



Timber Legality Risk Dashboard: Honduras

Drafted as of: December 2025

SUMMARY OF LEGALITY RISKS

Risk scores: 86¹ (Higher Risk^a)

Corruption Perception Index: 22 (154th of 180 countries in 2024)²

Conflict State: No³

Export Restriction in Effect: Ban on hardwood and sawnwood exports⁴

Import Regulation in Effect: No

- **Extremely high illegal logging rates for high-value wood:** Illegal logging is estimated to affect 80-90% of the most valuable, and CITES-listed, hardwoods (big-leaf mahogany, cedar, granadillo, and rosewood) and 40-50% of softwoods (mainly *Pinus oocarpa*). These levels are driven by organized crime, corruption, and export demand—much of it from the United States (US), and for key species like rosewood and mahogany, from China.
- **Deep involvement of organized crime:** Organized crime, especially drug-trafficking cartels, are closely tied to illegal logging, land grabs, and ranching—often using these activities to launder their drug money, establish territorial control, and build “narco- infrastructure,” such as airstrips, roads, and cocaine and marijuana laboratories. Drug-trafficking routes are also used to move timber and cattle.
- **Severe impacts on protected areas:** Logging, fire (often intentionally set by organized crime to clear the forest), ranching, and narco-infrastructure have devastated Honduras’ main protected areas, especially the Rio Platano, Patuca and Tawahka Biosphere Reserves, and Patuca National Park, in the northeast or La Mosquitia area of Honduras.
- **Violence and displacement of Indigenous Peoples:** “Narco” logger-ranchers have caused large-scale displacement of Indigenous Peoples and ethnic groups, combined with violence and human and land rights’ abuses. Honduras had the world’s highest per capita murder rate of “land defenders” (mostly indigenous) in 2023.
- **Community forestry was once strong but is now much weaker:** Honduras previously had extensive FSC-certified community-managed forests. The country’s first community forest enterprises (CFEs) were certified in 1999, and by 2013, four FSC certificates covered over 150,000 hectares of broadleaf forest across 72 communities. Most broadleaf CFEs have since collapsed due to criminal encroachment, intimidation, and weak governance. While pine-forest CFEs remain active, with nearly 100 cooperatives, most lack harvesting capacity and rely on intermediaries, creating high illegality risks amid inconsistent law enforcement, high administrative costs, and competition from cheaper illegal timber.
- **Illegal logging is often linked to land title conflicts:** Up to four-fifths of private property in Honduras has inadequate titles or no titles at all. There is also a tendency for titles to be granted on top of other existing titles, especially on ancestral land, often resulting in violence, arrests, and other forms of persecution for the resident land-holding Indigenous and ethnic communities.
- **Weaknesses and corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary:** Forest law enforcement in Honduras is severely hampered because the state Forest Conservation Institute (ICF) is not mandated to file charges, and must instead rely on municipal prosecutors, resulting in slow legal responses and very low conviction rates despite frequent arrests. These weaknesses are compounded by pervasive corruption and a deeply compromised judiciary, with high-level political figures—including former presidents—linked to organized crime and illegal logging networks. International and national pressures led to the creation of an anti-corruption mission (MACCIH) in 2016, but its dissolution in 2020 left Honduras without an effective mechanism to address entrenched impunity in the forest sector.
- **“Zero Deforestation by 2029” plan and militarized enforcement:** In 2024, the Castro administration (2022-2026) pledged to end deforestation by 2029, and it deployed the military (as has happened with previous emergency forest protection plans) to implement its Zero Deforestation strategy. This approach has met widespread civil society criticism, including due to it undermining the role and authority of legally mandated forest sector institutions.
- **Paper dominates the wood products’ trade:** Paper accounted for 83% of wood product imports (by value) and 62% of the export value in 2023—far outweighing Honduran timber products traded on international markets.
- **High-risk timber imports:** Almost 80% of Honduras’s timber product imports in 2023 were from “higher risk” sources, led by Guatemala and China. The main imports were seating, packing cases, “other wooden furniture,” fibreboard, plywood, and bedroom furniture. Very little unprocessed timber is imported due to the abundant national forest resource. In the case of paper, the main sources of imports in 2023 were the US (27% of import value), followed by El Salvador and other Central American countries.

- **High-risk timber exports:** Due to the high levels of illegal logging, as well as the high-risk imports, Honduran timber product exports should be treated with great caution by the main buyers, most obviously the US, the destination for almost half of Honduras' wood sector exports.
- **The US is the main market for Honduran timber and paper exports (notwithstanding discrepancies between Honduran and US reported trade data):** The US was the destination for 46% of Honduras's timber product export value, and 47% of the export value of paper articles in 2023, according to Honduran customs data. However, US import data suggests this significantly underreports the real trade. From 2015 to 2023, the US-reported annual import value averaged US\$35.4 million (M) compared to the Honduras-reported US\$21.4M. The main US timber imports from Honduras in 2024, based on US-reported data, were "other wooden furniture," bedroom furniture, seating, wooden tools, sawnwood, and fuelwood. Honduras was also the top Central American (excluding Mexico) supplier of timber products to the US in 2023.
- **The Honduras-EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) and market leakage concerns:** Honduras is the only Latin American country that has negotiated an EU FLEGT VPA (ratified in 2022 following negotiations since 2013) to counter illegal logging and improve forest governance, as well as to develop a legal verification system for timber exports to the EU, and eventually for all national production. Although the VPA has driven several governance and policy improvements, exports to Europe have fallen sharply post-COVID (to less than 1% of Honduras's timber exports), suggesting a potential "leakage" effect of efforts to raise the bar, as Honduran exporters may be increasingly targeting less demanding markets.

TRADE PROFILE OF FOREST PRODUCTS^{5,b,c}

Total Imports (2023): US\$470 million (83% paper)

Total Exports (2023): US\$219 million (62% paper)

SUMMARY OF HIGHEST PRODUCT-LEVEL RISKS

Exports – Top Timber Products Exported in 2023 by value

- Paper (Chapter 48)
- Sawnwood (HS 4407)
- Other wooden furniture (HS 940360)
- Packing cases (HS 4415)
- Seating (HS 940161 and HS 940169)
- Wooden tools (HS 4417)
- Plywood (HS 4412)
- Joinery (HS 4418)
- Hoopwood (HS 4404)

SUMMARY OF HIGHEST SPECIES-LEVEL RISKS

Illegal logging and trade affect many timber species, especially high-value species, some of which are rare, endangered and/or protected under harvest and/or trade regulations. The following species are subject to protection measures.

CITES-listed Domestic Species:⁶

Appendix I:

- **Ebony, kaki** (*Diospyros* spp., around 254 species endemic to Madagascar, with 88 species reported as large trees)

Appendix II:

- **Big leaf mahogany** or **caoba del Atlántico** (*Swietenia macrophylla*)
- **Pacific mahogany** or **caoba del Pacífico** (*Swietenia humilis*)
- **Rosewood** (*Dalbergia* spp.)
- **Cumaru/almendro** (*Dipteryx* spp.)
- **Cedar** (*Cedrela* spp.)
- **Granadillo** (*Platymiscium parviflorum*)
- **Lignum vitae** (*Guaiaacum* spp.)
- **Ipe** (*Handroanthus* spp., *Roseodendron* spp., *Tabebuia* spp.)

Other Harvested Species:

Tropical Species:⁷

- **Santa María** (*Calophyllum brasiliense*)
- **Laurel** (*Cordia alliodora*)
- **Ceiba** (*Ceiba pentandra*)
- **Tamarindo** (*Dialium guianense*)
- **San Juan** (*Vochysia guatemalensis*)
- **Masica** (*Brosimum alicastrum*)
- **Sangre** (*Pterocarpus officinalis* Jacq.)
- **Caobina** (*Virola koschnyi*)
- **Cumbillo** (*Terminalia amazonia*)
- **Macho cedar** (*Carapa guianensis*)
- **Gregorywood** (*Terminalia buceras*)
- **Katalox** (*Swartzia cubensis*)
- **Machiche** (*Lonchocarpus castilloi*)
- **Zapotillo** (*Manilkara zapota*)
- **Ziricote** (*Cordia dodecandra*)

Temperate species:

- **Oocarpa pine** (*Pinus oocarpa*)
- **Carribean pine** (*Pinus caribea*)
- **Oak** (*Quercus* spp.)

