Timber Legality Risk Dashboard: Mexico

Drafted as of: June 2025

SUMMARY OF LEGALITY RISKS

Risk scores: 72.09 (Higher Risk[a])[1]

Conflict State: No[2]

Log or Sawnwood Export Restriction in Effect: No[3]

Import Regulation in Effect: No

- **Large-scale domestic illegal logging:** Estimates suggest that between 3-70 percent of all wood harvested in Mexico is illegal, amounting to between five and fourteen million cubic meters (m^3) annually. There are ongoing allegations of illegal harvesting of CITES-listed species in Mexico that are then exported to China.
- **Links to organized crime:** Illegal logging is closely linked to organized crime networks and cartels. These groups are also involved in drug and human trafficking, human rights violations, and coercive tactics, such as blackmail and extortion.
- **Community displacement and labor exploitation:** Violence associated with illegal logging is contributing to forceful displacement of farmers and Indigenous communities from their lands, while also increasing the risk of labor exploitation in the wood harvesting and processing industry (including child labor).
- **Governance weaknesses in community forests:** More than half of Mexico's forest–and three-quarters of the authorized timber harvest area–is under community ownership. Key informants suggest that over half of Mexico's illegal logging occurs in these areas, but it typically involves a few community members in situations with weak governance, disputes, or poorly defined property rights, rather than whole communities, unless under threat or pressure from organized crime.
- **Weak or unclear property rights:** Illegal logging and deforestation are correlated with unclear or weak property rights, which is particularly acute in lowland tropical forest, cloud, and mangrove forest, as well as in remote or sparsely populated areas with limited oversight.
- **Weak enforcement and corruption:** Enforcement of forest regulations has declined in recent years due to government austerity measures, including significant budget cuts to environmental agencies in the last administration. Low timber seizure rates and persistent corruption at all levels further enable illegal logging activities.
- **Dependency on wood product imports, with an increasing share from high-risk countries:** Mexico *legally* produces only about a third of the wood it consumes, relying on both domestic illegal supply and imported processed timber products to meet demand. Around half of Mexico's timber imports are sourced from lower-risk countries, but imports from higher-risk countries have increased over the past decade to 43% (by value). While some sawnwood comes from lower-risk countries such as the United States (US) and Canada, Mexico also imports substantial volumes of hardwood from high-risk countries.
- **Weak timber legality import controls:** Mexico's ability to control imports of illegally sourced timber remains weak. While there is a legal basis for verification that proves imported wood is legally harvested in its country of origin, it is weakly enforced.
- **Rising export exposure to markets with legality requirements:** Mexico's wood product exports grew significantly between 2015 and 2024, increasing by 83% in value to reach US$4.6 billion in 2024. Paper products accounted for nearly half of this, followed by seating and other wooden furniture. Between 2015 and 2024, Mexico's wood product exports to the US rose by 130%, driven primarily by surging demand for wooden furniture–especially seating and other furniture categories that grew more than 200 to 500%–which together accounted for more than half of Mexico's US-bound exports by 2024.

  Nearly all of Mexico's timber exports were destined for regulated markets: 94% to the US, 4% to Canada and 1% to the EU27+EFTA bloc between 2015 and 2024. In addition to wood products, a high proportion of charcoal exports–primarily to the US–is believed to be illegally produced, raising concerns about compliance with the US Lacey Act.

TRADE PROFILE OF FOREST PRODUCTS[4,b,c]

Total Imports (2024): US$10.3 billion

Total Exports (2024): US$4.6 billion

US$4.1 billion (95%) exported to "regulated markets"[d]

SUMMARY OF HIGHEST PRODUCT-LEVEL RISKS

Exports – Top Wood Products Exported in 2024 by Value

- Paper (Chapter 48 HS codes)
- Wooden Seating (HS 940161 and HS 940169)
- Other wooden furniture (HS 940360)
- Other articles of wood (HS 4421)
- Joinery (HS 4418)
- Kitchen furniture (HS 940340)
- Bedroom furniture (HS 940350)
- Packing cases (HS 4415)
- Flooring, molding, and strips (HS 4409)

SUMMARY OF HIGHEST SPECIES-LEVEL RISKS

Illegal logging and trade affect many timber species, but high-value species—often rare, endangered, and protected under harvest and/or trade regulations—are especially targeted and face the greatest risk of illegality. The species listed below are either currently protected in Mexico or have recently been brought under new protection measures.

CITES-listed Species:[5]

Appendix I:

- **Balmea** *(Balmea stormiae)*
- **Guatemalan fir** *(Abies guatemalensis)*

Appendix II:

- **Guaiacum** *(Guaiacum* spp.*)*
- **Mahogany** *(Swietenia humilis, Swietenia macrophylla)*
- **Rosewood** *(Dalbergia* spp.*)*
- **Cedar** *(Cedrela* spp.*)*[e]
- **Ipe**
- *Handroanthus* spp.
- *Roseodendron* spp.
- *Tabebuia* spp.

CITES-listed, and Other Possibly High-risk, Traded Species:

Mexico's reported imports of CITES-listed timber are:

- *Dalbergia latifolia* from India,
- *Cedrela montana* from Peru,
- *Cedrela odorata* from Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire (plantation material), and Peru,
- *Cedrela fissilis* from Peru,
- *Dalbergia melanoxylon* from Mozambique and Tanzania,
- *Guibourtia* species from Gabon and Cameroon, and
- *Swietenia macrophylla* from Belize and Guatemala.

FAO (2020) has also listed some species imported from Brazil and Peru as high risk:[6]

- Ipe *(Handroanthus* spp.*)* and teak *(Tectona grandis)* imported from Brazil
- Cumala *(Virola* spp.*)* and tornillo *(Cedrelinga cateniformis)* imported from Peru

Mexico's CITES-listed timber exports consist primarily of *Cedrela odorata*, mainly in the form of veneer, as well as *Dalbergia congestiflora* and *Dalbergia granadillo*, both of which are exported predominantly to China. Dalbergia granadillo is a critically endangered species used mainly for guitar manufacture and high-end cabinetry. Given its high commercial value, this species should be regarded as extremely high risk for US guitar manufacturers sourcing material internationally; the combination of high-market value, limited supply, and complex supply chains indicates that a significant proportion of trade is likely to be illegal.

FORESTRY SECTOR

Forested Area: 66.2 million ha (about 12-13% protected.[7]

Deforestation Rate: 0.31% annually [f,8]

Forest Ownership:[g,9]

- 2.3 million ha publicly owned (3.4%)
- 51.5 million ha privately-owned (77.3%)
- 12.8 million ha other/unknown ownership (19.2%)

Certified Forests:

- FSC Certification: 1.84 million ha (2024)[10]
- Mexican Forest Certification System (MFCS or NMX-AA-143-SCFI-2008): Certification: 902 thousand ha (2016)[11]
- Auditoría Técnica Preventiva (ATP) certification system

  No data were available specifically for the ATP area; however, according to CONAFOR (2025), the total area under forest certification across the three schemes reached 2.35 million hectares in 2023.[12]

DOMESTIC DOMESTIC PRODUCTION OF WOOD PRODUCTS[13]

- Logs: 8.85 million m^3 (2023)
- Wood Fuel (including charcoal): 38.18 million m^3 (2023)
- Wood Chips: 582,000 m^3 (2023)
- Case materials: 3.70 million tons (2023)
- Sawnwood: 6.82 million m^3 (2023)
- Particleboard: 754,000 m^3 (2023)
- Wood Pellets: 4,000 tons (2023)
- Veneer: 606,000 m^3 (2023)

THE WOOD PRODUCT TRADE OF HONDURAS – RECENT TRENDS

Wood Product Imports

In 2024, Mexico imported US$2.30 billion worth of "wood and articles of wood/wood charcoal"—a category that captures logs, sawnwood, plywood, and related timber products. The country also recorded a substantial trade volume in wood-derived materials: for instance, its imports of "wood products" overall—including processed wood, panels, and wood-derived articles—amounted to US$3.14 billion in 2024, with major origin countries including the US, China, Brazil, Chile, and Canada. On the pulp and paper side, Mexico's trade in "pulp of wood and fibrous cellulosic material" was valued at US$1.36 billion in 2024, mainly from the US, Canada, and Nordic countries.

Timber Product Imports

Mexico's top timber product imports (i.e., excluding pulp and paper) are sawnwood (HS 4407), plywood (HS 4412), fiberboard (HS 4411) and Flooring (HS 4409) (Figure 1). Since 2015, Mexico's sawnwood imports have increased by 45% in value, with plywood and fiberboard imports increasing 41% by value. Although seating (HS 940161 and 940169) accounts for only about 6% of Mexico's 2024 timber product import value, it experienced the highest growth (81%) over the past decade.

