



# Demystifying the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

An essential guide to trading under  
WTO rules for UK businesses





# WTO: An introduction

## What is the WTO?

Established in 1995, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is a global body made up of governments and customs territories that sets out rules for trading between nations.<sup>1</sup>

## The WTO's main roles and responsibilities include:

- Negotiating agreements that reduce obstacles to international trade
- Providing a legal and institutional framework to implement and monitor trade agreements
- Settling trade disputes between countries.<sup>2</sup>

## Why do you need to know about it?

In June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union. Since then, the UK government and the EU have been working together to negotiate the terms under which the UK leaves.

The UK is currently scheduled to leave the EU on January 31, 2020. If it does so without a Withdrawal Agreement being finalised, the UK's trade with the EU will take place under WTO terms.

What's more, the UK would no longer benefit from EU trade agreements with non-EU countries – although some of these have already been renegotiated to provide a continuation of the current terms. Trade with non-EU countries that the UK hasn't renegotiated terms with would take place under WTO rules.

This could lead to changes to the way you import and export goods. But don't worry, because at FedEx, we've been working hard to make sure that however the situation progresses, we'll be able to help you to ship simply and conveniently. We hope that this guide will help you to feel more confident going forward, whatever the outcome of Brexit.

# How does trading under WTO rules work?

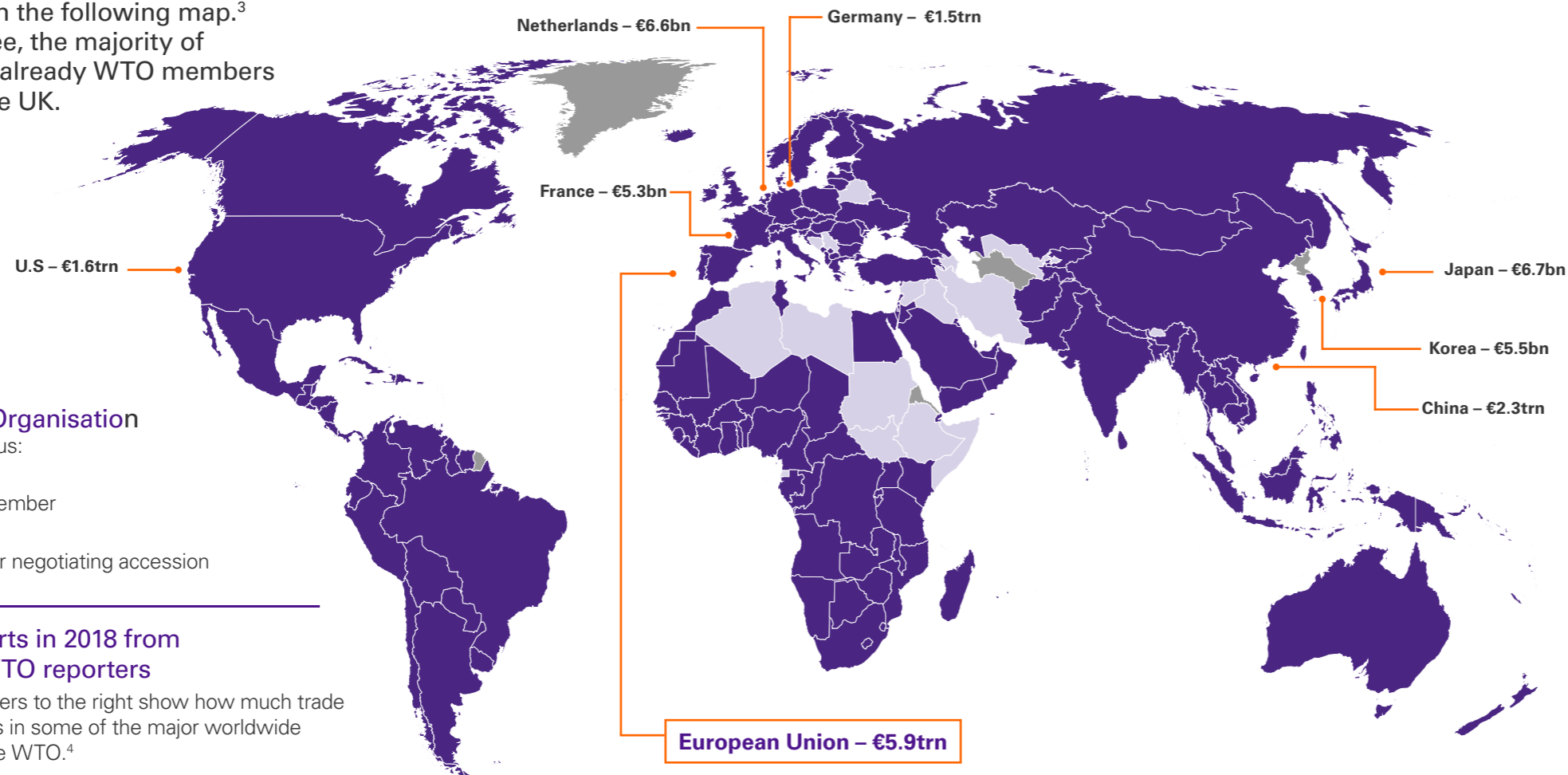
WTO members that don't have free trade agreements set up with one another trade under WTO rules. These rules set out how far and in what ways each member guarantees to keep its markets open to other members.

