

MARKET ENTRY GUIDE | OCTOBER 2026

Doing Business in the European Union

A practical guide for African companies entering the single market



ProdAfrica

CONNECTING BUSINESS

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THE ROUTE

Africa to Europe, through one front door



27

member states reached from a single registration.

90%+

of African exports by value already enter the EU duty-free.

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EORI number, valid for customs across the whole bloc.

WHY THE EU

The single market is worth the setup effort

One registration, 27 markets

A company properly established and VAT-registered in one member state can trade across all 27.

Most exports enter duty-free

Over 90% of African exports by value already enter free of import duties.

The EU is investing in trade

Substantial funding supports trade facilitation and private sector growth tied to the AfCFTA.

Standards travel with you

CE and REACH compliance is a credential that eases entry into other demanding markets.

STEP 1

Choose your point of entry

New EU subsidiary

A genuine EU legal entity. Needed to be Importer of Record, hire staff or build a long-term presence.

Branch of your company

Lighter to set up and good for market testing, but liability stays with the parent.

No EU entity

Work through a distributor, agent or Importer of Record. Fastest route, often the right start.

No single best country: weigh tax, formation speed, language and existing trade ties for your sector.

STEP 2

Register for customs and VAT

EORI number

The EU customs passport. Mandatory for any customs activity and valid in all 27 member states once issued.

VAT registration

Done in your country of establishment. Assess OSS and IOSS to report VAT EU-wide through one registration.

EORI identifies you to customs, VAT relates to tax. Apply for both in the same process.

STEP 3

Use the tariff preferences you may already have

EBA

Duty-free, quota-free access for Least Developed Countries.

Standard GSP

Reduced or zero tariffs on most lines for eligible developing countries.

GSP+

Zero duties on about two-thirds of lines, tied to international conventions.

EPAs

Reciprocal agreements with Sub-Saharan countries, duty-free and quota-free.

Association Agreements

The framework for North African countries.

Confirm your current regime and set up the certificate of origin before your first shipment.

STEP 4

The compliance layer that applies everywhere

CE marking

Product-level conformity for machinery, electronics, toys and more.

REACH

Chemical registration, including coatings and treated materials.

EUDR

Due diligence and geolocation for cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soy, timber and cattle.

CBAM

Embedded carbon reporting for cement, steel, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

GDPR

Applies to any EU personal data, including website visitors.

These follow you across all 27 member states.

STEPS 5 AND 6

Find and verify European partners

Verified B2B directory

ProdAfrica lists verified European companies with structured profiles and contacts.

VIES VAT check

Validate any EU VAT number online, free of charge.

Commercial registers

Review extracts independently; never rely only on documents the counterparty sends.

Enterprise Europe Network

Partner search and due diligence support, plus national and bilateral chambers.

Start with DG TRADE, national customs and tax authorities, and EU Access2Markets.

STEP 7

EU-specific red flags

Country-level variation

Tax, employment and contract law still differ by member state.

Rules of origin failures

The most common reason exporters lose preferential access.

Credit risk runs both ways

Established EU buyers are often the more creditworthy party.

EUDR and CBAM costs

Budget now for due diligence, geolocation and carbon reporting.

Language friction

Contracts and support are often in the local language.

One entity, many taxes

OSS simplifies VAT, but corporate tax stays country by country.

CHECKLIST

Your EU market entry checklist

Entry and registration

- Point of entry and entity structure chosen
- EORI obtained
- VAT registered, OSS/IOSS assessed

Trade preferences

- Regime confirmed (EBA, GSP, GSP+, EPA, AA)
- HS code confirmed
- Rules of origin and certificates in place

Compliance

- CE and REACH assessed
- EUDR and CBAM exposure assessed
- GDPR obligations understood

Partners

- VAT numbers checked in VIES
- Register extracts reviewed
- Payment terms set on two-way risk

IN SUMMARY

One market, twenty-seven front doors

Treat your first country as a strategic decision. Everything that follows, from OSS to the reach of one EORI, builds on it.



A QUESTION TO TAKE AWAY

Which EU country will be your first front door, and why?

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