Original: Spanish

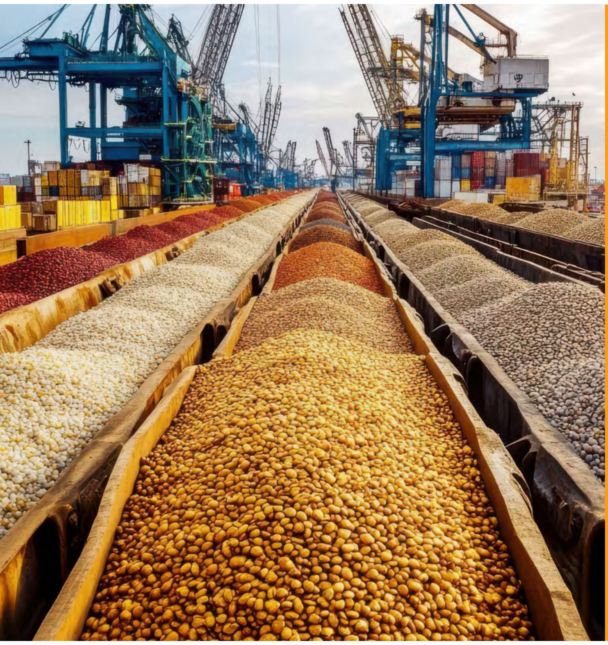
www.cepal.org/transport

number 6 / 2024 / ISSN: 1564-4243

FAL

BULLETIN 408

FACILITATION OF TRANSPORT AND TRADE IN **LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**



The role of trade and transport infrastructure in food security in Latin America and the Caribbean

Introduction

The concept of food security has been gaining prominence on the multilateral cooperation agenda since the World Food Summit held in Rome in November 1996. The Plan of Action agreed upon at that time declares the objective of achieving food security at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels; and it states that "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have

This *FAL Bulletin* analyses the role of trade and transport infrastructure in food security in Latin America and the Caribbean. It identifies the main challenges and opportunities for ensuring equitable and sustainable access to food in the region. It also includes strategic recommendations to strengthen the contribution of trade, especially intraregional trade, to regional food security.

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The authors appreciate the statistical assistance of Javier Meneses and the inputs from Mical Rodríguez. For further information, please contact miryam.saade@un.org.

This publication should be cited as: S. Herreros and M. Saade Hazin, "The role of trade and transport infrastructure in food security in Latin America and the Caribbean", *FAL Bulletin*, No. 408, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2025.

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physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). That document also noted that more than 800 million people, particularly in developing countries, did not have enough food to satisfy their basic nutritional needs. With the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the quest for food security was embodied in target 2.1: "By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round". However, the successive crises that have buffeted the world economy in recent years have caused setbacks on the path to achieving this target, both in Latin America and the Caribbean and worldwide (ECLAC, 2024b; FAO and others, 2024).

Some of the multiple dimensions of the concept of food security refer to quantitative variables (for example, the minimum daily intake of calories and other nutrients needed to lead an active and healthy life or the levels of income needed to access this), while others are eminently qualitative (for example, people's food preferences, which have a strong cultural component). Moreover, the determinants of food security —or insecurity— vary according to whether the level of analysis is individual, family, national, regional or global. At the aggregate level (countries and regions), international trade —mainly in food, but also in the inputs needed to produce it— plays a crucial role in the quest for food security. Trade can give access to foods for which local production is impossible or too costly because of climatic conditions, insufficient availability of land or technology, or other reasons. In addition, imports can supplement local production when the latter is temporarily restricted by events such as pest infestation, conflicts or extreme weather events. Moreover, the income generated by exports can be used to purchase food, whether produced locally or imported. Thus, international trade and the rules that regulate it are an integral part of what Hopkins and Puchala (1978) call "the international system of production, distribution and consumption of food".

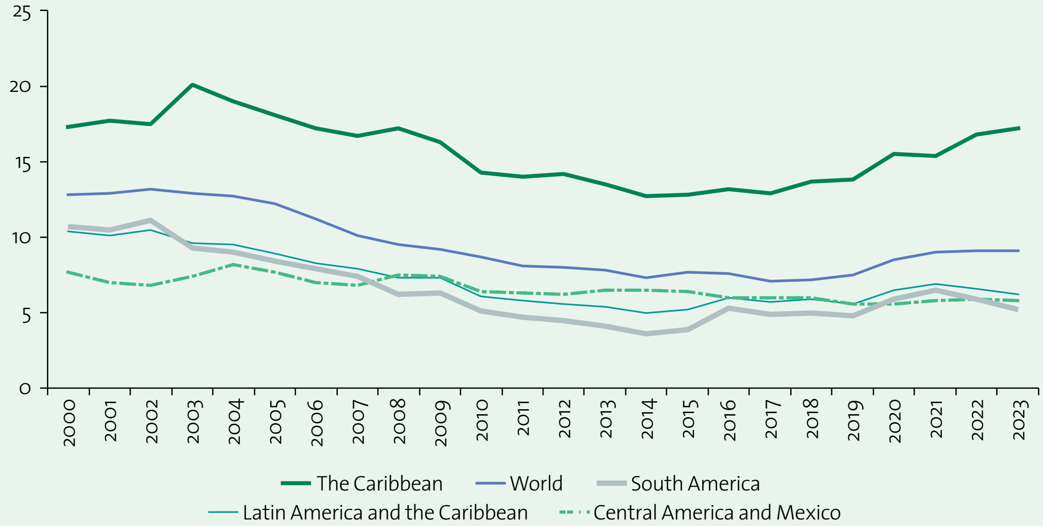
The three main participants in global food trade are nation states; international institutions, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC); and large agribusiness multinationals such as Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Bunge, Cargill, COFCO and Louis Dreyfus. Especially in the marketing of commodities, such as grains and oilseeds, these firms have significant power to decide what, how and where to produce, and which markets to supply as a priority. Other relevant corporate actors along the value chain are suppliers of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers, manufacturers of processed foods, and large supermarket and fast-food chains. Given the size and global presence that these actors tend to have, their business decisions can have a major impact on the conditions of access to food in the countries in which they operate, for example, by prioritizing export crops over others that are consumed mainly locally.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has identified food security-oriented agriculture as one of the driving sectors of regional economic growth, given the significant competitive advantages that Latin America and the Caribbean has in food production (ECLAC, 2023). In this context, this FAL Bulletin analyses the role of trade and transport infrastructure in food security in the region. The first section provides an overview of food security in Latin America and the Caribbean. The second section examines the linkages between food security and international trade, highlighting how the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers and regulatory harmonization can contribute to improving access to food and reducing its cost. The third section assesses the main challenges facing food trade in the Caribbean, a subregion noted for its limited connectivity and high tariff and non-tariff barriers. Lastly, this bulletin offers a set of strategic recommendations for strengthening the contribution of trade —especially intraregional trade— to food security in the region.

