

ORIGINAL

Regional International Trade: A Documentary Study in the Honduran Context

Comercio Internacional Regional: Un Estudio Documental en el Contexto Hondureño

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How to Cite: Umanzor Ortega, A. F. (2025). Regional International Trade: A Documentary Study in the Honduran Context. Edu - Tech Enterprise, 3, 189. <https://doi.org/10.71459/edutech2025189>

Submitted: 10-11-2024

Revised: 20-02-2025

Accepted: 23-07-2025

Published: 24-07-2025

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%.

Conclusions: 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%.

Conclusiones: 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 in terms of the 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 generate opportunities to control the processes linked to the internationalization of products in order to regulate the entry and exit of goods to and from abroad. These mechanisms allow for adequate cross-border controls and support regional integration in order to maintain sustainable development and growth, as well as generate a more efficient supply chain among participating countries. (Sidorova & Sidorov, 2021) 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 between countries, even promoting an approach increasingly associated with sustainability, which creates greater awareness of more environmentally resilient consumption and generates changes in the forms of commercial interaction. (Aranibar-Ramos & Quispe-Ambrocio, 2023)

When we talk about international trade, we generally refer to imports, which is the entry of foreign goods into a country, and exports, which is the shipment of domestic goods to another country. Both must go through a process of compliance with customs regulations, payment or exemption of taxes, as well as complying with restrictions that the countries of origin and destination have as rules for such commercial activities. It is therefore clear that international negotiations are subject to a series of processes and requirements, and it is therefore 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. (Machado Espinosa et al., 2019)

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), which is the entity responsible for the inspection and control of imported and exported goods through the different customs regimes. On its website, it has defined the following ACRs that the country has:

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
Association between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Central America.	Decree 150-2019	1
Central America and South Korea	Decree 197-2018	24
Honduras – Peru	Decree 127-2016	1
Canada – Honduras	Decree 251-2013	1
Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America	Decree 210-2013	1/8/2013
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	3/27
Central America and Chile	Decree 189-2007	July 18, 2008
Central America – United States – Dominican Republic	Decree 10-2005	1/4/2006
Central America and Dominican Republic	Decree 153-2001	12/19/

Source: information taken from (Honduran Customs Administration [ADUANAS], 2025).

Note: these trade agreements are particularly important for Honduras, as they allow the country to access new markets, attract foreign investment, and promote economic growth in the business environment.

The establishment of trade alliances between nations facilitates international trade by making use of 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, which will enable them to comply with their contractual obligations and avoid conflicts or disputes in order to maintain diplomatic relations. At the same time, through this process, the main terms of the contract between the parties can be defined, such as Incoterms, prices, and other important processes 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, 2024) It is therefore necessary to analyze how regional international trade relates to trade agreements.

This makes it necessary for buyers and sellers to be aware of 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 main actors. That is why it is hoped that they will generate favorable trade policies that provide better tariffs and help facilitate international trade and customs management. (Zhigue Sarango & Arias Montero, 2025)

In the case of Honduras, there are different types of tariffs that have been identified in the Import Tax, prepared by the Ministry of Finance [SEFIN], (2022), which establishes the following:

1. Import Tariff Duties (DAI): these are duties 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: mainly associated with the import of used vehicles and the tourism sector.
4. Production and Consumption Tax: specifically applied to cigarettes, soft drinks, alcoholic beverages, other fermented beverages, ethyl alcohol, and denatured alcohol.
5. Sales Tax (ISV): mainly applied to sales 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, which helps importers to comply with their tax obligations regarding the type of product and its tariff classification according to its description. This also helps customs officials in processing the paperwork of individuals and legal entities under current tax and customs regulations. (Ministry of Finance [SEFIN], 2022)

Regional international trade allows for the possible reduction of trade barriers that prevent the free flow of goods. That is why multilateral negotiations have allowed tariffs to be imposed to support the regulation of the entry and exit of goods in each country, with a view to protecting specific productive sectors and thus creating an efficient collection mechanism. (Padin, 2019) It is therefore easy to understand how international trade regulations on tariffs benefit regional international trade.