FORESTRY SECTOR

Forested Area: 5.7 million ha in 2024 (61% in protected areas), 52% of the national land area. 72% of forest is broadleaf, 27% coniferous, and 1% mixed.⁸

Deforestation Rate (2015- 2020): 0.8% per year (61,600 ha) between 2001 and 2024⁹

Forest Ownership (as of 2015):¹⁰

- 12.19 million ha privately-owned (35%)
- 1.69 million ha state-owned (27%)
- 0.63 million ha under community tenure^d (10%)
- 0.25 million ha owned by municipalities (4%)
- 1.31 million ha other/unknown ownership (21%)

Certified Forests:

- FSC Certification: 9,202 ha pine plantations owned by SANSONE company with FSC Forest Management and Chain of Custody certification.¹¹

DOMESTIC TIMBER PRODUCTION

Roundwood production from forest management plans approved by the state Forest Conservation Institute^e (ICF) in 2024 was 347,553 m³, with over 95% of it being softwood.¹² Earlier data, however, reveal that timber production is much higher, suggesting that a large share of it is illegal. A 2019 ITTO study¹³ reported that, in 2017, Honduras produced 770,000 m³ of logs, 306,000 m³ sawnwood, 49,000 m³ plywood, and 1,000 m³ veneer—this is much higher than the 438,760 m³ recorded as legal production (from approved management plans) in 2017.¹⁴ In 2017, the ITTO also reported that all log production, as well as 43% of sawnwood and 17% of veneer production, were destined for national consumption or processing, with the rest exported.¹⁵

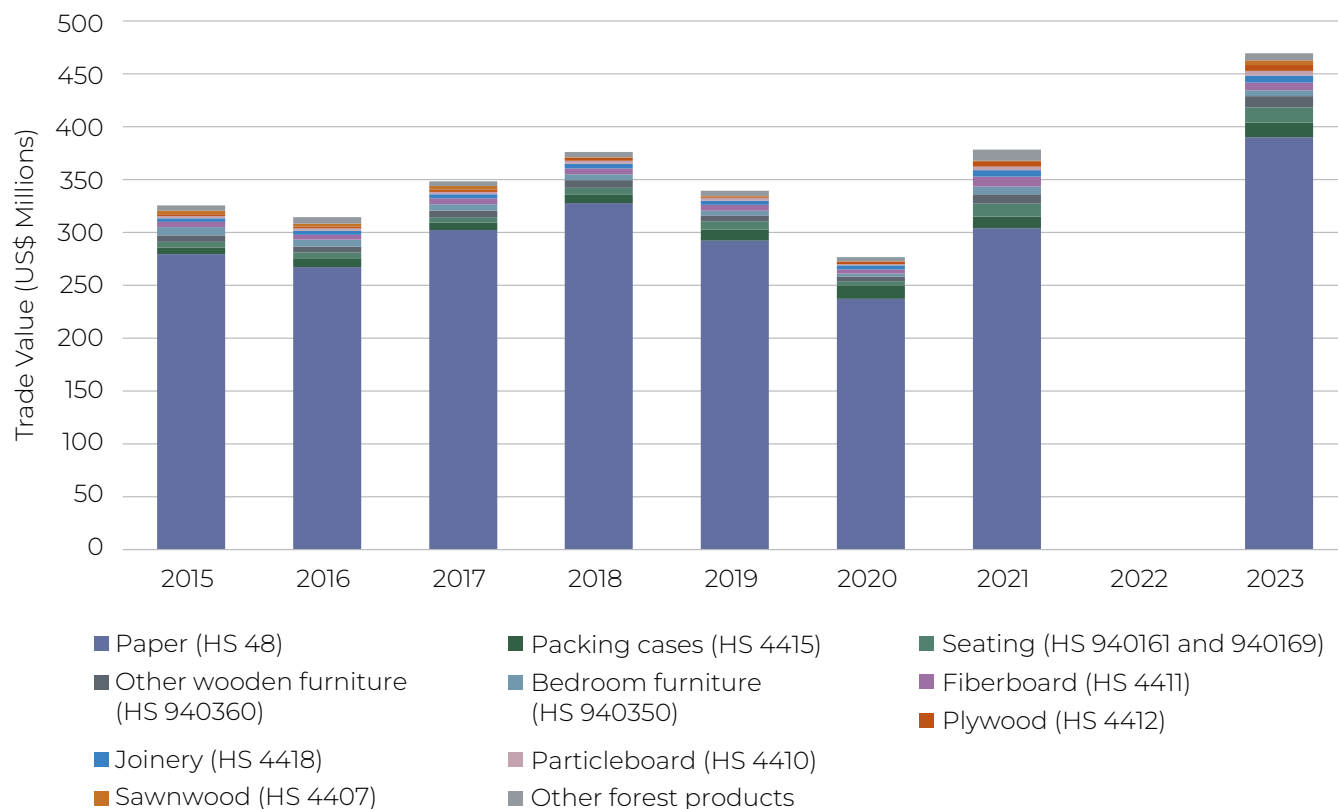
It should also be noted that in the past, Honduras had a significant area of FSC certified forest under the management of community forestry enterprises (CFEs), mainly in the northeast tropical forest area. The first CFEs, both in Honduras and Central America, achieved FSC certification in 1999, and by 2013, four FSC certificates covered over 150,000 hectares and 72 communities. Over time, however, the FSC certificates have been gradually lost due to multiple policy, governance, legal, and tenure problems. (Although one timber cooperative with 17,815 ha aims to recover its FSC certification pending an audit in 2026, there is an internal debate about the costs and viability of certification.)¹⁶

In contrast, CFEs in pine forest areas remain active, with nearly 100 agroforestry cooperatives and over 6,000 members. Although some CFEs produce furniture, resin, honey, and crafts, most lack harvesting equipment and therefore sell the standing timber to intermediaries (contractors) with a high risk of illegality due mainly to inconsistent law enforcement and forestry authority negligence. CFEs producing legal wood products also face economic pressure from the high bureaucracy costs, including due to lengthy procedures, and having to compete with cheaper illegally-sourced timber products.¹⁷

Imports

Honduran wood product imports are dominated by paper products and pulp, which made up 85% of the average annual wood product import value (US\$354M) over 2015-2023, while the average timber product import value was US\$54M. In 2023, the main timber imports were: wooden seating (19% of the timber import value), packing cases (17%), other wooden furniture (13%), fiberboard (9%), joinery (8%), bedroom furniture (8%), plywood (7%), particleboard (6%), and sawnwood (5%).¹ Very little unprocessed timber is imported due to the abundant national forest resource.

FIGURE 1: HONDURAN TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS BY MAIN PRODUCT TYPE (US \$M 2015-2023)



Honduras sources its timber imports from a range of countries (Figure 2), most of which are classified as high-risk sources—in 2023, about four-fifths of imports were from “higher risk” countries, particularly Guatemala, China, Brazil, and El Salvador. Guatemala has been the biggest supplier throughout 2015-2023, while China’s share has increased slightly from 15% in 2015-2020 to over 20% in 2023. In 2023, about 13% of timber imports were from the US.

Relating to paper articles, the main sources of their 2023 import value (\$452M) were the US (29%), El Salvador (22%), Guatemala (18%), Mexico (8.6%), and China (5.8%). The fastest growing sources between 2022 and 2023 were Mexico, Guatemala, and China.

Wood Product Exports

Paper dominates Honduras’ wood product exports. From 2015-2023, paper accounted for 71% (US\$212M per year) of the wood product export value. In 2023, Honduras exported \$143M worth of paper articles, almost half (47%) of it to the US. The other main market destinations in 2023 were Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Since Honduras does not have pulp plantations, paper articles are manufactured in Honduras from pulp sourced from other countries.

