

# THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: FOOD SECURITY PROJECTIONS FOR BI-REGIONAL RELATIONS

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## 1. Introduction

Relations between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU) are undergoing a revival. It is a phenomenon that needs to be properly analysed and must be framed in the situation facing both the EU and the Latin American and Caribbean countries in recent decades, particularly the present one. While some European countries have deep historical and cultural ties with LAC, those bonds were not strong enough to sustain robust and strategic relations, leaving a space that was gradually filled by other emerging powers, like China.

This chapter addresses the EU's recent policy on LAC against a new international backdrop marked by the war in Ukraine and the confrontation between the United States and China. As far as the impacts of this new situation are concerned, it will deal exclusively with food security as a vehicle for recasting LAC as a strategic partner of the EU. It is a narrow definition since both the war in Ukraine and the clash between the world's two biggest powers have repercussions on various issues on the global agenda, in aspects such as energy availability and strategic materials, international security and the appearance of new coalitions, to name just a few.

## 2. Food security

While the concept of food security first emerged in the 1970s, it has acquired new meanings in recent years, taking account of economic and sociocultural variables. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has four main dimensions: the physical availability of food, economic access to it, utilisation, and the stability of the first three dimensions over time (FAO, 2011).

The definitions of food security as provided primarily by the FAO face new challenges, mainly because of the impact of social, geopolitical and climate risks, for example, which have prompted the use of concepts such as "food insecurity". This seeks to be a broader expression, encompassing the

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dimensions mentioned above, but taking into consideration vulnerability, which is associated with the “likelihood of a drastic reduction in access to food or in consumption levels owing to environmental or social risks, or a limited response capacity on the part of states” (PESA, 2011).

On the European side, food security occupies a place of utmost importance in its cooperation pillar and is, as we know, a key feature of the EU’s relations with the rest of the world. In fact, the EU is the world’s leading donor. According to OECD figures, in 2019 it provided over 55% of official development assistance (ODA) (Martín and Fillol, 2022). The EU has approved a series of regulations and declarations on food security over the years, particularly with regard to combatting hunger on a global level in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The EU’s approach to food security also considers sustainability a central aspect, promoting good agricultural practices that include making good use of soil, caring for biodiversity and the sustainable management of forests and grasslands.

The EU actively cooperates with international bodies specialising in the matter. For example, it participates in programmes with the FAO through initiatives that support low-resource countries to promote infrastructure – public or private – for sustainable agriculture and to achieve food production that enables reaching food security (Martín and Fillol, 2022). The EU’s joint cooperation on this subject is much broader, as it not only covers bilateral and plurilateral action with other countries, but also with another series of international bodies that include the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Meanwhile, and of paramount importance for the goals set out in this chapter, it is worth noting the internal policy on food security pursued by the EU. This has undergone changes in recent years, particularly since the 2000s with the definition of new goals and the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), created in 2002 under Regulation 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council (European Union, 2002). This agency is responsible for assessing the risks in matters of food safety and it currently has a specific strategy (Strategy 2027), focusing on science, safe food and sustainability (EFSA, 2021).

The EU has devised a food security policy that not only covers cooperation as a central pillar, but also sets out an internal policy that has become all the more important recently owing to growing international conflicts and, particularly, the war in Ukraine.

As for the EU’s link with LAC through the major international cooperation mentioned above, the European countries work together with their Latin American counterparts on several agricultural research programmes, which include areas such as sustainable agriculture, incorporating technology, sustainable practices and climate change. The EU and the LAC countries have cooperated on promoting food security standards to guarantee the quality and safety of food produced in both regions. They have made progress on issues such as malnutrition, especially in deprived areas of LAC, through various programmes. Other issues tackled collectively are related to family agriculture, which is given paramount importance in terms of promoting sustainable practices.

Point 3 of the recent declaration from the EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit of July 2023 includes the importance of working together to face the multiple crises related to food insecurity, along with supply chain problems and inflation. Point 17 of the same declaration, meanwhile, refers to the importance of enhancing cooperation on a series of issues that includes food and energy security. Point 28 of the declaration mentions the Global Gateway strategy and its goal of mobilising public funding and private capital in areas including food and energy production (EU-CELAC Declaration, 2023). In addition to the large number of programmes existing between the EU and LAC countries, we must also consider the importance of the trade in food for the two regions and the role played by the partnership agreements in place (or under negotiation) between the parties.

