

## EFFECTS IN EXPORTS AND PORTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN FACE OF COVID-19



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*Ricardo J. Sánchez & Eliana P. Barleta<sup>1</sup>*  
*UN-ECLAC*  
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In the last few months, the world has witnessed and continue to witness a drastic change in our daily lives, which has also caused great impacts on business, trade, and shipping. The outbreak of a pandemic changed all economic and trade expectations for 2020. From a forecast of 3,6% growth in container trade worldwide, new projections have lower down their expectations to 2,5%, and a lower rate might be expected with the continuing increase of blank sails and labour restrictions.

Several countries have been implementing restrictive measures on ports and harbours aiming at curbing the spread of COVID-19. At the beginning, measures were adopted by some Asian ports and targeted shipping operations with the city of Wuhan. Following the rapid escalation of the pandemic, however, restrictions have been gradually expanded in geographic coverage and scope. Currently, they usually include more rigorous inspections and a closer articulation of port and maritime organizations with National Health Authorities, with specific control and quarantine procedures for vessels whose previous ports of call are based in countries registering the largest number of cases of COVID-19. Non-essential operations have been

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limited and, in most countries, severe measures have been adopted towards cruise ships, some of which have been denied docking at ports and have been left stranded at sea. The short-term impact of this health crisis is a major blow not only to the port sector, but to logistics worldwide. According to some international analysts, the impact is expected to be manageable in the medium term —if the spread of the virus is contained. As trade facilitators, ports and its personnel are highly exposed to events beyond their control. Ports plays an essential role during this critical moment, because food, cargoes, including those with life-saving supplies, cannot arrive to where they are needed if ports are not working. In this sense, this Maritime & Logistics Bulletin is going to analyse two main topics: first, the impacts on grain and minerals exports in Latin America; secondly, the effects and the behaviour of the main container ports in the region and around the world during the first trimester of 2020 in comparison to 2019; a brief review of measures, impacts and reflexions are added in the third part of this document.

## **I. Grain and minerals exports in Latin America**

### **A. Grain exports behaviour**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has already begun to show negative effects on the region's trade with China, which since 2017 is the region's second largest trading partner with 8,5% of total exports and 3,4% of total imports; and the United States, with 44,6% of total exports and 32,4% of total imports<sup>2</sup> (UN-ECLACa, 2019).

Latin America exports mostly commodities to China, of which 22% are soybeans, 16% copper and its concentrates, 15% oil, 9% iron and 7% refined copper (cathodes). These products will be affected by a prolongation of the epidemic and by the lower demand from China as a result of the first phase of the agreement (UN-ECLACb).

Previously, the region has been favoured by trade tensions between the United States and China. The surcharges that China applied to some United States agricultural and agro-industrial products -soybean, meat and wine, among others- favoured its competitors in South America, whose exports to China expanded in 2019. Countries such as Argentina and Uruguay recorded significant increases in exports of soybeans and meat, among other products. Mexico, on the other hand, benefited from new export opportunities to the United States, due to the substitution of Chinese products.

Exports of soybean by the United States to China in the first two months of 2020 increased six-fold year-on-year, according to customs data released on March 25<sup>3</sup>, in which China imported 6.1 million tons of soy from the United States in the first two months, compared to approximately 1 million tons in the same period in 2019<sup>4</sup>. According to the same source, shipments from Brazil in the first two months of the year reached 5.14 million tons, a 26%

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<sup>2</sup> Data from 2Q 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See more at <https://www.datamarnews.com/noticias/us-soy-imports-from-china-increase-six-fold-in-first-two-months/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem* as 2.

drop compared to 2019. Total soy imports by China in the first two months of 2020 increased 14.2% year on year, to 13.51 million tons.

In Argentina, within the framework of the necessary sanitary measures to contain the advance of the pandemic, the ports remain functional with strict protocols, but both the entry of trucks and the shipment of grains, flours and oils fell during the week. The arrival of logistics of trucks transporting grains and the shipment of grains, by-products and oils from the port terminals located in the area from Arroyo Seco to Timbúes, both located in Argentina, have been affected by the health crisis imposed by the COVID-19 virus<sup>5</sup>.

