

SADC & COMESA Preferential Trade Guide

How to legally reduce import duty using Zimbabwe's trade agreements

Zimbabwe is a member of both the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Goods that qualify as originating in a member country can enter Zimbabwe at a reduced duty rate, or duty free. To benefit, you must prove where the goods were made.

What this means for you

- Lower or zero customs duty on qualifying goods, which can significantly reduce landed cost.
- Preference is based on where the goods were **made**, not where they were bought or shipped from.
- Preference is not automatic. You must claim it with the correct Certificate of Origin, at the time of clearance.

Which goods qualify?

Goods qualify when they meet the rules of origin of the agreement. The rules differ by product, but generally a product qualifies if it is:

- **Wholly obtained** in a member country, such as agricultural produce grown there or minerals extracted there; or
- **Sufficiently processed** in a member country, meaning enough local value was added or the goods changed tariff classification during manufacture, as set out in the product-specific rules.

Simply repacking, relabelling or shipping goods through a member country does not make them originate there. Some goods are also excluded or on sensitive lists with slower duty reductions. Check the specific product before you place the order.

SADC and COMESA compared

	SADC	COMESA
Who is covered	Goods originating in SADC member states that participate in the trade protocol.	Goods originating in COMESA member states participating in the free trade area.
Certificate	SADC Certificate of Origin	COMESA Certificate of Origin
Issued by	Authorised body in the exporting country, usually the revenue authority or chamber of commerce.	Authorised body in the exporting country, usually the revenue authority or chamber of commerce.
Claimed at	Time of customs clearance in Zimbabwe, with the declaration.	Time of customs clearance in Zimbabwe, with the declaration.

Membership, participation and the products covered vary by country and change over time. Ask your agent to confirm the position for your supplier's country and your product.

Step by step: how to claim preferential rates

Step	What to do
1. Confirm eligibility	Before ordering, confirm with your agent that the product and the supplier's country qualify, and what the preferential rate is.
2. Tell your supplier	Ask your supplier to apply for the Certificate of Origin from the authorised body in their country. Give them the right agreement (SADC or COMESA).
3. Supplier applies	The supplier submits proof of origin, such as manufacturing records or input costs, and the body issues the certificate.
4. Check the certificate	Check the details match the invoice and transport document: exporter, consignee, description, quantity and invoice number. Errors can lead to rejection.
5. Send to your agent	Send the original or a copy as required, with your other documents, before the goods arrive.
6. Claim at clearance	Your agent declares the preference and submits the certificate with the declaration. Customs verifies it.
7. Keep records	Keep copies. Customs can verify origin after clearance, and wrongly claimed preference can lead to payment of the difference and penalties.

Common mistakes: certificate issued after shipment when not allowed, details that do not match the invoice, certificate issued for the wrong agreement, and goods that do not meet the rules of origin.

Need help with this consignment? Speak to your George Steward clearing agent before the goods ship. Getting the paperwork right at the start avoids delays and storage charges at the border.

General guidance only, not legal or tax advice. Requirements, permits and rates are set by ZIMRA and other regulators and change from time to time. Confirm the requirements for your specific shipment with your George Steward clearing agent before you ship. Last reviewed: October 2026.