contracted by 6.7%. As a result, LAC's share of total US purchases increased by 1.8 percentage points (p.p.), rising from 18.2% to 20.0%.

The country where LAC imports were most volatile between 2022 and 2023 was **China**. Its purchases from the region are estimated to have grown by 3.5% on average, while total Chinese imports fell by 6.1%. However, records for the last quarter point to a strong rebound, especially for purchases originating in LAC.[3] LAC's market share in China increased slightly, from 8.6% in 2022 to 9.5% in 2023.

[3] It should be noted that this section is based on an analysis of the totals imported by trade partners, as reported by the statistical authorities of the destination countries. Exports recorded by the national sources of LAC countries for bilateral flows are analyzed in the next section. Any discrepancies are due not only to the sources but also to the lag between the times that exports and imports are recorded.

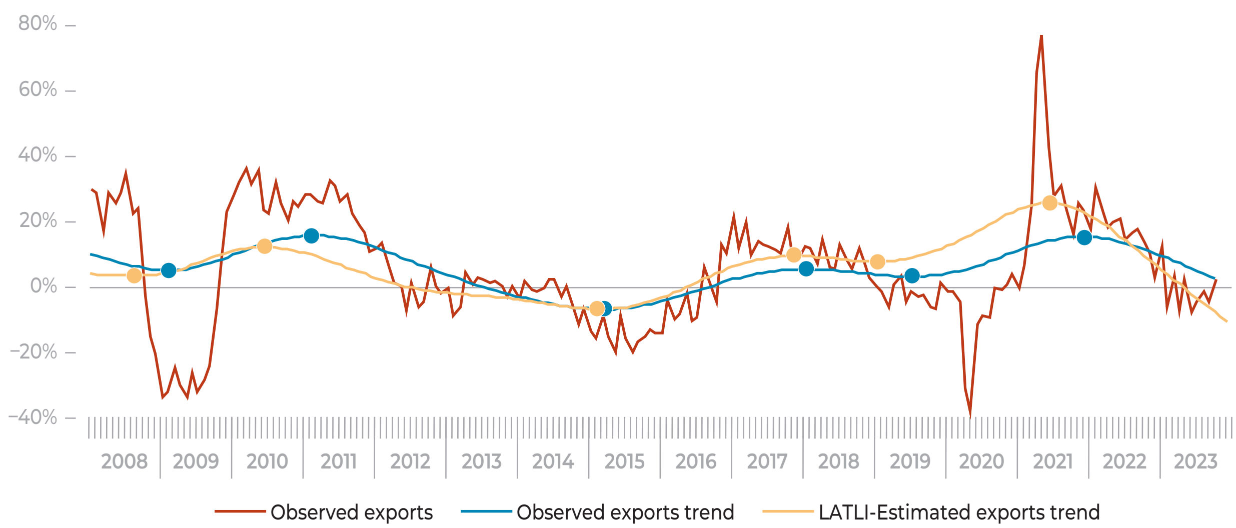
In the **European Union**, purchases from LAC contracted rapidly. The annual average is estimated to have fallen by 5.9%, although the rate of decline slowed at the end of 2023. Total imports fell at a similar rate (–5.4%). As a result, LAC's significance as a supplier to the EU economies remained at 1.9%.

Latin America's intraregional purchases are estimated to have declined slightly less than its total imports in 2023 (–4.1% and –5.9%, respectively). As a result, intraregional trade increased from 14.7% in 2022 to 15.1% in 2023.

Prospects

The objective of the IDB's Latin American Trade Leading Index (LATLI) is to forecast an eventual turning point in the growth trend for the value of LAC exports (Figure 5). Furthermore, the growth rate for export values can be estimated in real time using the nowcasting prediction methodology underlying the Latin American Trade Nowcasting Index (LATNI).[4]

FIGURE 5 • CHANGES IN THE TREND IN THE VALUE OF GOODS EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA
(Year-on-year growth rate and LATLI index, January 2018=100, 2008–2023)



Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector estimations.
Note: The leading index series shows the trend after the Hodrick-Prescott filter was applied. The dots indicate the turning points in the trend for the estimated series and the observed value of LAC exports.