I. Overview of food security in Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2023, an estimated 9.1% of the world's population, or 733 million people, were suffering from hunger, defined as the prevalence of undernourishment (FAO and others, 2024). This figure is 3.7 percentage points lower than in 2000, but 1.6 points higher than in 2019, prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the hike in food prices caused by the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (see figure 1). The prevalence of hunger in 2023 In Latin America and the Caribbean was significantly lower than the global average, affecting 6.2% of the population. Although this is down by 4.2 percentage points since 2000, it is still slightly higher than before the pandemic, despite the decline in 2022 and 2023. In the latter year, an estimated 41 million people were hungry in the region (4.7 million more than in 2019). Of these, 22.8 million (56%) resided in South America, 10.5 million (26%) lived in Central America and Mexico, and 7.7 million (19%) were in the Caribbean. The lower prevalence of hunger in the region in the last two years reflects its reduction in South America, since it has remained stable in the subregion of Central America and Mexico and has actually increased in the Caribbean.

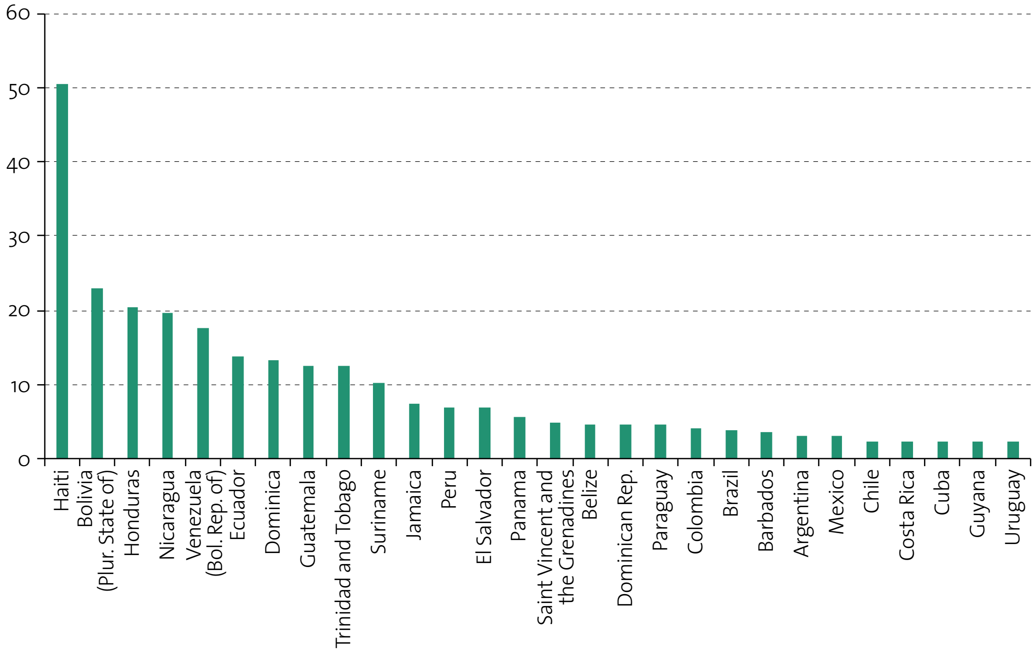
Figure 1
World, Latin America and the Caribbean and subregions: prevalence of undernourishment, 2000–2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT [online database] https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home.

Hunger is much more prevalent in the Caribbean (17.2%) than in South America (5.2%) or in Central America and Mexico (5.8%). This is mainly explained by the situation in Haiti, where it is estimated that half of the population experienced hunger in the 2021–2023 triennium. The other countries with rates above 10% in that period are the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Ecuador in South America, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala in Central America, and Dominica, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname in the Caribbean (see figure 2). At the other extreme, 14 countries had undernourishment rates below 5%.

Figure 2
Latin America and the Caribbean (28 countries): prevalence of undernourishment, average 2021–2023
(Percentages)



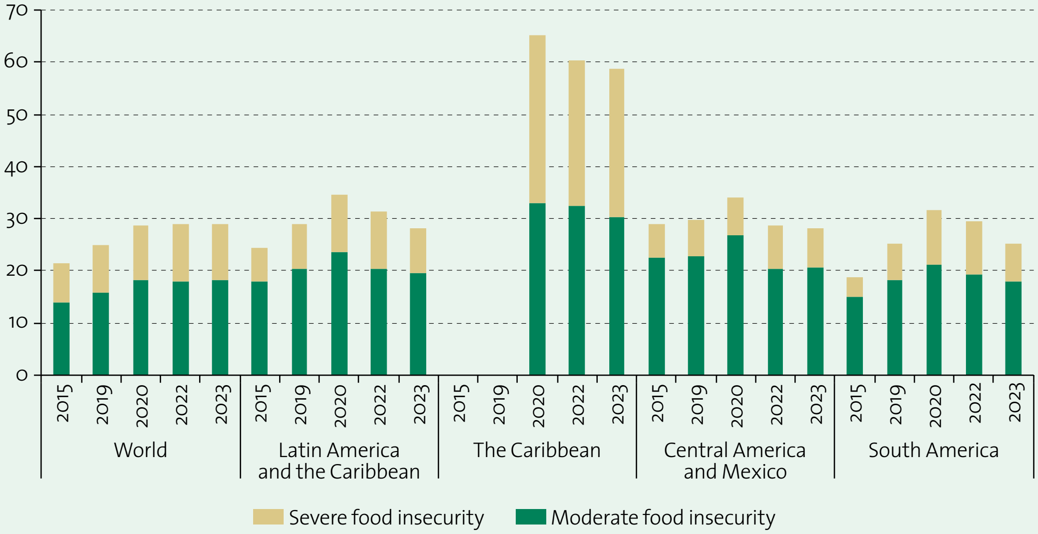
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT [online database] https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home.
Note: Undernourishment prevalence rates are estimated to be less than 2.5% in Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guyana and Uruguay.

A complementary metric to the prevalence of undernourishment is the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity. This indicator, which has been available since 2015, estimates the proportion of the population that faces difficulties in obtaining sufficient food over the course of a year. Moderate food insecurity refers to a situation in which people are uncertain of their ability to obtain food and have been forced to reduce the quality or quantity of food they consume due to lack of money or other resources. Severe food insecurity means that individuals have likely run out of food, experienced hunger and, at the most extreme, have gone for days without eating (FAO and others, 2023).

