

IMPORTERS & EXPORTERS GUIDE FOR NIGERIA'S SONCAP PROGRAMME

Empowering Importers and
Exporters in Nigeria's Conformity
Assessment Programme

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1 INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Importers & Exporters Guide for Nigeria's SONCAP programme, a transformative resource that aims to empower individuals involved in international trade within Nigeria's Conformity Assessment Programme. In this guide, we dig deep into the intricate world of import and export, shedding light on the vital roles played by importers, exporters, and IAF (International Accredited Firms), such as Cotecna, in guaranteeing adherence to achieve compliance and quality standards.

Designed as a must-read resource, this guide not only provides valuable insights into the roles of importers and exporters but also serves as an illuminating exploration of the overall import-export conformity process in Nigeria. Whether you are an importer seeking clarity on navigating the certification process or an exporter yearning to comprehend your responsibilities in ensuring conformity, this content is your ultimate guide to mastering the intricacies of SONCAP.

Join us on this enlightening journey as we equip you with the knowledge and understanding that will transform your approach to international trade in Nigeria. By the end of this guide, you'll be well-versed in the essential aspects of SONCAP, enabling you to navigate the complexities of the certification process with confidence and expertise. So, let's embark on this transformative expedition together and unlock the full potential of import-export trade in Nigeria's dynamic market.

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2 WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SONCAP?

In this section, you can learn more about the mandatory scheme introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria to ensure the quality and standards of all imports of regulated products into the country.

WHAT IS SONCAP?

The Standard Organization of Nigeria Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP) was established in 2005 to check standard of goods imported into the country as against the set standards in Nigeria and International standards. This program is handled by Federal Government parastatal SON, the Standard Organization of Nigeria.

The objective is to ensure the quality and standards of all imports of regulated products into the country.

This assessment conformity scheme requires all imported products, whose standard specifications were declared compulsory by SON, to be inspected for conformity to the relevant Nigerian standard before release into the Nigerian market.

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OBJECTIVES OF SONCAP PROGRAMME

- > Ensure that regulated products comply with the Nigeria Industrial Standards (NIS) or approved standards prior to export to Nigeria
- > Provide a level playing field in terms of quality for both regulated and locally manufactured products in order to prevent unfair competition
- > Prevent the dumping of substandard goods into the Nigeria market and as a result preventing economic loss to the importer and the nation at large
- > Impede loss of lives and property including foreign exchange bearing in mind that the exporting country/Exporter have been paid for the goods shipped into Nigeria
- > Forestall any adverse reaction (such as environmental pollution occasioned by destruction of substandard products) by regulatory agencies on arrival of such goods in Nigeria
- > Facilitate trade through fast track clearance of goods at the ports
- > Encourage genuine investors and investments in Nigeria
- > Promote made in Nigeria products
- > Conserve foreign exchange

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SONCAP COMPLIANCE PROCEDURE

SONCAP is divided into Product and SONCAP certificate.

Under the import requirements of the Federal Government of Nigeria, in order to clear their goods, importers need to have the following documents for every consignment of regulated products:

- a Product Certificate (PC), issued by an IAF such as Cotecna
- a Certificate of Conformity (COC), called the SONCAP Certificate (SC), issued by an IAF such as Cotecna

Obtaining the SC from Cotecna is based on first having a valid Product Certificate (PC). The PC is required for the opening of the Form M, which is a document needed to pre-declare the goods to be imported in Nigeria. There are three types of PCs, as detailed below.

The **Product Certificate (PC)** is the first certificate issued during the certification process. It is used in the opening of the Form M to enable importation into Nigeria. This process is initiated in the country where the goods are to be exported. This is an exporter driven process. The objective of product certification is to confirm that products meet the vendor's specification and design claims and address international quality standards and best practices. It is the first point of call where inspection is carried out on the product where the is qualified to be shipped to Nigeria or not.

Upon satisfactory test and analysis Product Certificate is issued. This can be categorized into 3 different types – Unregistered PC, Registered and Licensed depending on where the goods are classified in terms of risk and other factors associated.

A **SONCAP Certificate (SC)** is a required document for regulated products to pass through Nigerian customs clearing procedures. Lack of a SONCAP Certificate will result in a delay in the clearance of regulated products through customs or a refusal to let them into the Nigerian domestic market. This document is used to generated Pre – Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), This PAAR and other documents are necessary for the release of the goods by customs at the Port of entry in Nigeria.