The LATLI shows no signs that the export value trend will move from a contraction to an expansion until at least May 2024.

The LATNI, on the other hand, enables the year-on-year growth in LAC exports to be estimated for November and December, even though no official data was available for these two months at the time of publication. The model confirms that the region's exports remain in a contractionary phase,

[4] For a detailed description of the two indicators and the data and estimation methodology used, 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.

with the year-on-year growth rate ranging from –3% to –2% in November and from –4% to +2% in December.[5]

Performance by Subregion

LAC exports entered a contraction in 2023 following the expansion recorded in 2022 (Table 1). The exceptions to this pattern were Brazil, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Paraguay, where external sales continued to grow.

The following section analyzes the main factors and destination markets that drove export performance in the different LAC subregions in 2023 (Figure 6). The annex contains detailed data on each country and the main export products.

In **South America**, exports are estimated to have fallen by 5.3% in 2023 after growing by 16.4% in 2022. External sales contracted in every South American economy except Brazil and Paraguay. Falling commodity prices accounted for most of the performance in this subregion, as volumes are estimated to have increased by 1.7% in 2023, driven by higher shipments from Paraguay, Brazil, Venezuela, and, to a lesser extent, Colombia. Throughout 2023, export performance measured in constant prices declined in Argentina, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay. China and, to a lesser extent, the United States offset part of the decline in shipments to the rest of Asia, the European Union, and nontraditional destinations, including several countries in Africa and the Middle East.

Exports from **Mesoamerica** increased by 2.6% in 2023 after growing by 16.1% in 2022. Exports from **Mexico** expanded by 2.9% in 2023, driven almost entirely by higher shipments to the United States. Sales from **Central America** were flat (0.0%). The only countries whose export performances improved notably in 2023 were Costa Rica and Panama. Although Nicaragua's exports grew slightly, they did so at a much lower rate than in 2022. The increase in Central American shipments to the United States offset the decline in sales to all other destinations.

Exports from the **Caribbean** countries contracted at an estimated rate of 31.9% in 2023 after growing by 72.1% in 2022. The subregion's export performance was very heterogeneous. There were strong contractions in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Belize, while the drop was smaller in Barbados. Jamaica, on the other hand, is estimated to have remained on an expansionary path.

[5] The range of these estimates indicates a high degree of uncertainty in the forecast. Trends in the variables that typically drive exports and that are captured by the model are yielding mixed signals. Specifically, according to two of the estimation methods, the year-on-year growth rate for November and December 2023 will be negative (–3% and –4%, respectively), while one method predicts a possible improvement in December and a positive estimate (+2%).

TABLE 1 • VALUE OF GOODS EXPORTS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN BY SELECTED DESTINATIONS

(Annual growth rate, percentages, 2022 and 2023)