With this in mind, countries are increasingly concerned with having more adequate international logistics that control the performance of ports or airports in terms of their functionality to facilitate logistics services for companies that carry out their import and export operations in these logistics terminals, thus ensuring adequate supply chain processes. This improves the competitiveness of the country and its companies, suggesting that the employees who provide these services should maintain a professional profile and skills that certify optimal job performance, helping to reduce operating and shipping times for goods and improve the quality of logistics services. (Lázaro Guerrero et al., 2022)

From this point of view, countries focus on developing infrastructure that supports international operations in order to maintain competitive capacities to develop regional trade relations, since ports, airports, roads, and border points are necessary to ensure that trade flows are carried out properly and optimally. This will allow for the movement of transport in various modes, such as 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 trade. Infrastructure is therefore understood to be the set of structures, engineering works, and physical facilities linked to improving maritime, land, rail, and air services. (Triana Cordoví & Galeano Zaldívar, 2020) Achieving transport infrastructure efficiency facilitates exports and imports at each border, marking an exit and entry point focused on avoiding congestion and improving access to ports and airports with more adequate and safer roads. In addition, improvements are being made through financing so that customs can facilitate cargo verification through clearer, more accurate, and concise processes, with technology and applications that favor the facilitation of international trade between regions with more efficient and environmentally resilient operations. (Corrales C. & Mendoza Cota, 2021)

It should also be mentioned that regional international trade is increasingly linked to a more resilient approach to environmental care, generating means of transport and operations that are more aware of the damage they cause, especially 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, 2021), 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. (Merizalde Véliz et al., 2024) 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, 2018) It is therefore necessary to understand that infrastructure benefits international logistics.

The interconnection between markets in different countries enables economies to advance, improve, and adapt to processes. In this sense, currently, with Industry 4.0 and innovations, the different sectors, including port, air, and land, have tried to maintain a process of digital transformation toward 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 move them toward digitization. (González-Cancelas et al., 2020) Based on the above, international logistics becomes relevant as it allows for the efficient management of the flow of goods between countries, using different modes and means of transport, logistics, port, and customs agents to coordinate customs clearance and distribution. (Lázaro Guerrero et al., 2022)

In this regard, countries will face different challenges in terms of improving processes, procedures, and logistics standardization in the development of international trade operations in their regions, which will allow them to improve logistics chain management mechanisms at the airport and land transport levels. These challenges will help them strengthen the coordination and communication that the various actors in the logistics-port sector must maintain in order to achieve efficient shipping operations, 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 chosen because it allows the facts to be presented in an orderly and schematic manner, facilitating the relationship between the main elements that comprise it and obtaining comparative statistical data between different periods of time in which commercial operations between countries have been generated.

Likewise, the information collected can be used to perform different types of analysis, especially quantitative analysis, as the aim is to make comparisons using descriptive statistics. Qualitative content analysis will also be considered in order to intervene through the researcher’s interpretation and work experience in the field of international trade and logistics. The literature review was also conducted using evidence-based review, which allowed us to work with secondary data (documents from other authors) through the studies cited. (Arias-Odón, 2023)

The main secondary sources 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 provide key statistical data on Honduras and the region, together with scientific studies that shed light on the issues addressed 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 direct and manage 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 published in March 2025 by the Central Bank of Honduras [BCH], (2025), 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.

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

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

Description	2023	20	2025/ ^P
FOB exports	\$ 2889,9	\$ 2748,6	\$
CIF imports	\$	\$4562,6	\$4700,1
Trade balance	-\$ 1759,9	-\$ 1814,0	-\$ 1460,2

Source: information adapted from the BCH foreign trade report, using the currency indicated in the original document.

On the other hand, imports in 2024 compared to 2023 decreased by \$87,3 million, However, between 2025 and 2024, they increased by \$137,5 million, 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 the production of 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 or deficit trade balance, which clearly affects the economic conditions of the country’s inhabitants. It should be noted that this indicator alone does not represent all the negative difficulties that the nation may face. However, maintaining a prolonged deficit prolongs the need to compensate for it through public or private debt financing in order to continue purchasing goods or services, which leads to a constant increase in the level of indebtedness and poverty, among other aspects. It is recommended that exports be increased and, at the very least, a balance or surplus be created to immediately improve income conditions based on the economic resources that can improve this result.

