

GUIDE · FIRST STEPS

Exporting to the EU: What you need to know before you start

Seven steps from your first tariff code to your first order. Written for companies in Mercosur, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador that are shipping to the EU for the first time or want to grow their EU business.

FIRST STOP Access2Markets by the European Commission	AGREEMENTS Mercosur since May 1, 2026, Chile since Feb 1, 2025, Peru and Colombia since 2013, Ecuador since 2017	BOLIVIA GSP+ since 2014	PRODUCT SAFETY Regulation (EU) 2023/988, applies since Dec 13, 2024
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CUSTOMS DECLARATION Declarant established in the EU (Art. 170 UCC)

This page gives a general overview. It does not replace legal, customs or tax advice for your specific case. The legal texts and the answers of the competent authorities are binding.

Step 1: Check market access

It all starts with a number: your product's tariff code. The first six digits follow the Harmonized System (HS), which is the same worldwide. The EU extends them to the eight-digit Combined Nomenclature and, for imports, to the ten-digit TARIC code. Your home tariff code in Mercosur (NCM) or in the Andean countries matches the HS in the first six digits. After that, the systems diverge.

Take that number to [Access2Markets](#), the European Commission's free portal. In "My Trade Assistant" you enter the product code, country of origin and EU destination country. You then see the standard duty rate, the preferential rate under the agreement, import VAT in the destination country, product requirements and the rules of origin. The ROSA tool walks you step by step through whether your product meets the rules of origin. The Commission's TARIC database also shows quotas, anti-dumping duties and import restrictions.

Which agreement applies depends on your country:

COUNTRY	LEGAL BASIS	IN EFFECT SINCE
Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay	EU-Mercosur Interim Trade Agreement, provisionally applied	May 1, 2026
Chile	EU-Chile Interim Trade Agreement (ITA)	Feb 1, 2025
Peru	EU-Colombia/Peru Trade Agreement	Mar 1, 2013
Colombia	EU-Colombia/Peru Trade Agreement	Aug 1, 2013
Ecuador	Accession to the Trade Agreement	Jan 1, 2017
Bolivia	Generalised Scheme of Preferences, special arrangement GSP+	2014

You will find details on the agreements on the page [EU-Mercosur Agreement](#). For Bolivia: in June 2026 the EU published a new GSP regulation that applies for ten years from January 1, 2027. Before signing contracts for 2027, check which preferences will then apply to your product.

The preferential rate only applies to goods originating in the partner country, and only with the right proof. The agreements differ a good deal here:

- Mercosur: the exporter makes a statement on origin with fixed wording, on the invoice or another commercial document. Exporters from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay add their national tax or registration number (CUIT, CNPJ, RUT). For a transition period of three years, which can be extended by two, the EU also accepts official certificates of origin.
- Chile: a statement on origin by the exporter, including the RUT, or the importer's knowledge of the origin. The old EUR.1 has not been accepted since February 1, 2025.
- Colombia, Peru, Ecuador: EUR.1 movement certificate or an origin declaration on the invoice. An approved exporter may make the declaration; for consignments up to €6,000, any exporter may.
- Bolivia (GSP): statement on origin. If the originating goods in a consignment are worth more than €6,000, the exporter must be listed in the Registered Exporter system REX; you register with the competent authority in your own country.

Work through the rule of origin once for each product before you price with the preferential rate. Packing, simple mixing or simple assembly are not enough. A furniture maker in Misiones using fittings from Asia, or a food producer with imported ingredients, should check the bill of materials against the rule in the agreement.

Step 2: Meet the product requirements

An agreement lowers the duty. The requirements for the product stay the same as for a manufacturer in Germany or Spain.

Industrial goods

Many product groups are covered by EU harmonization legislation: machinery, electrical equipment, radio equipment, toys, pressure equipment, construction products, medical devices. If yours falls under it, you need a conformity assessment, technical documentation, an EU declaration of conformity and the CE marking. Harmonized standards referenced in the Official Journal of the EU give a presumption that the product meets the requirements. For connected devices and software, the [Cyber Resilience Act](#) adds its own rules from December 11, 2027.