In 2023, 28.2% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean (188 million people) faced moderate or severe food insecurity —representing a sharp reduction from the peak of 34.6% attained in 2020 during the pandemic (see figure 3). For the first time since this indicator has been recorded, in 2023 the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity was slightly lower in the region than globally (28.9%). In the same year, the indicator in South America was below the regional average (25.1%), while in Central America and Mexico

it was equal to that average, and in the Caribbean it was much higher at 58.8%. In 2021–2023, moderate or severe food insecurity affected more than 20% of the population in 22 of the 28 countries for which information is available. The exceptions are (in ascending order): Uruguay, Costa Rica, Bahamas, Chile, Brazil and Grenada.

Figure 3
World, Latin America and the Caribbean and subregions: prevalence of moderate and severe food insecurity, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023
(Percentages)



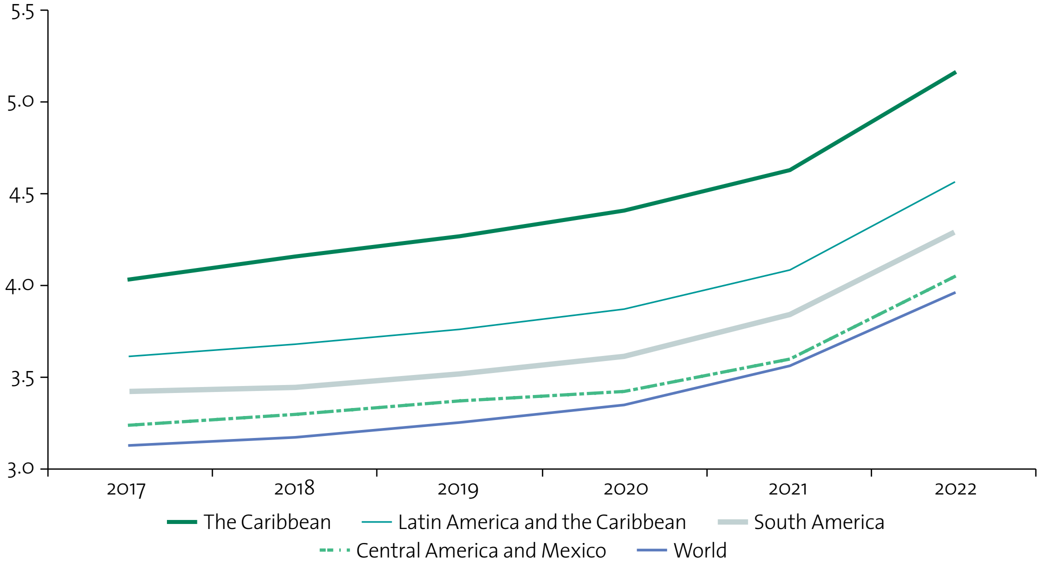
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT [online database] https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home.
Note: No pre-2020 data are available for the Caribbean.

The cost of accessing a healthy diet increased by around 26% worldwide and in the region between 2017 (when this indicator was first calculated) and 2022,[1] as a result of the various shocks (pandemic, war in Ukraine) that have forced up the prices of food and its inputs.

[1] This is defined as the cost in each country of acquiring the cheapest possible healthy diet, defined as a diet consisting of a variety of locally available foods that meet energy and nutritional needs (FAO and others, 2024). The composition of a healthy diet therefore varies between countries and regions.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the region in which accessing a healthy diet is most costly: US$ 4.56 per person per day in purchasing power parity (PPP). This is 15% above the world average of US$ 3.96 PPP per person per day (see figure 4). The cost of accessing a healthy diet is especially high in the Caribbean, where it amounts to US$ 5.16 PPP per person per day (30% above the world average). As a result, in 2022, half of the Caribbean population would have been unable to access a healthy diet, compared to 26% in South America and Central America and Mexico.

Figure 4
World, Latin America and the Caribbean and subregions: cost of accessing a healthy diet, 2017–2022
(Dollars per day per person, in purchasing power parity)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), FAOSTAT [online database] https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home.

The cost of making up the shortfall in income needed to access a healthy diet was estimated as equivalent to 0.52% of the region's GDP in 2021, which, when disaggregated by subregion, amounts to 0.51% of GDP in South America, 0.73% of GDP in Central America and Mexico, and 4.45% of GDP in the Caribbean (FAO and others, 2024). By country, the cost varies from just over 31% of GDP in Haiti (which significantly influences the high cost reported for the Caribbean subregion) and 5.3% of GDP in Honduras, to less than 0.1% of GDP in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay. It should be noted that not addressing hunger and malnutrition costs much more, amounting, on average, to 13.3% of GDP for the Caribbean countries, 6.9% of GDP in Central America and Mexico, and 8.8% of GDP in South America (FAO and others, 2024). By helping to balance food supply and demand between surplus and deficit areas, international trade can play a crucial role in reducing the cost of the food basket in the region, as will be detailed in the next section.

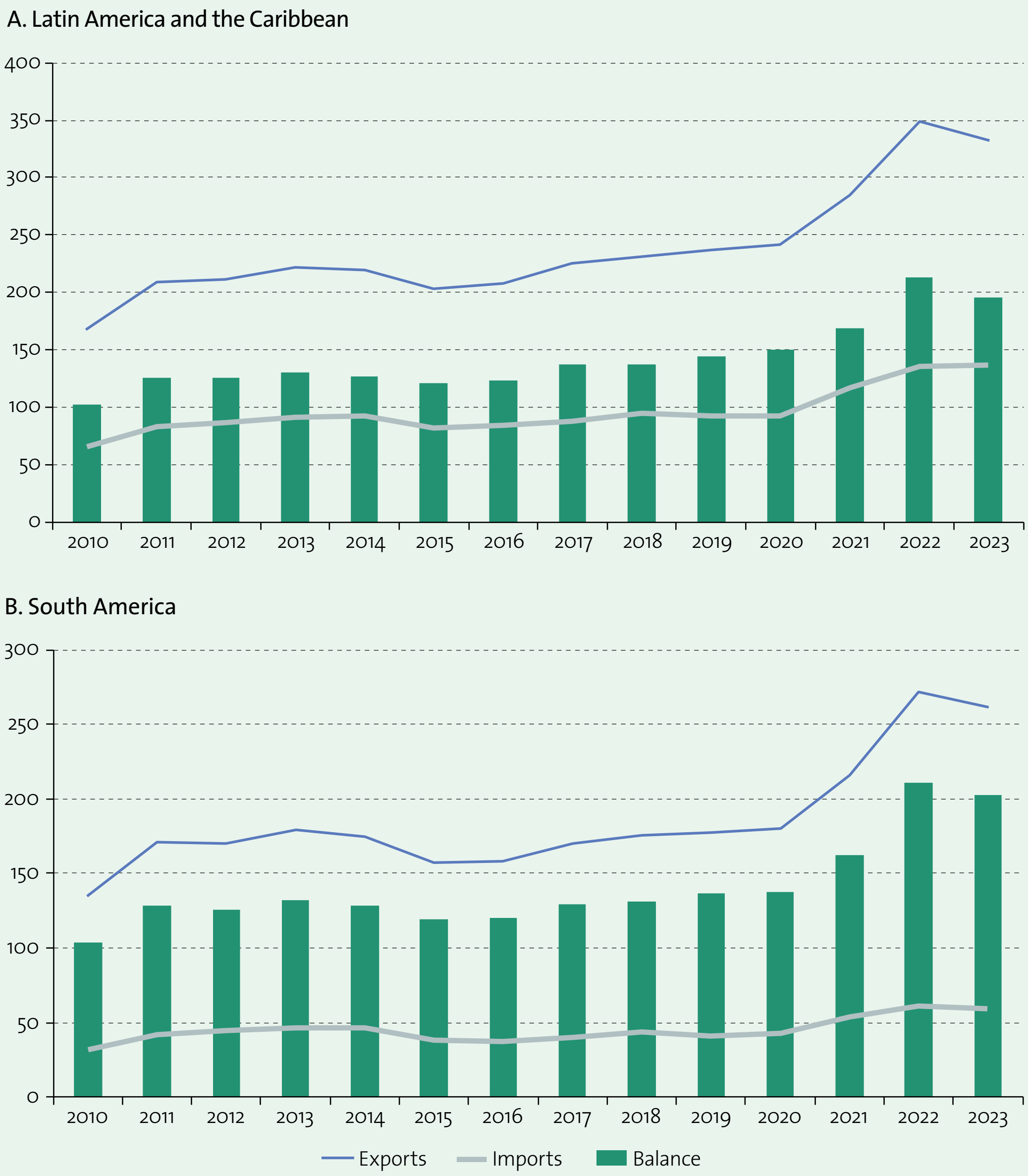
II. Linkages between food security and international trade in the region

Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole is the world's leading net food-exporting region (OECD/FAO, 2024). Measured in current dollars, its food exports expanded at an average annual rate of 6.3% between 2010 and 2022, totalling US$ 349 billion in the latter year (see figure 5). Regional food imports grew at the same rate in that period, amounting to US$ 136 billion in 2022. Both flows outpaced the growth of total exports and imports of goods in the same period (3.9% and 4.6% per year, respectively). Thus, the share of food in the region's total exports of goods increased from an average of 19% in 2010–2012 to an average of 25% between 2020 and 2022, while its share in total goods imports grew from 7.5% to 9.4% between the two periods. The region accounted for an average of 15.5% of world food exports between 2020 and 2022, 10 percentage points more than its average share of world exports of all goods in the same period. Three of the region's countries were among the top 10 world food exporters in 2022: Brazil ranked third with a 7% share; Argentina was seventh, with 3%; and Mexico was in ninth place with 2%. The first position is held jointly by the 27 members of the European Union, with a 35% share, followed by the United States (9%).

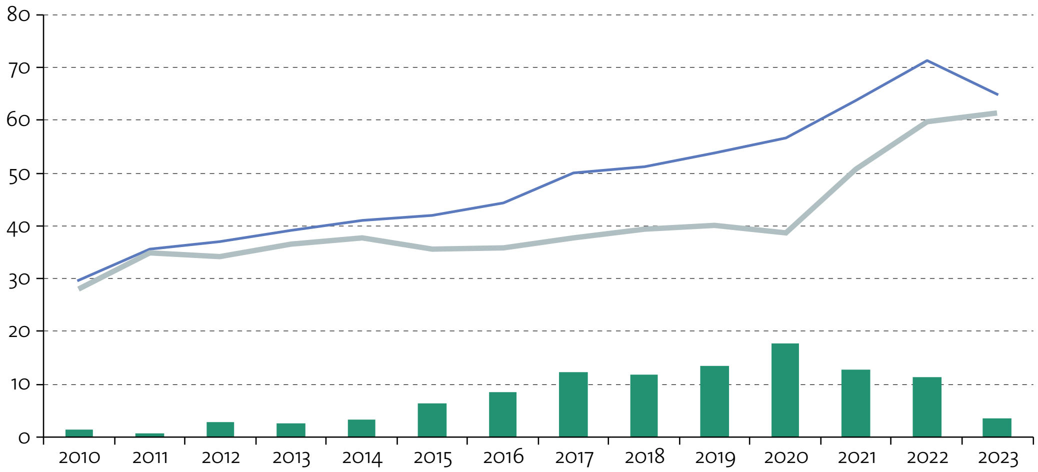
Figure 5

Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries) and subregions:
value of food trade, 2010–2023

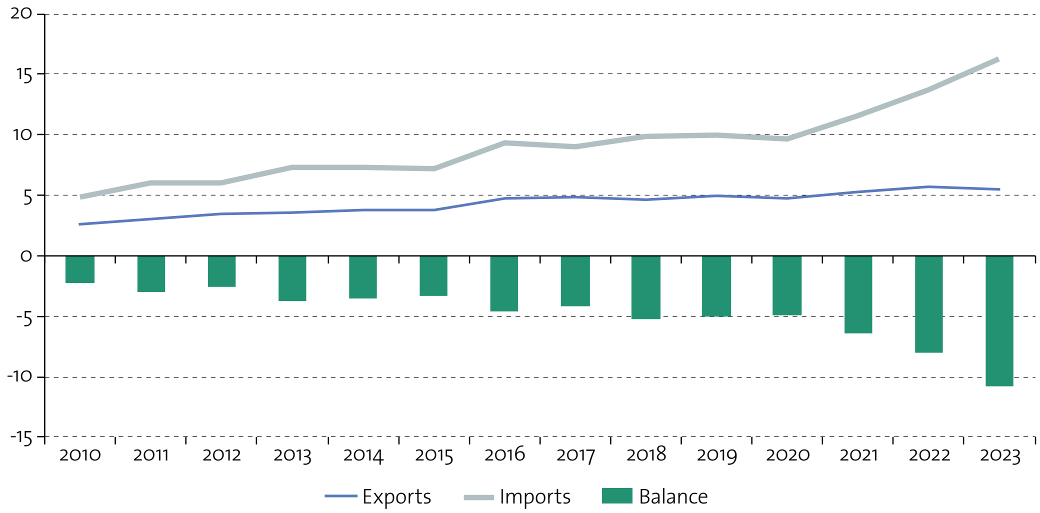
(Billions of dollars)



C. Central America and Mexico



D. The Caribbean



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, UN Comtrade Database [online] https://comtrade.un.org/.

The region's growing food export specialization is evidenced by the fact that the average value of shipments of agricultural and fishery products increased from 53% of the sector's total production in 2011–2013 to 68% in 2021–2023 (OECD/FAO, 2024). However, food trade patterns differ widely between the different subregions: while South America accounts for the bulk of the region's exports and surpluses, the subregion comprising Central America and Mexico runs a small surplus and the Caribbean displays a persistent deficit.

