

# Regional International Trade: a Documentary Study in the Honduran Context

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## Comercio Internacional Regional: un Estudio Documental en el Contexto Hondureño

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** in Honduras, regional international trade has become important to achieve an effective integration of import and export operations that allows it to achieve a sustainable development that benefits the supply chain of both companies and countries that make up its main trading partners.

**Objective:** to determine the importance of regional international trade for Honduras.

**Method:** online documentary, through secondary data through quantitative analysis with data through descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis of the literature through review based on evidence.

**Results:** it was evidenced that Honduras is an important contributor to the trade of the Central American region since in the intraregional and extraregional exports it has a 10,7 % participation, in contrast in the imports 14,6 %.

**Conclusion:** international trade in all areas has become an effective tool to achieve exchanges between different nations, however, at the regional level generates a positive impact between the countries that make up it, since its economy is dynamized thanks to the various partners that make up it, which allows to take advantage of each of its competitive advantages such as the case of Honduras with the Central American region.

**Keywords:** International Trade; Customs Union; Tariff; Trade Policy; Foreign Trade.

### RESUMEN

**Introducción:** en Honduras el comercio internacional regional se ha vuelto importante para lograr una eficaz integración de las operaciones de importación y exportación que le permita alcanzar un desarrollo sostenible que beneficie la cadena de suministro tanto de las empresas como países que conforman sus principales socios comerciales.

**Objetivo:** determinar la importancia del comercio internacional regional para Honduras.

**Método:** documental en línea, a través de datos secundarios mediante el análisis cuantitativo con datos a través de la estadística descriptiva y análisis de contenido cualitativo de la literatura mediante la revisión basadas en evidencias.

**Resultados:** se evidenció que Honduras es un contribuyente importante al comercio de la región centroamericana ya que, en las exportaciones intrarregionales y extrarregionales tiene un 10,7 % de participación, en cambio en las importaciones 14,6 %.

**Conclusión:** el comercio internacional en todos los ámbitos se ha vuelto una herramienta eficaz para lograr intercambios entre diferentes naciones, no obstante, a nivel regional genera un impacto positivo entre los países que lo conforman, ya que, su economía se ve dinamizada gracias a los diversos socios que lo integran, lo que permite aprovechar cada una de sus ventajas competitivas tal es el caso de Honduras con la región de Centroamérica.

**Palabras clave:** Comercio Internacional; Unión Aduanera; Arancel; Política Comercial; Comercio Exterior.

## INTRODUCTION

International trade has become essential for every country, as it allows them to maintain commercial relations with different trade blocs and regions and, above all, to make themselves known abroad. That is why countries are constantly innovating to diversify their markets by expanding into various business sectors that boost the economy, giving rise to the need to analyze how regional international trade is developing in the Honduran context.

Based on this, countries create opportunities to control processes related to the internationalization of products to regulate the entry and exit of goods to and from abroad. These mechanisms enable effective cross-border controls and support regional integration to maintain sustainable development and growth, as well as to improve the efficiency of supply chains among participating countries. Sidorova & Sidorov<sup>(1)</sup> It is therefore necessary to determine the importance of regional international trade for Honduras.

In this sense, foreign trade operations linked to imports (purchases) and exports (sales) are favored by regional international trade, even promoting an approach increasingly associated with sustainability, which creates greater awareness of more environmentally resilient consumption and drives changes in the forms of commercial interaction.<sup>(2)</sup>

When international trade is mentioned, it generally refers to importing —bringing foreign goods into a country—and exporting —sending domestic goods to another country. Both must go through a process of compliance with customs regulations, payment or exemption from taxes, and compliance with the rules of the countries of origin and destination for such commercial activities. Therefore, it is clear that a series of processes and requirements condition international negotiations, and it is necessary to identify how regional international trade relates to foreign trade operations.