Consumer products without a specific rule of their own fall under the General Product Safety Regulation (EU) 2023/988, in application since December 13, 2024. Two points affect exporters directly. First, a product may only be placed on the market if an economic operator established in the EU is responsible for it (Art. 16 in conjunction with Art. 4 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1020). That is usually your importer or an authorized representative. Second, instructions and safety information must be in a language set by each member state. If you sell through an online marketplace, the listing has to name the manufacturer and the responsible person.

In practice, labeling means the manufacturer's name and address, a type or batch number, the CE mark where required, and warnings in the local language. Plan the label for each destination country before you print packaging.

Food, animals and plants

Here the hurdles are higher and the lead time longer. Regulation (EU) 2017/625 governs official controls at the border. Products of animal origin follow a listing principle: your country must be approved for the product category, often with an approved residue monitoring plan, and your establishment must appear on the list of approved establishments. Beef from Uruguay, honey from Argentina or shrimp from Ecuador can only enter the EU from listed establishments. The listing is requested by the competent authority in your country, such as SENASA, MAPA, SAG, ICA, SENASA Perú or Agrocalidad.

Every consignment of animals, animal products and many plants needs an official certificate issued or recorded in the EU's TRACES system. The consignment is checked at a border control post: documents, identity and, depending on risk, sampling. Pesticide maximum residue levels are set by Regulation (EC) No 396/2005. They are often stricter than in South America, and for active substances without EU approval a very low default value usually applies. An avocado exporter in

Antioquia should build the spraying schedule around these limits rather than around the home market.

EU buyers take a HACCP-based food safety system for granted. Retailers usually also ask for IFS, BRCGS or FSSC 22000. More on this on the page [Food safety](#).

Step 3: Organize customs and import

Ask your buyer the most important question early: who declares the goods in the EU? EU customs law does not use the term "importer of record" as such. It speaks of the declarant. Under Art. 170 of the Union Customs Code (UCC), the declarant must be established in the EU. There are exceptions, for example for transit, temporary admission and occasional declarations. Normally, then, your EU customer or its freight forwarder handles the import.

The declarant needs an EORI number for this. As an exporter without an establishment in the EU, you need one yourself if you lodge customs declarations or entry summary declarations, apply for a customs decision, or act as a carrier. In that case you apply for the EORI in the member state where you first carry out such an activity.

The delivery term sets out who bears what. The usual choice is the International Chamber of Commerce's Incoterms 2020. Under FCA, FOB or CIF your responsibility ends before the EU border, and the buyer takes care of import, duty and taxes. Under DDP you owe the duty and import VAT in the destination country yourself. That usually means an indirect customs representative in the EU, an EORI number and often a VAT registration in the member state. Only agree to DDP once you have that setup in place.

On import, import VAT and possibly excise duties (on wine or spirits, for example) are due on top of the customs duty. Each member state sets its own rates; Access2Markets shows them by country. An importer entitled to deduct input VAT can usually reclaim the import VAT. For the tax treatment of your business model, especially for sales to consumers or warehousing in the EU, bring in a tax advisor in the destination country.

Before the goods arrive, the EU requires safety and security data in the Import Control System ICS2. The entry summary declaration is usually lodged by the carrier. To do so, the carrier needs precise information from you: a meaningful description of the goods, the HS code, the consignor and the consignee. "Various goods" or "spare parts" will not do and lead to queries and delays.

The usual documents include the commercial invoice, packing list, waybill or bill of lading, the proof of origin and, for food, the health certificate. If quantities, weights and descriptions do not match across the documents, customs will often hold the consignment.

