



3 reasons
why freight
forwarders should
consider outsourcing
customs clearance



MAERSK

ALL THE WAY

Introduction





Customs compliance can be challenging, and in today's market, it's only getting more complex. Regulations are constantly shifting, port congestion continues to cause unforeseen delays, and new customs systems are coming into force.

How can freight forwarders prepare and navigate in this changing customs landscape? Here, we explore these market changes in more detail and break down why now might be the time for freight forwarders to respond.



#1

Duties, tariffs
and trade agreements
continue to change



"In recent decades, there has been significant fluctuation regarding what goods are subject to tariffs as lists are updated, revised and renegotiated.¹"

- McKinsey & Company



For example, the UK is set to enter round 6 of negotiations on an enhanced Free Trade Agreement with Switzerland.²



At present, the average tariff rate is relatively low at 2.5%, down from 3.6% in 1993.³ However, it looks likely that tariffs will be top of the agenda in 2025 and beyond.

Whether it's amendments to free trade agreements or the introduction of tariffs or sanctions, the customs landscape is constantly changing. This fluidity is making it difficult for even the most experienced forwarders to keep pace. Be ready to adapt to regulatory shifts and keep shipments moving efficiently.

Not only do you have to monitor the changes, but you also have to inform customers in advance about potential changes in order to prepare the necessary documentation or perhaps even rethink the route of the supply chain.

Any failure to do so risks hold-ups at the ports. But do you have the time or the expertise to manage these customs risks?

Having trouble keeping pace with trade regulations?

Here are three questions to consider:

1. Are you confident in your understanding of the trade regulations for the markets you operate in?
2. Are you proactively identifying risks related to trade policy changes?
3. Do you have contingencies in place to mitigate the negative effects of new tariffs and sanctions?



The Maersk advantage

Maersk is able to support freight forwarders through our deep industry-wide customs expertise and local regulatory knowledge, with more than 2,500 customs experts globally.



#2

Increased bottlenecks
at major ports



68%
of major ports saw anchor
times increase in 2024.⁴



At the port of Lazaro
Cardenas, customs
clearance is one of the
main bottlenecks, pushing
average import container
dwell time to 11 days.⁵



The European Commission
is considering scrapping
the de minimis, a current
€150 threshold under
which items can be bought
duty free.⁶

Since the pandemic, port congestion has been a major challenge for all involved in the world of logistics. It's fair to say, customs formalities are responsible for a fair share of the delays.

Fortunately, customs authorities are looking at ways to tackle the backlogs. One option being touted by some governments is the decentralisation of customs with the creation of 'regional hubs' intended to take the pressure off major ports and routes. Another is the removal of the de minimis, though some officials have cautioned whether this would actually increase the workload of overstretched customs officials.

Still, these are measures focused on the big picture. What about if there are problems with the actual declaration? Liaising with the relevant customs authorities can be a time-consuming process, one that increases the risk of delays and added costs for your customers' shipments. Is your business set up to respond quickly and get things back on track when there is a problem?

Bottlenecks threatening your efficiency?

Here are three questions to consider:

1. Are you experiencing extended dwell times at major ports?
2. Are your clearance issues caused by incorrect documentation?
3. Do you have strong relationships with the customs authorities?



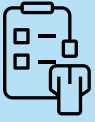
The Maersk advantage

Maersk has strong relationships with customs authorities all over the world, which help us minimise delays if there are problems with the paperwork.



#3

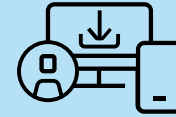
Growing investment in
customs technologies



More than 130 customs authorities globally have already started to develop or even fully implemented automated customs systems.⁷



The European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services (CLECAT) says it supports the need for better harmonisation and modernisation of customs IT systems and processes.⁸



“However, there’s a “lagging adoption of digital tools” in the freight forwarding industry.⁹”

- International Forwarding Association

To help manage increasingly complicated imports and exports, customs authorities are looking to adopt more uniform, digitalised ways of working, such as the establishment of an EU customs data hub.



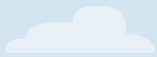
However, when it comes to digitalisation, the freight forwarding industry is lagging behind – and the transition to these new systems is creating extra workload demands that will take time to get up to speed with.

That said, where some technologies require training, others can deliver value straight away. For example, ready to use e-booking capabilities are available on the market, which can streamline your customs management process and free up internal resources to focus on training elsewhere.

Want to harness new technologies?

Here are three questions to consider:

1. Is your team fully trained on the latest customs systems?
2. Is your technology stack compatible with current and incoming systems used by customs authorities?
3. What parts of the customs process can you digitalise?