In consideration of these processes, countries create conditions that improve trade opportunities between regions. Among these are Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs), which use tariff and legal mechanisms to support the economic growth of these nations through entry into new markets, thereby expanding their participation and generating greater competitiveness and benefits for stakeholders such as consumers, workers, and companies, allowing them to maintain equitable practices in fair trade, intellectual property, investments, and simplification of customs and administrative procedures that improve their logistics and supply chain.<sup>(3)</sup>

Honduras has several trade agreements that help it manage its international trade between signatory regions or countries, allowing it to maintain trade relations that are extremely important for its domestic production and exports. The most important of these is the Central American Integration System (SICA). According to the Honduran Customs Administration (ADUANAS), the entity is responsible for inspecting and controlling imported and exported goods under the various customs regimes. On its website, it has defined the following ACRs that the country has:

The articulation of trade alliances between nations facilitates international trade by leveraging multilateral trade rules and agreements established by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Therefore, countries must be aware of the different legal bases that apply to international negotiations, enabling them to comply with their contractual obligations and avoid conflicts or disputes

to maintain diplomatic relations. At the same time, through this process, the main terms of the contract between the parties can be defined, including Incoterms, prices, and other key terms, to ensure that procedures related to subjects of international law are governed by the rules contained in treaties and other sources of international law. Castillo Argañarás<sup>(5)</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to analyze how regional international trade relates to trade agreements.

**Table 1.** Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) signed by Honduras

| Name of the Treaty  | Decree          | Validity          |
|---|-----------------|-------------------|
| Free Trade Agreement between Central America and Panama   |                 |                   |
| General Treaty on Economic Integration CA   |                 |                   |
| El Salvador and Honduras with the Republic of China (Taiwan)                                      | Decree 006-2008 | July 15, 2008     |
| Partnership between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Central America. | Decree 150-2019 | 1/1/2021          |
| Central America and South Korea   | Decree 197-2018 | January 24, 2019  |
| Honduras – Peru   | Decree 127-2016 | 1/1/2017          |
| Canada – Honduras   | Decree 251-2013 | 10/1/2014         |
| Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America                              | Decree 210-2013 | 8/1/2013          |
| Mexico and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua                            | Decree 65-2012  | 1/1/2013          |
| Colombia – El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras   | Decree 188-2007 | March 27, 2010    |
| Central America and Chile   | Decree 189-2007 | July 18, 2008     |
| Central America – United States – Dominican Republic  | Decree 10-2005  | April 1, 2006     |
| Central America and the Dominican Republic  | Decree 153-2001 | December 19, 2001 |

**Note:** These trade agreements are particularly relevant for Honduras, as they allow the country to access new markets, attract foreign investment, and promote economic growth in the business environment. Information taken from (Honduran Customs Administration [ADUANAS]<sup>(4)</sup>

This makes it necessary for buyers and sellers to be familiar with international trade regulations on tariffs so that they can identify the barriers they will face in the countries where they want to conduct their commercial operations. Tariff increases or decreases can have different impacts in each country, affecting or benefiting their leading actors. That is why it is hoped that they will generate favorable trade policies that offer more favorable tariffs and facilitate international trade and customs management.<sup>(6)</sup>

In the case of Honduras, different types of tariffs have been identified in the Import Tax, prepared by the Ministry of Finance [SEFIN]<sup>(7)</sup>, which establishes the following:

1. Import Tariff Duties (DAI): These are levied on the importation of goods into the territory and depend on the type of product.
2. Selective Consumption Tax: This tax is levied on the importation of new or used vehicles.
3. ECOTAX: This is mainly associated with the importation of used vehicles and the tourism sector.
4. Production and Consumption Tax: This applies

specifically to cigarettes, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, other fermented beverages, ethyl alcohol, and denatured alcohol.

5. Sales Tax (ISV): Applies mainly to the sale of goods and services.

6. Contribution for Social Programs and Road Heritage Conservation (ACPV): Applies to fuels (gasoline, bunker fuel, diesel, LPG, kerosene, jet fuel).

The different types of tariffs, and in particular this document, provide information on the tax charges that may be applied to the importation of goods from abroad, helping importers facilitate compliance with their tax obligations based on the type of product and its tariff classification. This assists customs officials in processing the paperwork of individuals and legal entities in accordance with current tax and customs regulations.<sup>(7)</sup>

Regional international trade can help reduce trade barriers that prevent the free flow of goods. That is why multilateral negotiations permitted the imposition of tariffs to support the regulation of the entry and exit of goods across countries, with a view to protecting specific productive sectors, thereby creating an efficient mechanism for collection. Padín<sup>(8)</sup> It is therefore clear how international trade regulations on tariffs benefit regional international trade.