In the week that has not yet ended and that began last Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>, the position of trucks, according to the entities that group the deliverers of grains, amounted to 10,997 trucks while in the same number of days of the previous week (March 16-19), that number was 11,591, falling by 5.1%.

If the same comparison is made with the overseas ships that entered and left the port facilities located in the area, it means that in the current week, 20 ships entered and 16 left, while in the same number of days of the previous week (16 to 19/03 inclusive), 21 ships entered and 27 left.

According to the Rosario Trade Exchange, from Argentina, as for the tons loaded by the ships that left the port terminals located from Arroyo Seco to Timbues, the information available from the maritime agencies covers March 23-25. During this period 139,976 tons of corn, 110,941 tons of soybean by-products, 35,000 tons of wheat and 3,000 tons of oil were loaded. While during the same amount of days of the previous week (16 to 18/03), the ships sailed loaded about 381,224 tons of corn; 187,766 tons of soybean by-products; 27,200 tons of oils and 30,000 tons of biodiesel. A comparison of the total tons loaded with grains, flours, oils and biodiesel between the two periods (626,190 tons versus 288,917 tons) shows a 54% drop.

According the Central Bank of Paraguay (BCP), the country's total exports, as of February 2020, reached USD 1,972.1 million, in comparison to a USD 2,042.9 million as of February 2019, presenting a decrease of -3.5% in 2020 as the same period last year. Using the same time period, the Paraguayan Chamber of Oilseed and Grain Processors (CAPPRO from its acronym in Spanish), the oilseed crushing industry already fell 27%. Total oilseed crushing in January presented the worst record since the last 9 years, a total of 34,966 tons, a drop of more than 116,000 tons compared to this month's average over the past three years. In this case, is also

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<sup>5</sup> See more at <https://www.bcr.com.ar/es/mercados/investigacion-y-desarrollo/informativo-semanal/noticias-informativo-semanal/situacion-de-2>.

important to consider the delay in the current harvest, which helps to explain in parts the significant drop.

*Note: The 2019/2020 estimated production of soybean, yield, and production is 338.08 million metric tons. The top 3 expected exporters are: Brazil (124.5), United States (96.84), and Argentina (52.0). The Paraguayan production expected is 9.9<sup>6</sup>.*

## **B. Overview mineral exports in the case of Chile, Peru and Brazil**

According to the last data available, during January and February 2020, Chilean exports decreased 10.5% compared to the same period in 2019, according to data from the National Customs Service<sup>7</sup>.

Exports from the mining sector, which accounted for 48.9% of the country's total shipments, reached US\$ 5.862 billion, a decrease of 5.5% over the same period last year.

Within the basket of mining products, for copper ores and concentrates<sup>8</sup>, shipments for the months of January and February 2020, were 461.6 thousand tons on average, being 4% lower than the average for the same period in 2019. In terms of value, average shipments<sup>9</sup> for the months of January and February 2020 reached 2,530.8 million dollars, representing 4.3% less than the same period in 2019.

In the case of Peru, total exports of the country fell by 4.3% in the first month of 2020, due to the reduction in exports of important products such as copper (-7.5%), natural gas (-58%), coffee (-31%), fishmeal (-23.5%) and textiles (-20.7%). Copper exports decreased due to the lower volume exported (-10%)<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding Brazil, in the case of iron ore and its concentrates, the shipments for the months of January and February 2020 were 24,444 thousand tons on average, being this value 21.3% lower than the average of the same period in 2019. In terms of value, average shipments for the months of January and February 2020, were 1,626.78 million dollars, being this value slightly higher by 0.09%, compared to the same period in 2019. However, it is important to

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<sup>6</sup> According to the United States Department of Agriculture. To see more details: <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/production.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> See more at: <https://portalportuario.cl/exportaciones-chilenas-disminuyen-105-durante-enero-y-febrero/>.