## WTO rules are centred on two key principles:<sup>5</sup>

- **Most Favoured Nation:** this states that a member country is not allowed to discriminate between trade partners. So, if a member grants a special status to one country, it is required to extend it to all members of the WTO.
- **National Treatment:** under this principle, imported goods and locally produced goods should be treated equally. This rule applies as soon as a product, service or item of intellectual property enters the country.

## Which other countries are WTO members?

There are 164 members in the WTO, represented in the following map.<sup>3</sup> As you can see, the majority of countries are already WTO members – including the UK.



## World Trade Organisation

Membership status:

- WTO Member
- Observer negotiating accession

## Value of exports in 2018 from the leading WTO reporters

The country markers to the right show how much trade currently operates in some of the major worldwide markets under the WTO.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Data subject to change – all details were correct at time of writing.

## WTO schedules

Every WTO member also has a list of tariffs (taxes on imports of goods) and quotas (limits on the number of goods) that they apply to other countries, known as WTO schedules.

In the majority of cases, tariffs are applied to imported goods by the country importing them. But there can also be tariffs on exported goods.

## Resolving disputes

When it comes to disputes, the WTO encourages members to settle these through consultation with each other. If this is unsuccessful, governments take the disputes to the WTO if they believe their rights under WTO agreements are being infringed.

Specially appointed independent experts then make a judgment based on their interpretations of the agreements and individual members' commitments.

# Understanding the UK government's tariff schedule in the event of a No Deal

If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, it would no longer be a part of the EU's tariff schedule. Instead, it would lodge its own tariff schedule with the WTO and previous tariffs would no longer apply. In preparation, the UK government has published a temporary plan for import tariffs designed to protect businesses, consumers and vulnerable industries.

According to the new tariff schedule, 82% of UK imports from the EU would be tariff-free after Brexit, down from 100% now. In addition, 92% of imports from the rest of the world would pay no import duty, up from 56%.<sup>6</sup>



## What could happen after January 31, 2020?

The temporary schedule would be in place for up to 12 months while the government finalises its permanent schedule. Duty-free trading between the UK and the EU would end, and duties and additional export/import procedures would be introduced.

Unless otherwise agreed, the UK would trade with the EU on the same basis as other 'third countries' (all those that are not in the EU or European Free Trade Association).

Here are some of the import tariff rates for the UK in the event of a No Deal Brexit:\*

\*Products have been selected to show tariffs across a broad range of sectors. Please note these rates are subject to change, but were correct at the time of writing.

Goods	Tariff rate <sup>7</sup>
Motor vehicles (for under 10 people)	10%
White sugar	15 euros /100kg
Fresh bananas	114 euros /1000kg
Porcelain/china tableware and kitchenware	12%
Polyethylene	6.5%
Cotton bed linen	12%
Pneumatic tyres	4.5%
Ceramic flags and paving, hearth or wall tiles	5%

You can see all current temporary tariff rates and get more detailed information on these plans on the government website [here](#).

## Tariffs on your exports to the EU

Under a No Deal Brexit, any goods that you export to the EU will be subject to the WTO's Most Favoured Nation rule. This means that from January 31, 2020, your EU importers will need to pay the same tariffs on your goods as all other WTO members.<sup>8</sup>

More details on these tariffs will become available [here](#). The [EU's Trade Helpdesk](#) is another great resource for businesses and can tell you more about the EU's rates and taxes.

## Key changes this could bring to your business

### Changes to duties and tax

A No Deal could mean changes to the duties and tax you pay. For instance, you may need to pay customs duty on your imports from the EU, and you may see changes to the rates you pay on imports from other non-EU countries.<sup>9</sup> Import duty rates could vary depending on which country you import your goods from.

Your EU customers could also have to pay import duty on products you export to them.