### 3. A new global stage

The food security outlook in EU-LAC relations must necessarily take into account the main shifts on the global stage, in what could even be considered a new era given the magnitude of the events like the war in Ukraine, which shows no clear sign of ending. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there have been different phases of global instability connected to an immediate increase in international prices owing to supply constraints on account of the importance of both Russia and Ukraine in the production of certain foods. The conflict triggered spikes in inflation reported in the early months of the war and an increase in poverty in markets heavily reliant on these staples, like countries in Africa. Of course, the phenomenon also spread to energy and mineral resources (Bartesaghi, 2022).

In addition to the conflict mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic had a global impact that sparked debates on the importance of supply chains. It is an issue that has also raised concern in the framework of the confrontation between the United States and China, which could have global implications in the event that the two main powers clash over Taiwan.

Geopolitical tensions arising out of the war in the Ukraine, confrontation among various powers and mounting distrust among countries has impacted cooperation, with a gradual increase in trade-restrictive measures, which have hit all-time highs. In fact, in a recent report on global trade the World Trade Organization (WTO) issued a warning about signs of trade fragmentation, calling for a drive towards "re-globalisation". This concept helps to give some idea of the scale of the risk the international system is facing because of the increase in geopolitical tensions (WTO, 2023).

The World Bank says we are in the midst of a global food crisis, stating that by 2030 some 670 million people will still face hunger, which is associated to shocks from climate change, a global water crisis and biodiversity loss, among other scourges that continue to plague the goal of eliminating world hunger (World Bank, 2023). In particular, it has addressed the case of the Central African Republic, where 75% of the population depends on agriculture (World Bank, 2019).

Moreover, there is a growing consensus on the fact that we are going through a climate crisis with the previously mentioned repercussions on food security not only on account of supply restrictions arising from the

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impossibility of sustaining production because of climate phenomena such as floods, droughts or heatwaves, but also because of the effect that food production has on carbon emissions (World Bank, 2022). The UN has warned of a failure to meet climate change goals, which impacts the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. The UN references a recent study by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) that establishes that science leaves no room for doubt that climate goals are not being met (WMO, 2023).

The recent G20 New Delhi Declaration also highlights the importance given to food security, a situation aggravated by political crises, but especially to climate change, which was the central issue tackled by the world's main powers (G20 Secretariat, 2023). The challenges set out above are not intended to cover all those currently facing the international community. But they signal a new era and require huge cooperation efforts and highlight the need for states to achieve some minimal level of cohesion through international organisations (Bartasaghi, 2021).

In parallel with the changing global backdrop driven by the confrontation between the United States and China, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the EU has faced enormous challenges of its own that have had an impact on the policies pursued with other international actors. Prominent among them are the euro crisis, the wave of terrorism that struck several European capitals some years ago, an escalating migration crisis, an increasingly widespread groundswell of nationalist and populist trends, and Brexit. All these phenomena have had systemic effects and prompted the EU to review its strategic alliances and strengthen its institutions to speed up the approval of policies that bolster EU cooperation.

#### **4. Historical and institutional components of Europe-Latin America relations**

The countries of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean share historical and cultural roots that are still very much present and this is particularly evident in the role that Spain and Portugal continue to play at certain times when bi-regional ties need fresh impetus. Unlike the United States, Europe does not share a continent with LAC, or international bodies like the Organization of American States (OAS), created in 1948, which channel the debates on the continental agenda.

The efforts to formalise European cooperation with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean began in the 1980s, with the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Economic Community in 1986. Apart from contacts by some European countries in the Contadora Group in a bid to contribute to securing peace in Central America, it was not until the Rio Summit of 1999 – where regular top-level meetings were introduced (and subsequently replaced by CELAC-EU summits) – that bi-regional relations became more formal (Bartasaghi & De María, 2017).

Alongside meetings of considerable political significance, there were other initiatives like inter-parliamentary exchange (Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly); the participation of European countries in Latin American and Caribbean integration processes; Ibero-American summits, and, from the 1990s onwards, the deployment of a strategy of EU engagement with LAC through “partnership agreements”.

The first of such agreements was with Mexico in 1997; it was followed by one with Chile in 2002, and in 2008 came the agreement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). A few years later, in 2012, an agreement was reached with Central America and negotiations began with the Andean countries, particularly Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. A deal was struck with Mercosur in 2019, the only one of those mentioned that has not been ratified (taking the economic and trade pillar as a reference) owing to the renegotiation under way because of new environmental commitments proposed by the EU. The breadth of agreements the EU has signed with the LAC countries, with the exception of Venezuela, Bolivia, Guyana and Suriname, gives the European bloc an edge over the United States and China, which have also entered into treaties in recent years, but they are not nearly as extensive as those signed by the EU.