With this in mind, countries are increasingly concerned with ensuring more robust international logistics that control the performance of ports and airports, enabling them to facilitate the logistics services of companies that conduct import and export operations at these terminals, thus ensuring adequate supply chain processes. This improves the country's and its companies' competitiveness, suggesting that employees who provide these services should maintain a professional profile and skills that ensure optimal job performance, helping reduce operating and shipping times for goods and improve the quality of logistics services.<sup>(9)</sup>

From this point of view, countries focus on developing infrastructure that supports international operations to maintain competitive capacity for developing regional trade relations, since ports, airports, roads, and border points are necessary to ensure that trade flows are carried out efficiently. This will allow for the movement of goods in various modes—maritime, land, and air—through different means that meet the needs of each country in the region and, above all, the mobilization provided for in the negotiations carried out within the framework of international purchase and sale. Infrastructure is therefore understood to be the set of structures, engineering works, and physical facilities that support maritime, land, rail, and air services.<sup>(10)</sup>

Achieving transport infrastructure efficiency facilitates exports and imports at each border, marking an exit and entry point focused on ensuring that congestion is avoided, improving access to ports and airports with more adequate and safer roads. In addition, improvements are made through financing so that customs can facilitate cargo verification through clearer, more accurate, and more concise processes, with technology and applications that favor the facilitation of international trade between regions with more efficient and environmentally resilient operations.<sup>(11)</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that regional international trade is increasingly linked to a more resilient approach to environmental protection, generating means of transport and operations that are more aware of the damage they cause, mainly since resilience

strategies are based on strengthening value chains within the framework of a trade and industrial policy that looks after the interests of companies and the country García-Durán Huet & Ibáñez Díaz<sup>(12)</sup>, it is imperative to consider that globalization has generated various changes in global supply chains because it represents the interconnection of markets, which allows countries to transcend borders and fosters broad collaboration between nations.<sup>(13)</sup> In this context, transport is defined as the movement of goods from a place of origin to a destination while maintaining quality, flexibility, and competitive prices in international markets. Cabrera Cánovas<sup>(14)</sup> it is therefore necessary to understand that infrastructure benefits international logistics.

The interconnection of markets across countries enables economies to advance, improve, and adapt. In this sense, currently, with Industry 4.0 and innovations, the various sectors, including ports, air, and land, have tried to maintain a process of digital transformation towards the concept of automation 4.0 through new regulatory and connectivity requirements, making use of emerging, new, and disruptive technologies that the market has made available to lead them towards digitization.<sup>(15)</sup> Based on the above, international logistics becomes relevant as it enables the efficient management of the flow of goods between countries, leveraging different modes and means of transport, as well as logistics, port, and customs agents to coordinate customs clearance and distribution.<sup>(9)</sup>

In this regard, countries will face different challenges in improving processes, procedures, and logistics standardization to develop international trade operations in their regions, thereby enhancing logistics chain management mechanisms at airports and land levels. These challenges will help them strengthen the coordination and communication that the various actors in the logistics-port sector must maintain to ensure the efficient operation of their shipments, thereby enabling them to lead the way in automation for competitive global trade.

## METHOD

The study was conducted using online documentary research, using secondary data to analyze the broad development of regional international trade in the Honduran context. This methodology was used because it allows the facts to be presented in an orderly, schematic manner, which facilitates the relationship between the main elements that comprise it, and provides comparative statistical data across different periods in which commercial operations between countries have occurred.

Likewise, different types of analysis can be carried out using all the collected information, primarily quantitative analysis, to make comparisons using descriptive statistics. On the other hand, qualitative content analysis will be used to intervene through the researcher's interpretation and fieldwork experience in international trade and logistics. The literature review was also conducted using an evidence-based approach, which enabled us to use secondary data (documents from other authors) through the studies cited.<sup>(16)</sup>

The secondary sources mainly used include institutional websites duly accredited by the Government of Honduras, publications by the Central American Integration System, and the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration, which will provide the primary statistical data on Honduras and the region, together with scientific studies that will enable an understanding of the subject matter in the Honduran and Central

American context.