If the UK has a Free Trade Agreement or Economic Partnership Agreement with a country, this may enable preferential importing and exporting conditions. Find out which new trade agreements have already been set up for a No Deal Brexit [here](#).

The [UK Trade Tariff tool](#) will be updated with all necessary information on tariffs. You can look up all duty and VAT rates and commodity codes [here](#), and view the temporary rates after a No Deal [here](#).

### Changes to customs/shipping documentation

Under a No Deal Brexit, the paperwork you fill out in order to get your shipments processed efficiently at customs may change, and you may be required to provide more details.

Your current EU Certificates of Origin used for exporting goods may also cease to be valid. The UK government will likely supply you with an alternative document to use to make sure you can specify the [origin of your goods](#).

### Changes to border control processes and transit times

There could also be changes to the way the UK border operates at ports and airports.<sup>11</sup> Your goods could also face more checks at EU borders or see changes in processes in third countries which previously traded with the UK under agreements with the EU.

It is essential to ensure you provide the correct paperwork to minimise the risk of delays.

### What is a commodity code?<sup>10</sup>

Commodity codes classify goods for import and export, so you can:

- Fill in declarations and other paperwork
- Check if there's duty or VAT to pay
- Find out about duty reliefs





# How FedEx and TNT can support you

Times of change call for services you can trust. With our decades of trade expertise, reliable services and customs knowledge, FedEx and TNT are the partners you need to help you navigate the road ahead.

## Count on us for your global shipping needs

We'll make sure that whatever happens, you continue to offer great service not just to your customers in the EU, but across the world, with:

Next-day delivery to Europe by **12 p.m.**



**55,000 weekly** road trips across Europe

**Customs clearance**

abilities with 1,000s of experts



**117 years'** combined experience

**AEO status** to 'fast-track' shipments through customs

**425,000** employees in 220+ countries and territories



## 5 steps to becoming Brexit-ready

While negotiations continue, you can prepare your business by taking the following steps.<sup>12</sup> These will help you to prevent delays at customs and get your goods to customers quickly in the event of a No Deal.

### 1. Make sure you have a UK EORI number that starts with GB

To continue importing goods, you'll need a UK Economic Operator Registration and Identification (EORI) number – which you can get [here](#). If you're exporting, make sure your importer has one.

### 2. Decide who will make import/export declarations

You can make your own customs declarations or you can hire someone else to do them, such as a customs agent or FedEx – which completes import and export declarations as part of the door-to-door service it offers.

### 3. Register for a streamlined import process

Reduce the amount of information you need to provide at the border by applying for 'transitional simplified procedures'. Find out if you can register [here](#).

### 4. Check the rate of duty and tax you need to pay

You may need to pay customs duties and VAT on all imports. If you're exporting, your importer may need to pay these on your goods. This will depend on the classification of your goods. Find out the rate of customs duties [here](#), and check when you'll need to account for and pay VAT [here](#).

### 5. Check the actions needed for your specific type of goods

Depending on what you're importing or exporting, there may be other steps you need to take to get your business ready. For example, you may need to change the labelling on your goods, apply for licences, or find an approved UK border inspection post where your goods can enter the UK. Get more details on this [here](#).

You can find out all official government advice for preparing to import after Brexit [here](#), and preparing to export [here](#).

### Guiding you through Brexit

We're well-positioned to support your business through Brexit. We continue to follow developments closely and, whatever the outcome, you can be confident we'll be able to help you to implement any new processes and regulations.

What's more, our multi-hub network in Europe gives us flexibility in the crossings we choose and agility in our decision-making, while our expertise and experience will help ensure your shipments navigate borders seamlessly.

Check out some of our other essential resources:

- Take a look at our [Brexit Checklist](#) for all the information you need to prepare your business.
- Get all the answers on how a No Deal Brexit could affect imports and exports in our [No Deal Need-to-Know guide](#).
- Drive efficiency with [FedEx® Electronic Trade Documents](#), our simple, reliable online tool that reduces paperwork and helps to prevent customs delays to ensure the timely delivery of your international packages.



# Want to get in touch?

Feel free to email us at [brexitquestions@fedex.com](mailto:brexitquestions@fedex.com) for any questions you may have.



## Sources

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9 Check temporary rates of customs duty (tariffs) on imports after a no-deal Brexit (UK government), <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-temporary-rates-of-customs-duty-on-imports-after-eu-exit>

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12 Get Ready for Brexit (UK government), <https://www.gov.uk/brexit#business>

Please note: All information provided in this guide was correct at the time of writing. Details are subject to change as the situation with Brexit progresses.