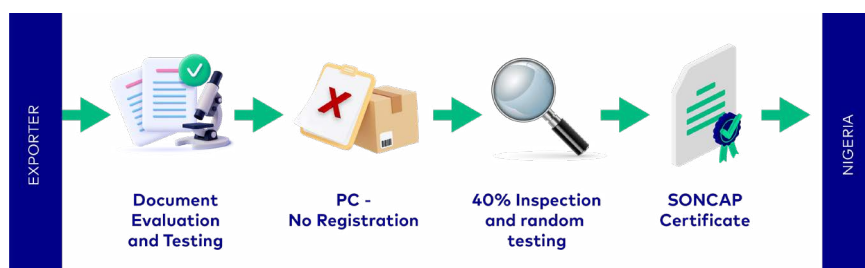
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THE 3 CERTIFICATION ROUTES OF SONCAP

Exporters can obtain a Product Certificate (PC) and a SONCAP Certificate (SC) through Cotecna using one of three levels of compliance, called "Routes". SON has defined three Routes that are applicable as assessment of conformity procedures for products regulated under the SONCAP program.

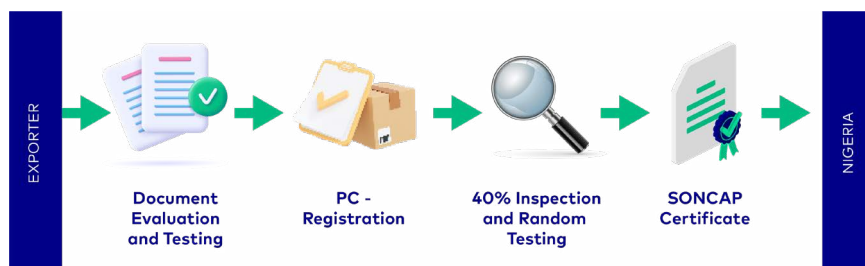
Route A: Unregistered or Unlicensed Products

This route is recommended for infrequent exporters.



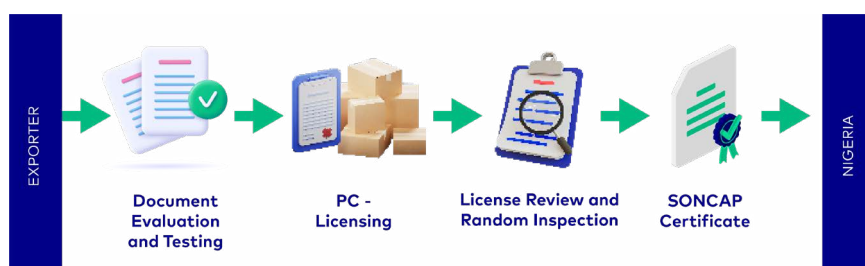
Route B: Registered Products

Exporters/manufacturers that have frequent shipments to Nigeria are recommended to apply for Product/SONCAP certification under Route B if they have a Quality System in place in order to determine that the manufactured products are produced consistently over time with the same quality product.



Route C: Licensed Products

Manufacturers/producers that have regular shipments to Nigeria, and/or those who have demonstrated an excellent level of compliance under Route B, are qualified to apply for Product Licensing under Route C.



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SONCAP FEES

Process	Type of Product / Certificate	Fees in USD per Certificate	Validity
Registration and Licensing	PC (U) - Product Certificate Unregistered	500	6 months
	PC (R) - Product Certificate Registered	1,000	1 year
	PC (L) - Product Certificate Licensing	2,000	1 year
Shipment Certificate	SC - SONCAP Certificate	350	per shipment
Other	New Product on PCU, PCR, PCL	350	per product
	Additional model	10/120	per month/year
	Amendment of Certificate	100	/
	Non-Conformity Report	350	/

APPLYING FOR SONCAP CERTIFICATES

Since 2013, Cotecna has been partnering with the Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON) in running the SON Conformity Assessment Programme (SONCAP) to ensure that the quality and safety regulations of Nigeria imports are met.