Exporting group/ member	2023 vs 2022							2022 vs 2021 World Total
	Subregion	Latin America and the Caribbean	United States	Asia (excl. China)	China	European Union	World Total	
SOUTH AMERICA	**–4.6**	**–5.1**	**2.4**	**–11.9**	**5.9**	**–12.1**	↓ **–5.3**	**16.4**
Argentina	–4.6	–5.9	–19.0	–38.6	–35.7	–38.4	↓ –25.3	13.5
Bolivia	–29.2	–28.7	–46.9	–36.9	47.1	–27.2	↓ –21.6	23.8
Brazil	–2.5	0.9	–1.4	–2.8	16.5	–9.1	↓ 1.7	19.0
Chile	–6.0	–6.2	7.3	–5.8	–3.6	3.9	↓ –2.6	4.0
Colombia	–11.3	–14.5	–9.4	4.5	7.7	–12.4	↓ –13.7	37.5
Ecuador	–15.6	–5.0	0.0	–47.4	–0.3	0.0	↓ –5.3	22.3
Paraguay	27.3	26.8	7.7	14.9	139.2	4.3	↑ 19.1	–5.9
Peru	–11.1	–7.4	2.4	–19.8	–2.9	–8.9	↓ –6.6	4.2
Uruguay	–8.4	–7.9	3.8	–25.1	–38.4	–6.4	↓ –19.2	17.3
Venezuela	–18.2	–32.0	424.2	–45.0	–27.5	–24.3	↓ –11.1	65.9
MESOAMERICA	**–1.6**	**–5.6**	**3.8**	**–14.3**	**–5.8**	**5.4**	↓ **2.6**	**16.1**
Mexico	–2.9	–8.6	3.9	–17.2	–6.0	8.2	↓ 2.9	16.7
Central America	**–1.5**	**–1.7**	**2.4**	**1.4**	**–5.0**	**–2.9**	↓ **0.0**	**10.9**
Costa Rica	9.7	8.4	21.5	24.9	10.5	15.5	↑ 16.4	9.5
Dominican Republic	–8.9	–10.4	2.3	14.6	–12.3	–18.3	↓ –4.0	6.3
El Salvador	–3.4	–3.4	–16.3	2.0	–73.4	–15.8	↓ –8.9	11.3
Guatemala	–3.3	–3.6	–10.7	–5.4	–78.8	–8.5	↓ –9.5	14.9
Honduras	0.8	–4.3	6.6	–16.1	6.4	–13.6	↓ –2.6	18.1
Nicaragua	–4.6	–5.1	–0.7	–42.1	20.5	–13.8	↑ 0.8	13.3
Panama	5.2	5.3	11.1	–11.8	30.5	–4.3	↓ 4.0	0.2
CARIBBEAN	**20.2**	**–75.3**	**14.1**	**2630.0**	**–85.4**	**–61.8**	↓ **–31.9**	**72.1**
Bahamas	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Barbados	–5.9	–4.9	–21.5	19.5	464.0	0.9	↓ –4.7	3.5
Belize	0.5	–5.6	–12.6	n.a.	n.a.	5.6	↓ –17.4	0.8
Guyana	83.1	–82.1	15.7	26,996.2	–93.8	–61.8	↓ –40.9	160.1
Haiti	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Jamaica	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	→ 28.9	28.4
Suriname	–24.1	–19.2	84.1	–19.5	40.9	–83.7	↓ –20.7	13.2
Trinidad and Tobago	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	↓ –35.9	54.1
LATIN AMERICA	**–5.3**	**–5.2**	**3.6**	**–12.3**	**5.1**	**–8.0**	↓ **–1.6**	**16.2**
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	**–6.3**	**–6.3**	**3.6**	**–11.2**	**4.9**	**–9.4**	↓ **–2.2**	**17.0**

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

Notes: The table does not include the 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, and Nicaragua includes exports under special trade regimes (STRs). For individual Central American countries, the subregional growth rates are for Mesoamerica. However, Mexico is excluded from the aggregate for Central America, and thus the subregional total only represents trade within Central America. See the Methodological Note for additional information on the procedures, time periods, and data sources used in the estimates. The arrows show the change in trend in comparison with the previous year. The abbreviation "n.a." is used when no data is available.

FIGURE 6 • CONTRIBUTION OF MAIN TRADING PARTNERS TO THE TOTAL VARIATION IN THE VALUE OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN GOODS EXPORTS
(Year-on-year growth rate, percentages, and percentage points, 2023)

Source: IDB Integration and Trade Sector estimates based on official sources.
Note: The figure does not include Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago as the relevant data was not available.

Conclusions

The post-Covid recovery in LAC goods exports lost momentum in 2022, and in early 2023, the region's external sales entered a contractionary phase. However, the pace of decline began to slow by the middle of the year. Exports are estimated to have fallen by 2.2% in 2023 after expanding by 17.0% in 2022.

The possibilities for a recovery in world trade in general and LAC exports in particular are limited by inflation, which remains relatively high, and restrictive monetary policies, amid lingering aftershocks of the pandemic and increasing geopolitical conflicts. Although there is growing evidence that the fragmentation of global trade could benefit some Latin American economies, in the current context, the leading indicator for the region's exports does not point to a change in the trend in the first half of 2024.

South America was hit by deteriorating commodity prices, which entered a downward phase in mid-2022 after the spike caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Prices continued to fall throughout the year, with the exception of sugar. Even so, several products remain close to record highs. The subregion's export volumes continued to grow, although at a much slower pace than in the previous year. The only destination markets where export values increased were China and, to a lesser extent, the United States, while the rest of Asia, the European Union, and several partners in Africa and the Middle East accounted for most of the contraction.

