



How to Obtain an Import Permit In Nigeria 2026: A Comprehensive Step-by-Step Guide

Description

In today's fast-paced global trade environment, Nigeria remains one of Africa's most vibrant markets. Whether you are a small business owner or a large multinational, obtaining an import permit is essential to legally bring goods into the country. This guide will walk you through the entire process, the regulatory requirements, and even share estimated costs and helpful tables. With Nigeria's continuous improvements in trade facilitation; such as the Single Window Trade Portal, understanding the procedure in 2026 is more critical than ever.

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Introduction

Importing goods into Nigeria can unlock tremendous market potential, but before you can start shipping your products into the country, you must obtain an import permit. With the evolution of digital trade systems such as the Nigeria Single Window for Trade and improved regulatory guidelines, the process is now more streamlined and transparent.

This guide is aimed at simplifying the complex import process. It covers every aspect, from basic company registration and tax compliance to the detailed steps of submitting and validating the necessary forms. Whether you are importing regulated goods such as pharmaceuticals or industrial equipment, following this step-by-step guide will help you navigate the system efficiently in 2025.

Understanding Import Permits in Nigeria

An import permit is an official authorisation issued by government agencies that allows the importer to bring specified goods into Nigeria. The permit ensures that the imported products meet local regulations, quality standards, and safety requirements. Several regulatory bodies oversee various aspects of importation:

- **Nigeria Customs Service (NCS):** Oversees the processing of the electronic import documentation (e.g., Form M and PAAR).
- **SON (Standard Organisation of Nigeria):** Issues the SONCAP certificate for regulated products.

- **NAFDAC (National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control):** Regulates and certifies food, drugs, chemicals, and other products.
- **NUPRC (Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission):** Handles permits for petroleum products.
- **NAQS (Nigeria Agricultural Quarantine Services):** Issues permits for agricultural seeds and livestock products.

Understanding which agency governs your specific product category is vital to ensure you comply with all the requirements.

Pre-Requisites for Obtaining an Import Permit

Before you can start the import permit process, several critical steps must be completed. The following prerequisites lay the foundation for a smooth import process.

Company Registration.

While the focus of this article is on obtaining an import permit, the first step for any importer is to legally register your company in Nigeria. Registration is done via the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

Key points about CAC registration:

- **Certificate of Incorporation:** Provides legal recognition.
- **Reduced Detail:** In this guide, we assume that you have completed CAC registration. For comprehensive information, refer to detailed guides on company incorporation in Nigeria.

Tax and Bank Requirements

Once your company is registered, ensure you complete the following:

- **TIN Registration:** Register your TIN on the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) TaxPromax Platform to enable MDA's and Bank to see it when they log into their portal. This is mandatory for all tax-related activities.
- **Authorised Dealer Bank (ADB):** Open an account with a reputable bank in Nigeria. The bank will act as your Authorised Dealer Bank, processing the e-Form M, PAAR, and mediating between you and the NCS.

Step-by-Step Process to Obtain an Import Permit

The import process in Nigeria follows several key steps. Each stage is designed to ensure that all documentation, regulatory requirements, and inspections are completed efficiently.

Step 1: Obtain Regulatory Certificates

Overview:

Before initiating the import permit application, the importer must secure all the necessary regulatory certificates related to the products.

- **Product Certificates (PC):** For regulated items, obtain the required Product Certificate from the relevant regulatory agency (e.g., SON for electronics or NAFDAC for food and drugs).
- **Regulatory Permits:** Depending on the product type, you might need additional permits (e.g., petroleum permits from NUPRC or agricultural permits from NAQS).

Tip:

Check the latest updates on the [Nigeria Customs Service website](#) for product-specific regulations and any changes in fee structures.

Step 2: Activate the Regulatory Certificate on the Single Window

Overview:

Once you obtain your regulatory certificate, the next step is to activate it on the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal.

- **Activation Process:** Log in to the portal and link your certificate to your import profile. This confirms that your product meets the necessary regulatory standards.
- **Documentation:** Have a digital copy of your certificate ready for upload.

Step 3: Open a Form M on the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal

Overview:

Form M is an electronic import application that must be completed and submitted online.

• Required Documents:

- **Proforma Invoice:** Detailed invoice from your supplier.
- **Insurance Certificate:** Proof of insurance covering the shipment.
- **Regulatory Certificates:** Attach your activated Product Certificate.
- **Other Relevant Documents:** Shipping details, packing list, and any additional documentation required for your product.

Submission:

- **Online Process:** Fill out the form on the [Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal](#) and attach the required documents.
- **Fee Payment:** A fee (commonly around N1,500) is usually charged for processing the e-Form M. Always check the latest fee schedule on the official website.

Step 4: Bank Review and Submission to the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS)**Overview:**

Your Authorised Dealer Bank (ADB) plays a crucial role in validating and forwarding your Form M.

