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Exporting from the UAE: Turning CEPA Market Access into Repeatable Growth

Preferential access creates opportunity, but successful exporters still need product eligibility, landed-cost discipline, partner control and finance.

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EDITORIAL GUIDE

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> UAE non-oil foreign trade reached approximately AED1.937 trillion in the first half of 2026, 13.1% higher than the same period in 2025. Non-oil exports rose 23.9% to AED452.8 billion and represented 23.4% of total non-oil foreign trade, according to figures released through the UAE Media Office.

Trade with countries covered by a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement already in force reached AED304.3 billion during the period. For an individual exporter, however, market access is only one part of success. Product eligibility, customer demand, compliance, logistics, cash and collection still need to work together.

H1 2026 trade signals

NON-OIL FOREIGN TRADE	Approximately AED1.937 trillion.
NON-OIL EXPORTS	AED452.8 billion, up 23.9% year on year.
CEPA TRADE	AED304.3 billion with partners whose agreements were in force.

Choose a market from evidence

Begin with product-level demand, competitive price, regulation and route to customer. National trade growth may be concentrated in commodities or sectors unrelated to the company. Use the Ministry of Economy and Tourism’s trade dashboards to examine destination, product category and trend, then test that data through customers, distributors and industry sources.

Rank markets using consistent criteria: reachable demand, tariff treatment, standards, logistics, payment risk, required localisation, distributor quality and strategic fit. A large market with difficult registration and weak margins may be less attractive than a smaller market where the company has a credible route to repeat sales.

Confirm whether the agreement benefits your product

A CEPA does not make every shipment duty free. The product must be classified correctly and meet the applicable rules of origin and documentary requirements. Confirm the tariff line, origin criteria, required certificate or declaration and the schedule under which any reduction applies.

Map the bill of materials and production process to origin rules before promising a landed price. Retain supplier declarations, production records and cost evidence. If a product or sourcing pattern changes, reassess eligibility. The exporter should be able to support the origin claim after the shipment, not only obtain a document before it leaves.

Build the landed-cost model

Calculate price after packaging, inland transport, freight, insurance, duties, taxes, inspection, certification, port charges, distributor margin, returns and foreign-exchange effects. Compare Incoterms carefully because they allocate cost and risk differently. A high gross margin at the factory gate can disappear before the customer receives the product.

Model alternative routes and shipment sizes. Faster delivery may reduce inventory and customer risk even when freight costs more. Larger shipments may lower unit cost but consume cash and increase exposure to slow demand. The commercial team should quote from an approved landed-cost model rather than an incomplete price list.

> *Preferential access creates an opening; repeatable export performance comes from evidence, compliance and cash conversion.*

Complete product and customer due diligence

Determine registration, labelling, language, conformity, safety and sector requirements in the destination. Verify the importer, distributor and end-use where relevant. Screen counterparties and transactions under the company’s financial-crime and sanctions controls, and understand restrictions that may apply to goods, technology or destinations.

A distribution agreement should address territory, channels, targets, pricing, marketing, inventory, customer data, intellectual property, compliance, sub-distributors, termination and unsold stock. Avoid granting broad exclusivity before the partner has demonstrated capability and transparent market coverage.

Finance the export cash cycle

Export growth may extend the period between purchasing inputs and collecting cash. Forecast deposits, production, shipment, acceptance, tax and payment timing by order. Set customer credit limits and approval evidence. Consider letters of credit, guarantees, export credit insurance or receivables finance where proportionate to the risk and economics.

Define responsibility for documentary accuracy. Small inconsistencies can delay bank processing, customs release or customer acceptance. Reconcile purchase order, commercial invoice, packing list, transport documents, origin evidence and payment terms before dispatch.

Learn from each market

Track contribution margin after logistics, claims and support—not revenue alone. Monitor customer concentration, repeat orders, price variance, delivery performance, returns, overdue receivables and distributor inventory. Review whether demand is reaching the intended end customer or accumulating in the channel.

Use early shipments to improve packaging, documentation, forecasting and partner management. Expansion into a second market should reuse proven controls while accounting for different rules and customer behaviour. A disciplined export platform becomes a capability rather than a series of one-off deals.

Create one accountable export operating model

Sales, supply chain, finance, tax, compliance and legal teams should use one order-to-cash workflow. Define who approves the customer, product classification, origin evidence, price, credit, Incoterm, shipping documents and release. A responsibility matrix prevents a transaction from moving forward because every team assumed another had completed the check.

Maintain controlled product and customer master data. Changes to composition, supplier, tariff classification, destination, distributor or bank details should trigger review at the appropriate level. Integrate freight and customs information where practical, but retain human review for high-value exceptions and unusual routes.

Prepare for claims, returns and disruption

Contracts should explain inspection, acceptance, warranty, returns, liability and dispute procedures. Keep evidence of packing, condition, dispatch and delivery. Determine who bears loss at each stage and whether insurance matches the agreed term. A profitable order can become a loss when damaged goods, rejection or demurrage is not allocated clearly.

Build alternatives for critical ports, carriers, brokers and suppliers. Test how a delay affects shelf life, customer production, documentary deadlines and cash. Communicate early using verified shipment status rather than optimistic estimates. Continuity planning should prioritise the products and customers where delay creates the greatest financial or reputational consequence.

Review tax and customs reconciliations after shipment. Confirm that export evidence, declarations, invoices, transport records, receipt and accounting entries describe the same transaction. Investigate quantity, value, currency and classification differences while records are accessible. A disciplined close protects both the commercial margin and the evidence needed for tax, customs, banking and future origin verification.

An export-readiness sequence

01	**Select:** Rank markets with product-level evidence.
02	**Qualify:** Confirm tariff, origin and product requirements.
03	**Price:** Model landed cost and channel margin.
04	**Protect:** Diligence partners, contracts and payment risk.

05	**Execute:** Control documents, logistics and acceptance.
06	**Measure:** Track repeat demand and cash contribution.

The UAE’s trade network gives businesses access to a widening set of markets. Companies create lasting value when they treat agreements as an input to strategy and build the commercial, documentary and financial discipline needed to deliver repeatedly.

Official sources

1. **UAE Media Office: H1 2026 non-oil foreign trade results**
2. **Ministry of Economy and Tourism: International Trade Relations Dashboard**
3. **Ministry of Economy: Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements**

Online edition: **https://iraaglobal.com/insights/uae-export-growth-cepa-market-readiness-2026/**

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