On the other hand, the Honduran Customs Administration (2025), through the National Intelligence Management in its report on revenue collection and customs statistics for March 2025, has demonstrated the tax collection process through the different procedures managed at ports, airports, land border crossings, and customs offices distributed throughout the national territory, which includes the following:

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

Type of collection	March 2025/ ^P	March 2024	Increase
Land customs revenue	L 5661,5	L 5160,8	L 500,7 9,7
Maritime customs revenue	L 8811,8	L 8504,6	L 307,2 3,6
Air customs revenue	L 59,2	L 10,2	L 49,0 480,4

Source: information adapted from the collection report, customs statistics from ADUANAS, using the currency indicated in the original document, which clarifies that the official currency of Honduras is the Lempira or L. This is reflected in the table.

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%. that is, ports are a fundamental part of the import and export procedures for goods, with Puerto Cortés being one of the most representative in terms of participation, with a cumulative collection of L 6568,5 million, representing 45,2%. In second place, the Port of Henecán reported revenue of L 1597,4 million, representing 11,0% of the total collected. Therefore, the automation and investments made in these operational centers are necessary and generate benefits for the port logistics offered to their main customers.

Land operations are equally important, as they generate 60,6% of revenue collection operations. Therefore, investment in road infrastructure and connections between major transportation routes is vital, as they allow for the movement of large volumes of goods from different sectors and trade between countries, especially in the Central American region. on a smaller scale, air operations account for 0,4% compared to the rest, which shows that it is increasingly necessary to diversify modes and means of transport, since exporters and importers will use them to bring their goods in or out of the country with their main trading partners, depending on their needs.

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

In addition, it is necessary to recognize that diversifying the different modes of transport and entry or exit of goods

from a country will allow it to offer various ways of negotiating 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, in order to 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 the imposition of ad valorem tariffs, which are taxes applied to imported goods. This also represents a form of protection for the country’s national industry, which in turn generates revenue for the government and, above all, regulates international trade between different countries around the world.

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 valuation
			2025 / 2024	
ISV	L 8096,4	L 8514,3	L 417,9	5,2
ACPV	L 2929,9	L 3067,5	L 137,6	4,7
DAI	L 1821,7	L 1888,4	L 66,7	3,7

Source: information adapted from the collection report, customs statistics from ADUANAS, using the currency indicated in the original document.

With regard to international trade regulations on tariffs in Honduras, the main taxes levied 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) in accordance with the legal provisions contained in Decree No. 41-2001; and thirdly, Import Tariff Duties (DAI) are recorded, which are represented according to the percentage established in the Agreement on the Central American Tariff and Customs Regime and its Protocols.

Each 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 established under the Central American Tariff System (SAC), which consists of a ten-digit numerical code that identifies: The first two digits refer 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 type of tax to be paid is determined, which facilitates international trade and customs management between countries in the region and the declaration of goods imported or exported.

With regard to regional international trade, the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) (2024) 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 , 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.

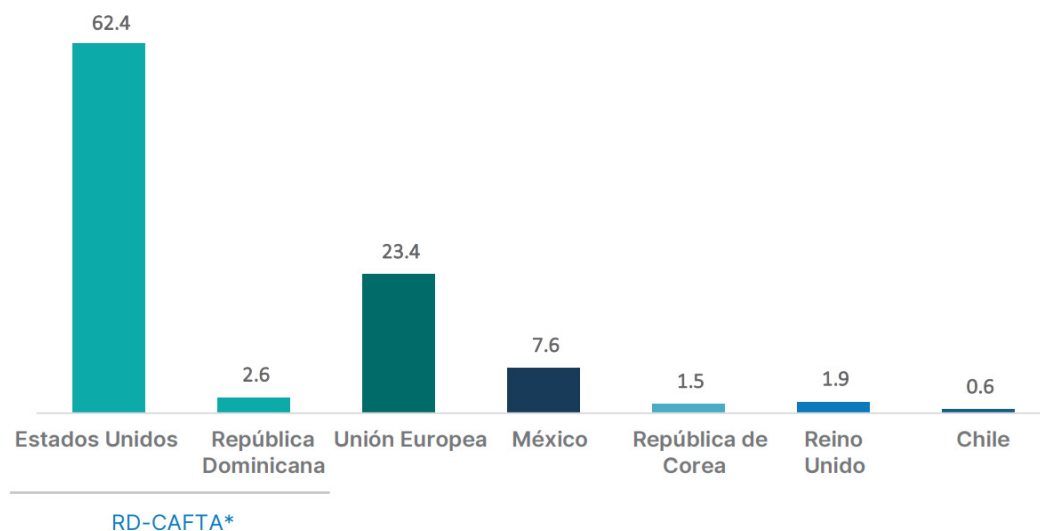
Table 6.
Millions of USD and percentage share (%) in 2023