**Table 2.** Search criteria used

| Description      | Details  |
|------------------|--|
| Databases        | Indexed scientific journals, institutional publications.   |
| Type of document | Scientific articles, books, book chapters, institutional reports.  |
| Search field     | Title, abstract, and keywords.   |
| Search terms     | Regional international trade, foreign trade operations, negotiation, infrastructure, transportation, trade agreements, trade regulations, international logistics. |

## RESULTS

To develop this section, it was necessary to gather information published in various reports by national and international government entities that manage and administer data on each of the processes related to international trade in Honduras and the region. To begin this process, we took into account the foreign trade report on goods published in March 2025 by the Central Bank of Honduras [BCH],<sup>(17)</sup>, which is the regulatory body that provides these statistics based on all operations carried out in the context of the import and export of goods.

**Table 3.** Imports and exports in Honduras as of March 2025, in millions of USD

| Description   | 2023        | 2024        | 2025 <sup>p</sup> |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| FOB exports   | \$ 2 889,9  | \$ 2 748,6  | \$ 3 239,9        |
| CIF imports   | \$ 4 649,9  | \$ 4 562,6  | \$ 4 700,1        |
| Trade balance | -\$ 1 759,9 | -\$ 1 814,0 | -\$ 1 460,2       |

In terms of foreign trade operations, exports show a decrease of \$141,4 million between 2024 and 2023, compared to an increase of \$491,3 million between 2025 and 2024, which has been benefited by several factors, as the manufacturing industry is one of the most representative, followed by agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing. However, agriculture has faced difficulties due to the adverse effects of Tropical Storm Sara in 2024, which persisted into the first quarter of 2025. It is worth noting that coffee was one of the most favorable products, and the shrimp industry was also favorable.

In contrast, imports decreased by \$87,3 million USD in 2024 compared to 2023. Furthermore, between 2025 and 2024, there was an increase of \$137,5 million USD, which was mainly represented by the consumption of industrial supplies, consumer goods, capital goods, and food and beverages, which maintains domestic production and consumption, as well as those products that are mainly manufactured for export to the different destinations with which the country has trade relations.

These data are representative because they show a negative trade balance, which directly affects the economic conditions of the country's inhabitants. This indicator alone does not reflect all the negative challenges the nation may face. However, maintaining a prolonged deficit prolongs the need to compensate for it through financing from the country's public or private debt to continue purchasing goods or services. As a result, levels of indebtedness and poverty, among other indicators, continue to rise steadily. It is recommended that exports be increased and, at most, a balance or surplus be created to immediately improve income conditions, based on the economic resources available to achieve this.

On the other hand, the Honduran Customs Administration<sup>(18)</sup>, through the National Intelligence Management in its revenue collection report, customs statistics as of March 2025, has demonstrated the tax collection process through the different processes that are managed in ports, airports, land border points, and customs offices that are distributed throughout the national territory, which shows the following:

Based on this data, it can be seen that Honduras has high growth in its customs operations across its various customs offices, with maritime operations being the most representative at 39,0 %. In other words, ports play a fundamental role in the import and export of goods, with Puerto Cortés being one of the most representative in terms of participation, with a cumulative collection of L 6 568,5 million, representing 45,2 %. In second place, the Port of Henecán reported revenue of L 1 597,4 million, representing 11,0 % of the total revenue. Therefore, the automation and investments made in these operational centers are necessary and generate benefits for the port logistics offered to its main customers.

Land operations are equally fundamental, as they generate 60,6 % of revenue operations. Therefore, investment in road infrastructure and connections between the main communication routes is vital, as they enable the movement of a high volume of goods from different sectors and trade between countries, especially in Central America. On a smaller scale, air operations account for 0,4 % compared to the others. This shows that it is increasingly necessary to diversify modes and means of transport, as exporters and importers will bring in or send out their goods to their main trading partners as needed.