FIGURE 2: MAIN SOURCE COUNTRIES OF HONDURAN TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS (US \$M 2015-2023)

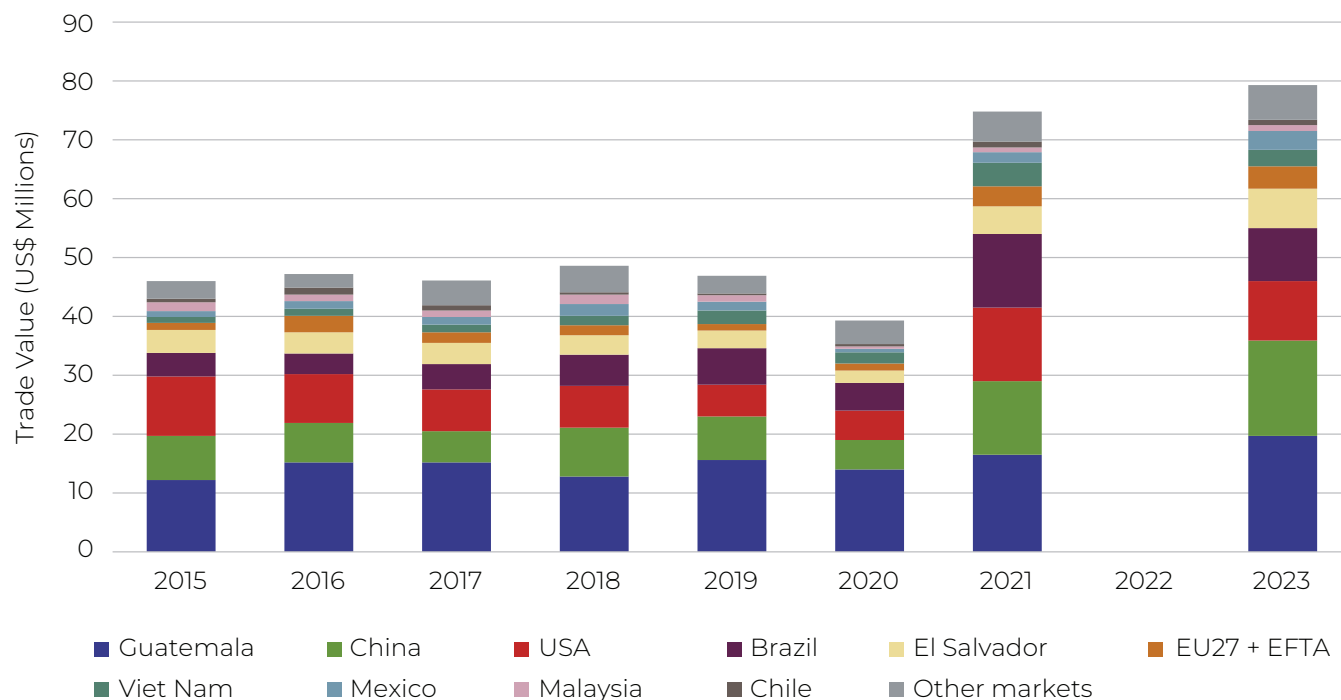
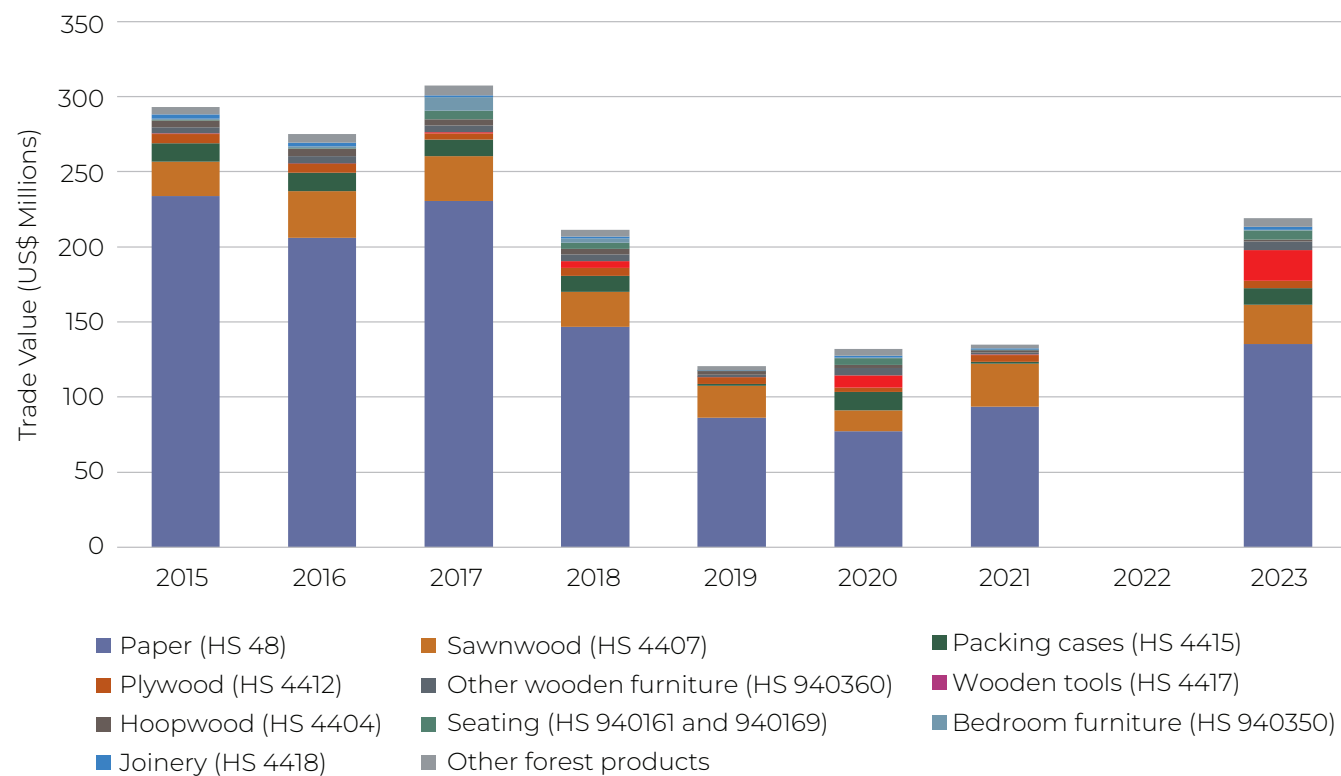
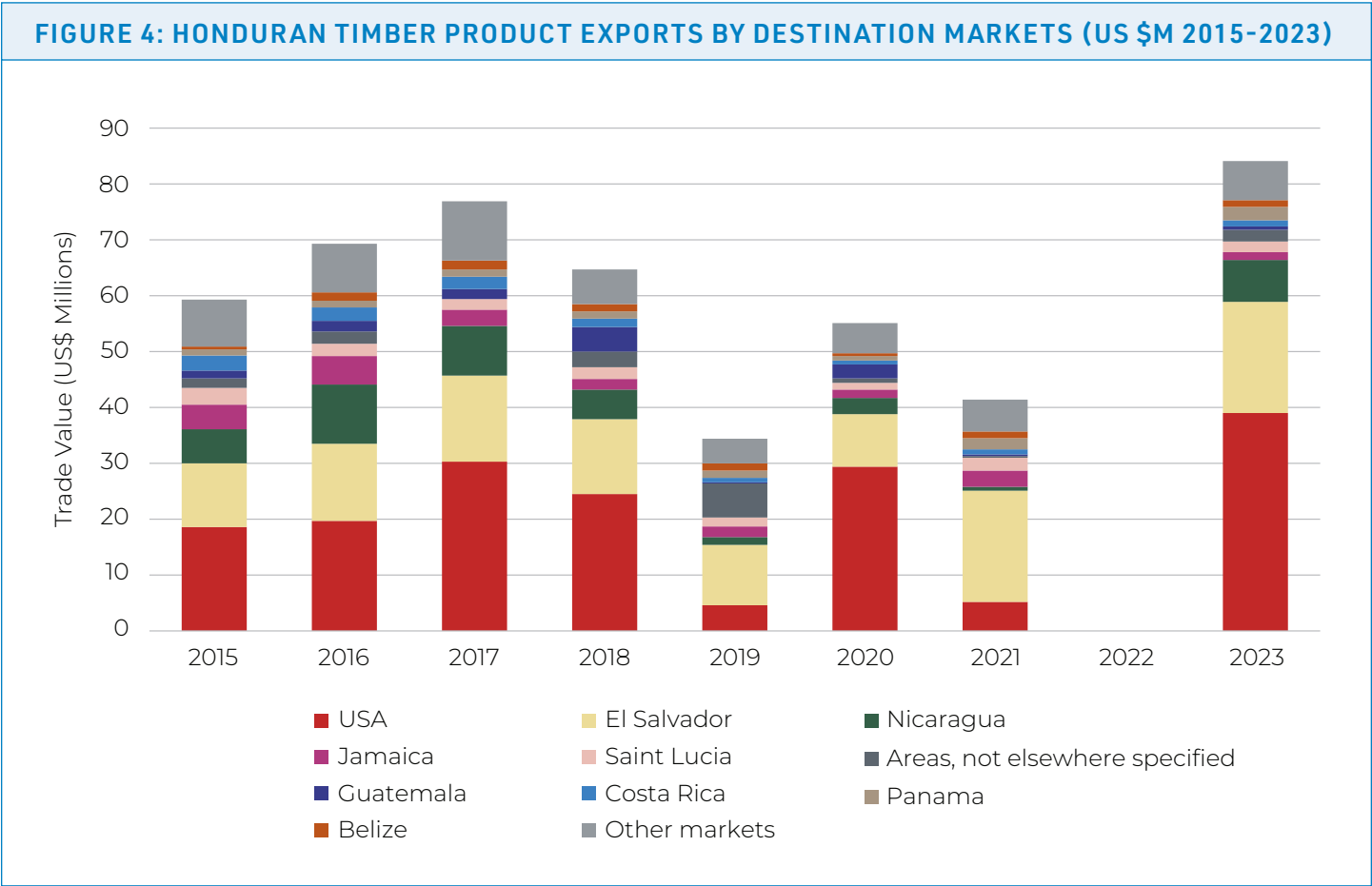