Our mandate **allows us to accompany exporters and importers throughout the conformity assessment process** and assist them in obtaining the necessary Product and SONCAP Certificates (PC & SC). As a reminder, **all shipments of regulated products going into Nigeria must be accompanied by a SONCAP Certificate (SC)**, which is mandatory for import clearance. In the absence of a valid SC at Customs, concerned products will be refused at destination.

You can check and download SONCAP's [Exporter Guide](#), [Request for Certificate](#) directly or you can select your country & [Contact](#) the relevant office.

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3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IMPORTERS & EXPORTERS

You might have wondered what are the differences in roles between an importer & exporter in the certification process of SONCAP, read on to find out.

WHO IS AN IMPORTER?

An importer is a person or company who engages in bringing in goods into a country from a foreign entity for the purpose of trade. The receiving nation is known as an importing country for trade.

There are certain requirements required to be complied with by any importer before carrying importing goods into Nigeria. The steps toward importation commence with the importer duly registering a company with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The importer is also expected to register and open a tax file with the nearest branch of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS). A Tax Identification Number will be issued to the importer with a valid email address attached to it.

Also, the importer is required to open a corporate bank account by choosing any reputable bank in Nigeria to act as the Authorized Dealer Bank (ADB), which will be responsible for processing the E-Form M and Pre-Arrival Assessment Report (PAAR), as well as act as the mediator among the Nigeria Customs Service, the importer and other bodies where necessary. The E-Form M and PAAR documentation are processed on the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal. The importer must register as a client on the Nigeria Single Window Trade Portal, which is an intergovernmental online site that encourages trade between government agencies and parties on the FIRS' site.

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WHO IS AN EXPORTER?

An exporter is a person or company who engages in sending goods abroad. This means, the person ships goods from his present country to another for the purpose of trade. In this regard, the nation to which the goods were sent is known as the exporting country.

The exporter can be the manufacturer or the supplier. He is expected to provide documents relating to the goods. For Product Certificate documents required are Product test report, ISO certificates, Picture of the product, Quality declaration from the manufacturer. Inspection of the product takes place at the exporter's location. Similarly, documents required for SONCAP Certificate are Final Invoice, Packing list, Product certificate, Bill of Lading. Exporter plays a vital role in the importation of goods into Nigeria as related goods are from his side and conformity and assessment takes place at his side.

ROLES OF IMPORTERS & EXPORTERS REGARDING SONCAP PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Importation is a business operation that involves acquiring commercial consumable goods and products from another country into Nigeria. The procedure for import is governed by various laws and regulations made by different government agencies responsible for import operations in Nigeria. There are different regulatory bodies in Nigeria dependent on the kind of goods and product to be imported. For instance, An importer of wares and equipment, machinery etc. must obtain a SONCAP Certificate, an importer of petroleum products must obtain import from the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR), while any importer of food or drug items must obtain a requisite permit from the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