In Mexico, export values increased in the first half of the year and then stagnated. The increase was mainly explained by volumes, with demand from the United States acting as the main driver of expansion. Meanwhile, the value of flows from Central America remained flat for most of 2023, as increases in shipments to the United States were offset by decreases to all other destinations, particularly the rest of the region and the European Union.

After the boost to exports that fuel prices provided in 2022, the impact of the price reversal was felt in the Caribbean. Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago were particularly affected.

The prospects for a reversal of this trend in the next six months are limited, given the context of low global economic growth, persistent inflation, restrictive monetary policies, and growing geopolitical conflicts. Meanwhile, weak demand would limit upward pressure on commodity prices, barring further escalation of conflicts in the Middle East and extreme weather events affecting the supply of oil and agricultural products, respectively.

Global economic growth is expected to remain weak in 2024 due to continued high interest rates, particularly in advanced economies, while inflation returns to target levels. This would limit access to credit, especially for developing countries. Despite some recent signs of expansion, the growth slowdown in China would particularly impact real demand for LAC exports.

In this environment where downside risks predominate, the war in Ukraine continues and new armed conflicts have arisen in the Middle East, disrupting global supply chains, increasing transportation costs, and potentially leading to further increases in commodity prices, especially oil. This may have a negative impact on inflation and global activity, which will indirectly affect the region's real exports.

In the absence of new geopolitical tensions or adverse weather events, the outlook for commodity prices suggests that they will be highly volatile but will follow a downward trend in the current context of weak demand. Although prices are near all-time highs, a slowdown in China's growth would particularly affect metals such as copper and iron ore. The outlook for agricultural prices is also moderate, as production in several key countries in markets such as soybeans or coffee is expected to recover following the weather events that limited their supply in 2023.

However, the El Niño phenomenon is expected to peak in the first half of 2024, which, combined with the possibility of new natural disasters and a shock to oil prices as a result of geopolitical tensions, could push prices up. This would bring asymmetric benefits for LAC countries, depending on their exposure to risks and the structure of their export patterns.

This scenario may be exacerbated by the proliferation of restrictive trade policies and more active industrial policies, the increasing fragmentation of the global trading system, the uncertainty caused by electoral cycles in several countries, and the increased frequency and intensity of adverse weather events.

Conversely, in a more optimistic scenario, a soft landing followed by accelerating growth in the United States and a confirmation of the recent green shoots in the Chinese economy could contribute to a better trade performance for LAC.

All in all, the trade outlook for the region has improved significantly compared to last year. The balance of risks suggests that the trade contraction will ease in the coming months. However, a great deal of uncertainty surrounds the timing and intensity of a potential recovery.

Annex: Export Performance by Country

This annex analyzes the growth of export values for the LAC countries for which data is available (Table 1) and assesses how trading partners contributed to this performance (Figure 6), describing the main determinants at the product level.

South America

Paraguay was the only country in South America whose export performance improved in 2023 compared to the previous year due to the recovery from the severe drought in 2022. Exports are estimated to have increased by 19.1% in 2023 after falling by 5.9% in 2022. The increase in soybean shipments for processing in Argentina accounted for most of the expansion against a backdrop of falling oilseed prices.

Brazil's exports increased by 1.7% in 2023 after growing by 19.0% in 2022. This stagnation was explained by higher shipments to China and, to a lesser extent, Argentina and Mexico, offset by declines to the European Union and the rest of the world. In terms of products, the main increases were in soybeans, maize, and sugar due to higher volumes shipped amid falling prices. Good harvests in Brazil offset lower production due to adverse weather conditions in major competitors such as Argentina (soybeans) and Thailand and India (sugar).

After growing by 4.0% in 2022, **Chile**'s exports are estimated to have fallen by 2.6% in 2023, dragged down by both prices and volumes. Exports to China and the rest of Asia declined significantly, while shipments to the United States and the European Union increased. There was a drop in exports of mining products, mainly copper and lithium, which was partly offset by an increase in exports of chemical products.

