



CBI
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

CBI Buyer Requirements:

Metal parts in Europe

Introduction

For Developing Country exporters, the product and production process is subject to three types of requirements:

- **Musts:** legal and non-legal requirements you must meet in order to enter the market.
- **Additional requirements:** relatively common requirements that most of your competitors have already implemented. In other words, the ones you need to comply with in order to keep up with the market.
- **Niche market requirements** for specific segments.

What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

For most imports of metal parts from Developing Countries, the most important requirements are non-legal. They can be those put in place by the public sector (such as standardisation bodies), or can be industry-led requirements (such as buyer requirements and private standards).

Quality management.

ISO certification is an international requirement that is crucial, as EU players request it. [ISO 9001](#) is a quality management system that is very common, and if you have not done so already, you will need to implement this quality management system and get your certification.

Tip:

- Make sure you have your ISO certification, preferably through an internationally recognised body, as this offers more credibility towards European buyers.

Implement Six Sigma and lean manufacturing to keep up.

[Six Sigma](#) and [lean production](#) are now crucial requirements demanded by EU buyers. You are advised to implement them in order to remain competitive in the EU marketplace. These methods are management strategies aimed at:

- **Six Sigma:** improving the quality and results of business processes by reducing the standard deviation and increasing process predictability.
- **Lean manufacturing:** avoiding sending money and resources for any goal other than creating value for the consumer.

Tip:

- Implementing Six Sigma and lean manufacturing should not only be seen as complying with requirements. These approaches will also help you improve your performance on cost, speed, delivery times and reliability.

Compliance with voluntary standards for quality and safety

Buyers often ask their suppliers to deliver products according to voluntary standards. The large number of different standards makes it hard to determine which ones are applicable and relevant. The standards are often harmonised, overlap and/or complement each other. Which one is the best to follow will depend on your specific situation (e.g. product and market(s) you want to target). In Europe, the following standards are most prevalent:

- [ISO standards](#): recognised worldwide and cover a wide variety of products.
- [EN-standards](#): developed by the European Committee for Standardisation and are harmonised throughout the EU. ISO standards are often harmonised with EN-standards and published as EN-standards.
- **National standards:** developed by [standardisation bodies in EU member states](#) and only asked for and relevant in the specific EU member state. ISO and EN-standards are more common, but some buyers will still work with national product standards.

Tips:

- source of information once you have Be sure that you understand all standards applicable in a country, or mentioned in an inquiry, before making an offer.
- For more information about specific standards, see our factsheets about specific products, such as [aerospace parts](#).
- Every successful company needs a good compliance strategy. Determine which quality standards are most suitable for the product and market(s) you want to target. [EU standardisation bodies](#) are a good done some research.

What legal requirements must your product comply with?

For metal parts and components in general, no specific legal requirements apply. There are, however, three exceptions: parts intended for use in the construction industry, motor vehicles and railway systems.

Also, the [Liability for defective products \(Directive 85/374/EEC\)](#) in fact refers to finished products. The Product Liability Directive states that the European importer is liable for the products put on the European market. In principle, however, the European importer can on a claim to the producer/exporter.

Other general legislation that must be taken into account:

- Wood packaging materials used for transport (including dunnage) ([Directive 2000/29/EC](#)): Europe sets requirements for wood packaging materials such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, pallets, box pallets and dunnage (wood used to wedge and support non-wood cargo).
- Another packaging-related directive is the general directive about [packaging and packaging waste](#) (Directive 94/62/EC). This directive prescribes the marking of the kind of packaging material used, and the maximum levels of heavy metals in the packaging material.

Tips:

- Identify which directives and standards are applicable to your product(s). Identify your product code in the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) and get an overview of all legal requirements applicable.
- Note that there are general requirements (non-product-specific legislation) on [packaging](#) and [liability](#) that apply to all goods marketed in Europe.

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Environmental performance.

Environmental performance and energy efficiency are some of the issues (potential) EU buyers pay attention to. An increasing number of buyers are looking for green manufacturing methods and stay away from polluting processes wherever possible. On the other hand, energy-saving concepts will get the attention of an EU buyer, as this is what the market is looking for. The extent to which buyers include environmental performance and energy efficiency in their sourcing criteria varies greatly. Most companies that consider this have set up definitions which are made available to potential suppliers.

The environmental management system [ISO 14001](#) is becoming increasingly common. You may therefore consider this system in order to keep up with your competitors. However, ISO 14001 alone will not give you a competitive edge, as many players have already implemented it.

Tip:

- Consider taking an eco-design approach by giving attention to the environmental impacts of the product during its whole lifecycle. Several ideas include: dismantling of parts of final product(s) for later re-use or recycling, lower usage of raw materials, avoidance of mixtures of materials that are difficult to separate and avoidance of hazardous substances/materials.

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Metal parts for food processing equipment.

For metal parts that come into contact with food (thus, metal parts applied in food processing equipment), specific legal health control provisions apply ([EC No 2023/2006](#)).

Tip:

- See our study on [metal parts for food processing equipment](#) for more information.

CSR – a diverse picture.

EU companies are increasingly looking at corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR considers the three Ps: planet (i.e. environmental performance), people and profit. EU companies will have varying degrees and ambition levels of sustainability.

Some companies will (initially) strictly focus on their own operations. Others also look at the CSR performance of their direct suppliers, and in some cases (especially with important issues) the entire supply chain. In these cases suppliers can be asked to comply with supplier's codes of conduct and/or be assessed.

Some companies will even audit their suppliers on CSR and base their selection on this score. The weighting may be as high as 30% of the audit score. On the other hand, there are companies that have not (yet) included CSR in their weighting at all, with the key indicators for relevance lying in brand strength and awareness. Therefore, products sold in the consumer market are more likely to be sold taking CSR into account.

Important CSR issues in the metal parts sector relate to sourcing raw materials, respecting human rights and land rights, ensuring healthy and safe working conditions and focusing on environmental performance. Other CSR issues that can be of importance will depend on the specific issues that are in play in your particular sector, country or region. EU buyers will aim to show due diligence, meaning they will take necessary steps to avoid implications in CSR violations. Part of this can involve making a risk assessment when buying from regions where CSR issues are likely to occur.

Tips:

- Inform yourself about the CSR requirements of your (potential) buyers by checking their website or CSR reports for statements about supplier codes, codes of conduct and the general vision and objectives. See [World Steel Association](#) for more information about its sustainability policy. Its members represent about 85% of world steel production. On the [members page](#) of the Association, you can find CSR and sustainability reports showing how large multinationals address sustainability issues.
- Regardless of whether your buyers are asking for compliance with CSR issues, it is advised that you address sustainability issues. These issues will become more important in the coming years, and a professional attitude will help you to maintain and find new buyers.
- Certain European partners may also consider certification an added value. In this case, [SA8000](#) on social accountability, or [OHSAS 18001](#) on occupational health and safety may provide a competitive advantage.
- To find out which CSR issues are relevant for your country, refer to the country maps on the websites of [UN Global Compact](#) (Human rights), the [International Labour Organisation](#) (labour standards including health & safety), [Transparency Index](#) (corruption) and [Environmental Performance Index](#) (environment). You will have to do more research to determine whether these issues are relevant for your company. Include suppliers in this process and take steps if necessary. CSR Netherlands has developed a [tool](#) with which you can find CSR issues that apply to your product and country specifically. Please be aware that none of these sources provide information that is complete and/or specific enough for your situation, and should therefore be considered a starting point. Do more research, include suppliers in this process and take steps if necessary.



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