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	\$7378,49	13,3%	Honduras	\$ 16 040,18	14,6%
El Salvador	\$ 6498,11	11,7%	El Salvador	\$ 15 648,33	14,2%
Honduras	\$ 5950,97	10,7%	Panama	\$ 14 526,99	13,2%
Panama	\$ 3366,95	6,1%	Nicaragua	\$ 10 916,35	9,9%
Central America	\$ 55 521,43	100,0%	Central America	\$ 109 967,84	100,0%

Source: information adapted from the SIECA report on the current state of Central American economic integration, using the currency indicated in the original document.

In terms of regional foreign trade, Honduras accounts for 10,7% of exports, making it the fifth largest source of income for the region with a range of products, 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 production and export, such as petroleum oils or bituminous minerals, automobiles, medicines, and cell phones, among others, In both cases, these products are recognized at the intraregional and extraregional levels with different countries outside its geographical area, which are its main trading partners.

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



Source: information taken from the SIECA report on the current state of Central American economic integration.

At the Central American level in 2023, it can be seen that the main trading partner is the United States, followed by the European Union (EU), which shows that, taken together, all regional trade agreements with each of the countries that are its main trading partners boost foreign investment. allowing for an improvement in the productive environment and promoting 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 total, specifically with the following destination markets: the US, 10,1%; Central America, 10,0%; the European Union (EU) with 16,8%, Mexico with 10,1%, and China with 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 the exportable supply according to the demands and requirements of each country.

Central American exports are distributed as follows: US 37,4%, Central America 26,7%, European Union 13,9%, Mexico 4,5%, and China 3,4%. within which Costa Rica ranked as the largest exporter with 32,7% of the average, and Panama was the main exporter to China with 70,7% of its trade, which may be favored by the channel that allows the country’s various goods to be transported to their final destinations.

On the other hand, it is necessary to determine that imports occupy an important place 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 as follows: the United States, 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 for foreign goods entering the national territory of each of the countries that make up the region.

Based on these data, Guatemala, with an average of 27,6%, was the main 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, although this dependence is not entirely concentrated on 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 the

most representative.

These results show that Central America is a region with high growth potential, despite the fact that its imports exceed exports, suggesting a trade deficit. However, it maintains a diversified dependence. Overall, trade integration boosted regional economic dynamics with higher quality standards and greater 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). It also has 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 airports and 25 domestic airports, as well as two regional hubs located in El Salvador and Panama.

As a result, there is a dynamic commercial landscape in the region, characterized by robust infrastructure that strengthens regional and international connectivity, benefiting both import and export operations. It is also important to understand that the diversity of partners mitigates risks and promotes trade between the nations that are party to the agreements signed. The road, port, and air network allows it to consolidate a strategic position with a strategic location in the region for each of its members. All of the above conditions make it a focus for attracting foreign investors and enhancing the regional value chain with more competitive and 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 eliminates taxes, tariffs, and tariff barriers between these countries, in addition to adopting a common external tariff for products imported or exported to third countries or other trade blocs. (Central American Integration System [SICA], 2023) All of this has been referred to as the Deep Integration process that has been implemented among these nations, which has as its legal basis the legal instruments of Central American economic integration, which has allowed for the creation of a single customs territory with peripheral customs offices, integrated border posts, free transit, tariff harmonization, 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 km², representing 57,1% of the total geographical area of Central America, with total exports of goods in 2023 valued at \$26 635,1 million, representing 48% of the total for the region according to SIECA. (2024). The above data suggests that having processes that benefit free trade between countries facilitates the transport of products with free movement, which improves the competitiveness of countries. This suggests that customs control and administration measures should be increased for all products with and without free movement.