Ecuador's exports are estimated to have fallen by 5.3% in 2023 after growing by 22.3% in 2022. This decline was mainly due to a sharp drop in exports to the United States, the rest of LAC, and, to a lesser extent, Asia (excl. China). It was explained by reductions in the country's shipments of crude oil and bananas.

Venezuela's exports fell by an estimated 11.1% in 2023 after increasing by 65.9% in 2022. The increase in oil export volumes fell short of offsetting the drop in prices. Although shipments to the United States grew strongly, this was not enough to offset the decline in exports to all other destinations, especially the rest of LAC.

Colombia's foreign sales are estimated to have fallen by 13.7% in 2023 after increasing by 37.5% in 2022. Lower exports to the United States and the rest of LAC accounted for half of the decline. The drop was mainly due to lower prices for products such as oil and thermal coal.

After growing by just 4.2% in 2022, **Peru**'s exports are estimated to have fallen by 6.6% in 2023 due to both lower volumes shipped and lower prices. Although sales to all major destinations except the

United States declined, Asia accounted for half of the decrease. Copper and zinc ores and natural gas were the products that contributed most to this outcome.

Exports from **Uruguay** in 2023 are estimated to have fallen by 19.2% due almost entirely to lower volumes. This downturn was strongly influenced by significant decreases in shipments to China and the rest of the world. Soybeans, which were affected by the drought, and beef accounted for the sharp contraction.

Bolivia's exports increased by 23.8% in 2022, while a decline of 21.6% is estimated for 2023. The drop was mainly explained by lower shipments to the rest of LAC, especially Argentina, and Asia (excl. China). This was partially offset by an increase in shipments to China. Lower exports of petroleum gas and other gaseous hydrocarbons, zinc ores and concentrates, gold, and soybean oil accounted for most of the contraction.

After growing by 13.5% in 2022, **Argentina**'s exports are estimated to have decreased by 25.3% in 2023. Both prices and exported volumes fell in the context of a severe drought. Although this decline affected all export destinations, Asia accounted for almost 40%, with a further 25% coming from less traditional destinations, including some partners in the Middle East and Africa. The products that contributed most to the contraction were cereals and soybeans and their derivatives.

Mesoamerica

Mexico's exports are estimated to have grown by 2.9% in 2023, a sharp deceleration compared to the average growth rate in 2022 (16.7%). The increase in sales to the United States accounted for almost all of this growth, although Canada and the European Union also contributed positively. The products that contributed most to the increase in exports were land vehicles and their parts.

Nicaragua's exports are estimated to have increased by 0.8% in 2023 after growing by 13.3% in 2022. The most significant increase was in shipments to Canada, which offset declines in sales to all other destinations, particularly intraregional markets. The overall growth in exports is mainly explained by an increase in shipments from the national customs territory (NCT), which grew by 3.2%, while exports from special trade regimes (STRs) fell by 1.4%. The largest increases were in raw gold and automotive harnesses, while shipments of coffee and apparel and accessories fell.

Exports from **Honduras**[6] decreased by an estimated 2.6% in 2023 after growing by 18.1% in 2022. This contraction in exports is mainly due to lower shipments to the European Union, the rest of LAC (particularly countries in Mesoamerica), and Asia (excl. China). However, these declines were partially offset by significant increases in exports to Canada and the United States. Among the factors contributing to this reduction were significant decreases in coffee and palm oil exports. Conversely, cane sugar exports increased.

After increasing by 6.3% on average in 2022, exports from the **Dominican Republic** are estimated to have contracted by 4.0% in 2023. The increase in shipments to the United States was not enough to offset the drop in exports to all other destinations. Sales to the European Union and the rest of LAC showed the strongest declines. The overall decrease was mainly due to a reduction in NCT sales (–16.3%), while STR exports increased by 3.3%. Although shipments

[6] STR exports are not included as up-to-date official data was unavailable.

of pharmaceuticals and apparel and accessories increased, those of precious metals and iron and steel castings fell.

Guatemala experienced export growth of 14.9% in 2022 and an estimated drop of 9.5% in 2023. The destination markets that accounted for most of this decline were the United States and China, followed by the rest of LAC and the European Union. NCT exports fell by 4.9%, while STR sales did so by 19.2%. The main products contributing to this decline were coffee, meat, diesel, and apparel.