These data help us consider that means of transport play a fundamental role in this process, and that investing in different routes and forms of communication is essential for a country. Being able to offer its entrepreneurs the opportunity to move their cargo through diversified logistics management makes their supply chain more efficient, allowing them to meet their contractual obligations to their main customers abroad and domestically, which makes it more attractive to foreign investors.

In addition, it is necessary to recognize that diversifying the modes of transport and the entry or exit of goods from a country will allow it to offer various ways to negotiate freight rates for the transport of goods. This suggests that the multiple actors in the supply chain, such as entrepreneurs, customers, and suppliers, among others, can choose the best means of transport to move their cargo, ensuring that their logistics costs are not a problem, and maintain their level of competitiveness in the market by relying on timely port, shipping, and customs service providers.

Likewise, countries have various ways of maintaining and managing their commercial operations. To this end, they suggest imposing ad valorem tariffs, which are taxes applied to imported goods. This also protects the country's domestic industry, which, in turn, will generate revenue for the government and, above all, regulate international trade.

About international trade regulations on tariffs in Honduras, the central taxes on customs operations are, first, the Sales Tax (ISV), which is the most representative and has a general rate of 15 % and 18 % for alcoholic beverages, beer, and cigarettes; second, the Contribution for Social Programs and Road Heritage Conservation (ACPV), which applies to fuels (gasoline, bunker fuel, diesel, LPG, kerosene, jet fuel) according to the legal regulations contained in Decree No. 41-2001. Thirdly, there are

**Table 4.** Revenue by type of customs office in millions of lempiras (L) as of March 2025

| Type of collection       | March 2025/p | March 2024 | Increase       |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------|----------------|
| Land customs revenue     | L 5 661,5    | L 5 160,8  | L 500,7 9,7 %  |
| Maritime customs revenue | L 8 811,8    | L 8 504,6  | L 307,2 3,6 %  |
| Air customs revenue      | L 59,2       | L 10,2     | L 49,0 480,4 % |

**Note:** Information adapted from the customs collection report, customs statistics from ADUANAS. The currency indicated in the original document was used, clarifying that the official currency of Honduras is the Lempira or L, which is reflected in the table.

**Table 5.** Revenue by type of tax in millions of lempiras (L) as of March 2025

| Description | March 2024 | March 2025/p | Absolute valuation | Relative assessment |
|-------------|------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|             |            |              | 2025 / 2024        |                     |
| ISV         | L 8 096,4  | L 8 514,3    | L 417,9            | 5,2 %               |
| ACPV        | L 2 929,9  | L 3 067,5    | L 137,6            | 4,7 %               |
| DAI         | L 1 821,7  | L 1 888,4    | L 66,7             | 3,7 %               |

**Note:** Information adapted from the collection report, customs statistics from ADUANAS, using the currency indicated in the original document.

Import Tariff Duties (DAI), which are represented according to the percentage established in the Agreement on the Central American Tariff and Customs Regime and its Protocols.

is different and will apply according to the type of merchandise and how tariff preferences are assessed according to the import tax, that is, the document that allows for the declaration and identification of imported goods will be taxed under a tax rate according to the tariff position that has been established based on the Central American Tariff System (SAC), which consists of a ten-digit numerical code that identifies: The first two digits to the chapter; the next two to the heading; the third pair to the subheading; and the last four to the tariff subheadings. Based on this classification, the tax rate to be paid is verified, which facilitates international trade and customs management between countries in the region and the declaration of goods under import or export.

In relation to regional international trade, the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration [SIECA]<sup>(19)</sup> in its report entitled: Current Status of Central American Economic Integration, showed that Honduras stands out within the regional

framework as the fourth country in Central America with 6,9 % and a cargo movement of 907,4 million TEU<sub>2</sub>, respectively, of the total of 13,1 million TEU for the entire Central American region, with a total of 17,236 foreign trade vessels served. Panama ranks first with 63,7 %, the country with the highest volume of goods traffic due to its high operational capacity in the canal, followed by Guatemala with 13,5 % and Costa Rica with 12,5 % in 2023.

