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International trade rules and standards

From Incoterms to UCP 600, from CMR to ISO 6346: the rules every logistics professional should know, on one page.

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Online interactive version: **https://ozgurkonakci.com/en/guide/trade-rules-and-standards/**

SHORT ANSWER

International trade rules come in three kinds: rules the parties choose by contract (ICC rules such as Incoterms, UCP 600 and URDG 758), international conventions to which states are party (such as CMR, Hague-Visby, Montreal and TIR), and technical standards (such as ISO 6346, ISPM 15 and the IMDG Code). Which apply depends on the type of transaction, the mode of transport and whether the countries involved are parties.

Three kinds of rules

The rules you meet in international trade fall into three groups by their legal nature:

- **Rules chosen by contract:** International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) rules such as Incoterms, UCP 600, URC 522 and URDG 758. They become binding when the parties refer to them in the contract.
- **International conventions:** agreements to which states are party, such as CMR, Hague-Visby, Montreal and TIR. They have the force of law in the contracting states and often cannot be varied by contract.
- **Technical standards and codes:** such as ISO 6346, ISPM 15, the IMDG Code and the CTU Code. They provide a common language for equipment, packaging and cargo safety; some are mandatory, others are recommendations.

Rules and standards library

Rule / standard	Area	Issued by	Year	What it covers	Status
Incoterms® 2020	Sale and delivery	ICC	2020	Eleven rules setting the delivery point, transfer of risk and allocation of costs between seller and buyer. Incoterms® 2020 →	Current; endorsed by UNCITRAL. Source

Rule / standard	Area	Issued by	Year	What it covers	Status
UCP 600	Payment and banking	ICC	2007	Rules governing documentary credits. Payment methods and letters of credit →	Current; endorsed by UNCITRAL. Source
ISBP	Payment and banking	ICC	2023	International standard banking practice for examining documents under credits. Payment methods and letters of credit →	Updated in 2023. Source
eUCP 2.1	Payment and banking	ICC	2023	Supplement to UCP 600 for electronic records. Payment methods and letters of credit →	In effect since 1 July 2023. Source
URC 522 / eURC 1.1	Payment and banking	ICC	—	Rules for documentary collections; eURC is the supplement for electronic records. Payment methods and letters of credit →	eURC 1.1 in effect since 1 July 2023. Source
URDG 758 / ISDGP	Payment and banking	ICC	2010 / 2022	Rules and practice standard for demand guarantees. Delivery without the original bill of lading: LOIs and bank guarantees →	Endorsed by UNCITRAL. Source
CMR	Contracts of carriage	UN (UNECE)	1956	Contract, document and carrier liability for international road carriage. Carrier liability and cargo insurance →	In force; Türkiye is a party. Source
Hague-Visby Rules	Contracts of carriage	International convention	1924 / 1968	Carrier obligations, liability and limits in carriage by sea under bills of lading. Carrier liability and cargo insurance →	The most widely applied regime in sea carriage. Source
Hamburg Rules	Contracts of carriage	UNCITRAL	1978	An alternative liability regime for carriage by sea. Carrier liability and cargo insurance →	In force since 1992; 36 parties. Türkiye is not a party. Source

Rule / standard	Area	Issued by	Year	What it covers	Status
Rotterdam Rules	Contracts of carriage	UNCITRAL	2008	A convention for door-to-door carriage wholly or partly by sea.	Not in force: 20 ratifications needed, 5 states have ratified. Source
Montreal Convention	Contracts of carriage	ICAO	1999	Carrier liability, complaint periods and time bars in international air carriage. Cargo damage and the claims process →	In force. Source
SOLAS VI/2 — VGM	Cargo and equipment safety	IMO	2016	Declaring a packed container's verified gross mass before loading. Container packing and weight distribution →	Mandatory. Source
CTU Code	Cargo and equipment safety	IMO / ILO / UNECE	2014	Code of practice for packing containers and other cargo transport units. Container packing and weight distribution →	Non-mandatory; the industry reference. Source
IMDG Code	Cargo and equipment safety	IMO	Amendment 42-24	Carriage of dangerous goods by sea. Dangerous goods transport: IMDG and ADR →	Amendment 42-24 mandatory since 1 January 2026. Source
ADR	Cargo and equipment safety	UNECE	2025	International carriage of dangerous goods by road. Dangerous goods transport: IMDG and ADR →	Updated every two years. Source
ISO 6346	Cargo and equipment safety	ISO / BIC	2022	Container identification number, check digit and size-type code. How to read and check a container number →	Current. Source
ISPM 15	Cargo and equipment safety	IPPC (FAO)	—	Treatment and marking of wood packaging material in international trade. Container packing and weight distribution →	Applied by Türkiye on imports and exports. Source
CSS Code	Cargo and equipment safety	IMO	—	Code of safe practice for cargo stowage and securing on ships. Project cargo and out-of-gauge loads →	A key reference for project and heavy cargo. Source