The main category of regional food exports, by amount exported, is meat, fish and their preparations, which, on average, accounted for 19% of the value of total shipments in the 2020–2022 triennium. In second place are oilseeds (mainly soybeans), with a 16% share, followed by fruits and vegetables (15%), in which fruits are the main component (11%). Processed foods are in fourth place, with a 12% share, of which 6% corresponds to (mainly alcoholic) beverages. Cereals (mainly maize and wheat) and products of the milling industry are the main category of regional food imports, maintaining an average share of 22% in the 2020–2022 triennium. This category is followed by processed products (19%), which include miscellaneous preparations and beverages (both with a 6% share). In third place are meat, fish and their preparations (15%), with meat accounting for 12% and fish and other fishery and aquaculture products representing 3%.

The country distribution of the region's food exports reveals a high degree of concentration. Brazil alone accounted for 37% of total exports in 2020–2022; and the five largest exporters had a joint share of 78%. The import side is less concentrated geographically: Mexico accounted for 30% of total food imports in 2020–2022, and the top five importers had a combined share of 64%. Both Central America and the Caribbean account for a larger share of imports (13% and 11%, respectively) than exports (7% and 2%).

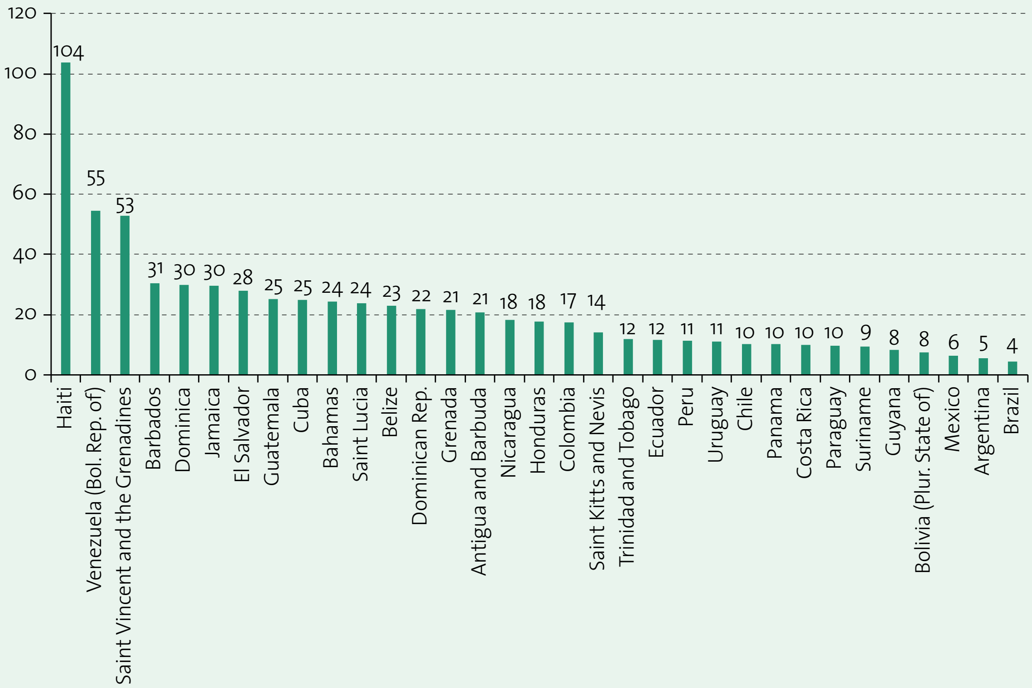
The United States is the main extraregional supplier of food, although Canada is the leading supplier of lentils, wheat and pork. Both of these North American trade partners benefit from their relative geographical proximity, especially relative to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, and preferential access for their products to several countries with which they have signed free trade agreements.

Two indicators that link international trade directly with food security are the value of food imports relative to total exports of goods and services, and the cereal import dependency ratio. While the former measures a country's capacity to finance its food imports from export earnings, the latter measures its degree of reliance on imports to supply the population's cereal consumption. Both indicators highlight the severe vulnerability of the Caribbean subregion. Apart from Belize, Guyana and Suriname, the Caribbean countries are all small island economies, in which shortage of available land and vulnerability to natural disasters pose major constraints on development of the agriculture sector. Moreover, being located at a latitude corresponding to a tropical climate, these countries have to import crops that grow in temperate climates, making them highly dependent on imports. Thus, in 2020–2022, the value of food imports accounted for more than 20% of total exports in 15 of the region's countries, of which 12 are in the Caribbean (see figure 6). At the same time, in all Caribbean countries except the Dominican Republic, between 86% and 100% of cereal consumption is imported.

Figure 6

Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): value of food imports, average for 2020–2022

(Percentages of total exports of goods and services)



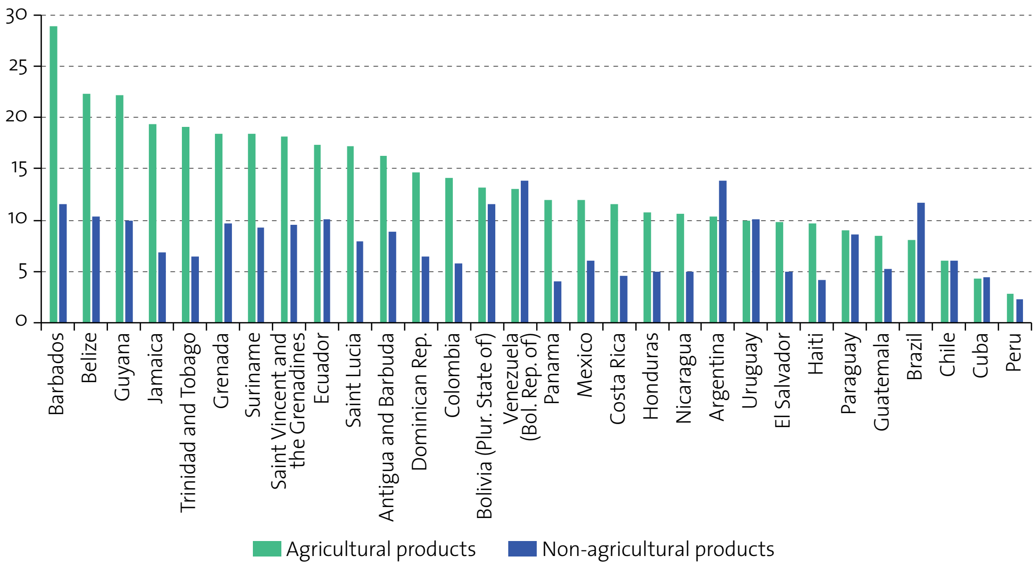
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, UN Comtrade Database [online] https://comtrade.un.org/.