Between 2015 and 2024, approximately 90% of Mexico's timber product imports came from six markets: the US, China, Brazil, Chile, the EU27 and EFTA countries, and Canada.[9] Recent trends show a modest decline in imports from Chile and Canada, alongside growing imports from Vietnam and Indonesia (Figure 2). The US remained Mexico's leading supplier in 2024, accounting for 34% of import value. China was the second-largest supplier (22%), with its export value to Mexico more than doubling over the decade. The fastest-growing suppliers were Vietnam (up 224%) and Indonesia (171%), although together they still only accounted for about 5% of Mexico's 2024 timber import value.

FIGURE 1. MEXICO'S TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS BY MAIN PRODUCT TYPE (US$ 2015-2024)[14]

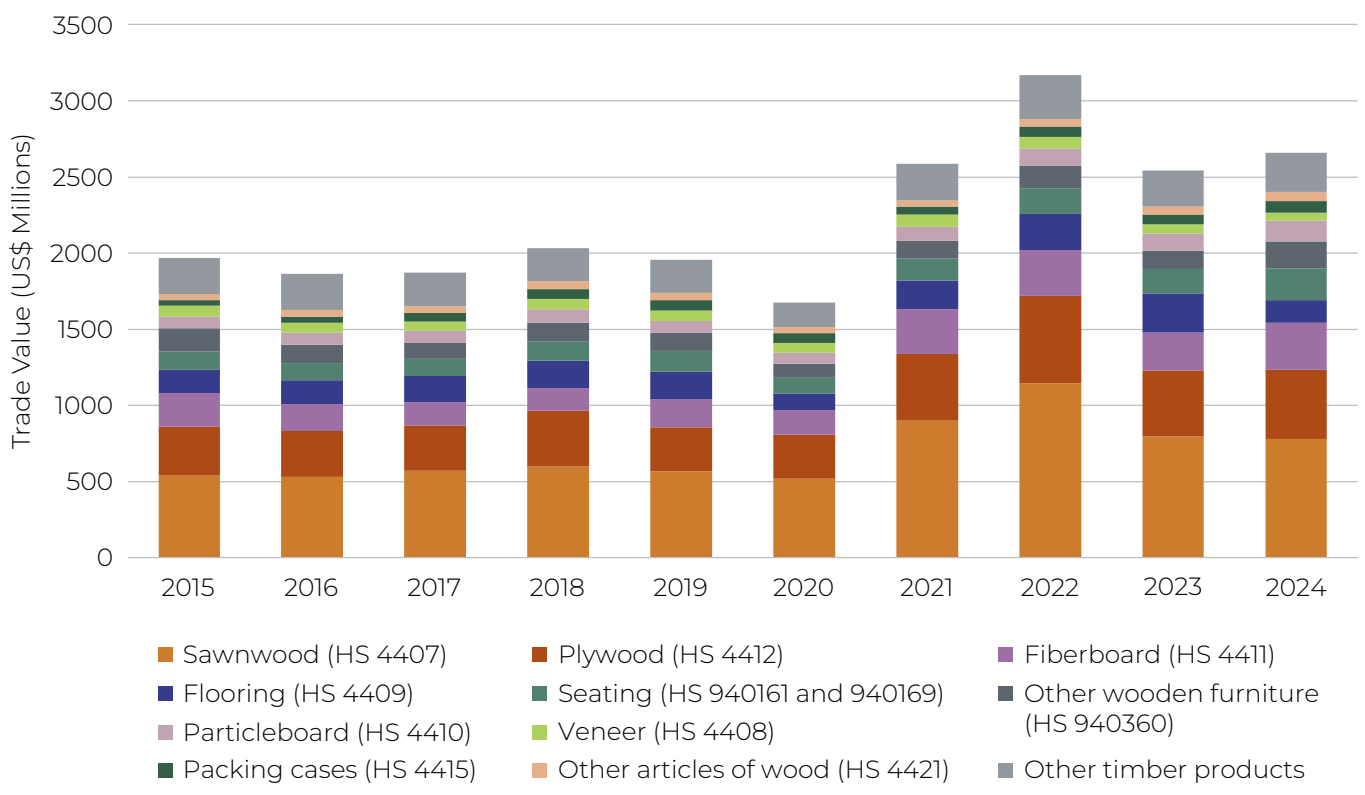
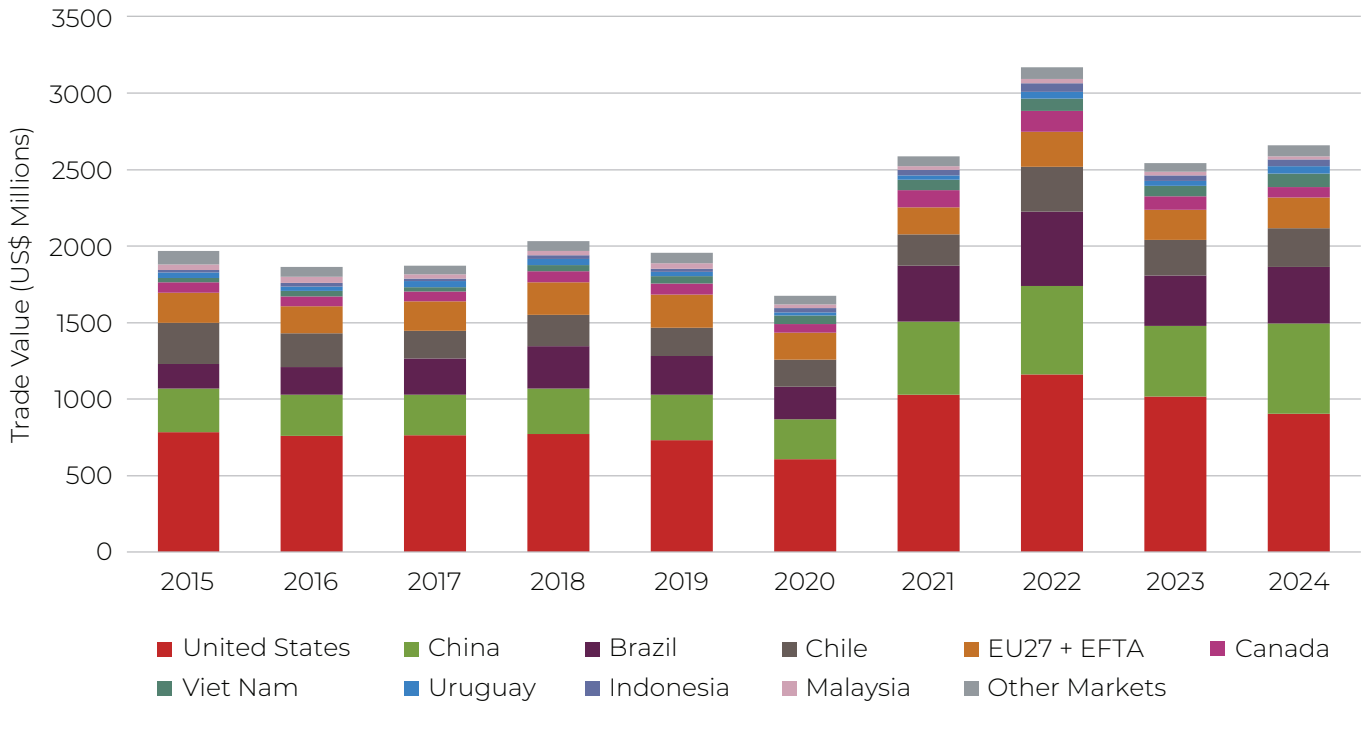


FIGURE 2. SOURCE COUNTRIES FOR MEXICO'S TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS (US$ 2015-2024)[15]