The above-mentioned agreements could be the path towards a road map for convergence among the Latin American integration processes, as in the case of Mercosur with the Andean Community (CAN), Mercosur with the Pacific Alliance, or harmonisation within the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) itself. Many LAC countries have granted the EU concessions of a depth that they did not grant each other in the regional blocs themselves, as in the case of Brazil and Mexico in the framework of the ALADI (Bartesaghi, 2021)

Over the last few years, the EU has approved a series of policies that impact relations with Latin America, either by incorporating new challenges or broadening existing cooperation, in what has been dubbed a relaunch of relations with LAC (with Africa too) in the framework of the new international backdrop described above.

The European Green Deal is an ambitious plan to make the EU economy more sustainable and reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, with a view to reaching climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. The policy seeks to reduce emissions, encourage the transition to renewable energy by reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promote energy efficiency and the circular economy, lower the consumption of natural resources, safeguard biodiversity and natural ecosystems and support a just transition that leaves no one behind in the shift towards a sustainable economy. This policy has implications for LAC in several fields, but especially in export flows thanks to Regulation 2023/1115 of the European Parliament and the Council, approved in 2023 and which is set to enter into force in 2024 (European Union, 2023). Under it, goods traded in the EU market must refrain from giving rise to deforestation or forest degradation. On that list are products of paramount importance in LAC's exports to Europe, including meat, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, soybeans and wood.

The ambitious European legislation has implications for trade agreements too, particularly with Mercosur, since the environmental agenda the EU has presented to the bloc as a condition for ratifying the deal has been rejected by the South American countries. On the subject of the European policy, ten LAC governments – including Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia –, along with countries from other regions of the Global South like Indonesia, Nigeria or Thailand, have submitted a complaint to the European Commission as they consider the measure will disrupt trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, 2023).

In 2021, the European Commission also launched the Global Gateway strategy (European Commission, 2021) in order to promote international cooperation ties through better infrastructure and connectivity in investments to improve energy efficiency. The initiative is funded through the EU budget and will mobilise over €300bn in the period 2021-2027. The projects funded by the programme are selected through a competitive process and they are assessed according to their economic, social and environmental merit.

The European Commission president said that with the programme “we will support smart investments in quality infrastructure, respecting the highest social and environmental standards, in line with the EU’s values and standards. The Global Gateway strategy is a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world”.<sup>1</sup> In the framework of the programme, the EU intends to implement an investment plan in LAC (in Africa, Asia and the Balkans too) in key sectors related to health, digital, research and education, as well as transport, the climate and energy, pillars that are closely linked to food security. In fact, the Global Gateway coordinates its investments outside the EU through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the EIB Group, which partner the European Commission and the European External Action Service in executing this programme. In LAC’s case, investments of over €30bn are projected and cover five main themes: climate and energy, digital, education and research, health, and sustainable transport. The projects the programme will undertake with the countries of the region are related to solar energy, green hydrogen, electricity networks and bioeconomy, for example (European Investment Bank, 2023).

Also directly relating to LAC, the EU launched a new agenda with the region in 2023, releasing it prior to the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels (European Commission, 2023). The “New agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean” seeks to strengthen political, economic and cultural ties between the two regions, highlighting the shared values of democracy, human rights, social justice, and sustainable development.

At the launch of the new policy with LAC, the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy and vice-president of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, was very clear when he stated that: “Latin America and the Caribbean are central in the fight against climate change and represent a global power in terms of biodiversity, renewable energies and strategic raw materials for the green transition”, adding the need to “move from being ‘natural partners’ to being ‘partners of choice’” (European Union Delegation in Ecuador, 2023). As for the pillars of the new agenda, many of the points established are related to energy sustainability, but also to food production, diversification focused trade, supply chain security and trade agreements. The new policy refers to the Global Gateway EU-LAC Investment Agenda as a central tool (European Commission, 2023).

As we can see, the new era of EU-LAC relations will be marked primarily by the approval of the European Green Deal and its resulting regulations; by the Global Gateway agenda with LAC, and by the EU’s new policy towards LAC that will govern action with the region through the CELAC, at subregional level (with Mercosur, the Central American Integration System, or SICA, the Pacific Alliance, Andean Community and CARICOM) and on a bilateral level.