III. Constraints on food trade in the region

A major barrier to global food trade is the high level of tariff protection that the products in question still face. This situation is reproduced in the region, where the simple average most-favoured-nation tariff applied to agricultural products was 13.6% in 2023, almost 6 percentage points higher than the rate applicable to non-agricultural products (7.8%). The highest tariff barriers are applied in the Caribbean countries, which are precisely those that are most dependent on food imports in the region. In the majority of these countries, average agricultural tariffs are close to 20%, and in some cases higher (see figure 7). Moreover, while there is a substantial network of preferential trade agreements linking the countries of South America, Central America and Mexico, which reduces barriers to food trade between them, this is not the case between the Caribbean countries and the rest of the region. All of these factors make access to food more expensive for the Caribbean population, which contributes to the fact that the cost of accessing a healthy diet in the subregion far exceeds both the world average and the levels prevailing in the rest of the region.

In addition to facing higher tariff barriers, on average, than other goods, food trade is often subject to higher costs arising from non-tariff measures (mainly sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements and other technical regulations). Globally, the average cost of complying with these requirements is estimated as equivalent to a tariff of 17% for agrifood products, compared to a tariff equivalent of under 4% in the case of manufactures (UNCTAD/World Bank, 2018). On average, an agrifood product is subject to seven different SPS measures (UNCTAD, 2024). Similarly, for Latin America and the Caribbean, Dolabella and Durán (2021) estimate that the agriculture, hunting and fishing and processed food sectors are subject to the highest tariff-equivalent non-tariff measures in intra-regional trade (8.4% and 5.6%, respectively).

Figure 7
Latin America and the Caribbean (30 countries): average most-favoured-nation tariff applied to agricultural and non-agricultural products, 2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of International Trade Centre/World Trade Organization/United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (ITC/WTO/UNCTAD), *World Tariff Profiles 2024*, Geneva, 2024.

Food trade is also hampered by various export restrictions (tariffs, licences and bans). These barriers tend to be raised during episodes of high prices and global supply constraints, when governments use them to prioritize consumption by the local population. For example, since the end of 2021, and especially after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, 34 countries have imposed export bans on foodstuffs that are essential for food security, such as cereals, oilseeds, oils, legumes and meats. Although these measures are relatively uncommon in the countries of the region, they have an adverse impact by pushing up food prices.

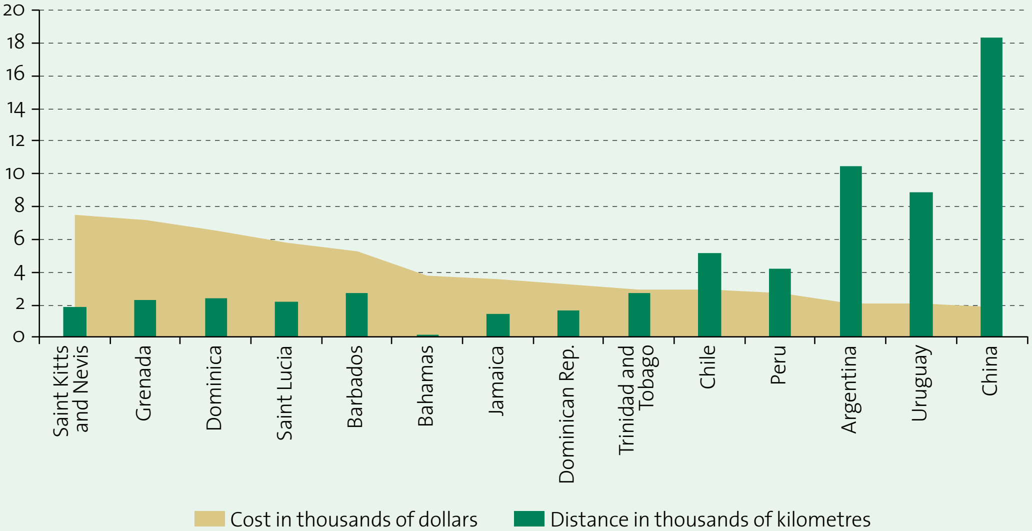
Unlike tariffs, SPS requirements and other technical regulations are applied to both imported and locally produced goods. They are also necessary to achieve important food security objectives, such as ensuring food safety, protecting the country's flora and fauna from pests and diseases, and promoting environmentally sustainable production. However, the levels of requirements for the same product vary widely from one country to another, and in some cases may be higher than necessary to achieve their objectives. This is especially the case when these standards significantly exceed those recommended by specialized international forums, such as Codex Alimentarius, the World Organization for Animal Health and the International Plant Protection Convention (UNCTAD, 2024). Accordingly, global and regional efforts should be made to apply them in a way that minimizes their negative impact on trade.

In addition to the impact of high tariff barriers, food trade in the Caribbean is hampered by the subregion's weak connectivity, deficient logistics and sparse transport infrastructure. For example, the scarcity of maritime frequencies, and difficulties in consolidating cargo and obtaining refrigerated or temperature-controlled containers, pose major challenges for transporting agricultural products between the Caribbean and Central America (FAO/IDB, 2024). Available routes and travel frequencies are limited (generally weekly), as exemplified by the routes between Puerto Limón (Costa Rica) or Puerto Cortés (Honduras) and Port Point Lisas (Trinidad and Tobago), and Puerto Barrios (Guatemala) and Kingston (Jamaica). Similarly, Guyana and Grenada are among the many Caribbean countries that do not have direct routes between them, so they must be connected through a third country (usually the United States).