El Salvador's exports dropped by an estimated 8.9% in 2023 after growing by 11.3% in 2022. This contraction was mainly due to reduced trade with the United States and Honduras. The products that contributed the most were some textile and apparel products, electrical capacitors, and cellphone parts, all of which are produced in STRs. Exports from STRs fell more than those from NCTs (–20.7% and –5.9%, respectively).

Throughout 2023, **Panama**'s exports[7] are estimated to have increased by 4.0% after stagnating the previous year. This increase was primarily due to a significant rise in shipments to China, which offset decreases in shipments to Asia (excl. China) and Canada. The country's export growth was largely explained by a significant increase in shipments of timber, while more than half of the decline in shipments to other destinations is due to a drop in exports of copper ores and concentrates.

Costa Rica's export performance in 2023 was an improvement over 2022. Exports are estimated to have increased by 16.4%, above the 9.5% recorded in 2022. Shipments to the United States and, to a lesser extent, the European Union accounted for this growth. NCT exports increased by 4.2%, driven by shipments of bananas and pineapples. STR sales increased by 24.1%, largely explained by medical and dental instruments and supplies.

Caribbean

After increasing by 160.1% in 2022, **Guyana**'s exports are estimated to have contracted by 40.9% in 2023. This downturn owed mainly to the fall in sales to the rest of LAC and the European Union. The drop in crude oil exports accounted for almost two-thirds of the total decline in exports.

Suriname's exports are estimated to have fallen by 20.7% in 2023 after increasing by 13.2% in 2022. The contraction was mainly due to lower shipments to Europe. The export products that explained this performance were precious metals, primarily gold.

After experiencing a 10.8% increase in 2022, **Belize**'s exports are estimated to have fallen by 17.4% in 2023. The United Kingdom was the destination that contributed the most to the overall decline. The products that most affected the country's performance were bananas and sugar.

Exports from **Barbados** increased by 3.5% in 2022 but are estimated to have fallen by 4.7% in 2023 as a result of the decrease in shipments to the United States and, to a lesser extent, Jamaica. This decrease was partially offset by an increase in the value of exports to Canada. The outcome was mainly due to lower shipments of hydraulic cement, crude oil or bituminous mineral oils, and electric engines and generators.

[7] STR exports are not included.

Methodological Note

The estimated exports from LAC for 2023 were calculated using data available through January 10, 2024.

The data used was for the following periods: January–August for Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago; January–September for Panama, Guyana, and Suriname; January–October for Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Peru; January–November for Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay; and January–December for Brazil. The data for Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua include STR exports. Venezuela's exports were estimated by combining price data from the Merey-type oil price series and import data from the country's main trading partners.

The aggregate volume index for Latin America comprises ten countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Export volume indices were calculated using 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 (Central Reserve Bank), and Uruguay (Central Bank). The series for Paraguay was calculated using data on export volumes for the country's main products as reported by the Central Bank and aggregated according to the export structure of 2015. For Mexico and El Salvador, the series of exports 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 information on Merey-type oil prices and production. The national series were aggregated based on countries' shares in total exports in 2015, valued in US dollars.

The following official data sources were used. Argentina: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses; Barbados: Central Bank of Barbados; 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 Department of Statistics; Costa Rica: Foreign Trade Promoter (PROCOMER); Dominican Republic: Customs Authority; Ecuador: Central Bank of Ecuador; El Salvador: Central Reserve Bank of El Salvador; European Union (27 countries, excl. 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; Panama: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses; Paraguay: Central Bank of Paraguay; Peru: National Customs and Tax Authority (SUNAT); Suriname: Central Bank of Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago: Central Statistical Office; United States: US Census Bureau; Uruguay: Central Bank of Uruguay; Venezuela: OPEC and IMF.

The following abbreviations are used in this publication: 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; LATLI-Latin American Trade Leading Index; LATNI-Latin American Trade Nowcasting Index; NCT – National Customs Territory; OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries; STRs – Special Trade Regimes; USITC – US International Trade Commission.