Step 4: Sort out contracts and payment

EU buyers work with framework agreements and purchasing terms that often run to twenty pages or more. Expect these elements:

- a supplier code of conduct on human rights, working conditions, the environment and corruption, often with the obligation to pass it on to your own suppliers;
- a data processing agreement under Art. 28 GDPR as soon as you process personal data for the customer, plus standard contractual clauses where needed;
- an information security annex with minimum measures, reporting deadlines for security incidents and rules for subcontractors;
- audit and information rights: the customer or an auditor it appoints may review your processes, on site or by questionnaire;
- liability, warranty, recalls and proof of insurance;
- choice of law and place of jurisdiction or arbitration.

Go through these clauses with your legal counsel before you sign. Many obligations are negotiable, such as audit frequency, reporting deadlines or liability caps. Whatever you sign, you will have to prove later.

A contract for the sale of goods is often automatically governed by the UN Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG) if both countries are parties and the contract does not exclude it. Decide deliberately whether you want that.

On payment: with new business relationships, many exporters protect themselves with a documentary letter of credit under the ICC rules ERA 600 (UCP 600) or with documentary collection. Established EU customers, on the other hand, usually insist on payment on open account with a payment term. The EU Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU generally limits payment terms between businesses to 60 days, unless the contract expressly provides otherwise and this is not grossly unfair to the creditor. For outstanding receivables, export credit insurers and factoring companies in your country offer cover.

Step 5: Answer your customers' compliance questions

The questionnaire arrives at supplier onboarding at the latest. It contains the obligations your EU customer has to meet itself and passes on to you. Which rules affect your business depends on your product or service:

IF YOU SUPPLY ...

EXPECT QUESTIONS ON

IT services, software, data processing	GDPR , NIS2 , DORA for banks and insurers, the AI Act for AI features
Connected devices, software as a product	Cyber Resilience Act
Soy, beef and leather, coffee, cocoa, wood, rubber, palm oil	EUDR
Steel, aluminum, cement, fertilizers, hydrogen	CBAM
All goods, especially agriculture, mining, textiles	Forced Labour Regulation , CSDDD and CSRD

A recognized certificate is often the fastest way to answer many of these questions. Depending on the industry, EU buyers ask for [ISO 9001](#) for quality, [ISO 14001](#) for the environment, [ISO/IEC 27001](#) for information security, [food safety](#) standards and, in the automotive industry, [TISAX](#). A certificate will not replace a questionnaire, though it makes it a lot shorter.

In practice, the same questions come back from every new customer. If policies, evidence and earlier answers sit in one place, such as a GRC platform like [Sightadel](#), the next questionnaire takes days instead of weeks. Security questionnaires often also ask how you find vulnerabilities in systems reachable from the internet. An external attack surface check such as [veyrisk](#) provides a report you can attach.

The free [EU Readiness Check](#) shows in about ten minutes which of these rules apply to you and where the gaps are.

Step 6: Find customers and use the support available

You do not have to go it alone for your first contacts. Several networks can help, most of them free or for a small fee.

The European Commission's Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) connects small and medium-sized companies with business partners, technology cooperation and advice. It has partner organizations in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru. In its partnering database you can post cooperation offers and search requests from European companies.

The EU delegations in your country know the agreements, organize business forums and refer you to the trade sections of the member states. The member states' embassies have their own trade promotion staff. The German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHK) have offices in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. They offer market studies, partner searches and business delegations to Germany. Other member states, such as France, Italy or Spain, also run bilateral chambers in most countries.

The national export promotion agencies know the funding available at home and organize joint stands at trade fairs:

- Brazil: ApexBrasil
- Chile: ProChile
- Colombia: ProColombia
- Peru: PROMPERÚ
- Ecuador: Pro Ecuador
- Uruguay: Uruguay XXI
- Paraguay: REDIEX at the Ministry of Industry and Commerce

In Argentina and Bolivia, state export and investment promotion has been restructured in recent years. Your foreign ministry can tell you who to contact today.

Trade fairs are still the fastest way to meet many buyers at once. For food, Anuga in Cologne and SIAL in Paris are the big meeting points, for fruit and vegetables Fruit Logistica in Berlin, for industrial goods Hannover Messe. A joint stand run by your export agency usually costs less than a stand of your own and brings visitors with it.