- **Validation:** The bank reviews your submitted Form M and verifies that all attached documents are complete and valid.
- **Submission to NCS:** Once validated, the ADB submits the form to the Nigeria Customs Service for further review.

Note:

Any discrepancies or incomplete documents will be flagged by the bank or the NCS, and you will be required to rectify these before proceeding.

Step 5: Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) Review and Approval of Form M**Overview:**

After the ADB submission, the Nigeria Customs Service reviews the Form M.

- **Decision:** The NCS either approves or rejects the application. Approval means your Form M is successfully registered on the Single Window system; rejection will include

a list of deficiencies to be corrected.

- **Turnaround Time:** In many cases, the NCS will review and respond within one working day.

Action Required:

If your Form M is rejected, review the feedback, correct the errors, and resubmit the application through your bank.

Step 6: Coordination with Exporter and Initiating the SONCAP Process

Overview:

Once your Form M is accepted, a copy of the form must be forwarded to your exporter.

- **Exporter's Role:** The exporter will then use the approved Form M along with the final invoice, bill of lading (or airway bill), and packing list to contact Cotecna or another accredited certification body for the issuance of the SONCAP Certificate.
- **SONCAP Certificate:** This certificate confirms that your shipment meets the Nigerian standards for regulated products.

Step 7: Activate the SONCAP Certificate and Apply for PAAR

Overview:

With the SONCAP Certificate in hand, the next step is to activate it on the Single Window platform.

- **Activation:** Log in and upload the SONCAP Certificate to your account.
- **Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR) Application:** Once activated, apply for a PAAR, which is essential for customs clearance upon arrival of your shipment.

Key Point:

The PAAR system is designed to assess the consignment before arrival, reducing delays at the port.

Step 8: Issuance of the Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR)

Overview:

The Nigeria Customs Service issues the PAAR once all documentation is verified and the

shipment details are confirmed.

- **Notification:** The PAAR is sent electronically to your email and updated in the Single Window system.
- **Clearance:** With the PAAR in place, you can now commence the customs clearance process for your goods.

Timing:

The PAAR is typically generated within hours after the final documents are received and verified by the NCS.

Step 9: Shipping, Manifest Submission, and Customs Clearance

Overview:

At this stage, the focus shifts to logistics and shipping.

- **Import Manifest:** Your shipping company submits the import manifest to the Nigerian Port Authority (NPA) or the designated terminal operator.
- **Charges:** Pay all applicable ship charges, terminal handling fees, and NPA charges.
- **Bill of Lading:** The shipping company issues the bill of lading once all documentation is in order and payments are confirmed.

Tip:

Keep digital copies of all documents for easy reference during customs clearance.

Step 10: Terminal Handling, Inspection, and Final Delivery

Overview:

Once the shipment arrives at the port, the terminal operator handles cargo inspection, weighing, loading, and final delivery.

- **Inspection:** The terminal operator conducts physical or electronic inspections based on the channel indicated in your PAAR (green for direct release, blue for subsequent check, yellow for documentary check, red for physical/scanning check).
 - **Handling Charges:** Additional handling fees are generated by the terminal operator, which you must settle before cargo release.
 - **Delivery:** After clearance, the goods are released, and you can arrange for final delivery to your warehouse or distribution centre.
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Cost Tables and Company Registration Categories

Understanding the fee structures not only for import permit processing but also for company registration in Nigeria is key to budgeting your project. Below are two tables summarising estimated costs as of 2025. (Note: Always verify current rates on official websites as fees may be updated.)

Table 1: Estimated Import Permit and Processing Fees

Permit/Process Category	Estimated Cost (NGN)	Notes / Description
e-Form M Processing Fee	₦1,500	Charged per transaction; check official fee schedule
PAAR Application Fee	Varies (subject to inspection charges)	May vary by shipment size and product category
SONCAP Certification Fee	Varies by product	Depends on product type and regulatory requirements
NAFDAC Permit (if applicable)	Varies by product	For food, drugs, and regulated chemicals
NUPRC Permit for Petroleum Products	Application: ₦75,000; Processing: ₦210,000	For importation of petroleum-related products
NAQS Permit for Agricultural Imports	Varies by product	Specific to seeds, livestock, and related products

Table 2: CAC Registration Cost Summary (Simplified)

Company Type	First Million Cost (NGN)	Subsequent Million Cost (NGN)	Notes
Private Limited Company	85,000	30,000 per million	Popular choice for SMEs and foreign investors
Public Limited Company	105,000	40,000 per million	Required for companies with wider shareholding

Company Type	First Million Cost (NGN)	Subsequent Million Cost(NGN)	Notes
(Other forms e.g., Sole Proprietorship)	Varies*	Varies*	Sole Proprietorship details are less formal; not registered with CAC

*Note: For sole proprietorships and partnerships, costs are generally lower but may not offer the same legal protections and are not fully detailed here.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What exactly is an import permit in Nigeria?