FIGURE 3: HONDURAN TIMBER PRODUCT EXPORTS BY PRODUCT TYPE (US \$M 2015-2023)



Timber export values have fluctuated widely, with the 2023 value (US\$84M) more than double that of 2021 (Figure 3). The main timber export products over 2015-2023 have been sawnwood (41% of an average annual export value of US\$60.6M), packing cases (15%), plywood (7.9%), other wooden furniture (7.3%), wooden tools (6.6%), hoopwood (5%), seating (4.3%), bedroom furniture (3.2%), and logs (2.3%). In 2023, exports of other wooden furniture and seating surged—rising to US\$20M and US\$6.1M respectively, while sawnwood, hoopwood, bedroom furniture, and logs all trended down.

The US is the dominant market for Honduran timber exports. According to Honduran-reported Comtrade data, on average US\$21.4M per annum of timber products were exported to the US from 2015-2023. Figure 4 shows that timber exports to the US surged in 2023 to US\$39M (46% of the export value). The next most important markets were all regional: El Salvador (24% of the 2015-2023 export value), Nicaragua (8.9%), Jamaica (4.5%), Saint Lucia (3.4%), Guatemala (2.7%), Costa Rica (2.5%), and Panama (2.4%).

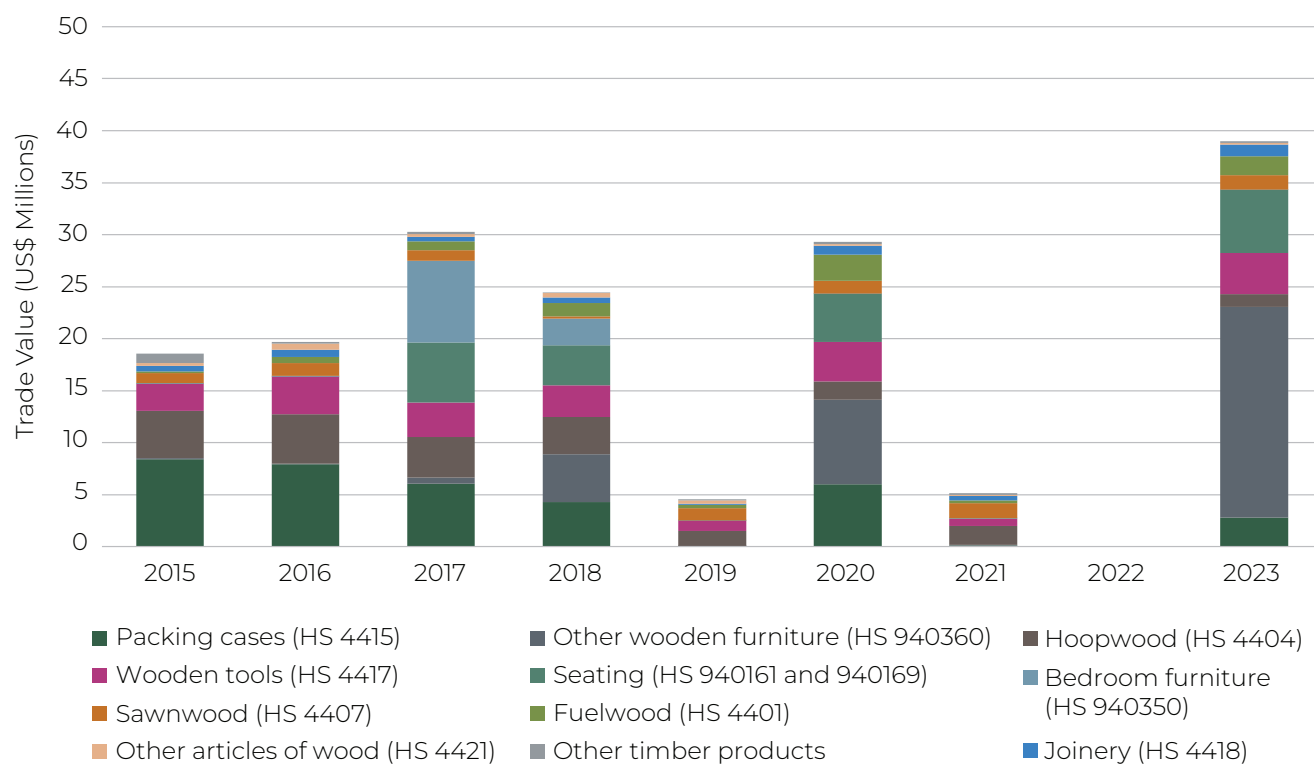


Big discrepancies between Honduran export data and US import data: Comparing Comtrade data reported by Honduras and the US (Figure 5) shows that US-reported import values are consistently and substantially higher. These discrepancies suggest systematic underreporting or misreporting in Honduras's export data, which is often associated with illegal logging and tax evasion, as well as weak customs oversight. The persistent gap—where US imports far exceed Honduras's reported exports—indicates a high likelihood of unrecorded or illicit timber flows moving through Honduran supply chains.