1. In: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway\\_es](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_es) (online) [accessed October 11th, 2023]

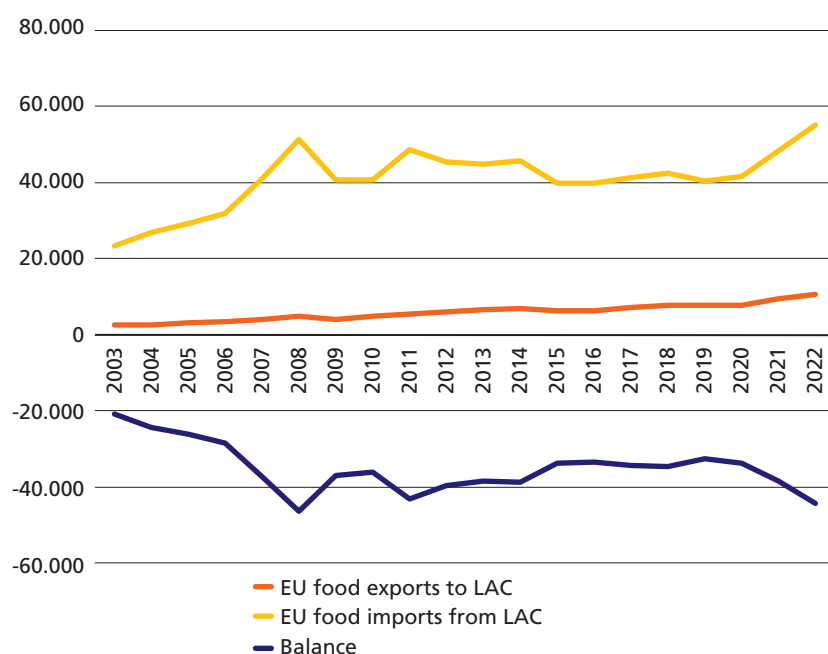


## 5. Trade and food security

To complement the analysis of the regulatory and institutional scope relating to the importance of food security between the EU and LAC, we must look at the evolution and current state of food trade between the two actors.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen in Graph 1, EU food purchases from LAC went through a long period of stagnation before making a marked recovery starting in 2020. In fact, taking the period 2003-2022, food exports from the EU to LAC grew at an annualised rate of 7.9%, compared to 4.7% for imports (a lower rate than the growth reported for EU food imports from the rest of the world).

The trade balance in this sector weighs heavily in favour of LAC (by close to \$45bn in 2022). As for LAC's importance as purchaser of food exported by the EU, it accounted for 1.5% in 2022 (2.3% in terms of all products). In the case of LAC as a supplier of the total acquired by the EU, that share came to 8% in food, while it was 2% of all products.

**Graph 1. Foreign food trade between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean**



Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).

In terms of products, the main foods exported by the EU to LAC in 2022 were beverages, followed by preparations of vegetables and fruits and by animal fats and oils (see Table 1).

As for EU food purchases from LAC, first place went to edible fruit and nuts, followed by residues from the food industries and oil seeds and oleaginous fruits (see Table 2).

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2. "Food" is understood as the universe of products comprising chapters 01 to 23 of the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (HS).

Table 1. Food exports from the European Union to Latin America and the Caribbean by product

Chapter	Product description	European Union (EU 27) exports to Latin America and the Caribbean, \$US thousand		Annualised change (%)	Share (%)		LAC in EU global food exports (%)
		2003	2022		2003	2022	
'01	Live animals	20,731	70,234	6.6	0.8	0.7	0.6
'02	Meat and edible meat offal	23,159	340,771	15.2	0.9	3.2	0.6
'03	Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	61,527	228,766	7.2	2.4	2.1	0.8
'04	Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin...	361,083	808,245	4.3	14.3	7.5	1.1
'05	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included	29,204	145,756	8.8	1.2	1.4	3.3
'06	Live plants and products of ornamental horticulture	50,567	164,796	6.4	2.0	1.5	0.9
'07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	54,808	229,610	7.8	2.2	2.1	0.8
'08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	21,859	296,696	14.7	0.9	2.8	0.9
'09	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	17,923	117,969	10.4	0.7	1.1	0.8
'10	Cereals	182,913	200,801	0.5	7.2	1.9	0.5
'11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	292,275	608,163	3.9	11.6	5.7	5.7
'12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal plants;...	43,765	494,943	13.6	1.7	4.6	2.3
'13	Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts	44,992	196,406	8.1	1.8	1.8	5.4
'14	Vegetable plaiting materials; vegetable products not elsewhere specified or included	2,214	4,167	3.4	0.1	0.0	2.2
'15	Animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes	145,972	1,011,700	10.7	5.8	9.4	2.3
'16	Preparations of meat, of fish, of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates...	44,364	151,346	6.7	1.8	1.4	0.7
'17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	50,344	156,731	6.2	2.0	1.5	1.0
'18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	63,109	292,473	8.4	2.5	2.7	1.0
'19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products	219,611	744,817	6.6	8.7	6.9	1.4
'20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants	113,565	1,023,778	12.3	4.5	9.5	2.9
'21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	183,696	844,343	8.4	7.3	7.9	2.1
'22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	416,607	2,014,699	8.6	16.5	18.8	2.5
'23	Residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder	79,944	576,627	11.0	3.2	5.4	1.6
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Food</b>	<b>2,524,232</b>	<b>10,723,837</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1.5</b>
<b>'TOTAL</b>	<b>All products</b>	<b>50,734,004</b>	<b>158,857,973</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.3</b>

Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).



**Table 2. Food imports of the European Union from Latin America and the Caribbean by product**

Chapter	Product description	European Union (EU 27) imports from Latin America and the Caribbean, \$US thousands		Annualised change(%)	Share (%)		LAC in EU total food imports (%)
		2003	2022		2003	2022	2022
'01	Live animals	11,833	11,051	-0.4	0.1	0.0	0.1
'02	Meat and edible meat offal	1,302,592	2,199,564	2.8	5.6	4.0	4.7
'03	Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	1,987,493	3,674,309	3.3	8.6	6.7	7.5
'04	Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin...	194,862	209,249	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.4
'05	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included	149,499	244,280	2.6	0.6	0.4	4.9
'06	Live plants and products of ornamental horticulture	335,393	608,325	3.2	1.5	1.1	4.7
'07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	280,127	684,378	4.8	1.2	1.2	2.3
'08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	4,853,970	10,384,205	4.1	21.1	18.8	20.7
'09	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	1,961,129	8,249,116	7.9	8.5	14.9	30.9
'10	Cereals	572,663	2,978,266	9.1	2.5	5.4	8.4
'11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	9,252	89,312	12.7	0.0	0.2	1.3
'12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal plants;...	2,972,381	6,043,941	3.8	12.9	10.9	16.9
'13	Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts	33,405	194,502	9.7	0.1	0.4	5.6
'14	Vegetable plaiting materials; vegetable products not elsewhere specified or included	12,503	15,934	1.3	0.1	0.0	2.8
'15	Animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes	326,347	2,999,623	12.4	1.4	5.4	5.6
'16	Preparations of meat, of fish, of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates...	652,817	1,499,960	4.5	2.8	2.7	7.1
'17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	295,086	888,995	6.0	1.3	1.6	6.4
'18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	193,375	544,076	5.6	0.8	1.0	2.1
'19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products	10,312	25,857	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
'20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants	1,387,772	2,571,027	3.3	6.0	4.7	9.1
'21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	144,616	434,297	6.0	0.6	0.8	1.5
'22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	793,036	2,118,499	5.3	3.4	3.8	4.4
'23	Residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder	4,578,383	8,551,647	3.3	19.9	15.5	21.6
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>Food</b>	<b>23,058,846</b>	<b>55,220,413</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>'TOTAL</b>	<b>All products</b>	<b>54,265,076</b>	<b>160,897,930</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>

Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).

Comparing the performance of EU food imports from LAC to the same trends in China, according to Trade Map data the Asian power bought goods to the value of \$74.4bn in 2022, growing at an annualised rate of 15.4% in the period 2003-2022, while the EU bought \$55.2bn and its purchases grew at a rate of 4.7% over the same period (Trade Map, 2023).

In summary, trade data confirm that in the last few years the EU has lost ground as a destination of the food LAC places in the world, to China in particular.

## 6. Conclusions

The new international context, marked by confrontation between the United States and China and the impact of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine on supply chains, prompted the EU to review its relations with other regions of the world. This can be seen not only in the case of LAC, but also in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Food security in its broadest sense (such as sustainable production, for example) is at the forefront of recent policies approved by the EU, prominent among which are the European Green Deal, the Global Gateway and the EU's policy towards LAC. The first two are more general and are not limited to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean alone. Yet these policies do have their own chapters for these countries, as was clear at the recent CELAC-EU summit held in Brussels.

From the point of view of trade in food, the EU has not been so important to LAC as a destination for these products over the last few years, its place being taken by China. Since 2020, however, there have been signs of a certain recovery. While there is a favourable international context for relaunching relations between the EU and LAC, in which food security carries greater weight, the severity of EU legislation regarding sustainability could impinge on the new strategy, as can be seen with the difficulties in closing the agreement between the EU and Mercosur. This could continue to favour the enhancement of the LAC countries' relations with other powers such as China.

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