Rule / standard	Area	Issued by	Year	What it covers	Status
Harmonized System (HS)	Customs and transit	WCO	2022	Classification of goods in customs tariffs; the first six digits of the Turkish tariff code. HS codes and customs procedures in Türkiye →	Updated every five years. Source
Common Transit Convention	Customs and transit	EU, EFTA and other parties	1987	Transit across countries under a single declaration, run through NCTS. Transit shipments and customs transit →	Türkiye a party since 1 December 2012. Source
TIR Convention	Customs and transit	UNECE	1975	International road transit under the TIR carnet. Transit shipments and customs transit →	Used in over 66 countries. Source
SAFE Framework of Standards	Customs and transit	WCO	2025	Customs standards for supply chain security and trade facilitation; the basis of the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) concept.	2025 edition published. Source
MLETR	Digital trade	UNCITRAL	2017	Model law for legal recognition of transferable documents such as bills of lading as electronic records.	Adopted by the UK, Singapore, France and others; Türkiye is not listed. Source

How to use them

- **When drafting a contract:** state the Incoterms rule and version ("FOB Izmir Port, Incoterms® 2020") and, for payment, UCP 600 or URC 522 explicitly.
- **When choosing a carrier:** know which convention governs the carriage; liability limits and notice periods depend on it.
- **When preparing the cargo:** add VGM, ISPM 15, IMDG and CTU Code requirements to the loading plan.
- **When considering digital trade:** the legal validity of electronic bills of lading varies by country; check the list of jurisdictions that have adopted MLETR.

Test yourself

1. Does UCP 600 apply if the parties do not refer to it in the contract? *(Answer: No; ICC rules become binding by incorporation.)*

2. Why are the Rotterdam Rules not applied? *(Answer: The 20 ratifications needed for entry into force have not been reached.)*
3. Which standard governs the heat treatment and marking of wooden pallets? *(Answer: ISPM 15.)*

Frequently asked questions

Are ICC rules law?

No. ICC rules such as Incoterms, UCP 600 and URDG 758 become binding when the parties incorporate them in their contract. International conventions such as CMR or Montreal, by contrast, have the force of law in the states that are party to them.

Are the Rotterdam Rules in force?

No. They need 20 ratifications to enter into force, and 5 states have ratified so far. The Hague-Visby Rules remain widely applied in carriage by sea.

Has Türkiye adopted MLETR for electronic bills of lading?

Türkiye is not on UNCITRAL's current list of jurisdictions with legislation based on MLETR. The list includes the UK, Singapore, France and Bahrain, among others.

SOURCES

UNCITRAL — Texts of other organisations endorsed by UNCITRAL (UCP 600, URDG 758, Incoterms 2020, ISDGP) — https://uncitral.un.org/en/texts/endorsed
Trade Finance Global — ICC updates to ISBP, eUCP 2.1 and eURC 1.1 (1 July 2023) — https://tradefinanceglobal.com/posts/icc-enhances-and-aligns-isbp-eucp-and-eurc-rules-to-streamline-trade-finance-operations/amp
UNCITRAL — Hamburg Rules status — https://uncitral.un.org/en/texts/transportgoods/conventions/hamburg_rules/status
Wikipedia — Rotterdam Rules (ratification status) — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotterdam_Rules
UNCITRAL — MLETR status — https://uncitral.un.org/en/texts/ecommerce/modellaw/electronic_transferable_records/status
WCO — SAFE Framework of Standards — https://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/instrument-and-tools/frameworks-of-standards/safe_package.aspx
IPPC — ISPM 15 (wood packaging) — https://ippc.int/publications/640/
Each rule's own source appears next to it in the library below

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