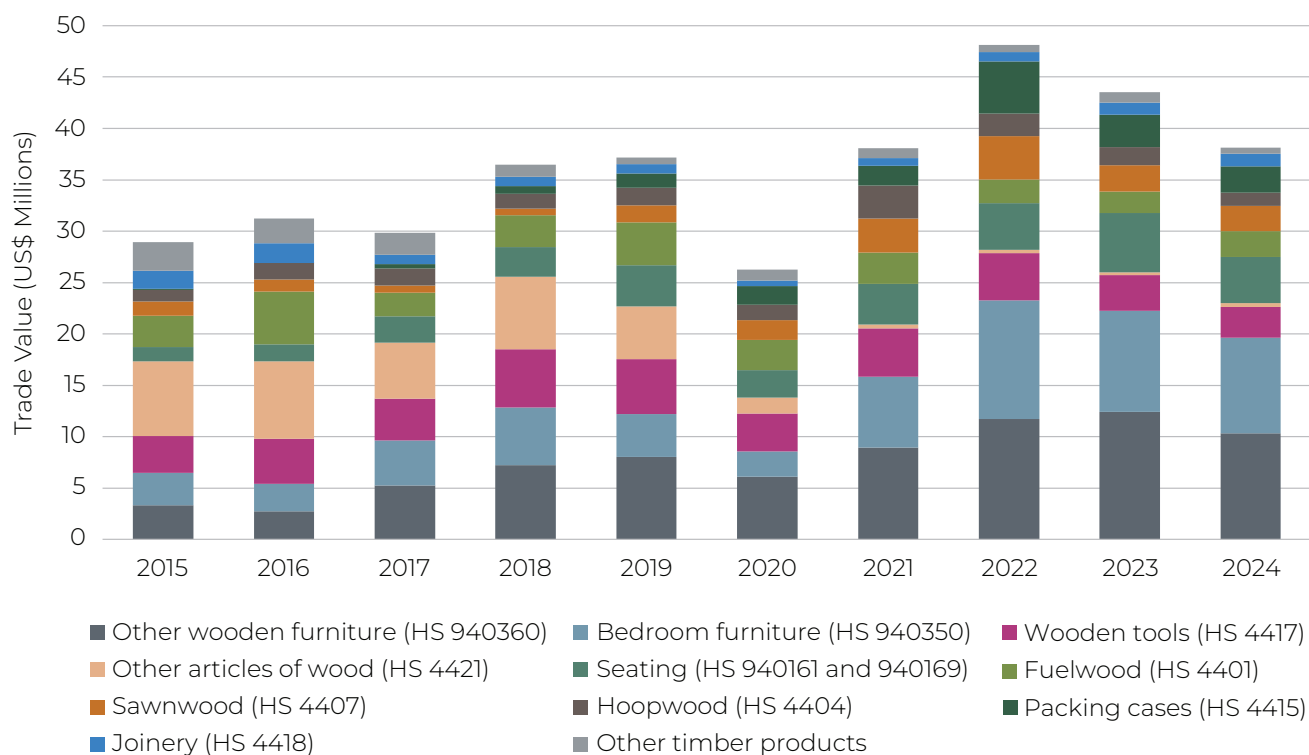
Excluding 2022 (when Honduras did not report to Comtrade), Honduras reported an average of US\$21.4M in annual timber exports to the US over 2015-2023, while US data show an average of US\$34.5M of timber imports for the same period. Over the full 2015-2024 decade, US imports averaged US\$35.8M/year, led by "other wooden furniture," bedroom furniture, wooden tools, other wood articles, seating, fuelwood, and sawnwood. Although overall US timber imports from Honduras dipped post-COVID, several categories surged: between 2022-2024, US imports averaged US\$43.2M per year, with strong growth in other wooden furniture, bedroom furniture, seating, packing cases, and sawnwood.

**FIGURE 5. DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN HONDURAS-REPORTED EXPORTS TO THE US
AND US-REPORTED IMPORTS FROM HONDURAS (US \$M 2015-2023)**