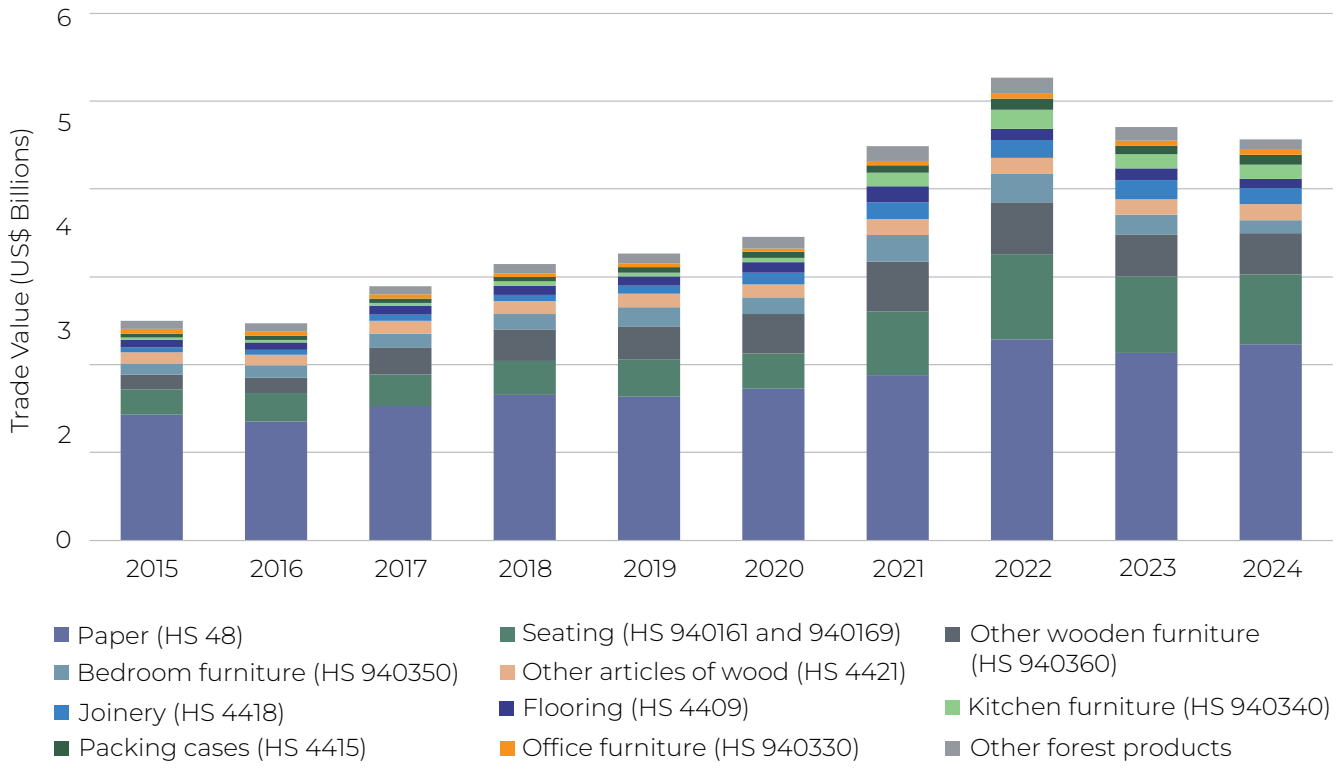


Wood Product Exports

Mexico's wood product exports increased by 83% in value between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 3), reaching US$4.6 billion in 2024. Paper products (Chapter 48) accounted for nearly half of total export value over the decade (49%), followed by seating (HS 940161 and 940169) at 15% and other wooden furniture (HS 940360) at 11%.

Export values rose 53% between 2020 and 2022, driven by increases in all major product categories. This momentum reversed in 2023 when overall export value contracted by 22%, affecting nearly all major product groups except wood flooring (HS 4409) and joinery (HS 4418), both of which continued to grow.

FIGURE 3. MEXICO'S WOOD PRODUCT EXPORTS BY PRODUCT TYPE (US$ 2015-2024)[16]

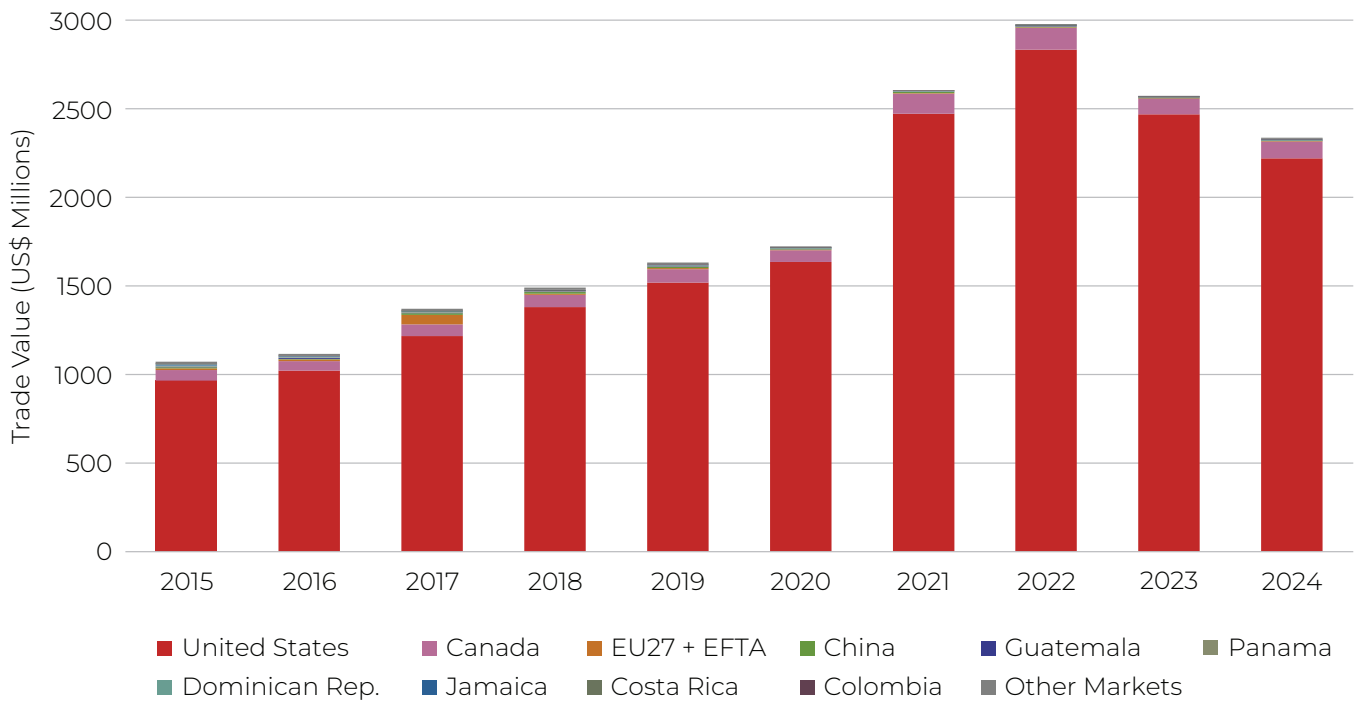


The US is the dominant destination for Mexico's timber exports, accounting for 94% of export value between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 4). Canada received 4% while 1% went to the EU27+EFTA bloc. Therefore, nearly all of Mexico's timber exports are directed to countries with established import regulations aimed at excluding illegally harvested timber, such as the US Lacey Act, the EU Timber Regulation, and Canada's Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRIITA).[h,17]

Based on Mexican customs data, Mexico's exports to the US increased by 130% in value between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 7), driven by rising demand for wooden furniture products, particularly seating (HS 940161 and 940169), other wooden furniture (HS 940360) and kitchen furniture (HS 940340). The export value of these wood furniture categories increased by over 200% over the period, while the value of joinery (HS 4418) rose by over 500%, and packing cases (HS 4415) by 216%. By 2024, more than half of Mexico's exports to the US consisted of seating and other wooden furniture.

Exports from Mexico to the EU27 and EFTA countries, although these were relatively very small, fell by 81% in value between 2015 and 2024 for all product categories except seating, which saw a 193% increase (although to only US$614,754 in 2024). In 2024, 71% of Mexico's reported timber product exports to EU Member States were to Germany, with 17% destined for Spain.

FIGURE 4. MEXICO'S TIMBER PRODUCT EXPORTS BY DESTINATION MARKET (US$ 2015-2024)[18]



Mexico's timber exports to China fell by 93% between 2015 and 2024, mainly reflecting a decline in Chinese demand for Mexican logs (HS 4403) and packing cases (HS 4415). In 2015, Mexico's export value of logs and packing cases (combined) to China was US$5.4 million, while in 2024 there were no reported log exports to China, and the packing case export value was only US$186,545.

Assessing Discrepancies Between Exporter and Importer Statistics

There are significant discrepancies between Mexico's reported exports to the United States and the US import data (Figures 5 and 6). From 2015 to 2024, the average annual gap was US$54.9 million, or roughly 3% of total reported trade. The United States consistently recorded higher import values for seating, exceeding Mexico's reported exports by an average of US$95.3 million per year. For other wooden furniture (HS 940360), the US figures were higher by US$53.7 million annually. In contrast, Mexico reported higher exports than the US reported imports for bedroom furniture (HS 940350) by US$82.6 million per year, and for packing cases (HS 4415) by US$40 million annually.

China's reported imports from Mexico also show notable discrepancies with Mexico's export data– an average of US$23.7 million additional value in China's imports per year over the 2015-2024 period compared with Mexico's reported exports. The biggest discrepancies were in 2021 and 2022, when China reported an average of US$76.2 million in additional import value, primarily for logs. Over the decade, China reported US$172.1 million more in log imports than Mexico reported in exports.