<sup>8</sup> Includes refined copper, blinster and bulk, COCHILCO, with information from the National Customs Service. See more information on: <https://www.cochilco.cl/Paginas/Estadisticas/Bases%20de%20Datos/Exportaciones-Mineras.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> FOB liquid return in millions of dollars.

<sup>10</sup> See more at: <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/mincetur/noticias/101313-exportaciones-no-tradicionales-agropecuarias-y-pesqueras-crecen-en-enero>.

note that for the month of February 2020, there was a significant fall in value (13.1%) from 1,740.45 million (January 2020 figure) to 1,513.11 million<sup>11</sup>.

## **II. Container throughput<sup>12</sup> behaviour: comparison between the first trimester of 2019 to 2020**

In Mexico, the Pacific coast during January and February 2019, had a total throughput of 775,649 TEU<sup>13</sup>, and during the same period in 2020, this coast moved 783,021, showing a growth of 1%. Nevertheless, the Gulf coast showed a drop of -5,1%, using the same category to compare both coasts.

In Callao, Peru, from January to March 2019, had a total throughput of 157,623 TEU, and in the same period in 2020 the port showed a decrease of -13,2% in its operations, summing up a total throughput of 136,803 TEU. The total throughput of the Peruvian ports reported a decreased of -12,1%, from 213,941 TEU from March last year to 188,014 TEU in 2020.

In Argentina, during the first trimester, Buenos Aires presented a great variation on the throughput. January and February had an increase in the throughput of 8,3% and 13,8% respectively, and during March, a drop of -15,3%.

In Chile central region, the two main container ports presented a significant decrease in their throughput. Main terminals in San Antonio and Valparaíso ports had a joint drop of -16.5% of throughput during the first trimester in 2020 compared to the first trimester of 2019.

On the other hand, during January and February, the total throughput of Brazil has shown an increase of 2,6%; and the Port of Santos, the greatest in movements in the country, during January to March had had an increase of 11% in their throughput, from 883,557 TEU moved in 2019 to 980,970 TEU reported in 2020.

The port area of Colon, Panama, during the first semester of 2020 had an increase of 22,5% on its activity. For the other terminals and ports in Panama, January and February have provided a considerable increase in both coasts. On the Pacific Coast, an increase of 24,4% was registered in 2020 in comparison to the same period in 2019. On the Caribbean coast, the growth was smaller than the other coast, but still had a considerable 14,5% of increase in their activity. Other big port on the Caribbean coast, Cartagena, Colombia, had a total throughput

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<sup>11</sup> See more at: <http://www.intracen.org/itc/market-info-tools/trade-statistics/>.

<sup>12</sup> Throughput: A measure of container handling activity, expressed in TEU. Throughput includes the handling of imports, exports, empty and full containers and transshipments.

<sup>13</sup> TEU: Stands for Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit which can be used to measure a ship's cargo carrying capacity. The dimensions of one TEU are equal to that of a standard 20' shipping container.

of 664,846 TEU during the first trimester in 2019, and increased 19% during the same period in 2020. The Pacific coast have experienced a decrease in its activity, since the port of Buenaventura, Colombia, had a drop of -11,3% during the first trimester in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

**Table 1: Compared periods from 2020 to 2019  
(see in brackets the period considered in each case)**

Buenos Aires, Argentina (Jan-Mar)	1,6%
Santos, Brazil (Jan-Mar)	11,0%
Chile, Central Region (Jan-Mar)	-16,5%
Total Peru (March only)	-12,1%
SPRC (Cartagena), Colombia (Jan-Mar)	19,0%
Buenaventura, Colombia (Jan-Mar)	-11,3%
Total Mexico Pacific (Jan-Feb)	1,0%
Total Mexico Gulf (Jan-Feb)	-5,1%
Total Panama Pacific Coast (Jan-Feb)	24,4%
Total Panama Caribbean Coast (Jan-Feb)	14,5%
Panama (Colon port area) (Jan-Mar)	22,5%

**Source: Prepared by the authors, with data from Maritime Authorities and ports and terminals operators from each country.**