HONDURAS-REPORTED TIMBER PRODUCT EXPORTS

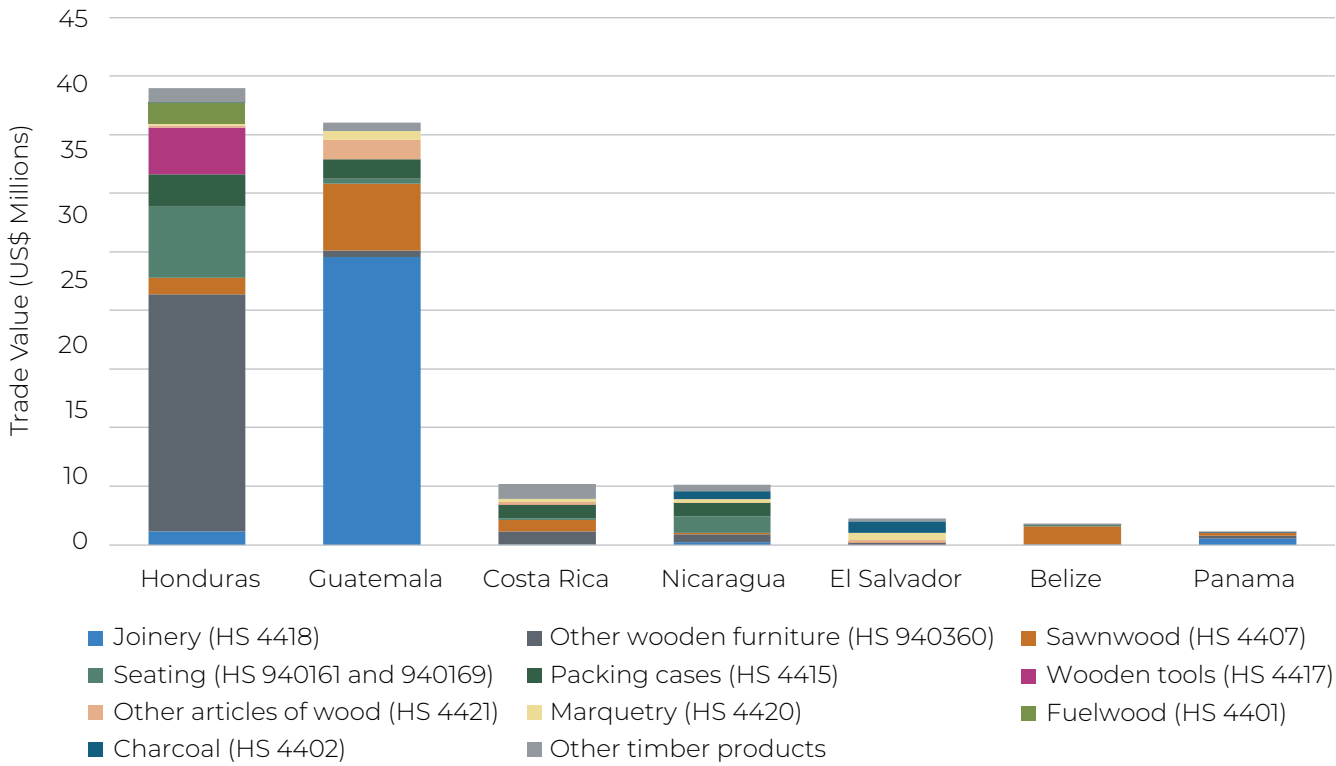


US-REPORTED TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS



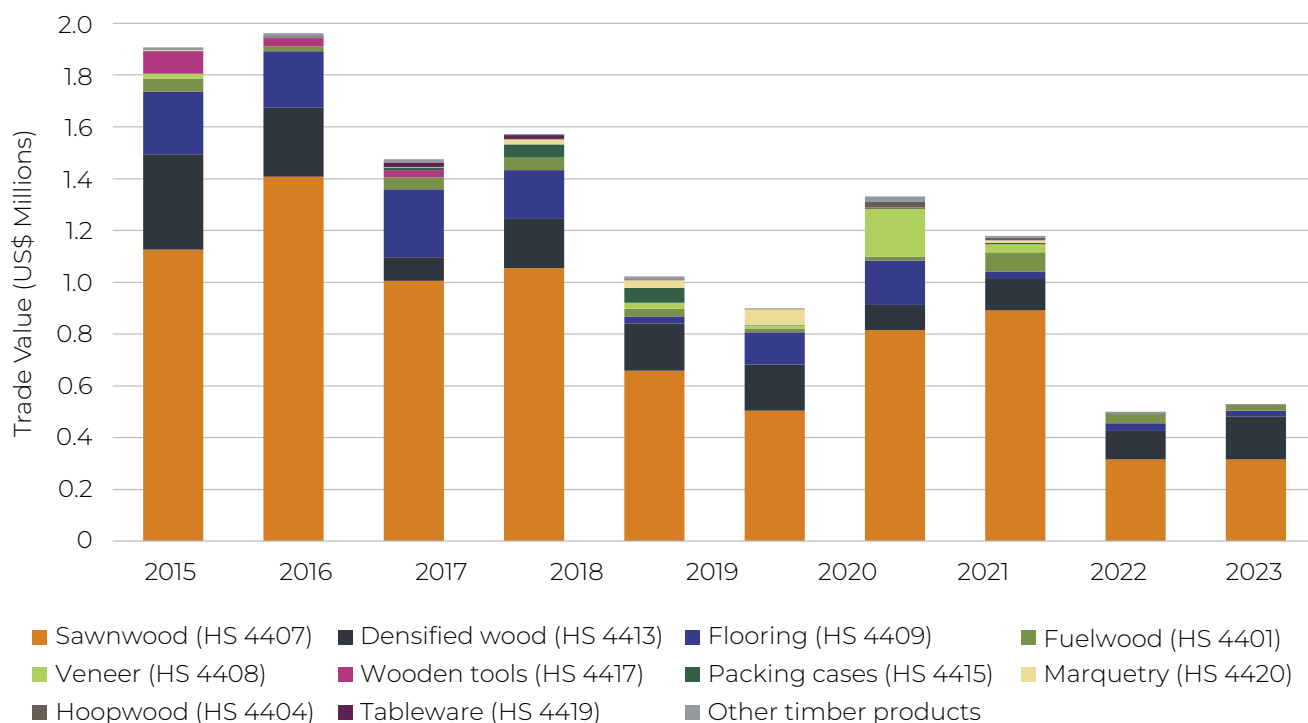
Honduras is the dominant Central American supplier of timber products to the US (excluding Mexico) as shown in Figure 6. In 2023, Honduras supplied 88% (\$20.2M) of US imports of "other wooden furniture" exports from the seven Central American countries, 74% (\$6.1M) of seating, 99% (\$4M) of wooden tools, and 100% (\$1.8M) of fuelwood.

FIGURE 6: CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION COUNTRY TIMBER PRODUCT EXPORTS TO U.S. IN 2023 (US\$M)



EU imports are minimal and declining. Europe accounted for only about 0.6% of Honduran timber products exports, or half a million USD, in 2023, but are presented here in view of the importance of the Honduras-EU Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA). Figure 7 shows that EU/EFTA imports from Honduras over 2023-24 were less than half of those of 2021-2022, and only a quarter of the 2025-2016 volumes—this suggests there may be a "leakage" impact of efforts to raise the bar, as Honduran exporters increasingly target less demanding markets.

FIGURE 7: EU27 AND EFTA TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS FROM HONDURAS (US\$ 2015-2024)



TIMBER LEGALITY CONTEXT

Extremely High Levels of Illegal Logging

Although national estimates of illegal logging are sparse, various studies and reports suggest very high levels of illegal logging, especially in the tropical/hardwood forest:

- An empirical analysis conducted in 2001 estimated that 75-85% of hardwood production and 40-50% of softwood production was illegal;¹⁸
- 50-60% of the 2016-2018 timber trade was illegal according to an Insight Crime report;¹⁹
- 40% of harvested (mainly softwood) timber lacked a legal permit according to a 2023 ICF analysis;²⁰
- 89% of mahogany cut in 2024 was illegal—this was based on an estimate by ICF that 1,650 m³ of mahogany was in circulation on the national market in 2023-2024, and only 11% (190 m³) was from approved management plans.^{21,9}

NEPCON's 2017 timber legality analysis²² assigned Honduras a Timber Risk Score^h of 0/100 and identified that the main legality risks related to rights to timber harvesting, taxes and fees, third-parties rights, transport, and trade. The assessment found "specified risks" for 19 forest legality sub-categories (Table 1), and that legal requirements were missing for two sub-categories: free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), and legislation on due diligence/due care procedures.

Key informants have also highlighted an illegality narrative associated with state-issued "plantation certificates." These certificates are public legal documents that grant harvesting and marketing rights to entities that have planted and managed the trees. Between 2014 and 2023, ICF issued 4,479 plantation certificates covering 282,349.85 ha.²³ However, key informants allege that some certificate holders have used them to log natural forest hardwoods, especially mahogany, while falsely claiming the timber originated from plantations. Although a 30-year ban on mahogany logging was introduced in 2024, an exemption remains for mahogany from "certified" plantations, creating a loophole that can be abused.

**TABLE 1: "SPECIFIED RISKS" AND "NO LEGAL REQUIREMENTS" IN NEPCON 2017
TIMBER RISK ANALYSIS OF HONDURAS (SOURCE: NEPCON, 2017)**

LEGAL CATEGORY	SUB-CATEGORY	RISK CONCLUSION
Legal rights to harvest	1.1 Land tenure and management rights	Specified
	1.2 Concession licenses	Specified
	1.3 Management and harvest planning	Specified
	1.4 Harvesting permits	Specified
Taxes and fees	1.5 Payment of royalty fees and harvesting fees	Specified
	1.6 Value added taxes and other sales taxes	Specified
	1.7 Income and profit taxes	Specified
Timber harvesting activities	1.8 Timber harvesting regulations	Specified
	1.9 Protected sites and species	Specified
	1.10 Environmental requirements	Specified
	1.11 Health and safety	Specified
	1.12 Legal employment	Specified
Third parties' rights	1.13 Customary rights	Specified
	1.14 Free prior and informed consent	n/a
	1.15 Indigenous / traditional peoples rights	Specified
Trade and transport	1.16 Classification of species, quantities, qualities	Specified
	1.17 Trade and transport	Specified
	1.18 Offshore trading and transfer pricing	Specified
	1.19 Custom regulations	Specified
	1.20 CITES	Specified
Due diligence / due care procedures	1.21 Legislation requiring due diligence / due care procedures	n/a

Organized Crime is a Major Driver of Illegal Logging and Territorial Control

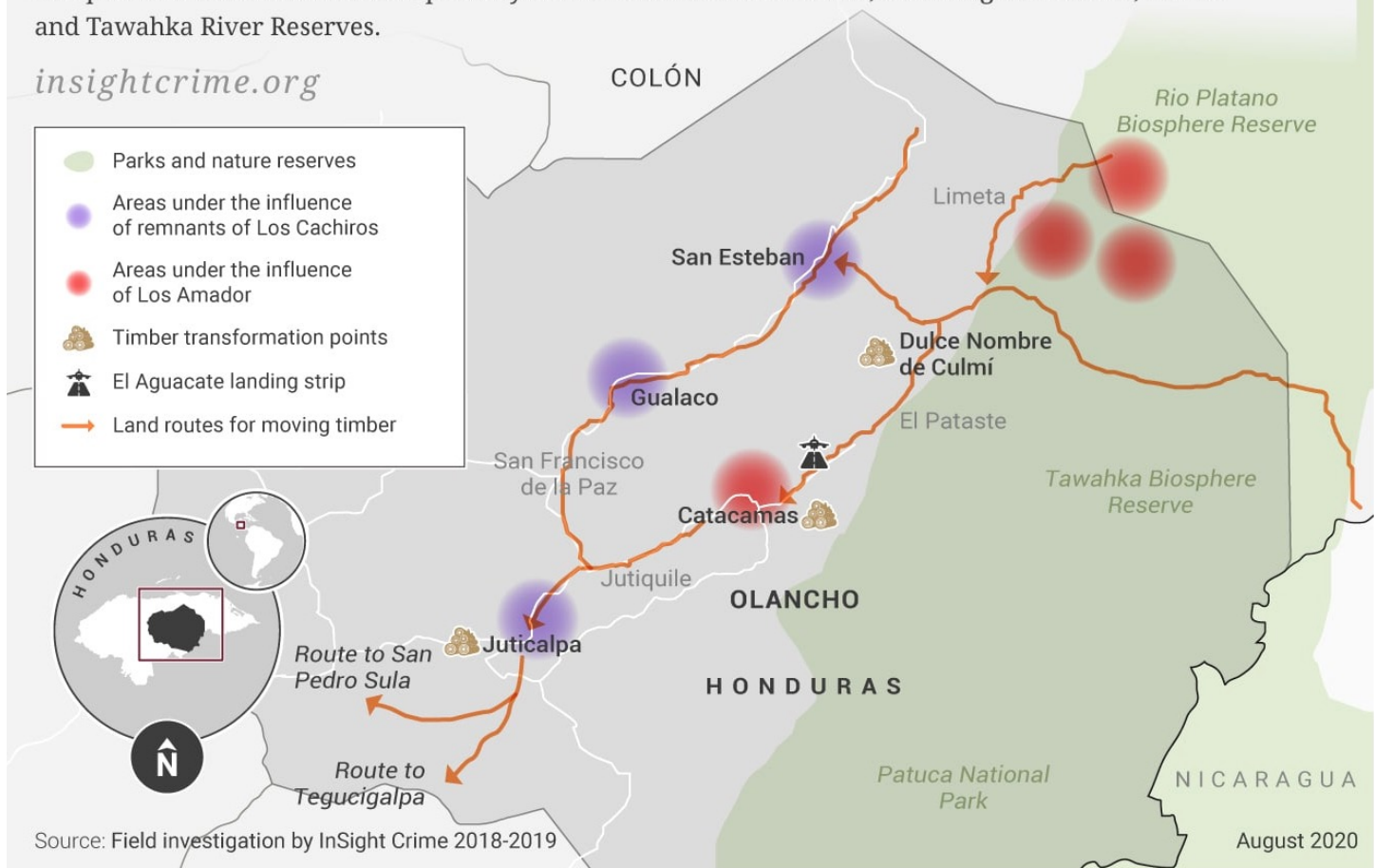
Multiple sources, including ICF, report that much of the illegal timber is harvested and traded by organized crime groups, especially "narco" logger-ranchers that use the same routes and networks as wildlife and drug trafficking operations.²⁴ These groups have heavily affected major biosphere reserves and national parks, like the Rio Platano and Tawahka Biosphere Reserves and Patuca National Park in Olancho Department. As reported by Insight Crime, ranching and logging operations are fronts that enable organized crime to establish territorial control, build narco-infrastructure (e.g. airstrips, drug production laboratories, etc.), and launder their money by investing in cattle, land, and timber (Figure 8).