FIGURE 5. MEXICO'S REPORTED TIMBER PRODUCT EXPORTS TO THE US ($US 2015-2024)[19]

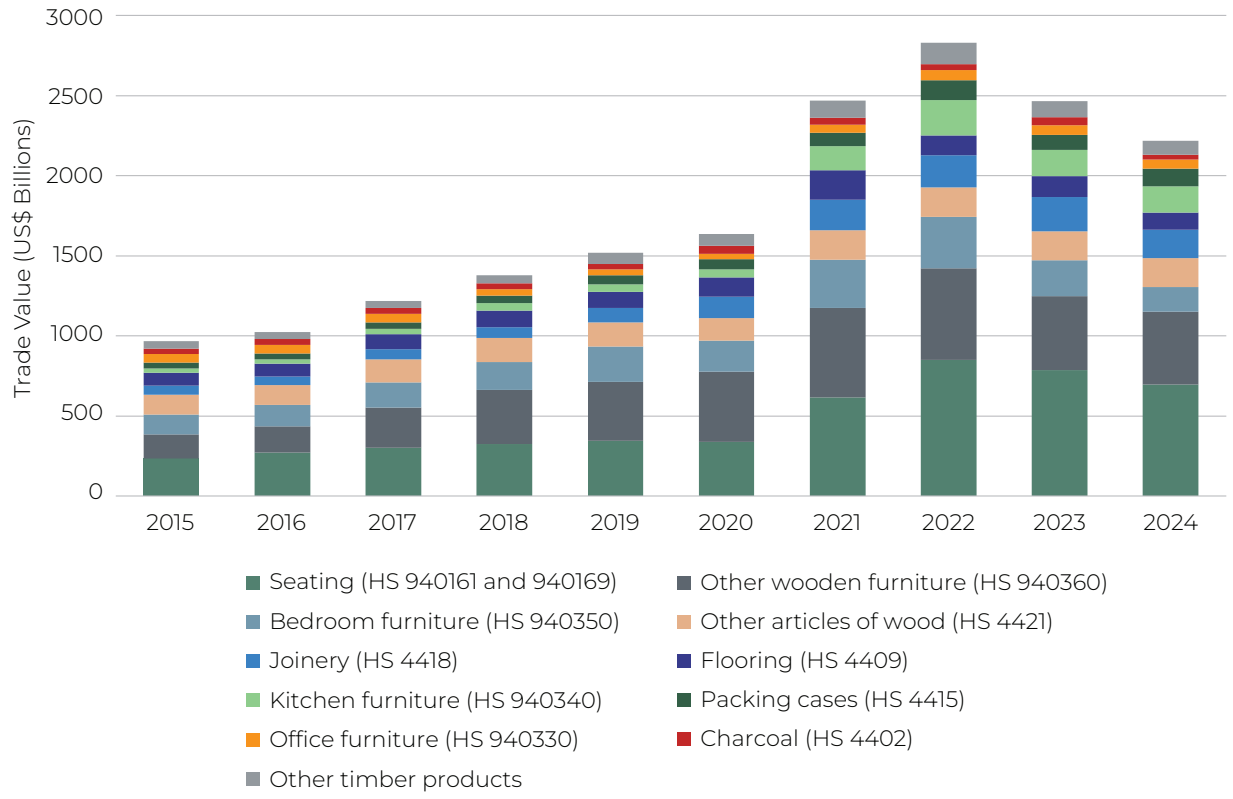
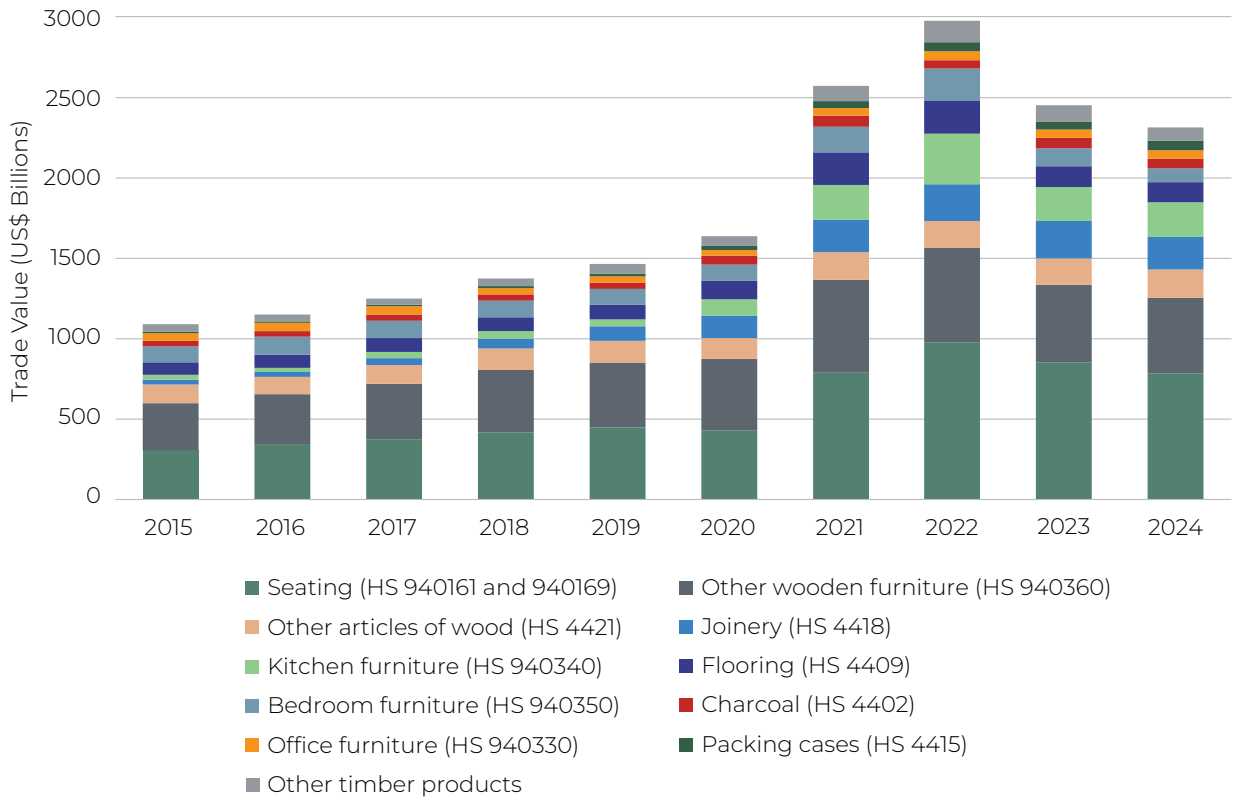


FIGURE 6. REPORTED TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS FROM MEXICO ($US 2015-2024)[20]



TIMBER LEGALITY

Forest Area

Mexico's forest area is approximately 67 million hectares, covering about a third of the country.[21] About half of this is temperate forests, predominantly situated in the Sierra Madre Occidental, Oriental, Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt in Central Mexico, Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, and in the south of Chiapas state. These forests are dominated by pine species (*Pinus* spp.) and, to a lesser extent, oak (*Quercus* spp.), fir (Abies spp.), alder (*Alnus* spp.), and juniper (*Juniperus* spp.), among others.[22] Mexico is a global hotspot for pine and oak diversity, hosting around 50% (about 50 species) of the world's pine species and a third (equivalent to 200 species) of oak species.[23]

Roughly half of Mexico's forest area—about 15% of the national territory—consists of tropical forest types, including tropical rainforests, tropical dry forests, cloud forests and mangroves. Tropical forest (both dry and humid) covers around 4.7 percent of Mexico's territory, concentrated primarily in the Yucatan Peninsula (Quintana Roo, Tabasco, Campeche, and Yucatan states) and along parts of the Pacific foothills and coast, such as Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Michoacan, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. Key tropical species include mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*), cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), black poisonwood (*Metopium brownei*), sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*), granadillo (*Dalbergia granadillo* or *Platymiscium yucatanum*), machiche (*Lonchocarpus castilloi*), gregorywood (*Bucida buceras*), katalox (*Swartzia lundelli*), and ziricote (*Cordia dodecandra*), among others.[24,25]

Forest Production

According to the National Forest Commission of Mexico (Comisión Nacional Forestal- CONAFOR), timber production in 2022 reached 8.8 million m^3 of roundwood.[26] Pine comprised the majority (66 percent), followed by oak (12 percent), and a range of tropical species (10.2%). In 2021, sawnwood accounted for 75 percent of timber production. Although produced in smaller volumes, plywood production doubled between 2020 and 2021, a trend that CONAFOR attributes to increased demand for home furniture during the COVID 19 pandemic, both domestically and in key export markets.[27] Over 70 percent of Mexico's timber production comes from the states of Chihuahua, Durango, Michoacan, Oaxaca, and Veracruz.[28]

Approximately 55 percent of Mexico's forest area is owned by forest communities: ejidos and mainly Indigenous agrarian communities. There are about 14,341 forest communities, each with at least 200 hectares of jungle, forest, or scrubland. However, only about 20 percent (2,868 communities) actively manage their forest for timber production.[29,30] Among those that do, an average of 42% of their forest area is used for timber production, while the remainder is managed for conservation.[31] Forest communities account for about 77% of the national volume of legally authorized timber extraction, with the remainder (23%) coming from private forest properties.[32]

Large-scale domestic illegal logging and some high-risk hardwood imports: An estimated 30-70% of wood harvested in Mexico is illegal, amounting to between 5 and 14 million m^3 of illegal supply annually.