**Note 1: These countries (with all their terminals and ports together), represent the 71% of the total throughput of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).**

**Note 2: In several cases, the fall of the port activity is mainly observed in March. In some cases, January and February showed growth on the container throughput, but a drop was observed in March, such as Buenos Aires and Santos.**

In Bolivia (Plurinational State of), there was a drop of 60% on imports, specially coming from Arica, Chile and Matarani, Peru, due heavy sanitary control. For the export flow, however, the trucks come back empty because of the few goods arriving from China. The Bolivian Chamber of International Heavy Transport (Cámara Boliviana del Transporte Pesado Internacional) said that due to the lack of goods the flow of trucks from the ports of Chile and Peru decreased from 400 to 150 heavy duty vehicles (Mundo Marítimo, 2020).

Foodstuffs and medications goods must be more resilient to some of these emergency situations compared to other types of goods. The idea that everyone had was there was going to be a resurgence in cargo once China got back on their feet and that would be the snapback that would create the recovery. But as soon as China recovered, then Europe had some significant issues with their supply chain and then, the United States -where cargo congestion already has hit the United States West Coast ports- and now that has cascaded down to Southeast Asia and then into India. Where the recovery was expected and tied to what we thought would be trying to get back to a normal cycle, now it's transcended into other markets,

where now there's congestion and bottlenecks in other areas. This could affect the logistic chain around the globe, because the busiest ports in the world are mainly Asian, European and North American (American Shipper, 2020).

Given the interruption of Chinese production in January 2020 and the expected recessions in the main importing regions, a decline is expected this year for the first time since 2009, when the containers' trade, according to Clarksons, had a decrease of -9% (in comparison to a 5 to 10% y-o-y growth seen in the previously years). Further, in October 2019, Clarksons had forecasted a 3,6% of y-o-y growth, in January the forecast dropped to 2,5%<sup>14</sup>.

Another important issue to be considered is the sudden massive volume of blanked sailings. The announcements in recent days is set to break records, the inactive containership fleet has dropped to 338 units for 2.12 million TEU as at the end of March 2020 (Alphaliner, 2020). The fall is also explained by the Chinese holidays in February. The inactive containership fleet had actually been dropping for most of the last month having hit a record of 2.46 million TEU on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

According to DHL (2020), the number of inactive ships in the larger segments, above 7,500 TEU, continues to increase, with a large number of them being placed in purification facilities, while the remaining units are still waiting to return to operation after the last two months' detentions caused by the spread of the COVID-19. The reduction in the number of shipments from the Far East has also reduced demand for food volumes in Europe and the Caribbean, resulting in increased deliveries from smaller feeder vessels of less than 1,500 TEU.

**Table 3: Cancelled sailings and waiting times worldwide**

	April-19	April-20	% variance
Cancelled sailings	17	66	288%
	Average weeks (13-14/2019)	Average weeks 13-14/2020	% variance
Ship waiting times	30	20	-33%

**Source: Drewry Supply Chain Advisors, 2020**

In the region, an initial review of the short-term impacts of the pandemic and the new control procedures on the shipping and maritime operations in LAC point to an average additional delay of 2.5 to 4 days in the arrival of import containers at their final destination. Similar delays

<sup>14</sup> Drewry and Alphaliner also forecasted similar y-o-y growth for 2020 in the end of 2019: 3.3% and 3.5%, respectively. In 2020, both have a less optimistic forecast for 2020.

have also been detected in inland border-crossing and for the delivery of air cargo, apart from increased prices of some essential goods. According to port operators, the negative effects observed to date have been severe, and in some cases are aggravated by logistics bottlenecks, for instance, the lack of storage capacity at ports and the unavailability of containers, and the need for new institutional arrangements for crisis management.