In terms of regional foreign trade operations, Honduras accounts for 10,7 % of exports, making it the fifth-largest contributor to the region's income, with various products successfully marketed, including coffee, palm oil, shrimp, bananas, sugar, and textiles. In terms of imports, it is the third largest country with a 14,6 % share, demonstrating its high dependence on foreign goods and services related to the demand for products for domestic and export production, such as petroleum or bituminous mineral oils, automobiles, medicines, and cell phones, among others. In both cases, it is recognized at the intraregional and extraregional levels with the different countries outside its geographical area that are its main trading partners.

**Table 6.** Millions of USD and percentage share (%) in 2023

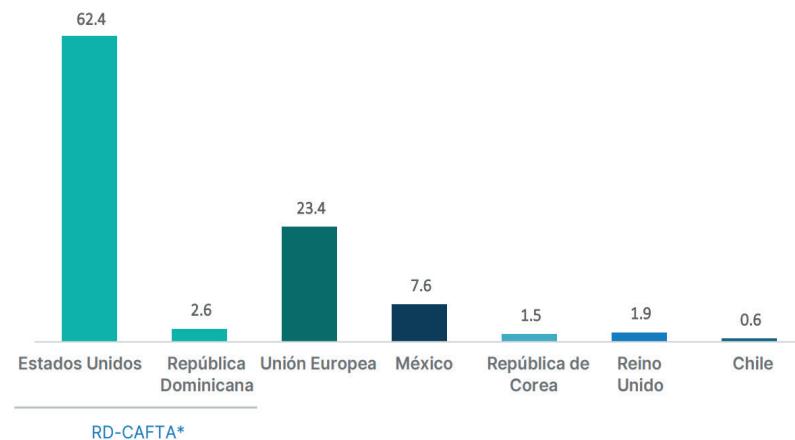
| Country         | Exports     | Country | Imports         |              |         |
|-----------------|-------------|---------|-----------------|--------------|---------|
| Costa Rica      | \$18 140,90 | 32,7 %  | Guatemala       | \$30 320,09  | 27,6 %  |
| Guatemala       | \$14 186,01 | 25,6 %  | Costa Rica      | \$22 515,90  | 20,5 %  |
| Nicaragua       | \$7 378,49  | 13,3 %  | Honduras        | \$16 040,18  | 14,6 %  |
| El Salvador     | \$6 498,11  | 11,7 %  | El Salvador     | \$15 648,33  | 14,2 %  |
| Honduras        | \$5 950,97  | 10,7 %  | Panama          | \$14 526,99  | 13,2 %  |
| Panama          | \$3 366,95  | 6,1 %   | Nicaragua       | \$10 916,35  | 9,9 %   |
| Central America | \$55 521,43 | 100,0 % | Central America | \$109 967,84 | 100,0 % |

**Note:** Information adapted from SIECA's report on the current state of Central American economic integration, using the currency indicated in the original document.

At the Central American level in 2023, the leading trading partner is the United States, followed by the European Union (EU), indicating that, together, regional trade agreements with these countries drive foreign investment. Allows for an improvement in the productive environment and promotes sustainable economic development in each of the countries that are part of this process, which together drive the regional economy.

In terms of exports, Honduras ranks fourth with an average

of 10,7 % of the market share, specifically with destination markets such as the US, 10,1 %; Central America, 10,0 %; the European Union (EU) with 16,8 %, Mexico with 10,1 %, and China, 0,7 %. This demonstrates that the Association Agreement with the EU has taken on special relevance in its trade relations, as with other nations, promoting competitiveness and suggesting the implementation of more demanding quality standards that strengthen exportable supply in line with the demands and requirements of each country.



**Figure 1.** Use of trade agreements in Central America. Percentage share (%) of total exports in 2023

Central American export trade is distributed among the US (37,4 %), Central America (26,7 %), the European Union (13,9 %), Mexico (4,5 %), and China (3,4 %). Among these, Costa Rica ranked as the largest exporter, accounting for 32,7 % of the average, and Panama was the leading exporter to China, accounting for 70,7 % of its trade, which may be favored by the channel that allows goods from this country to reach their final destinations.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that imports play an essential role in the Central American economy, as they support domestic and exportable production to meet national, intraregional, and extraregional requirements. Within this, the percentage share in 2023 has been the leading trading partner, the US, 29,8 %, followed by China with 15,3 %, Central America with 13,6 %, the European Union with 8,0 %, and Mexico with 7,8 %. These represent the main markets of origin of foreign goods entering each country's national territory in the region.