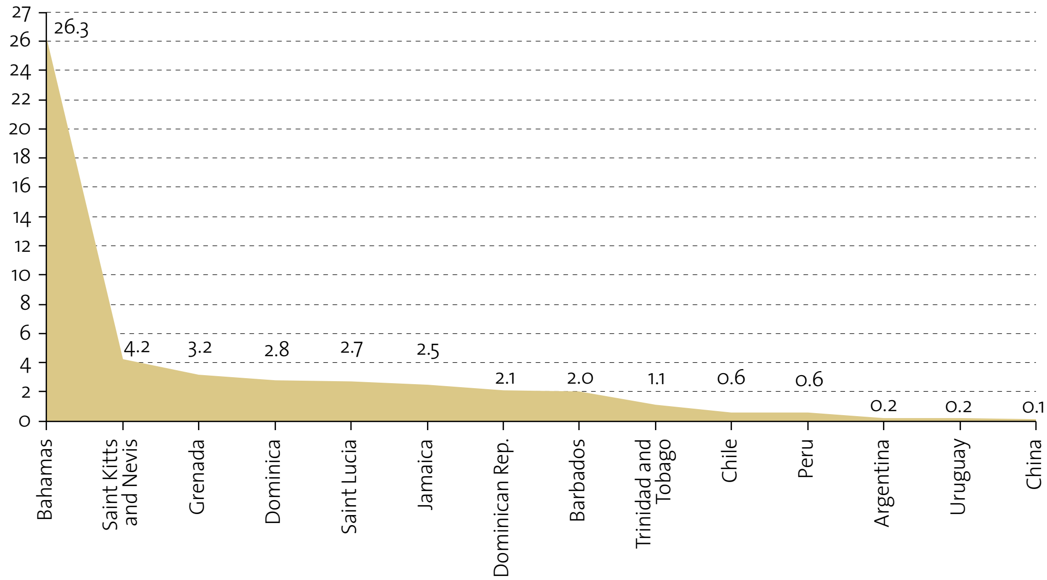
The problems of maritime cargo connectivity in the Caribbean are exposed when comparing freight rates to ship a 40-foot container from Miami (United States) to different ports in the Caribbean, South America and to the port of Shanghai (China). The freight cost to ship containers from Miami (United States) to the small island states of the Caribbean can be up to four times higher than shipping the same container to Argentina, Uruguay, or even China. For example, shipping a container from Miami (United States) to Buenos Aires costs less than shipping it to the Bahamas, which is only 144 kilometres away (see figure 8).

Figure 8
Cost of freight from the Port of Everglades in Miami, United States to selected ports in the Caribbean, South America and Shanghai, China

A. Cost and distance
(Thousands of dollars and thousands of kilometres)



B. Cost per kilometre
(Dollars)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of quotes obtained from the iContainers platform on 27 June 2024 and distances published by SEA-DISTANCE.ORG [online] https: https://sea-distances.org/.

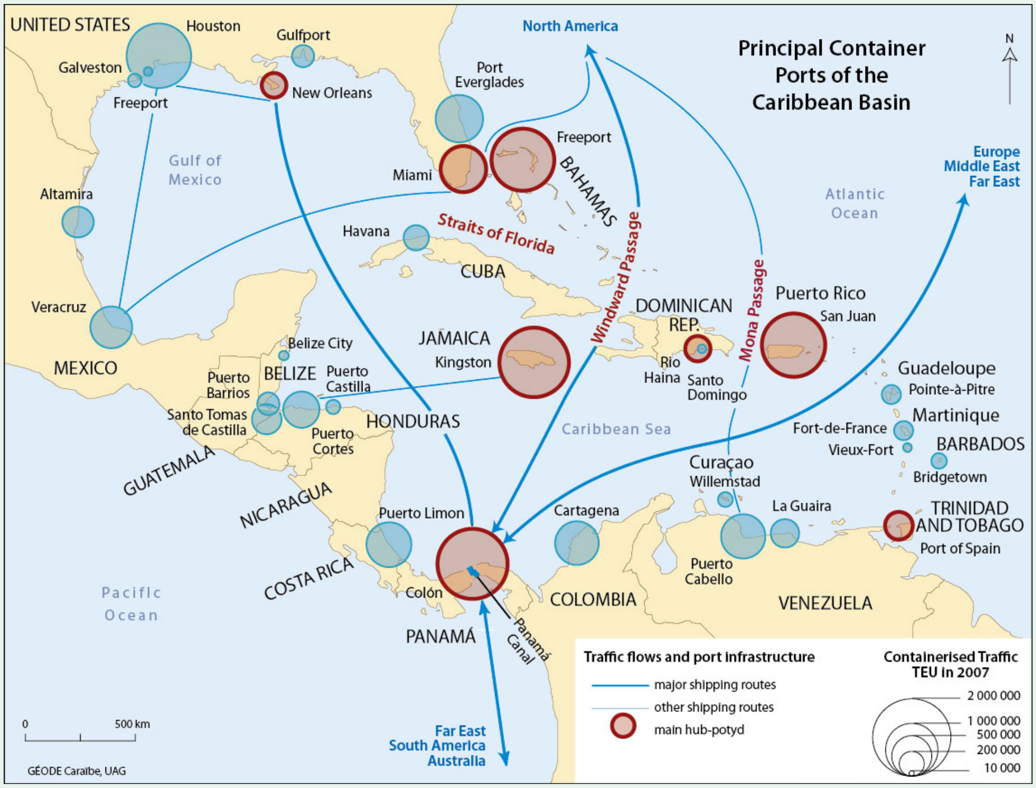
Note: The ports considered for each country are as follows: Freeport (Bahamas), Bridgetown (Barbados), Port Roseau (Dominica), Port Caucedo (Dominican Republic), Saint George (Grenada), Kingston (Jamaica), Basseterre (Saint Kitts and Nevis), Port Castries (Saint Lucia), Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Callao (Peru), Iquique (Chile), Montevideo (Uruguay) and Shanghai (China). The rates refer to the dispatch of a full 40-foot container. The costs include loading on the vessel, customs clearance and transportation. In all cases, the lowest costs were selected.

According to Briceño-Garmendia and others (2015), freight transport in the Caribbean operates through a dual hub-and-spoke system (see map 1). There is an extraregional network, centred on Miami (United States), which enables the main Caribbean centres to expand the scale of their international trade; and then there is an intraregional network, centred on Trinidad and Tobago and based on local routes, which then connect smaller regional hubs. In this second network, goods generally enter through the ports of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, from where they are distributed by smaller vessels, some of them informal, to the smaller islands (FAO/IDB, 2024).

The Liner Shipping Connectivity Index (LSCI), created by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), is an indicator used to assess the current connectivity of the Caribbean. The connectivity index shows how well countries are connected to global shipping networks, based on six components: (i) the number of scheduled calls per week; (ii) the annual carrying capacity deployed, in twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs); (iii) the number of regular shipping services to and from the country; (iv) the number of shipping companies providing services to and from the country; (v) the carrying capacity of the largest vessel deployed on services to and from the country; and (vi) the number of other countries that have direct shipping service connections to the country in question.[2] With the relative exception of Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean countries have a low level of maritime connectivity (see map 2).

