

Advice

EU – Mexico Free Trade Agreement

Brussels, 31 July 2026

1. Background

In May 2016, the EU and Mexico started the negotiations for a new, modernised global agreement. The negotiations concluded on 17 January 2025. The modernised Global Agreement will set the future framework for the EU's relationship with Mexico and, beyond a comprehensive trade agreement, cover issues of broader shared interest, including political issues, climate change and human rights. On 3 September 2025, the Commission adopted proposals for Council decisions on the signature and conclusion of the modernised Global Agreement (MGA) and of the interim Free Trade Agreement (iTA)¹. On 22 May 2026, the EU and Mexico signed the MGA and the iTA.

In 2023, the EU-Mexico trade in goods reached €82 million, while two-way trade in services reached €22 billion in 2022, making the EU's second-biggest trading partner in Latin America². In a yearly average from 2023 to 2025, the EU imported 9.959 tonnes of fishery and aquaculture products from Mexico for EUR 44,9 million. The EU exported 1.570 tonnes to Mexico for EUR 19,7 million (a yearly average from 2023 to 2025). The main products imported into the EU from Mexico were tuna (frozen yellowfin tuna and frozen tuna fillets), frozen hake and frozen octopus.

¹ https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/mexico/eu-mexico-agreement_en

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_248

2. Liberalisation of market access for fishery products from Mexico

Under the agreement in force since 1 July 2020, almost all fishery and aquaculture products, including frozen tuna fillets for direct human consumption, are traded duty-free into the EU. The only significant exceptions are pre-cooked tuna loins and canned tuna, which remain subject to preferential tariff-rate quotas. The new agreement foresees their progressive liberalisation.

Tuna loins for canning will be subject to a transitional tariff-rate quota of 6,000 tonnes per year during the first three years with an in-quota duty of 6% (instead of 24%). From year 4, the quota will expire and the duty will be reduced to 4,8%. From year 5, the tariff is totally eliminated and originated tuna loins will be able to enter the EU duty-free. Canned tuna will be subject to a five-year tariff-rate quota at 12,000 tonnes in year 1, increasing annually to 14,000 tonnes in year 5 with an in-quota duty of 6,8%. From year 6, the quota will expire and the duty will decrease to 3,4%. From year 7, the tariff will be fully eliminated and originating tuna loins can enter the EU duty-free.

According to FAO data, Mexico has one of the largest tropical tuna capture fleets in the world, ranking approximately eleventh in the world ranking. In 2024, Mexican tropical tuna catches exceeded 182,000 tonnes, of which more than 157,000 tonnes were yellowfin tuna. In the Eastern Pacific, Mexico is the second largest tropical tuna harvester. In 2023, Mexico produced more than 155,000 tonnes for canned tuna³. Considering the fleet capacity and industrial scale, Mexico could substantially increase supplies to the EU market, including of processed and canned products.

Usually, in the negotiation of trade agreements, the European Commission treats tuna products as “sensitive products” due to the impact of the lower labour and production costs of third

³ FAO FishStatJ Database

countries on the EU fishing fleet and on the EU processing industry, particularly accounting for the impact on the employment and economic development of coastal communities, as the EU is one of the world's largest markets for canned tuna and tuna preparations. The Spanish and EU processing industries, which are located in regions highly dependent on fishing, generate more than 15.000 and 25.000 direct jobs, respectively. The EU tropical tuna fleet generates more than 1.500 direct jobs. These industries have invested and continue to invest to develop with robust sanitary, social and environmental standards.

In terms of sustainability, it is important to recall that Mexico did not ratify the International Labour Organisation's Convention 188 on Work in Fishing. In the 2023, the Marine Stewardship Council certificate for the Northeastern Tropical Pacific Purse Seine Yellowfin and Skipjack Tuna Fishery, which represents a major part of the Mexican tuna fleet, was withdrawn after the reassessment process stopped. Moreover, the Mexican fleet mostly catches large tuna associated with dolphins. Although Mexico's dolphin-associated tuna fishery operates under the Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program and has substantially reduced dolphin mortality, a report of the mentioned agreement⁴ identifies several remaining concerns: an estimated 828 dolphin deaths in 2023, an increase in the fishing effort on dolphin-associated schools (accounting for 69,5% of yellowfin catches), uncertainty about the long-term effects of mother-calf separation during fishing operations, and important gaps in scientific knowledge due to outdated dolphin abundance estimates, making it difficult to assess whether current mortality levels are fully sustainable for affected dolphin populations.

⁴ [Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission \(IATTC\), Report on the International Dolphin Conservation Program, Document AIDCP-49-02 \(La Jolla, CA: IATTC, 2024\)](#)

Furthermore, an audit conducted by the European Commission in 2022 identified significant shortcomings in Mexican sanitary controls for tuna exports to the EU, including cold-chain failures, fuel contamination and colorant injections⁵.

In the view of the MAC, in the medium-term, the planned liberalisation of tuna products could negatively impact the competitiveness of the EU fishing fleet and of the EU processing sector, reducing the EU's food and industrial autonomy.

3. Recommendations

In the context of the ongoing approval procedures of the Free Trade Agreement with Mexico, the MAC considers the European Commission and the Member States should:

- a) Clarify the technical, economic and sustainability assessments leading to the progressive liberalisation of Mexican tuna loins and canned tuna under the modernised EU–Mexico Agreement, including the expected impact on the EU fishing fleet and processing industry;
- b) Closely monitor the impact of the agreement on the EU fishing and processing sectors, including economic and employment ones, and establish rapid safeguard measures in case of market disruption or serious harm, similarly to the Mercosur safeguard clause, including through the review clause foreseen in the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter;
- c) Guarantee robust sanitary, environmental and social controls for imported fishery and aquaculture products, ensuring compliance with EU legislation on the three pillars of sustainability and international governance, promoting a level-playing-field;
- d) Request ratification of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 188 on Work in Fishing by Mexico.

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/food/audits-analysis/audit-report/details/4624>