Illicit timber flows are often intertwined with drug trafficking, and reach both China and the US. Honduras is at the center of a major drug-trafficking route between Colombia and the US. According to the Global Initiative Against Organized International Crime (GI-TOC), illegally logged mahogany, cedar, and other species are frequently trafficked alongside cocaine and other drugs, and exported to China and the US with the help of corrupt politicians and police officers.²⁶ The

Timber Trafficking in Olancho, Honduras

Criminal groups made up of politicians, drug traffickers and cattle ranchers, have deforested the pine and precious wood forests in the primary nature reserves in Honduras, including the Plátano, Patuca and Tawahka River Reserves.

insightcrime.org



Honduras-China illicit timber trade has a long history: in 2014, Hong Kong customs intercepted four containers of timber containing 92 tons of Honduran rosewood (*Dalbergia stevensonii*) logs worth some US\$3 million. The shipment, labelled as "rubber waste", arrived in Hong Kong via Mexico and Guatemala, but originated in Honduras.²⁷ Another CITES-listed species, granadillo (*Platymiscium parviflorum*), is also in high demand in China.²⁸

As noted in Box 1, illegal logging and land disputes are often intertwined—land rights issues are a major underlying driver of illegal logging, deforestation, and violence. A report by the Organization of American States (OAS)³⁴ describes how the country's flawed titling system creates disputes over the possession and management of land. In 2020, it was estimated that about four-fifths of private property had inadequate titles or no titles at all. It was also noted that titles tend to be granted on top of others, especially on ancestral land, resulting in conflicts that often lead to violence, arrests, and other forms of persecution, especially for Indigenous and ethnic communities.³⁵

Weaknesses and Corruption in Law Enforcement and the Judiciary

A fundamental barrier to effective forest law enforcement in Honduras is that the ICF lacks the authority to charge individuals who violate the forest law or cause deforestation. Legal prosecution rests with municipal offices of the Public Prosecutor's Office, leaving the ICF's role limited to gathering evidence. This complicates efforts of the ICF to enforce protected area boundaries, and it results in a very slow response of the legal system.³⁶ Combined with entrenched corruption and a weak judiciary, this has resulted in very few convictions. For instance, although 153 people were arrested for environmental crimes in 2022-23, only three were convicted.³⁷

BOX 1: ORGANIZED CRIME, VIOLENCE, AND LAND RIGHTS ABUSES

Honduras is at the center of a major drug-trafficking route between Colombia and the US. Large firms or cartels, often involving senior government officials, operate as middlemen, transporting Colombian cocaine through Honduras by land, sea, and air to Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala on the way to the US. In recent years, these operators, looking to increase their profits, have diversified from cocaine, increasingly producing marijuana, "krispy" (a chemically-laced cannabis derivative), methamphetamine, and other synthetic drugs, that are then supplied to criminal organizations in Mexico.

International gangs, such as MS-13 and Barrio 18, have come to dominate Honduras' criminal landscape. These organizations maintain control over their areas of operation, using extreme violence, and drawing much of their power from the prison system. MS-13 has developed a "business-oriented and discrete profile," while Barrio 18 has a more traditional approach, including in its involvement in timber trafficking. Gangs from Colombia, Mexico, and El Salvador are also active in Honduras. All these groups operate in collusion with the Honduran authorities, including law enforcement officials, mayors, congress members, and at least one ex-president.

Organized Crime in *La Mosquitia* (and other areas) has resulted in the abuse of Indigenous human and land rights, violence, and forced displacement. Most land in *La Mosquitia* has been granted to Indigenous groups (although not the resources or authority to manage it), but many have been forced at gunpoint to abandon their land—in 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identified organized crime groups linked to cocaine, cattle, and timber as the main actors driving forced displacement. Inevitably, the land grabbing and displacement has been accompanied by violence. Environmental violence has normally involved land disputes, and it has been concentrated in Indigenous areas. Honduras had the highest murder rate of environmental defenders or activists (mainly from Indigenous groups) per capita in the world in 2023.

Main sources: GI-OTC, 2021²⁹; Insight Crime, 2024³⁰; Montoya, 2022³¹; Radwan, 2024³²; Global Witness, 2024³³.

The judiciary is widely considered to be weak, ineffective, and corrupt—Honduras ranked 119th of 142 countries in the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, with especially low scores for the absence of corruption and criminal justice.³⁸ Political interference is pervasive: appointments for Supreme Court magistrates and Attorney General have been subject to manipulation by Congress members, many of whom have been implicated in corruption scandals.³⁹ Corruption is endemic in the timber world. For example, in the Olancho Department, where illegal logging is endemic, the mayor of Catacamas and National Party Congressman Lincoln Figueroa was investigated for his involvement in illegal logging, and he was named in a human rights' report over the killing of an environmental activist in 1998.⁴⁰

Corruption has also been at the highest political level. Insight Crime⁴¹ found that most drug gangs or cartels operating in *La Mosquitia* had strong links to the National Party during its 2009 to 2022 tenure, especially with ex-congressman Tony Hernández—now serving a life sentence in the US on drug and weapon charges. His brother Juan Orlando Hernández, president of Honduras from 2014 to 2022, was extradited to the US in 2022 and convicted on similar charges in March 2024.⁴² Another ex-President, Manuel Zelaya (husband of Xiomara Castro, President from 2022–2026) has also faced corruption allegations, and his brother, Carlos Zelaya, a Congressman and head of the Honduran Environmental Commission in the Castro government, has been captured on film receiving bribes from drug traffickers.⁴²

Due to public and international pressure, the internationally-backed Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) was created in 2016 to support the Attorney General's Office, but Congress dissolved it in 2020. It has not been replaced or re-introduced.⁴³

The Honduras–European Union Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA)

The Honduras–EU VPA of the European Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) Initiative was signed in 2021 and ratified in 2022, following a comprehensive process of negotiation, including with civil society, since 2013. VPA implementation is being supported by the 2024–2030 EU–Honduras Forest Partnership project involving a €16M grant. This has four main action areas: to reduce deforestation, tackle illegal logging, boost job opportunities in the forest sector, and increase areas of protected, restored, and sustainably managed forests.⁴⁴

A key action of the VPA is the development of a national Timber Legality Assurance System (SALH), which includes digitized traceability. The SALH is being piloted in five municipalities, which account for approximately 70% of national softwood (pine) extraction and will provide the basis for timber export licenses to the EU. Over time, it is also expected to support legality verification for timber sold in the domestic market, as well in regional (Central American) markets.⁴⁵ Key informants report advances in two areas of the SALH:

- **Reduced illegal logging** in areas where "Inter-institutional Coordination and Control Points" have been established under the Interagency Task Force Against Environmental Crime (FTIA);
- **Modernization of the ICT** through the on-line Timber Traceability Information System (SIRMA) and database, which have improved monitoring and follow-up of management plans, and reduced procedural delays.