In terms of shipping, the LAC region, a total of 20 blank sailings were registered in the West Coast South America (WCSA) and 4 in East Coast South America (ECSA), is approximately a 50% of cancellations. Globally, more than 2 million TEU are already out of service, representing 8.8% of the total. As a background, the comparable impact would be that of the global economic and financial crisis in 2009. At that time, slightly more than 1.5 million TEUs were cancelled, now exceeded, bringing us to a historical record. In percentage terms, the current figure is lower, since at that time the paralyzed fleet was equivalent to 11.7% of global capacity. The Panama Canal Authority Administrator reported that as a result of the impact of the COVID-19, on March 27, 32 transits were recorded on the interoceanic waterway and 52 cancellations of vessels that had been booked.

### **III. Some reflexions for actions required during emergency situations**

Emergency situations require actions and government preparedness to act accordingly. For what we have experienced so far, in some cases there is a good-will in attending first needs, but also a lack of coordination in a first reaction from countries to act together to face a vital case such this pandemic.

Along with the impacts on shipping, the shortage of ships consequently causes a decrease in the supply of cargo space. In Brazil, according to the Union of Customs Brokers of São Paulo (SINDASP, from its acronym in Portuguese), the freight rates in some cases have skyrocketed up to 400% increase (Datamar, 2020c). In Perú carriers also started to fear that logistics costs cost up to 50% more.

The sanitary and social distancing measures imposed, it is essential that not only in ports, but the entire supply chains remain safely operational to cope with the pandemic. Logistics services, both international and domestic, are not only essential to ensure the smooth flow of supplies for the population, but also to keep the national industries and manufacturing sectors running. Some measures needed for achieving these goals are:

- 1) The establishment of special or fast-track customs procedures for the import of medical supplies and other critical products for the population, as well as preferential procedures and the authorization for unlimited amounts of international donations of such items. Similarly, it is essential to consider special measures for the transit of food, medical equipment and other merchandise towards landlocked countries.



- 2) Although air transport has dropped drastically in terms of number of passengers, it could play an essential role for the supply of medical items, as well as for other products purchased online by consumers. Strengthening the air cargo capacity through passenger aircraft for international or domestic distribution may require adapting and increasing the flexibility of some regulations, such as time slots and permits for cargo operations, in order to take advantage of the existing idle capacity.
- 3) With regard to the logistics workforce, it is essential to facilitate operations and provisions for crew change, urban supply and distribution operations. For international crew members not exposed to social interaction, a possible measure is to exempt them from the 14-day quarantine requirements in order to ensure that cargo supply chains are maintained, as well as to allow product delivery at any time. Along with this, provisions must be taken to ensure that the correct methods are used to protect them from being exposed to the virus and to apply regular free tests for the detection of Covid-19, assuring them the protection of their income in case of contagion or critical illness.
- 4) It is necessary to foster the creation of social and political committees for emergency response throughout the logistics system, ensuring wide representation, including that of unions and professional associations, as a way to safeguard port workers, stevedores and crew members from potential exposure to SARS-CoV-2, as some countries have been implementing up to date
- 5) It is essential to facilitate the transit of goods, particularly foodstuffs, water and medical supplies. Some regional integration initiatives, like the Mercosur countries, have agreed on the free circulation of cargo, goods and inputs by air and land into the bloc, besides other measures to facilitate communication and promote people's wellbeing. Some governments have already adopted resolutions allowing critical supplies, some of which could previously only be imported by air, to be carried by any mode of transport, reducing time and delivery costs.
- 6) Border should remain open for humanitarian assistance. Mexico and Panama, for example, has adopted a special protocol allowing for the disembarkation of cruise ships strictly for humanitarian reasons. Along with the United States, this country has reached an agreement to keep the border open to the economic exchange, agreeing not to limit the normal flow of workers, students and other persons involved in cross-border trade, such as drivers of cargo trucks.

- 7) Finally, in the current context of the COVID-19, the use of technology should be more widely promoted, along with encouraging e-commerce and cross-border digital services. The adoption of virtual platforms such as the Port Community Systems (PCS), the Single Window for Foreign Trade (VUCE), and Blockchain are tools that allow the operational continuity of essential processes for international trade and national logistics. The current contingency may be an opportunity to move forward with digital government and paperless trade, providing greater resilience to processes and a higher level of confidence to users about the key role of technology in logistics.

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