Step 7: A plan for the first 90 days

The plan below assumes a company that has an exportable product and wants to win its first EU customer. For food of animal origin, establishment approval usually takes longer, so file that application right away.

WEEK	TASK	OUTCOME
1 to 2	Determine the tariff code, run Access2Markets for two or three destination countries	Duty rate, preferential rate, taxes and product requirements per country
2 to 3	Check the rule of origin with ROSA, compare against the bill of materials	Decision on whether the preferential rate is within reach; form of proof of origin settled
3 to 5	Clarify product law: CE, product safety, labeling or SPS requirements, establishment listing	List of missing tests, documents and labels
4 to 6	Complete the EU Readiness Check, collect certificates and evidence	Gap list for data protection, security and supply chain; folder with certificates
5 to 7	Contact your export agency, the EEN and chambers, choose trade fairs	Partner search meetings, trade fair plan for 12 months

WEEK	TASK	OUTCOME
6 to 8	Prepare model contracts: supplier code of conduct, data processing agreement, security annex	Your own positions on liability, audits and reporting deadlines
8 to 10	Set the Incoterm and payment method, choose a freight forwarder and customs representative	Pricing delivered to the EU border and to the customer, import process settled
10 to 13	First quotes, sample shipment, answer the supplier questionnaire	Quote with the customer, onboarding underway

Keep the results in one file: tariff code, origin calculation, conformity documents, certificates, contract templates. You will need that file again for your second customer, and customs can check proofs of origin years later.

FAQ

Do I need an EORI number as an exporter from South America?

Only in certain cases: if you lodge customs declarations or entry summary declarations in the EU yourself, apply for a customs decision or act as a carrier. If your customer imports the goods, it needs the EORI number.

Where do I find the duty rate for my product?

In the European Commission's Access2Markets portal, under "My Trade Assistant". You need your product's tariff code, the country of origin and the EU destination country.

Is a certificate of origin from my home country enough for the preferential rate?

That depends on the agreement. Chile and the Mercosur agreement rely on the exporter's statement on origin; for Mercosur, official certificates of origin are also accepted during a transition period. Colombia, Peru and Ecuador use the EUR.1 or an origin declaration on the invoice, and Bolivia uses the statement on origin under the REX system.

Does my product need CE marking?

Only if it falls under EU harmonization legislation, for example for machinery, electrical equipment or toys. Other consumer products are covered by the General Product Safety Regulation (EU) 2023/988, which also requires a responsible economic operator in the EU.

Does the trade agreement exempt me from the EUDR, CBAM or GDPR?

No. The agreements cover duties, origin and procedures. All EU product, data protection and supply chain rules apply unchanged. You will find an overview under [EU rules](#).

Who helps me find partners for free?

The Enterprise Europe Network, your country's national export promotion agency and the bilateral chambers of commerce. Some chamber services are paid.

Which tool helps with answering supplier questionnaires?

A GRC platform keeps policies, evidence and previous answers ready for reuse. [Sightadel](#) does this for ISO 27001, ISO 9001, NIS2, the GDPR and other frameworks, and it is developed and hosted in Germany. For questions about vulnerabilities on your internet-facing systems, [veyrisk](#) checks your external attack surface and delivers a report.

Sources · Last updated: October 11, 2026

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General information, not legal advice. The official texts are authoritative.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE WITH TOOLS MADE IN GERMANY

 Sightadel

Sightadel walks your team through your EU requirements: templates, tasks, evidence and audit preparation in one place. Built and hosted in Germany, with an optional consultant package.

[See Sightadel →](#)

 veyrisk

veyrisk shows what attackers can see of your company from the outside: open services, certificates, known vulnerabilities. You can hand the report to EU customers and auditors.

[See veyrisk →](#)

Sightadel, veyrisk and Valar are products of neonotu GmbH, which operates MercoEU.

Which of these apply to your company?

The free EU Readiness Check shows you by industry and country in 10 minutes.

<https://www.mercoeu.com/en/eu-readiness-check>