Based on this data, Guatemala, with an average of 27,6 %, was the leading importing country in the region, Costa Rica, with 20,5 %, ranked second, Honduras, with 14,6 %, third, El Salvador, with 14,2 %, fourth, Panama with 13,2 % in fifth place, and Nicaragua with 9,9 % in last place, thus demonstrating that there is a wide diversity of commercial actors, as well as low, medium, and high dependence on some of the partners with which each country operates to meet its needs. However, it is not entirely concentrated on any one specific partner. In 2023, the Free Trade Agreement between Central America, the Dominican Republic, and the United States (DR-CAFTA) was the most widely used, and the Association Agreement between Central America and the European Union (AACUE) was also among the most representative.

These results show that Central America has high growth potential, despite its imports exceeding exports, indicating a trade deficit. However, it maintains a diversified dependence. Overall, trade integration boosted regional economic dynamics with higher quality standards and global openness, as it has an infrastructure that includes 14 land routes connecting the main connections in Central America (CA1-CA14), as well as 17 intraregional border posts and 10 peripheral border posts (designated for deep integration), as well as a total of 44 port facilities (23 on the Pacific coast and 21 on the Caribbean coast). In terms of air transport, it has 21 international and 25 domestic airports, with two regional hubs located in El Salvador and Panama.

Therefore, the region's commercial landscape is dynamic,

characterized by robust infrastructure that strengthens regional and international connectivity, benefiting both import and export operations. It is also essential to understand that the diversity of partners mitigates risks and promotes trade among the nations that are parties to the agreements. The road, port, and air networks allow it to consolidate a strategic position in the region for each of its members. All of the above conditions make it a focus for attracting foreign investors and for enhancing the regional value chain through more competitive, sustainable development.

Linked to this, in the Central American region, there is a customs union between Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, which represents a trade agreement that considers the elimination of taxes, tariffs, or tariff barriers between these countries, as well as the adoption of a standard external tariff for products imported or exported to third countries or other trade blocs. (Central American Integration System [SICA],<sup>(20)</sup> All of this has been referred to as a process of Deep Integration implemented among these nations, with its legal basis in the instruments of Central American economic integration. This has enabled the creation of a single customs territory with peripheral customs offices, integrated border posts, free transit, harmonized tariffs, and sanitary requirements. Despite all these elements, it should be noted that there are exceptions to free transit, such as products that are not freely traded.

This integration covers a territorial area of 42 422 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 57,1 % of Central America's total geographical area, with total exports of goods in 2023 valued at \$26 635,1 million USD, representing 48 % of the whole region, according to SIECA.<sup>(19)</sup> The above data suggest that processes that facilitate free trade between countries facilitate the transport of freely circulating products, thereby improving nations' competitiveness. This indicates that customs controls and administrative measures should be strengthened for all products, whether freely circulating or not.

The region shows key strengths in connectivity due to its privileged location, especially in Honduras, between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as its openness to leveraging the diverse logistics infrastructure of the nations that make up Central American integration. Likewise, its geographical location makes it a relevant trade corridor for investors seeking to leverage the diversity of trading partners, enabling them to gain a broader competitive advantage and reduce external vulnerabilities.

For negotiation processes, having a variety of airports, ports, and land routes allows you to boost your efficiency in carrying out exports and imports, that is, to move your goods

promptly, which expands your opportunities to generate various negotiations to close international trade contracts, as well as to use different types of Incoterms and negotiate the best prices for transportation, goods, and raw materials.