Demand for wood products is growing: Since 2009, growth in Mexico's manufacturing and construction sectors has driven increasing demand for raw materials, including sawnwood, some of which is reportedly sourced illegally from both domestic and imported sources.[33] This intensified during the COVID 19 pandemic as demand for furniture increased to accommodate 'remote' working. Much of the timber illegally logged within Mexico itself is reportedly used for construction, furniture, and paper products that mainly remain on the domestic market.[34]

Illegal deforestation estimates are high: In recent years, Mexico has experienced a significant rise in deforestation rates, driven primarily by agricultural land conversion. As of 2020, an estimated 95% of deforestation was illegal.[35] Estimates of illegal timber harvesting vary, but all point to a substantial share of the domestic market.

Government, non-governmental and independent analyses have estimated that between 30-70% of wood harvested for timber markets is illegal.[36] *Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente* (PROFEPA), Mexico's environmental enforcement agency, estimated in 2009 that approximately 30% of timber on the market came from illegal sources.[37] More recent assessments by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) suggest that up to 14 million m^3—at least 70% of domestic supply—may be from illegal sources.[38,39,40] Another study, using two different methodologies, estimated annual illegal timber volumes at 6-7 million m^3.[41]

More broadly, research suggests that illegal logging and deforestation are correlated with unclear or weak property rights. Deforestation tends to be higher in areas with a greater share of forest land under "undefined ownership," including lowland tropical forests, mangroves, and cloud forests. Illegal logging is also more prevalent in remote or isolated areas where there are less people or caretakers.[42]

Economic Value of the Illegal Timber Trade: Estimates of the value of Mexico's illegal timber trade vary. InSight Crime has estimated that the illegal timber trade generates between US$106-175 million annually, based on an assumed illegality rate of 30–50%.[43] Torres-Rojo (2021) provides a higher estimate of. $270 million.[44] The Office of the US Trade Representative places the figure significantly higher still, at 7,000 to 20,000 million pesos (US$342 to $978 million).[45]

Hotspots for Illegal Logging: According to CONAFOR, illegal logging is widespread in Mexico, but several regions stand out as particularly high-risk, according to CONAFOR. These include Sierra Tarahumara and Ciudad Madera in Chihuahua; the Sierra Occidental in Jalisco and its border with Michoacán (notably in avocado-growing areas); the eastern part of Michoacán bordering the State of Mexico; and the municipalities of Ocuilan and Río Frío in the State of Mexico. Other notable hotspots include Chiapas, the Costa Grande of Guerrero, and parts of Campeche, Puebla (particularly the Sierra Norte), and Hidalgo (notably Necaxa National Park).[46] Illegal logging tends to be more prevalent in regions with:

- high market demand for sawn timber, semi-finished wood products, or firewood.
- poorly defined property rights or ongoing land-tenure disputes.
- forest management restrictions, including protected areas where absentee private landowners are common.
- Weak internal governance within communities, including low social cohesion, limited accountability, or a lack of timber harvest permits—especially in or near the perimeters of protected areas.[47,48,49]
- Significant organized crime activity or proximity to major drug trafficking routes

In addition to timber exports, a high proportion of Mexico's charcoal exports, which go mainly to the US, is thought to be illegal.[50] Firewood and charcoal consume large volumes of wood and are responsible for a significant share of forest degradation.[51]

Illegal Exports of CITES-listed Species: Some CITES-listed timber species are being illegally harvested in Mexico and exported (mainly as logs) to China, often with the involvement of organized crime and corrupt officials. These activities have been documented even in protected areas such as the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve and communal lands in Southwest Mexico. Organized criminal networks have been involved in harvesting *Dalbergia granadillo*, using minors as "lookouts" and relying on complicit enforcement officials to facilitate species misdeclaration and enable export, mainly to China.[52,53,54]

Illegal shipments departed from both Mexico's Pacific and Atlantic ports. Photographs from enforcement operations show timber being exported as logs.[55,56,57,58] In June 2021, Mexico's Attorney General's Office intercepted 27 containers at the port of Progreso, Yucatan –25 of which contained *Dalbergia granadillo*, a CITES-listed species—valued at over US$3 million and bound for China. One of the seized containers was later released after a second expert analysis allegedly concluded the wood was not *granadillo*.[59] However, investigative reports by Emeequis and InSight Crime allege that the container was released following a visit by a law firm representing Chinese businessmen who offered a sizeable bribe.[60]

Urban Illegal Deforestation: Illegal logging has also risen in urban areas, particularly in Mexico City, where approximately 6,000 acres of forest were fully or partially cut by mid-2023—up sharply from about 500 acres before 2020 and accompanied by over 60 illegal logging complaints in just one year.[61]

Illegal logging is tied with organized crime, cartels and drugs, human trafficking as well as human rights violations.

Organized Crime and the Evolution of Illegal Logging in Mexico: Illegal logging is increasingly driven not by local farming communities, but by organized criminal groups and outside actors. These groups—often linked to drug and human trafficking, and other illicit economies—have entered the timber trade to diversify income and risk, avoid detection, and expand territorial control.[62,63,64] Their involvement has dramatically changed and escalated the scale, sophistication, methods, and violence associated with illegal logging in Mexico.[65]

Cartel Involvement and Strategic Shifts: Growing evidence show that cartels like CJNG, Sinaloa, La Línea, and La Nueva Familia Michoacana have moved into timber trafficking as a part of broader diversification strategies. Illegal logging provides an alternative revenue stream, driven in part by declining profits from heroin and cannabis following shifts in US drug demand. This trend is especially visible in poppy-growing municipalities, where spikes in deforestation have closely followed collapses in drug prices—demonstrating how cartel-driven land-use change is directly shaped by fluctuations in international drug markets.[66] For these groups, illegal logging is not only profitable; it also serves as a mechanism for money laundering, barter (e.g. for precursor chemicals or synthetic opioids), and strengthening territorial dominance.

Both CJNG and the Sinaloa Cartel have reportedly expanded into illegal logging and wildlife trafficking as part of broader transnational criminal networks.[67] Research from Brookings indicates that while Chinese traders initially organized the trade in illegally logged high-value tree species, such as rosewood (*Dalbergia* spp.) and granadillo (likely *Platymiscium yucatanum*) in southern Mexico, this lucrative activity have since drawn in cartels, which now play a growing role in controlling and profiting from these supply chains.[68]

In the northern state of Chihuahua, the Juárez Cartel and La Línea are increasingly involved in the illegal timber trade, particularly in the south and west of the state.[69] Municipalities such as Maguarichi, Guerrero, Uruachi, Ocampo, Madera, Guadalupe y Calvo, and Bocoyna have seen criminal groups operate clandestine sawmills processing illegally harvested wood from the surrounding forests.[70] In a 2020 press conference, Governor Javier Corral confirmed that illegal logging had become an important revenue source for organized crime in the region.[71]

In Michoacán state, competition for control of logging areas has intensified violence among cartel rivalries, such as CJNG, Viagras, and La Nueva Familia Michoacana / Los Correa.[72] Los Correa, linked to Cárteles Unidos, have reportedly been involved in illegal logging for more than two decades.[73]

Modus Operandi of Cartels: Criminal cartels have adopted increasingly sophisticated, coercive, and violent methods to control the timber supply chain. Their involvement now spans multiple stages of the trade:

1. **Forest clearing for drug crop expansion**: In some areas, cartels drive deforestation by clearing forests to plant poppy or marijuana crops. The felled timber is then sold for profit. These land conversions often occur in isolated or Indigenous regions with little oversight or resistance.[74]
2. **Takeover and extortion of sawmills**: Cartels are increasingly taking over the ownership of sawmills or coercing millowners into processing illegally sourced wood.[75,76] This is especially common in northern Mexico. InSight Crime reports that timber gangs connected to drug cartels frequently deliver truckloads of illicitly harvested timber to mills.[77]
3. **Timber laundering**: Once milled, illegal timber is laundered into the legal supply chain, making it virtually indistinguishable from legal lumber. Criminal groups sell the "clean" lumber to construction companies and secondary processors. Even sawmills not affiliated with organized crime groups may be forced to accept illegal shipments under threat, sometimes returning the processed wood to the criminal groups.[78,79] Illegal sawnwood laundering also occurs in lumberyards.
4. **Forced involvement of transport companies**: Timber transport is increasingly used as a cover for drug trafficking.[80] Criminal groups compel transport companies and individual truck drivers to mix legal and illegal loads. Those who refuse risk violence or even death, according to InSight Crime.[81]

Violence, displacement and child labor are rising

Rising violence linked to illegal logging has triggered displacement of farmers and Indigenous Peoples from their lands, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation within the wood harvesting and processing industry.