Respondents to a 2022 questionnaire on the impacts (based on the VPA negotiation phase) of the VPA⁴⁶ agreed that VPA negotiations have been positive for many issues, including stakeholder dialogue, civil society involvement, transparency, accountability, and coherence of the forest sector's legal and regulatory framework. It was also felt that it has helped lead to better consideration of women, youth, and marginalized groups, and even to a slight reduction in illegal logging—the proportion of timber produced with legal permits is reported to have increased to about 50% from 40% before the VPA negotiations.

On the other hand, respondents noted that the VPA process has not impacted illegal logging in public national (mainly tropical) forest areas, and that real change will require significant legal, policy, and governance reforms (and their implementation) to create incentives for legal and sustainable timber production, as well as greatly enhanced accountability and transparency, including between the central and regional levels.⁴⁷

The Presidential Response: The "Zero Deforestation by 2029" Plan

In May 2024, partly in response to public pressure, the government of President Xiomara Castro declared a state of emergency for the country's forests and, under the auspices of the National Defence and Security Council, launched the "Zero Deforestation by 2029" plan. With a budget of US\$766M for the 2024-2028 period, the plan aims to retake control of protected areas, evict criminal groups, and re-establish control of roads used for drug and timber trafficking.⁴⁸

Implementation of the plan has been put in the hands of the Armed Forces, working in coordination with the ICF and other state bodies. The army has been given significant forest law enforcement powers, as well as executive powers in such areas as reforestation and forest fire prevention. It is claimed that hundreds of operations were undertaken between May and August 2024, including interventions in some 20 protected areas, which have led to the arrest of dozens of people linked to organized crime.⁴⁹

Some national NGOs are critical of the plan, especially the role of the military, citing a previous unsuccessful experience in 2011 when the Armed Forces were handed responsibility for forest protection. For example, Independent Forest Monitoring, the NGO responsible for monitoring timber production and trade under the VPA, has expressed several concerns, including the weakening of the legally mandated forest sector institutions, lack of information sharing and transparency, contradictions when institutional responsibilities involving specific legal procedures are transferred to different bodies, and the challenge of conflicting regulations at different government levels. According to a government spokesman quoted in a national newspaper⁵⁰, the deforestation rate fell by 87% year-on-year to June 2025 due to the plan. However, this figure may be unreliable as it is based on "deforestation alerts" rather than confirmed deforested areas, which require subsequent verification.⁵¹

REPORTS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A list of relevant reports and additional online tools to complement this country report are also available at the IDAT Risk website: <https://www.forest-trends.org/fptf-idat-home/>

Key Reading:

1. Avalos, Hector Silva. 2020. The Logging Barons of Catacamas, Honduras. Insight Crime, 18 Sep. 2020. <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/logging-barons-catacamas-honduras/>
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3. Zapata, David. 2024. El 89% de la caoba que hay en el mercado es extraída de manera ilegal. El Heraldito, 30 July 2024. <https://www.elheraldo.hn/honduras/tala-caoba-mercado-nacional-extraida-manera-ilegal-bosques-honduras-DA20647433>

METHODOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY NOTES

^a Risk scores reflect NEPCon's Timber Risk Assessment, which measures the risk of illegality occurring in 21 areas of law relevant to timber legality, as well as Forest Trends' national governance scores, which provide an average relative governance and corruption risk score for 211 countries globally. NEPCon's scores have been flipped to ensure compatibility with Forest Trends' national governance scores, where higher scores are associated with greater governance and corruption challenges. An average of both the NEPCon and Forest Trends scores has been calculated for countries where both are available as of 2025. For all other countries, the risk score reflects Forest Trends' national governance scores as of 2025. Countries scoring less than 25 are considered "Lower Risk," countries scoring between 25 and 50 are "Medium Risk," and countries scoring above 50 are "Higher Risk." It is important to note that it is possible to source illegal wood from a well-governed, "Lower Risk" state, and it is also possible to source legal wood from a "Higher Risk" country. As such, the risk scores can only give an indication of the likely level of illegal logging in a country and ultimately speaks to how corruption and poor governance undermine the rule of law in the forest sector.

^b The term "wood products" is used to refer to timber products (including furniture), plus pulp and paper. It covers products classified in the Combined Nomenclature under Chapters 44, 47, 48, and furniture products under Chapter 94.

^c Except where otherwise specified, all trade statistics and chart data are sourced from UN Comtrade, compiled and analyzed by Forest Trends.

^d In the past, significant forest areas have been managed by community forestry enterprises (CFEs). For example, in 2013, there were a reported 172 CFEs in pine forest areas, 38 of which had usufruct-based management contracts over 275,000 ha, and 62 CFEs in tropical forest areas, 45 of which had contracts over 220,000 ha (ICF 2013). In the tropical forest area, due to the multiple governance, policy, legal, and tenure problems, it is unclear how many CFEs are still operational. It is a

different story in the pine forest areas, where it was reported in 2022 that there are almost a hundred agroforestry cooperatives (with over 6,000 members), which produce a range of forest products, including furniture, pine resin, honey, and pine needle craft products (Cuffe 2022). These cooperatives are represented by the Federation of Agroforestry Cooperatives of Honduras (FEHCAFOR). The latter has a sawmill, and although some products are exported to El Salvador and Nicaragua, most production is for the national market. Legal timber production by FEHCAFOR and the cooperatives face the huge problem of trying to compete with cheaper illegal timber.

^e The full name for ICF is the Instituto de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal, Áreas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre (National Institute of Forestry Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife) (ICF).

^f Honduras did not report its forest/timber imports to UN Comtrade in 2022.

^g These data come from a newspaper report (Zapata 2025) based on an interview with the head of IFC. In addition to the estimate that 89% of mahogany on the national market was illegal, it was stated that analysis of national forest inventory data revealed a sharp reduction in the density of mahogany trees. These findings provided the basis for introducing a 30-year ban on mahogany logging and processing, except for mahogany from ICF-approved plantations. The data justifying the ban, however, have not been published, leading to concerns about their validity (key informant).

^h The NEPCon risk score is a measure of the number of categories of laws that are not at risk of being violated, therefore the lower the score, the more widespread the risk of illegality. For each different timber source type in a country, NEPCon awards:

(a) 1 point for each category of law with a low risk of illegality.

(b) 0 points for each category of law with an identified risk of illegality.

NEPCon then summarise the legal categories that apply to a specific timber source and calculates the score or number of points as a percentage of the total of applicable laws (NEPCon, 2017).

ⁱ An identified risk is called a "specified risk" in the NEPCon analysis (in line with the terminology of forest certification schemes). (ibid).

^j Ex-president Hernandez received a full pardon from President Trump on November 28, 2025, but a few days later the Honduras Attorney General issued a warrant for his re-arrest. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/12/09/hernandez-honduras-warrant-trump-pardon/>.

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The Dashboards have been compiled from publicly available information sources to support risk assessments on the legality of timber products entering international supply chains. The Dashboards are for educational and informational purposes only. The Dashboards have been drafted with input from the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and are subject to external peer review. The Dashboards will be updated periodically based on newly available information.

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