## DISCUSSION

International trade is a necessary means of boosting Honduras's economy by leveraging its strategic location, which provides proximity to neighboring countries, reduces logistics costs, and facilitates the commercial exchange of products. Furthermore, its high share of regional imports demonstrates a commercial dependency that favors domestic production. The process of deep integration with El Salvador and Guatemala also enhances the free trade flow of certain products, thereby improving regional competitiveness. Shared infrastructure enables economies of scale and greater efficiency in customs processes.<sup>(19)</sup>

Regional international trade is related to Honduran foreign trade operations, as they are directly associated with intraregional and extraregional flows, both for exports, with a 10,7% share, and for imports, with a 14,6% share<sup>(19)</sup>, which demonstrates the need for streamlined customs processes in terms of documentation and goods clearance, as well as regulatory harmonization in terms of tariffs that benefits the flow of goods across its borders with different modes of entry or exit, whether by sea, air, or land. The participation of the region, and Honduras in particular, in a customs union allows foreign trade actors to optimize their response times and reduce operating costs.<sup>(1)</sup>

Infrastructure benefits international logistics, as it is a key factor in the development of Honduran intraregional and extraregional trade, particularly by enabling connectivity with the country's leading regional trading partners. Honduras has important ports connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as roads and airports that facilitate the movement of goods, thereby generating broad connectivity. This highlights the importance of investments to enhance connectivity and make the country more competitive as a commercial transit point. It is worth noting that this leads to a broad diversification of modes of transport.<sup>(11)</sup>

Regional international trade is positively related to the regional trade agreements that Honduras has with other nations, as these legally facilitate increased trade and thereby increase its market share. In addition, these agreements allow for the elimination of tariff barriers through rules that benefit them by progressively reducing tariffs on certain products Castillo Argañarás<sup>(5)</sup>. Some of the most representative agreements in this context were the RD-CAFTA and the AACUE, as they contribute to the standardization of technical, sanitary, and phytosanitary regulations that enhance the quality of exports. This allows for the creation of a stable and attractive business environment for foreign direct investment, reducing the bureaucracy of some customs and commercial operations through process automation.<sup>(3)</sup>

International trade regulations on tariffs benefit regional trade by providing countries such as Honduras with transparent, competitive rules for their import and export procedures. In this way, different types of ad valorem tariffs, such as ISV, DAI, and ACPV, among others, are linked to the Central American Tariff System (SAC) and the Honduran import tax (Secretariat of Finance [SEFIN]),<sup>(7)</sup>. This allows harmonizing the collection procedures that must be carried out at each customs office for the entry or exit of goods, thereby reducing regulatory conflicts

between regional partners. This standardization improves transparency for logistics actors and entrepreneurs.<sup>(8)</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown that countries participating in regional international trade benefit from having a variety of exportable goods, as this provides access to new markets. However, it should be emphasized that these opportunities suggest a greater capacity for investment in improvements that maintain adequate infrastructure and, above all, conditions for competitiveness, with optimal roads, automated ports with competent personnel, and airports that enable agile operations.

In this context, it has been proven that automating customs procedures for the release of goods speeds up logistics operations and, above all, benefits the supply chains of companies that import and export, using the means that facilitate trade relations with their main customers and suppliers. That is why countries such as Honduras invest in systems that streamline these processes and enable them to monitor statistics from each operation conducted at their maritime, land, and air customs offices.

The regional trade agreements that each country joins allow them to access new markets and purchase goods and services at preferential tariff rates, thereby promoting trade between nations. Therefore, they must strive to maintain harmonized, up-to-date processes and highly trained personnel across foreign exchange, customs, and freight transport, especially in Honduras, which has a customs union and several free trade agreements with various nations, allowing it to take advantage of the benefits they offer.

The openness of countries to both intraregional and extraregional international trade makes them more competitive, yet they often impose restrictions to protect and favor their domestic production. However, the entry of new competitors suggests that local companies should strive to produce higher-quality products at competitive prices to meet an increasingly demanding market. This process of globalization allows countries to make greater efforts to innovate and become more attractive.

This study has demonstrated that Honduras is a significant country for the Central American region and for the customs union. This process of deep integration has made foreign trade operations more dynamic. However, it shows that, just as Honduras has a high trade deficit, the region does as well. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that products with greater export potential should be reviewed, as exports in this context depend solely on exportable production in agriculture, textiles, and other sectors. Therefore, diversification is a good option that would allow the country to increase its exports or decrease its imports.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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