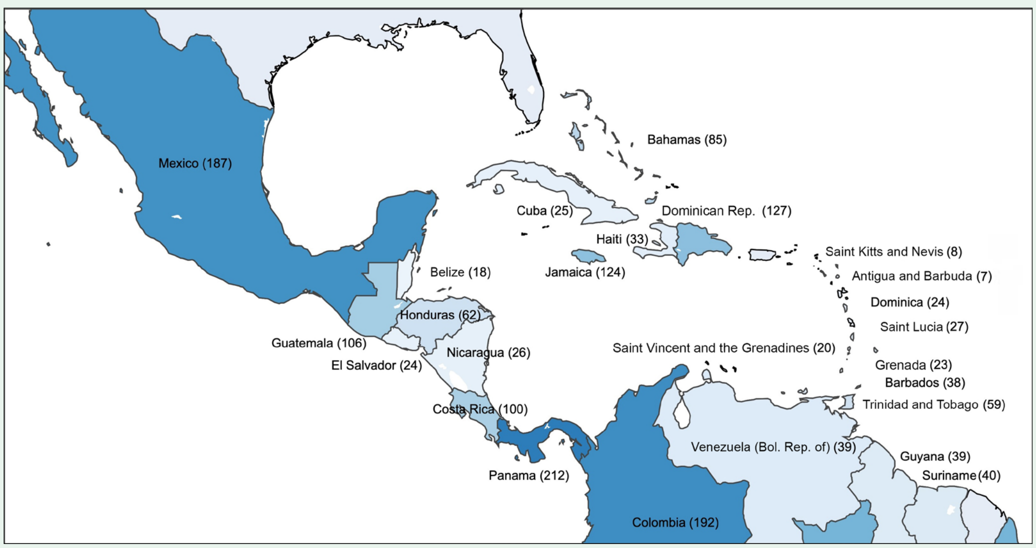
[2] A direct service is defined as a regular service between two countries; it may include other intermediate stops, provided that the transport of a container does not require transshipment.

Map 1
The Caribbean: main ports and maritime routes



Source: Atlas Caribe, "Impact of containerisation on ports" [online] https://atlas-caraibe.certic.unicaen.fr/en/page-118.html.

Map 2
Greater Caribbean (selected countries): United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Liner Shipping Connectivity Index, second quarter of 2024



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Liner Shipping Connectivity Index [online] https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.LSCI.

Note: The more intense the blue colour, the better connected the country is.

In addition to the scarcity of routes, one of the main challenges facing maritime connectivity in the Caribbean is the high freight cost. This can be explained by a combination of factors: (i) inefficient routes; (ii) high market concentration; (iii) diseconomies of scale; and

(iv) inefficient port management. Routes are inefficient because liner services often travel south fully loaded, but return northward empty (Edwards, 2024). Moreover, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (FAO/IDB, 2024), an international freight service for part loads, or a less-than-container load (LCL), is more costly and slower than a full-container load (FCL) shipment. However, the small volume of cargo handled in the Caribbean means there is not always sufficient volume for the latter. In the case of fresh foods, sanitary and safety reasons sometimes make it impossible to consolidate different types of product in the same shipment. The low degree of competition, given that the market is concentrated in a small number of shipping companies, generates dependency in terms of route decisions as well as incentives for price collusion (Briceño-Garmendia and others, 2015). In addition, the subregion is subject to diseconomies of scale because its ports are generally small and ill-equipped to accommodate modern vessels or large cargo volumes (Edwards, 2024). The scarcity of berths often leads to cruise ships being prioritized over cargo vessels. Compounding this, port handling charges in the Caribbean are two to three times higher than in similar ports elsewhere. These high costs are often related to inefficient procedures and bad port management (Telemaque, 2022).

IV. Concluding reflections and recommendations

As the world's leading net exporter of food, Latin America and the Caribbean plays a crucial role in global food security. Despite this, nearly 30% of the regional population faces moderate or severe food insecurity, and the cost of accessing a healthy diet is the highest in the world. Food insecurity in the region is not caused mainly by insufficient food availability, but by the difficulties experienced by large segments of the population in accessing an adequate diet because of low income. Multiple factors and inequalities converge at the root of this problem, which is why addressing it requires a coordinated approach that integrates the various public policies that have an impact on it. One of these is trade policy, since reducing barriers to food trade can be an effective way of making it more affordable, especially in a context of fiscal constraints that limit the possibility of implementing subsidies for food production or procurement.

The important role of trade in regional food security was highlighted by 16 Latin American countries at the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in June 2022, which called for a reform of multilateral agricultural trade rules. Furthermore, in January 2023, the 33 countries of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) updated the CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and the Eradication of Hunger, which had been adopted in 2015. The new Plan assigns a strategic role to trade, especially intraregional trade, in achieving its objectives.

Strengthening regional integration is key to ensuring a more stable and lower-cost food supply. An integrated regional market expands the supply of food and inputs from nearby sources, which reduces exposure to supply shocks, such as those generated by geopolitical conflicts and international tensions. In addition, greater regional integration encourages the creation of production chains that generate direct and indirect employment, promote economic and social development, and increase food security. In this context, the following lines of work are proposed to strengthen the contribution made by trade to food security in the region:

- **Move forward with food trade facilitation**. Simplify procedures, digitize processes and promote the interoperability of single windows for external trade, priority clearance of perishable products at border posts, and coordination between the sanitary, phytosanitary and customs authorities to expedite inspections.
- **Strengthen food trade logistics**. Improve connectivity, optimize port infrastructure and foster economies of scale to address high transport costs. This line of action is particularly important for the Caribbean countries, given the subregion's shortcomings in this area.

- **Promote regulatory harmonization**. Reduce non-tariff barriers through convergence of sanitary, phytosanitary and technical standards, facilitating the integration of small producers into value chains.
- **Expand preferential trade agreements**. Complete the network of agreements between the various subregions of Latin America and the Caribbean and explore flexible and gradual modalities of opening up in favour of smaller partners. Agreements should also be expanded to include cooperation in research, development and innovation aimed at improving agricultural productivity and expanding food supply.
- **Promote coordination in multilateral forums**. Draw attention to the region's strategic role in global food security, in order to attract funding and investment to accelerate the transition to more sustainable agrifood production.

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VI. Publications of interest

FAL Bulletin No. 394

Proposal for the implementation of a ferry service through Public Private Partnerships (PPP’s) in the Eastern Caribbean Region

Diogo Aita

This *FAL Bulletin* is part of the reflections on infrastructure and connectivity that have been frequently addressed in documents of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). It contributes to the reflections under the project “Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics: Contactless, Seamless and Collaborative UN Solutions”. This edition analyzes the possibility of implementing a ferry network in the Eastern Caribbean region through Public Private Partnerships (PPP’s) to promote better and more fluid connectivity.

Available in: English Spanish

FAL Bulletin No. 401

Port Report 2022–first quarter of 2023 The calm after the storm?

Miryam Saade Hazin
Eliana P. Barleta

Maritime transport has clearly played a major role in international trade in recent decades, particularly since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The Infrastructure Services Unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) began publishing the Port Report at the start of the new millennium. On this occasion, the Report comes in the aftermath of the impact of an unprecedented health crisis and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, which exposed the fragility of shipping and supply chains worldwide. The situation at present is beset with new challenges, such as the drought affecting the Panama Canal drought, among others, which are once again threatening to impair global supply chains.

Available in: English Spanish