Mexico has seen a muti-year escalation of attacks on farmers, Indigenous communities, and local activists. According to the Mexican Center for Environmental Law (CEMDA), 25 environmental and land defenders were killed across Mexico in 2024—the highest number documented since the organization began tracking such cases.[82] CEMDA documented 94 acts of aggression against individuals and communities defending land, forests, water, and territory. Many of these attacks were connected to conflicts over illegal logging, land grabbing, mining, and infrastructure development. The states of Chiapas, Guerrero, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Mexico City experienced the highest incidence of violent attacks.[83] CEMDA highlighted a persistent pattern of impunity, with limited state protection and few legal consequences for perpetrators, especially when linked to organized criminal groups or powerful economic interests.[84]

Forcible displacement tied to the violence heightens communities' vulnerability to further exploitation, particularly for Indigenous communities and young people.[85] Children or teenagers may be found working directly in logging operations or sawmills. In states such as Chihuahua and Chiapas, teenage workers may be forcibly recruited, deceived into accepting employment or lured by the false promise of high wages or the perceived status of cartel involvement.[86] The children are sometimes engaged by outside employers in hazardous work and exposed to violence. In San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, children reportedly sand lumber under guard,[87] while in Chihuahua, minors under the age of 15 reportedly work in the packing, transport, and cleaning of sawdust in sawmills. Some may be employed as *halcones* ("watchmen" or "lookouts") for criminal groups.[88]

Governance weaknesses exist in Community Forests

More than half of Mexico's forest is under community ownership. About three quarters of the forest area authorized for timber harvesting is located on communal land, i.e. land owned by ejidos and agrarian communities. These communal lands contain much of Mexico's highest-value timber, along with good infrastructure and access to markets. Organized crime groups are attracted to these areas, and key informants suggest that over half of Mexico's illegal logging occurs in these areas.

The degree to which communities themselves participate in illicit activities is a controversial issue. According to key informants, collusion is more likely in situations where internal conflicts exist (e.g., disputes over profit distribution, weak ejido governance, family quarrels, or land disputes) or incompletely defined property rights. High transaction costs for obtaining timber harvesting permits can also create incentives for illegal behavior. However, such collusion typically involves only a small number of community members, not whole communities, unless the community is acting under coercion from organized crime.

Weak or unclear property rights undermine make legality verification difficult

Unclear land tenure—both within communal systems and in areas with undefined ownership—significantly heightens legality risks across the country. Illegal logging is strongly correlated with poorly defined or disputed land tenure, especially in lowland tropical forests, cloud forests, mangroves, and other remote or sparsely populated regions where oversight is limited. In these areas, a significant share of forest land falls under "undefined ownership," creating legal ambiguity and weakening both community control and state enforcement. Such conditions make forests especially vulnerable to illegal clearing, unauthorized timber extraction, and encroachment by external actors—including organized crime—who exploit gaps in governance, unclear boundaries, and the absence of effective monitoring.

Weak enforcement capacity and corruption undermine governance efforts

Enforcement against illegal logging has deteriorated in recent years due to austerity measures and persistent resource constraints. While some reports suggest that policing and enforcement improved between 2000 and 2017—particularly in protected areas—government funding cuts since 2020 have fueled a resurgence of environmental crimes, including illegal logging in protected areas.[89,90,91]

Protected areas: The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) reports that strong enforcement by the environmental police division of the National Gendarmerie, part of the Federal Police, led to a 94% decline in illegal logging in the Michoacán butterfly reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage site, in 2016-2017 compared to 2015-2016 .[92] However, recent austerity measures have reversed these gains.[93] SEMARNAT's 2025 budget was cut by nearly 40% (from MX$70.2 B to MX$44.3 B), and CONANP's budget fell by 42%.[94] As a result, just MX$10.7 pesos per hectare (US$0.63) was allocated for managing Mexico's 225 protected areas in 2024.[95] Enforcement staffing in the Michoacán butterfly reserve fell from 180 to about 25,[96] leading to a sharp rise in illegal logging and violence. In 2020, PROFEPA reported the illegal cutting of 200 cedar, oak and fir trees in the reserve.[97] Illegal logging rose to almost 13.4 hectares (33 acres) in 2020/2021, a major increase from the 0.43 hectare (1 acre) recorded the previous year.[98] That same year, two environmental defenders connected to the butterfly reserve were murdered.[99]

Outside protected areas: Enforcement remains weak and challenged by criminal networks, cartels and corruption. Reported seizures of illegal timber account for just 30,000 m^3 a year, or just 0.2 percent of the estimated illegal harvests.[j,100] Oversight of sawmills is minimal, allowing laundering of illegal timber into legal into legal supply chains.[101] While authorities have shut down sawmills and wood collection points in Chihuahua as a result of illegal laundering, these actions have been described as mostly symbolic.[102,103] A lack of labor inspections, lax government oversight of supply chains, and insufficiently resourced and trained enforcement bodies—all compounded by corruption—hamper efforts.[104] Between early 2020 and September 2021, PROFEPA made just six seizures of illegal wood at customs checkpoints nationwide: three of these were in the port of Progreso, with authorities finding granadillo, ciricote, and machiche (Lonchocarpus castilloi). The ciricote and machiche shipments were bound for Wan Chai, a district of Hong Kong, China, while the granadillo was initially headed to Panama.[105]

Investigations into violence and murders have highlighted the scale of corruption, especially at the local level. In 2020, a Chihuahua state investigation into the kidnapping and murder of Cruz Soto Caraveo—forcibly displaced from the Sierra Tarahumara by cartels looking to expropriate the land—eventually led to the arrest of two people, one of whom was the local police chief.[106,107]

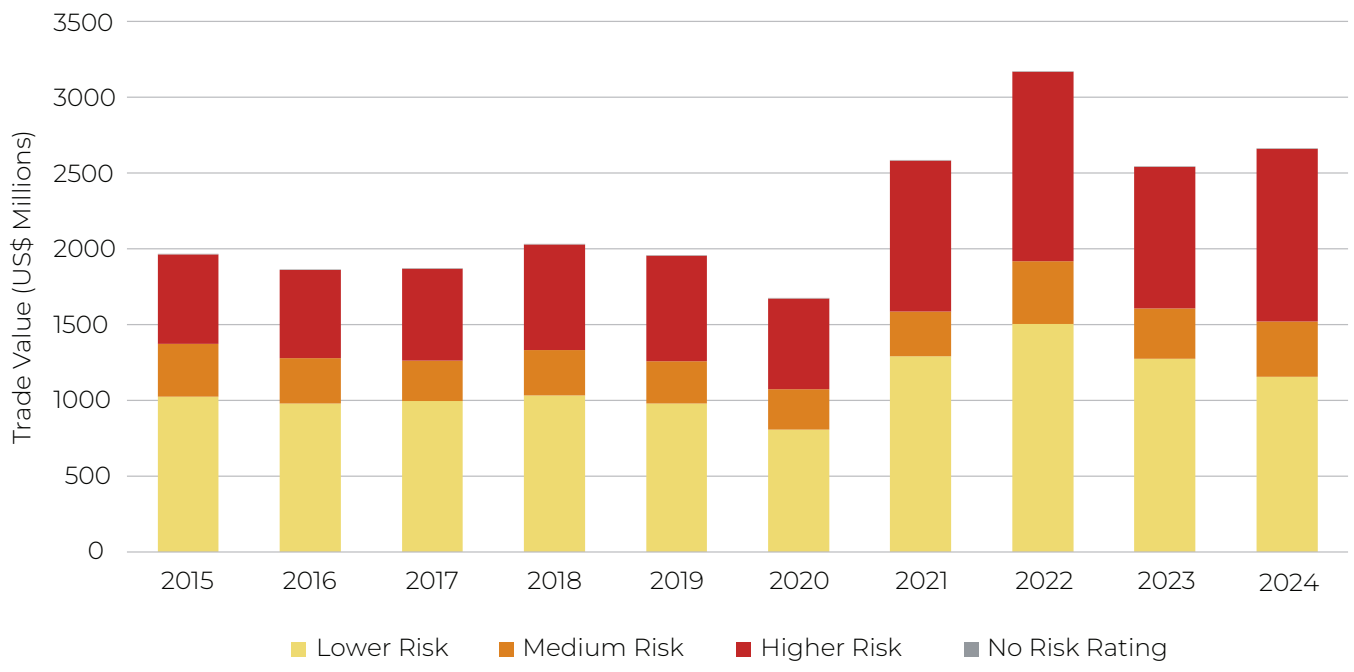
Imports account for a significant proportion of timber processed in Mexico, some of it high-risk

According to SEMARNAT, Mexico legally produces only about one-third of the wood it consumes, relying on a combination of illegally harvested domestic timber and imports to meet demand.[108] As of 2018, Mexico faced a trade deficit of 19.1 million m^3 in wood products and 19.4 million m^3 in pulp and paper.[109] Trade data from 2024 shows the continued growth in timber imports, while domestic production remained flat–indicating that the reliance on imported wood remains high.[110]

Sawnwood–mainly used in construction (60%)[k] and manufacturing–is Mexico's top timber import.[111,112] In 2017, Mexico imported approximately 4.5 million m^3 of sawnwood (HS 4407), primarily from the US, (37%) Chile (23%), Brazil (11%), Canada (7%), and Indonesia (5%). In the same year, reported domestic production was only 3.4 million m^3,[113] meaning that sawnwood–or products manufactured from it–had a 57% likelihood of containing imported timber.