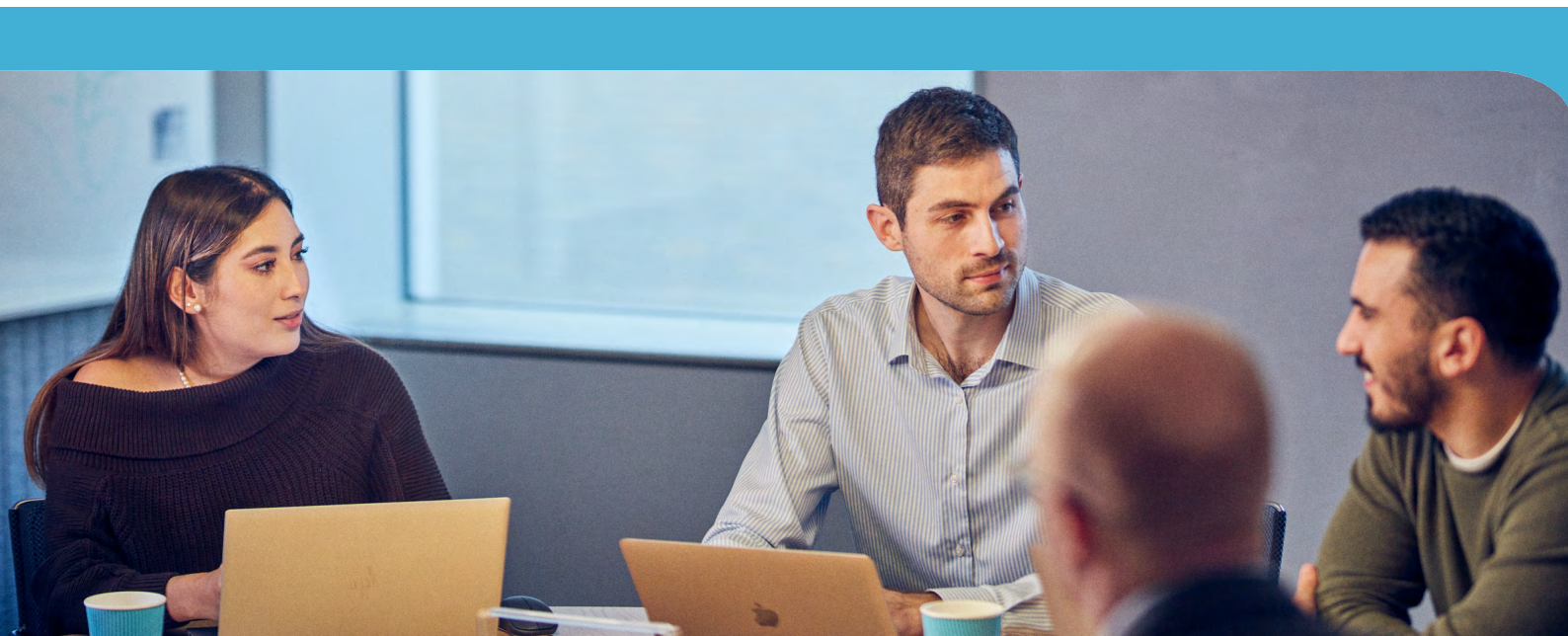
The Maersk advantage

Maersk enables freight forwarders to add customs to ocean bookings online, providing a one-stop shop for customs and ocean shipments. This means you can streamline the customs clearance process and ensure your customs cargo moves seamlessly through the ports.

Could a partnership with Maersk help you grow?

At Maersk, we understand that outsourcing customs might not be the first choice for freight forwarders. Against such mounting demands, though, with key question marks surrounding time and workload pressures, keeping customs in-house might overstretch your business. In this environment, outsourcing some or all of your customs to a reliable partner like Maersk can give you the space to focus on handling a higher volume of orders more efficiently.

Whether your need is to outsource all your customs clearance, have a logistics partner that can handle your overflow, or simply want to add customs to your ocean bookings online, a partnership with Maersk can help. By adding customs to your ocean shipments, you can manage customs and ocean bookings in one platform, helping to streamline your supply chain. Be ready to streamline your customs processes and position your business for growth.



Discover how to add customs to your ocean shipment booking in just a few easy steps.

[Learn more >](#)

1. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/geopolitics/our-insights/tariffs-on-the-move-a-guide-for-ceos-for-2025-and-beyond>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/update-following-round-5-of-negotiations-on-an-enhanced-free-trade-agreement-with-switzerland>
3. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators/Series/TM.TAX.MRCH.SM.AR.ZS>
4. <https://www.beacon.com/resources/global-port-congestion-2024-year-in-review>
5. <https://theloadstar.com/customs-clearance-the-main-bottleneck-at-mexican-ports-as-traffic-builds/>
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7. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/ai-is-already-helping-businesses-to-buy-and-sell-internationally-heres-how-technology-can-disrupt-global-trade-even-more/>
8. <https://theloadstar.com/removing-de-minimis-no-silver-bullet-as-ecommerce-traffic-floods-into-eu/>
9. <https://ifa-forwarding.net/blog/international-freight-forwarding/freight-forwarding-challenges-in-2024-and-beyond/>