Answer:

An import permit is a government-issued authorisation that allows an importer to legally bring goods into Nigeria. It ensures that imported products comply with local regulations, safety standards, and quality requirements.

2. Who needs an import permit in Nigeria?

Answer:

Any business or individual looking to import regulated products; such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, food products, or petroleum, must obtain the appropriate import permits from the relevant Nigerian authorities.

3. How long does it take to obtain an import permit?

Answer:

If all documentation is complete and submitted correctly, the Nigeria Customs Service can review and approve the e-Form M within one working day. However, overall processing (including obtaining regulatory certificates and PAAR issuance) may take several days to a few weeks depending on product type and compliance with documentation requirements.

4. What documents are required for the import permit application?

Answer:

Key documents include:

- A completed and validated e-Form M
- Proforma Invoice
- Insurance Certificate
- Regulatory Certificates (e.g., SONCAP or NAFDAC, as applicable)
- Shipping documents (Bill of Lading/Airway Bill, Packing List)
- A valid Tax Identification Number (TIN) and proof of company registration

5. Do I need a SONCAP certificate for every import?

Answer:

Not for every product. SONCAP certification is mandatory for regulated products (such as electronics, machinery, and some consumer goods). Items such as food and pharmaceuticals might require NAFDAC permits instead. Always check with the relevant authority for your specific product category.

6. Can foreigners import goods in Nigeria?

Answer:

Yes. Nigeria's regulations allow foreign investors to register companies and obtain import permits. A foreigner can even be the sole owner of a Private Limited Company, although Public Limited Companies may have additional requirements.

7. What happens if my Form M is rejected?

Answer:

If your Form M is rejected, the NCS will provide specific feedback regarding the deficiencies. You must correct the errors or provide missing documentation and then resubmit the form through your Authorised Dealer Bank.

8. Are the costs for permits fixed?

Answer:

Permit fees can vary by product category, shipment size, and specific regulatory requirements. Always refer to the latest guidelines on the [Nigeria Customs Service website](#) and other official sources for the most current fee structures.

9. Is company registration with the CAC a lengthy process?

Answer:

No. With the current online registration system, CAC registration has been significantly streamlined. While it is a necessary step, it is summarised here so you can focus on the import permit process itself.

Common Misconceptions About Import Permits in Nigeria

Misconception 1: Import Permits Are Overly Complex and Time-Consuming

Reality:

Thanks to digital platforms like the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal, the entire process; from submitting an e-Form M to obtaining PAAR, has become much more streamlined and faster than in previous years.

Misconception 2: Foreigners Cannot Successfully Import into Nigeria

Reality:

Nigerian law permits full ownership of companies by foreigners. Many multinational corporations and foreign investors have successfully navigated the system to import goods and operate in Nigeria.

Misconception 3: The Process Requires Excessive Documentation

Reality:

While documentation is essential to ensure compliance and safety, clear guidelines and online submission portals help to organise and simplify the process. Once you are familiar with the required documents, preparation becomes much easier.

Misconception 4: Regulatory Fees Are Exorbitant

Reality:

Regulatory fees are set by government agencies to cover administrative costs and ensure

product safety and quality. They are transparent and directly linked to the type and value of goods imported. A careful review of cost tables shows that the fees are reasonable and competitive compared to regional standards.

Conclusion

Obtaining an import permit in Nigeria in 2025 is a multi-step process that, when followed diligently, can be straightforward and efficient. This guide has covered all the necessary steps, from securing regulatory certificates and activating them on the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal to completing the e-Form M, undergoing customs review, and final clearance at the port. Additionally, understanding the prerequisites such as CAC registration (summarised for your convenience), TIN acquisition and upgrade to the TaxPromax Platform, and setting up an account with an Authorised Dealer Bank is essential.

By following the outlined steps and utilising digital platforms for seamless processing, importers can significantly reduce delays and ensure that their shipments meet all Nigerian regulatory standards. The inclusion of detailed cost tables and FAQs should help you better budget your venture and address any concerns during the application process.

For any business looking to enter or expand in the Nigerian market, meticulous planning, updated documentation, and staying informed of regulatory changes are key. With the evolution of systems such as the Single Window Trade Portal and improved coordination among agencies, obtaining your import permit in 2025 can pave the way for successful market entry and sustainable business growth.

Ready to Get Started?

Take the first step by ensuring that your company is properly registered and that all your tax and bank accounts are in order. Then, follow the step-by-step process outlined above to secure your import permit. Remember to regularly check the [Nigeria Customs Service](#) and other relevant official websites for updates to fees and guidelines.

Need Professional Assistance?

If you feel overwhelmed by the process, consider consulting with trade experts or corporate service providers who can guide you through every step, from CAC registration

to customs clearance. Professional advice can save time and help avoid costly errors.

Category

1. Industry Insights

ICA (Ibe Chido & Associates)