About half of Mexico's timber product imports come from lower-risk countries (Figure 7), based on Forest Trends' Illegal Deforestation and Associated Trade (IDAT) risk scores[m]. However, the proportion of timber imports from higher-risk source countries has increased over the past decade. In 2015, roughly 30% of Mexico's timber import value was sourced from higher-risk countries; by 2024, this had risen to 43%, with Chinese and Brazilian imports the largest but high profile from Peru, Russia, and Colombia as well.

FIGURE 7. RISK PROFILE OF MEXICO'S TIMBER PRODUCT IMPORTS BASED ON SOURCE COUNTRY RISK (US$2015-2024)[114]



As shown by Figure 8, plywood made up about 25% of Mexico's 2024 timber product imports from higher-risk source countries, followed by sawnwood (20%), fiberboard, and seating (15% each) in 2024.

China and Brazil were the dominant higher-risk suppliers in 2024, together accounting for 84% of higher risk timber product imports (Figure 9). About two-thirds of imports from China were in the form of plywood (HS 4412 - 30% of imports from China), seating (HS 940161 and 940169 - 21%) and fiberboard (HS 4411 - 14%). More than half of the imports from Brazil were in the form of sawnwood (HS 4407), 21% were plywood (HS 4412), and 18% fiberboard (HS 4411). Although Russia was a much smaller supplier overall, Mexico's imports from Russia increased by 364% from 2015 to 2022, peaking at US$14.6 million, before dropping by 65% to US$5.2 million in 2024.

FIGURE 8. MEXICO'S HIGHER-RISK SOURCE COUNTRY IMPORTS BY PRODUCT (US$ 2015-2024)[115]

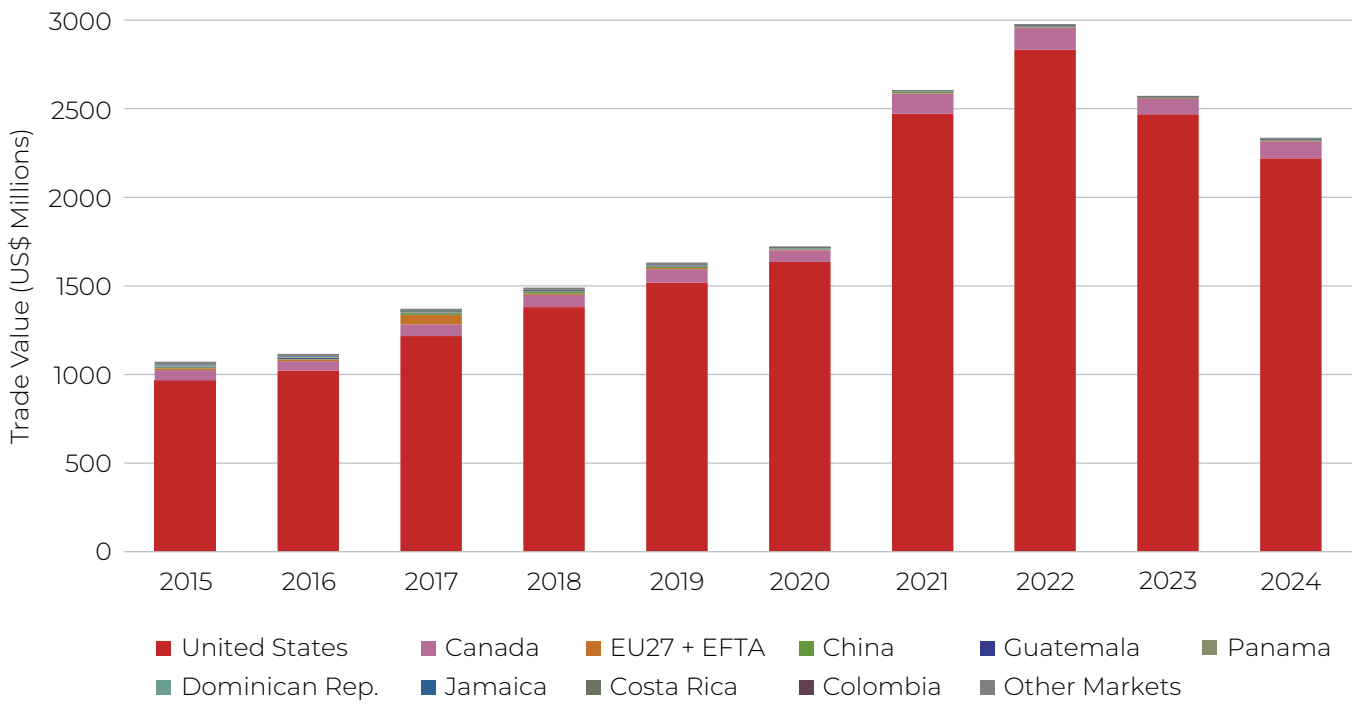
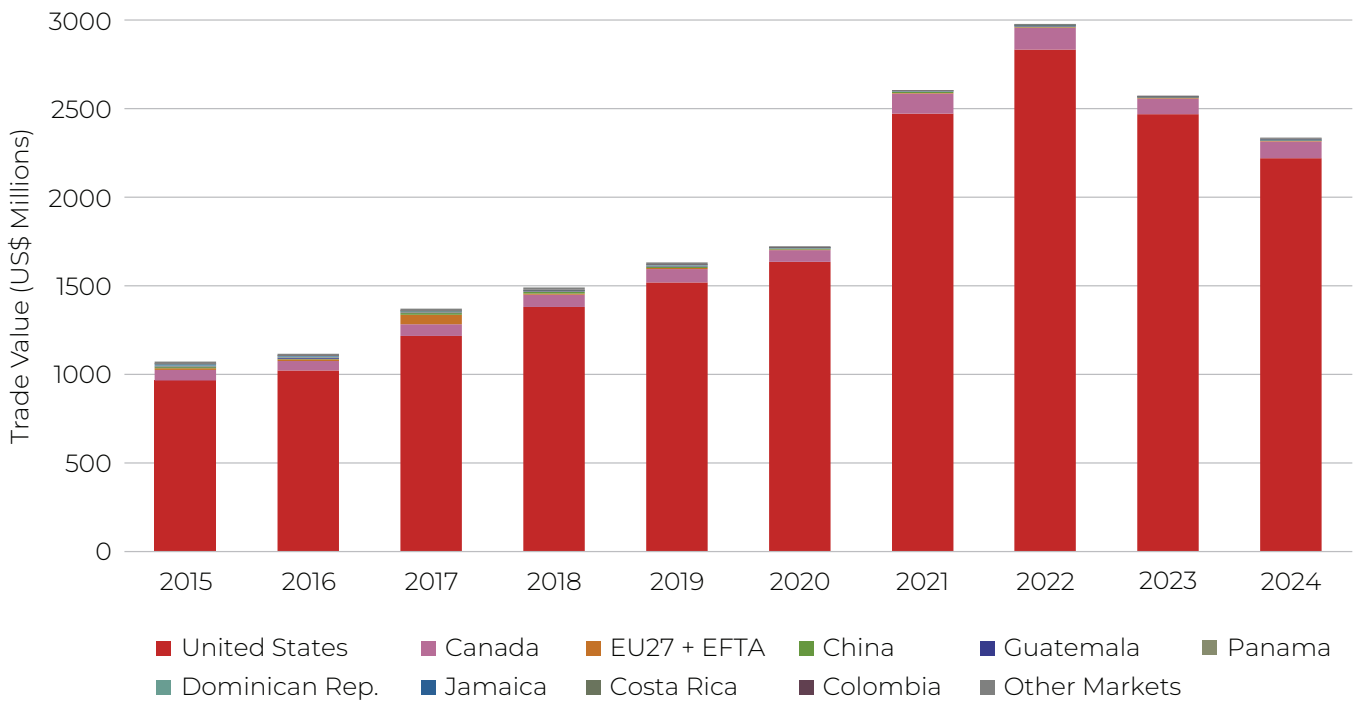
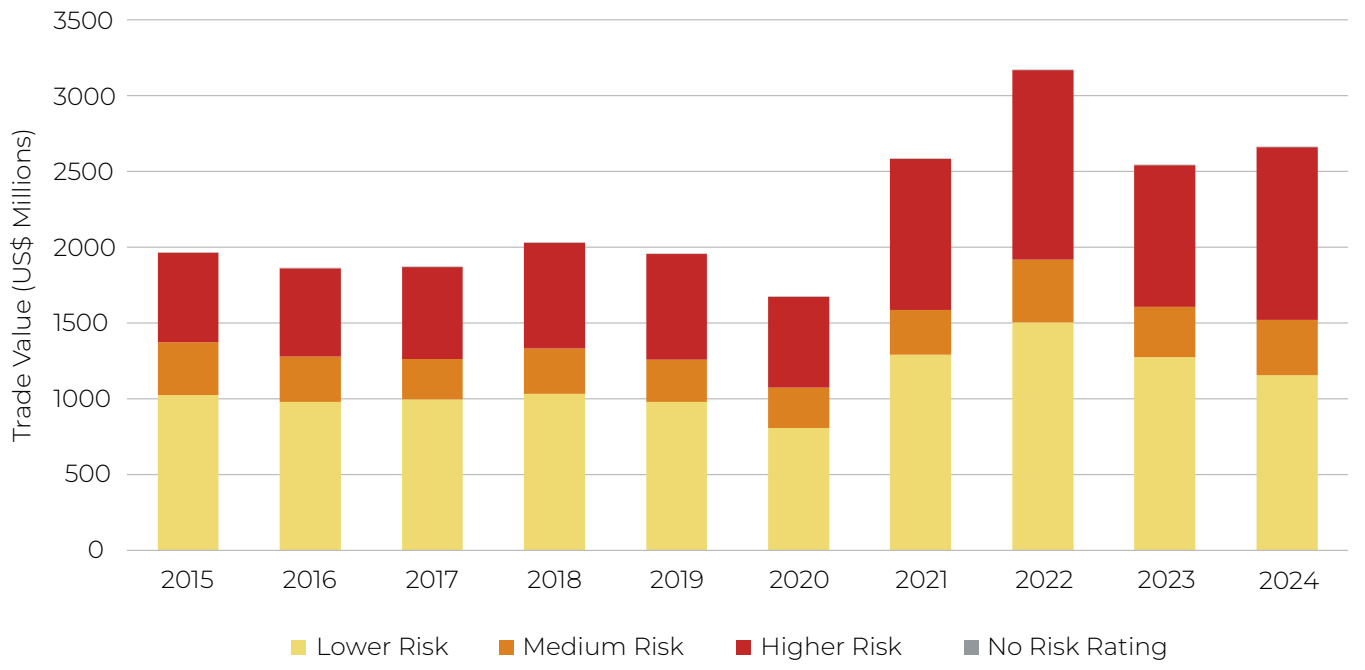