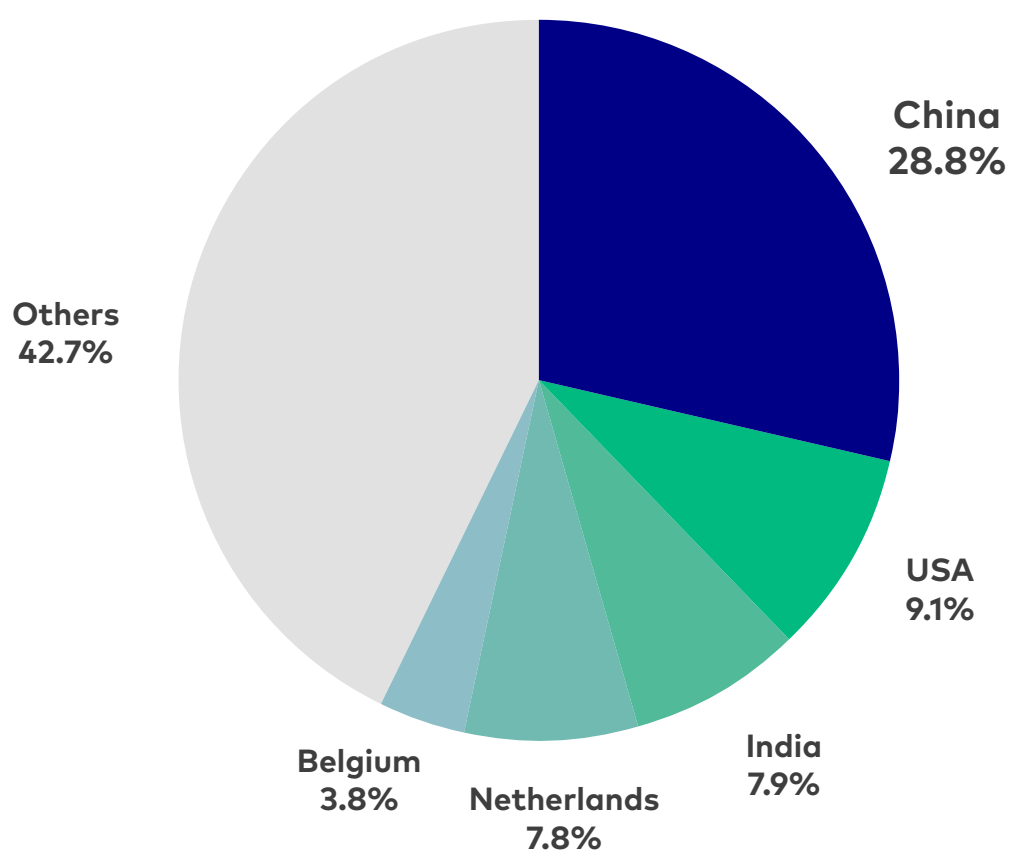
Importer and Exporter play a vital role in these processes from where the goods are coming from (Exporter's country) and where the good is to be delivered (Importer's country).



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EXPORTING COUNTRIES TO NIGERIA

According to World Integrated Trade Solution statistics on Nigerian imports, **China** was the largest exporting country to Nigeria in 2020, while countries like **USA, India, Netherlands & Belgium** come right after.



Exporting countries to Nigeria share (in percentages)

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4

GLIMPSE OF THE DOCUMENTATION PROCESS

Learn more about the specific import requirements of the SON Conformity Assessment Programme, including all necessary documentation and the different routes of compliance.

E-FORM M (THE ONLINE MANDATORY DOCUMENTATION PROCESS)

An e-Form M is an online mandatory documentation process introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS).

Put in place by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) it aims to monitor goods that are imported into Nigeria, as well as enable the collection of import duties where applicable.

In a nutshell, the guidelines say that all importers into Nigeria need to process the e-Form M through an Authorized Dealer Bank, irrespective of the value of their goods and whether payment is involved or not.

VALID CONFORMITY DOCUMENTS

Exporters will submit to Cotecna "Valid Conformity Documents", such as test reports, quality certificates and analysis reports.

A conformity document is valid when it has been issued by:

- > Third Party or in-house ISO/IEC 17025 accredited Laboratory
- > Approved laboratory as per Cotecna/SON's procedures

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5 ACRONYMS FOR NIGERIA SONCAP PROGRAMME

Trade imports in Nigeria has its peculiar operational codes and acronyms. These acronyms feature in every import transaction for purpose of maintaining standards, facilitate speed of processing documents and ensure quality assurance for all stakeholders. We hereby present details of most of the frequently used acronyms and what they stand for in the Nigeria Conformity Assessment Programme.

ADB	Authorized Dealer Bank	PAAR	Pre- Arrival Assessment Report
BL	Bill of Lading	PAM	Product Authentication Mark
CA	Certificate of Analysis	PC	Product Certificate
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria	PCL	Product Certificate Licensed
COC	Certificate of Conformity	PCU	Product Certificate Unregistered
FCL	Full Container Load	PFI	Proforma Invoice
FIRS	Federal Inland Revenue Service	PL	Packing List
FMF	Federal Ministry of Finance	RFC	Request for Certificate
FORM M	(Application to import)	SC	SONCAP Certificate
IAF	Independent Accreditation Firms	SON	Standards Organization of Nigeria
IMP	Import permit	SONCAP	Standard Organization of Nigeria Conformity Assessment Program
ISO	International Organization for Standardization	TIN	Tax Identification Number
NB	Notified Body		
NCR	Non-Conformity Report		
NCS	Nigeria Customs Service		
NIS	Nigerian Industrial Standards		

For further information and assistance in obtaining the necessary certificates when importing in Nigeria, don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

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