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Your first export or import: a step-by-step roadmap

Ten steps from legal registration to delivery; what to decide at each step, and which guide topic helps.

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Online interactive version: **https://ozgurkonakci.com/en/guide/first-export-import-roadmap/**

SHORT ANSWER

To start exporting from Türkiye, a company registers for tax, registers with customs and joins the relevant exporters' association, which is mandatory under Law No. 5910. The product's HS code and the destination's requirements are then determined, the delivery term (Incoterms) and payment method are written into the contract, transport and insurance are arranged, documents are prepared and the customs declaration is lodged through a customs broker.

Who is this for?

For a company exporting or importing for the first time, a newcomer to the sector or a student of international trade, the process can look scattered: customs, the bank, the carrier, the insurer and the destination country all come into play at once. This page sets the process out in **ten steps** and links each step to the guide topic that explains it.

The roadmap

Exporting

1 **Legal set-up**
Company and tax registration, registration with customs and membership of the relevant exporters' association. Membership is mandatory for exporters in Türkiye under Law No. 5910.
The parties in trade and logistics →

2 **Product and HS code**
Determine the product's HS code; check duties, quotas and standards in the destination.
HS codes and customs procedures in Türkiye →

3 **Destination requirements**
Clarify certificates, registrations, pre-notifications and labelling with the buyer.
Destination country guide: import requirements →

4 **Delivery term**
Choose the Incoterms rule: write where risk and cost change hands into the contract.
Incoterms® 2020 →

5 **Payment method**
Advance payment, open account, documentary collection or letter of credit: choose by your risk.
Payment methods and letters of credit →

6 **Transport and freight**
Compare mode, equipment and freight quotes; read surcharges line by line.
Freight quotations and surcharges →

7 **Insurance**
Check the carrier's liability limits; insure valuable cargo.
Carrier liability and cargo insurance →

8 **Documents and customs**
Commercial invoice, packing list, proof of origin and transport document; the declaration is lodged with a customs broker.
The bill of lading →

9 **Loading and tracking**
Correct packing, VGM declaration, cut-offs and delivery at destination.
The container shipment timeline →

10 **Payment and close-out**
Collecting payment and post-export steps (e.g., VAT refund).

Importing

1 **Legal set-up**
Company and tax registration and registration with customs.

2 **Product and HS code**
By HS code, check duties, additional charges and import restrictions.
HS codes and customs procedures in Türkiye →

3 **Product safety control**
Some products are subject to the Ministry of Trade's product safety and inspection (TAREKS) control before clearance.

4 **Supplier and contract**
Put delivery term, payment method and quality conditions in writing.
Incoterms® 2020 →

5 **Transport and insurance**
Clarify who pays freight and insurance under the purchase terms.
Carrier liability and cargo insurance →

6 **Document flow**
Original bill, telex release or seawaybill: have documents ready before the cargo arrives.
The bill of lading →

7 **Arrival and transit**
If the cargo moves from the port to an inland office, it travels under transit.
Transit shipments and customs transit →

8 **Customs declaration**
Declaration with a customs broker, payment of duties and inspection where needed.
HS codes and customs procedures in Türkiye →

9 **Delivery and free time**
Collect and return the container within free time; watch demurrage and detention.
Demurrage, detention and storage →

10 **Checks at delivery**
If there is damage or shortage, note it on the document and give notice in time.
Cargo damage and the claims process →

Four critical decisions

Most steps on the roadmap are execution. But four decisions set the cost and risk of the shipment from the start:

1. **Delivery term (Incoterms):** who handles freight, insurance and customs, and where does risk pass?
2. **Payment method:** advance payment, open account, documentary collection or letter of credit. How well you know the buyer drives the choice.
3. **Mode and equipment:** transit time, cost and the cargo's characteristics (volume, weight, temperature, hazard class) are weighed together.
4. **Document flow:** original bill, telex release or sea waybill; it must fit the payment method.

When a shipment leaves without these four decisions written into the contract, problems usually surface at the destination port, at the most expensive moment.

The document set: which document, from whom, and when?

The documents for an export shipment fall into three groups: commercial documents prepared by the seller, the transport document issued by the carrier, and documents required for origin, insurance or by the destination country. The table below sums up the core set; the descriptions of the commercial documents follow the Turkish Ministry of National Education's *Logistics Documents* course material, and the origin documents follow the explanations of the Turkish Ministry of Trade.

Document	What it does	Issued by	When
Proforma invoice	A quotation-style invoice showing the agreed terms (goods, price, delivery, payment). It is not a final invoice and creates no financial obligation. In a letter of credit sale, the buyer gives it to its bank to have the credit opened	Seller	At the order and contract stage
Commercial invoice	Description, quantity, unit and total price of the goods, delivery term, payment method and origin. Customs value and duties start from this document	Seller	At shipment
Packing list	Contents of each package, number and type of packages, gross and net weight, volume, marks and numbers, container number where relevant. The goods can be checked without opening the packages	Seller	At shipment, with the invoice
Transport document	Bill of lading, sea waybill, AWB, CMR or CIM consignment note	Carrier or freight forwarder	On or after loading
Origin and movement documents	A certificate of origin shows non-preferential origin; EUR.1 is a preferential origin document; A.TR shows free circulation status, not origin	The certificate of origin is approved by the competent authorities; EUR.1 is completed by the exporter, checked by the chambers and endorsed by customs; A.TR is issued by customs or bodies it authorises	Before shipment
Insurance policy or certificate	Compulsory for the seller under CIF and CIP; under other rules, a choice for whoever carries the risk	Insurer	Before the goods leave
Customs declaration	The formal declaration of the export	Usually a customs broker on the exporter's behalf	Before the goods leave customs
Documents required by the destination country	Such as a health or phytosanitary certificate, certificate of conformity or halal certificate	The relevant public authority or an accredited body	Depends on the country and product

A practical rule: the description of the goods, the number of packages and the weights on the proforma, commercial invoice, packing list and transport document must all match. In a letter of credit sale, that consistency decides whether you get paid.

For more detail: the differences between transport documents in **Transport documents compared: bill of lading, sea waybill, AWB, CMR and CIM**; origin and movement documents in **HS codes and customs procedures in Türkiye**; document compliance under a letter of credit in **Payment methods and letters of credit**; destination country documents in **Destination country guide: import requirements**.

Who will you work with?

- **Customs broker:** lodges the declaration and handles customs formalities.

- **Freight forwarder:** organises the transport, quotes freight and prepares documents.
- **Bank:** handles payment, letters of credit and guarantees.
- **Insurer or broker:** arranges cargo insurance.
- **Exporters' association:** export registration, statistics and support programmes.

The roles of each party are explained in detail in the topic on parties in trade and logistics.

Test yourself

1. Membership of which body is mandatory to export from Türkiye? *(Answer: The relevant exporters' association.)*
2. Which four decisions set a shipment's cost and risk from the start? *(Answer: Delivery term, payment method, mode of transport and document flow.)*
3. On import, which inspection applies to some products before customs clearance? *(Answer: The Ministry of Trade's product safety and inspection, TAREKS.)*

Frequently asked questions

Is membership of an exporters' association mandatory to export from Türkiye?

Yes. Under Article 4 of Law No. 5910, exporters must be members of the relevant exporters' association.

What is the most common mistake on a first export?

Shipping without settling the delivery term and payment method. Where risk and costs pass (Incoterms) and how payment is secured must be written clearly into the contract.

Is an inspection needed before customs clearance on import?

Some products are subject to the Turkish Ministry of Trade's product safety and inspection (TAREKS) control before clearance. Check by HS code whether a product is covered by the relevant communiqués.

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