The region shows key strengths in terms of connectivity due to its privileged location, especially Honduras between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as its openness and the diverse logistics infrastructure of the nations that make up Central America. Furthermore, its geographical location makes it an important trade corridor for investors who want to take advantage of the diversity of trading partners, giving them a broad competitive advantage and reducing external vulnerabilities.

For negotiation purposes, having a variety of airports, ports, and land routes allows it to enhance its efficiency in carrying out exports and imports, that is, to move their goods in a timely manner, which expands their opportunities to generate diverse 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

The importance of regional international trade for Honduras represents a necessary means of boosting its economy by taking advantage of its strategic location, which generates proximity to its neighboring countries, thereby reducing logistics costs and facilitating the commercial exchange of products. Also, its high participation in regional imports demonstrates that there is a commercial dependence to favor national production. Furthermore, the process of deep integration with El Salvador and Guatemala invigorates the free trade flow of some products, which improves regional competitiveness. By having shared infrastructure, economies of scale and efficiency in customs processes are achieved. (Secretariat of Central American Economic Integration [SIECA], 2024)

Regional international trade is related to Honduran foreign trade operations, as they are directly linked by intraregional and extraregional flows, both for exports (10,7%) and imports (14,6%) (Central American Integration System [SICA], 2023), which demonstrates the need for streamlined customs procedures in terms of documentation and clearance of goods, as well as regulatory harmonization of tariffs to facilitate the flow of goods across borders through 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. (Sidorova & Sidorov, 2021)

Infrastructure benefits international logistics as it is a key factor in the development of Honduran intraregional and extraregional trade, mainly because it connects the country with its main regional trading partners. Honduras has important ports connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, as well as roads and airports that allow for the movement of goods, thus 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 mentioning that this generates a wide diversification of means of transport. (Corrales C. & Mendoza Cota, 2021)

Regional international trade is positively related to the regional trade agreements that Honduras has with other nations, as these legally facilitate increased trade with other countries, increasing its market share. In addition, they allow for the elimination of tariff barriers through rules that are established to benefit them with a progressive reduction of some tariffs for certain products (Castillo Argañarás, 2024). Some of the most representative agreements in this context were the RD-CAFTA and the AACUE, considering that they contribute to the standardization of technical, sanitary, and phytosanitary regulations that increase the quality of exports. This allows for the creation of a stable business environment that is attractive to foreign direct investment, reducing the bureaucracy of some customs and commercial operations through process automation. (Machado Espinosa et al., 2019)

International trade regulations on tariffs benefit regional international trade as they allow countries such as Honduras to have clear and competitive rules for their import and export procedures. In this way, different types of ad valorem tariffs are applied, such as the ISV, DAI, ACPV, among others, which are linked to the Central American Tariff System (SAC) and the Honduran import tax (Ministry of Finance [SEFIN], 2022). This harmonizes the collection of fees for each procedure carried out by customs authorities upon entry or exit of goods, thereby reducing regulatory conflicts between regional partners. This standardization improves transparency for logistics operators and businesses. (Padin, 2019)

CONCLUSIONS

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

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

The regional trade agreements that each country joins allow them to access new markets and obtain opportunities to purchase goods and services at preferential tariff rates, thus promoting trade between nations. Therefore, they must strive to maintain harmonized and updated processes and highly trained personnel in each area of foreign trade, customs, and transportation of goods, especially 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 international trade, both intraregional and extraregional, makes them more competitive, often restrictive in order to protect and favor their domestic production. However, the entry of new competitors suggests that local companies must strive to produce competitive products with better quality and competitive prices for an increasingly demanding market. This process of globalization allows countries to make a greater effort to innovate and become more attractive.

This study has demonstrated that Honduras is a very important country for the Central American region and for the customs union. This process of deep integration has allowed foreign trade operations to become more dynamic. However, it also shows that just as the Honduran nation has a high trade deficit, the same is true for the region. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that products that could generate greater exports should be reviewed, since, in this context, it was found that exports depend solely on exportable production associated with agriculture and textiles, among others. Therefore, diversification is a good option that would allow the country to increase its exports or reduce its imports.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the results obtained or the interpretations proposed.

FINANCING

This work has not received any specific funding from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies. It was carried out using the researchers' own resources.

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