

How to export to the European Union?

EU Trade Helpdesk: Your 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 EU Trade 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 EU Trade 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 how to claim these at the EU customs. 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 EU Trade 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 To a significant extent, complex and varied national laws have been replaced by a single set of European rules, cutting down on costs and inconvenience for businesses wanting to trade in other EU countries.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. 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 for export so that it complies with the product-specific requirements related to safety, health, animal health, packaging and labelling, and marketing standards;
- Finding the relevant national authorities and border inspection posts.

The EU Trade Helpdesk provides information on these processes based on current EU law. Where there is no EU law applicable to a specific product, national law in the importing country comes in. In this case, please contact the authorities of the destination country.



Preferential trade agreements and preferential schemes

Free trade agreements the EU has concluded with trade partner countries or regions or unilateral preferential schemes the EU has established for trade partners are integral part of the EU Trade Helpdesk along with their specific sets of rules.

These agreements include:

- Free Trade Agreements;
- Economic Partnership Agreements
- The Generalised System of 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 EU Trade Helpdesk explains the applying rules of origin and which proofs of origin are required to qualify for a preferential tariff. The Helpdesk also integrates antidumping law and thus indicates any additional duties that may be temporarily imposed according to the findings and decisions of the EU Antidumping Committee.



Map: Countries the EU has or negotiates trade agreements with



Figures on trade flows

You may want to include the latest statistics in your business plan. The EU Trade Helpdesk presents the recent trade flows in its section "statistics". It shows trade flows in total or by product group, in value and in quantity, between any country and the EU as a whole or each of the EU member states. Figures are available from 2002 onwards and can be exported to Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.



How to start using the EU Trade Helpdesk?

A computer or smartphone and access to the internet are required to use the Trade Helpdesk. Once an internet connection is made all data are searchable on the site. The service is provided by the European Commission and has been set up specifically for EU importers and for EU trade partner countries to export to the EU. Most of our information is available in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese. The use of the service is free of charge.

Further information? Contact us at our site: tradehelpdesk.europa.eu/contact/write-to-us or via one of the social networks: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact/social-networks_en or follow EU Trade on Twitter.com/(@Trade_EU)