

How to export to the European Union?

Export helpdesk:

An online guide to access Europe's markets

How can the EU's trade partner countries best access the European Union (EU) market? A good starting point is the European Commission's Export Helpdesk, which provides a free online service covering all import rules in force in the EU on a product-by-product and country-by-country basis.



With a share of around 20% of global imports and exports, the EU is the world's largest single market. It needs the products it imports, be they intermediate products for various industrial sectors such as mineral oil, electronic equipment, motor vehicles and chemicals or agricultural products such as fruits, vegetables and other foods. The Export Helpdesk provides the EU import conditions for each single product. It informs exporters in its trade partner countries whether they can benefit from reduced duty rates and under which conditions these reduced rates can be claimed. This service is particularly valuable to small and medium enterprises and to exporters from countries in development for which the EU has put preferential trade arrangements in place. Although quite a number of lower middle income countries benefit from such preferences the imported products must yet fulfil specific import requirements. The Export Helpdesk is a single access point for this information.



No customs duties within the single market

The EU is a customs union and its 28 member countries form a single territory for customs purposes. This means no customs duties are paid on goods moving between EU countries. All countries apply a common customs tariff for goods imported from outside the EU. Goods that have been legally imported can circulate throughout the EU with no further customs checks.



Exporting products to the EU

When exporting to the EU, companies access a single market of 28 countries with over 500 million consumers. The principle of free movement of goods, allowing goods to be transported and sold anywhere in the EU, is a cornerstone of the EU market. To a significant extent, complex and varied national laws have been replaced by a single set of European rules, cutting down on costs and inconvenience for businesses wanting to trade in other EU countries. The EU market for goods is already highly integrated and harmonized among the 28 countries. However, to make the EU market work efficiently, businesses have to respect a number of rules and compete fairly. Anti-competitive behaviour, such as abuse of a dominant market position, price-fixing agreements and distorting public support, are prohibited. To take part in EU trade, it is necessary to know the procedures to follow.

These cover:

- Classifying products and finding the correct product codes;
- Completing a customs declaration with the necessary documents, including a single administrative document, commercial invoice, freight documents, insurance papers and a packing list;
- Calculating applicable tariffs and quotas, for example, for agricultural products, value-added tax rates and excise duties in EU countries;
- Preparing a product so that it complies with product-specific requirements related to public, plant and animal health, safety, packaging and labelling, and marketing standards;
- Finding the relevant national authorities and border inspection posts.

Information on these processes is provided by the Export Helpdesk and is based on current EU law. Where there is no EU law applicable to a specific product, national law in the importing country will apply and the authorities of the destination country should be contacted.



Preferential trade agreements

Preferential trade agreements the EU has concluded with countries or regions, along with their specific sets of rules, are integral to the Export Helpdesk.

These agreements include:

- Customs unions;
- The Generalised System of Preferences;
- The preferential duty regime for African, Caribbean and Pacific States;
- Free trade agreements;
- Autonomous trade preferences.

For imports under a preferential regime it is important to prove that the product de facto originates from a country that benefits from preferential arrangements. The Export Helpdesk explains which rules of origin apply and which proofs of origin are required to qualify for a preferential tariff. The Helpdesk also integrates antidumping law, providing information on additional duties that may be temporarily applied according to the findings and decisions of the EU Antidumping Committee.



Figures on trade flows

Before deciding to access foreign markets, the Export Helpdesk can be used to look at current trade flows. The statistics section of the website provides the figures on trade flows between any country and the EU as a whole and between any country and individual EU member states. Figures are available from 2002 onwards and can be exported to Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.



Using the Export Helpdesk

A computer and access to the internet are required to use the Export Helpdesk, and once an internet connection is made all the necessary data are available and can be searched. The service is provided by the European Commission and has been set up specifically for the EU trade partner countries. It is free of charge, available around the world and a large part of the information is available in 4 languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese.

Further information? Contact us!

exporthelp@ec.europa.eu