FIGURE 9. MEXICO'S HIGHER-RISK IMPORTS BY SOURCE COUNTRY (US$2015-2024)[116]



Mexico also imports small volumes of logs and sawnwood from countries with an active log or sawnwood export restrictions in place (Figure 10). Many of the export restrictions in the source countries only apply to specific species. As such, the presence of a log export restriction (LER) or sawnwood export restriction (SER) does not indicate illegal sourcing, but rather signals a need for additional risk assessment and mitigation actions to ensure that log or sawnwood imports from these countries do not violate specific laws and regulations of the source country.[117]

FIGURE 10. MEXICO'S SAWNWOOD IMPORTS (HS 4407) FROM COUNTRIES WITH ACTIVE SAWNWOOD EXPORT BANS (US$ 2015-2024)[118]



High risk hardwood imports: While Mexico sources some sawnwood from low-risk countries such as the US and Canada, it also imports substantial volumes of hardwood from higher risk source countries, including Brazil and Peru, as well as high-risk species from China and several African countries. Many of these countries score poorly in global governance and corruption indices, or are listed by the World Bank's as "fragile and conflict-affected situations," raising concerns about their ability to enforce forest laws and prevent illegal logging.[119] Widespread corruption in source countries compromises forest law/regulation enforcement and heightens the likelihood that exported timber is illegally harvested. Peru, a major source of tropical timber for Mexico, has been linked to shipments of illegal wood that have entered Mexico without any legal consequences.[120,121]

It is unclear how much of this high-risk timber is consumed domestically versus processed and re-exported. Weak traceability across the timber sector makes it difficult for buyers to assess legality, increasing the risk that timber exported from Mexico contains a mix of legal and illegal domestic supplies, as well as potentially laundered materials from high-risk countries.

Despite some efforts to regulate timber imports, Mexico lacks effective enforceable regulations

A 2018 revision to Mexico's Forestry Law required importers to "validate the legal origin" of forest products. However, implementing regulations issued in 2020 allow this validation to rely solely on two documents: a SEMARNAT-issued transport permit and a customs declaration.[n,122,123] While this reflects a step towards addressing illegal timber imports, the framework does not require verification of compliance with source country laws, such as the legal right to harvest, or any due diligence or chain-of-custody checks. Additionally, weak implementation of criminal penalties[o] for illegal timber trading coupled with regulatory loopholes, has rendered the law largely symbolic.[124] As such, the Regulation does little to prevent illegal timber from entering the Mexican market or being transformed and re-exported to international markets.

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. El Pais. 2022. "'Mexican cartels are taking control of the fishing and logging industry'." Accessed June 18, 2025. https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-05-23/mexican-cartels-are-taking-control-of-the-fishing-and-logging-industry.html
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3. Bonello, Deborah. 2020. "How Drug Cartels Moved into Illegal Logging in Mexico" InSight Crime, September 18. insightcrime.org/investigations/drug-cartels-illegal-logging-mexico/https://
4. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, GITOC. 2020. "People and Forest at Risk. Organized crime, trafficking in persons and deforestation in Chihuahua, Mexico." Wagner, L., D. Siller and R. Landa. https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mexican.Illegal.Logging.22.04.v1.final_.pdf

METHODOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY NOTES

[a] Risk scores reflect Preferred by Nature'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 provides an average relative governance and corruption risk score for 211 countries globally. Preferred by Nature'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 Preferred by Nature 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 the risk that corruption and poor governance undermines rule of law in the forest sector. .

[b] The term "wood products" is used to refer to both timber products (including furniture) and pulp and paper (P&P). 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] Regulated markets reflect countries and jurisdictions that have developed operational measures to restrict the import of illegal timber. As of 2024, this included the United States, Member States of the EU (as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Some measures are more comprehensive in scope, implementation, and enforcement than others.

[e] Multiple cedar (Cedrela) species are also listed in a national norm (NOM059): *Cedrela angustifolia*, *Cedrela discolor*, *Cedrela dugesii*, *Cedrela oaxacensis*, *Cedrela odorata*, *Cedrela salvadorensis*, and *Cedrela tonduzii*.

[f] Deforestation is reported to be higher in lowland tropical forest, cloud forest, and mangroves, where there is a higher proportion of the area with unclear property rights according to ongoing research.

[g] All references to "EU + EFTA" signify the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as countries in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which include Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

[h] As of 2024 this included the United States, Member States of the EU (as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Some measures are more comprehensive in scope, implementation, and enforcement than others.

[i] In Mexico, SEMARNAT oversees national environmental policy, while CONANP—its subordinate agency—is responsible for managing protected natural areas and coordinating on-the-ground enforcement, including surveillance, biodiversity monitoring, and collaboration with environmental law enforcement bodies.

[j] As per the National Autonomous University in Mexico (UNAM), the volume of illegal timber production is of around 14 million cubic meters of timber per year; while the seizures by the environmental enforcement authority PROFEPA are less than 30,000 cubic meters.

[k] According to Torres-Rojo (2021) the housing industry in Mexico uses a limited amount of sawnwood as a building material sincemost formal housing is composed of concrete and bricks. The introduction of new building material (apparent, plastic, and recycled) has had a minimal effect on the demand for sawnwood for this sector, since it is mostly used in the building process, as supporting material, scaffolding, and as molding and support material for when concrete is poured.

[l] According to Torres-Rojo (2021) a high percentage of conifer sawn wood imports from the United States are processed industriallyin companies located on the US-Mexico border and free zones with the USA and returned to that country in the form of finished products. These imported woods are used to manufacture wood moldings, bookshelves, furniture, and frames.

[m] Risk scores reflect Preferred by Nature'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 provides an average relative governance and corruption risk score for 211 countries globally. Preferred by Nature'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 Preferred by Nature 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 the risk that corruption and poor governance undermines the rule of law in the forest sector.

[n] Article 99 of the Regulation of the Forestry Law published on December 9, 2020.

[o] According to the Federal Penal Code (not the forest law), penalties can be up to nine years in prison and fines, with variations depending on the quantity of wood involved, and whether it comes from protected areas.

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