

Ethiopia

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

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Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

Required Documents

Requirements differ significantly by importer status.

For non-diplomats (foreign workers, school employees, private organizations, NGOs)

- Original passport (original required, not a copy)
- Working permit (takes 3-6 weeks to obtain)
- Original packing list
- Original bill of lading (OBL) / air waybill (AWB)
- Valued inventory list in USD or EUR (for customs purposes only)
- Letter of support from employer

For diplomats and semi-diplomats

- Original passport
- Duty-free privilege document from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)
- Copy of diplomatic ID issued by MoFA
- Letter of guarantee issued and sealed by the diplomatic organization
- Import permit from MoFA
- Work permit from MoFA (issued to the shipper by the employer or diplomatic organization)
- Original two bills of lading / AWB
- Original packing list
- Valued inventory list in USD or EUR

For returning Ethiopian citizens

- Client's passport
- Letter from the Ethiopian Embassy or Consulate where the client has been working (mandatory), authenticated by MoFA at arrival before submitting to customs
- Original packing list
- Original two bills of lading / AWB
- Valued inventory list in USD or EUR

For Ethiopian citizens currently residing in Ethiopia

- Certificate of origin
- Bank permit with import license
- Proof of insurance from a local company
- Purchase invoices
- Freight receipt from origin steamship line

Specific Information

Non-diplomatic shipments are subject to duty. Ethiopia does not provide blanket duty-free entry for household goods. Non-diplomatic shipments are subject to customs duty evaluation, and the shipper will pay duties on some or all personal belongings as assessed by customs.

Diplomatic and semi-diplomatic shipments are tax-exempt. Containers are exempt from inspection. The duty-free privilege document is the general franchise that diplomats receive from MoFA upon resuming work and after processing their diplomatic ID.

Diplomat inventory strategy: It is advisable for diplomats to present only a general inventory with goods listed by value, without specifying quantities. As diplomatic containers are not inspected, a general inventory avoids triggering duties on duplicate electrical items. If, however, the diplomat declares having more than one item of the same type, customs duty will apply per the evaluation grid.

Shipper must be present with original passport. The shipper must be physically in Ethiopia with their original passport and work permit (or diplomatic exemption) at the time of customs clearance. This is non-negotiable.

Express/telex release not accepted. Only the original bill of lading is accepted.

15-day document lead time. Documents should be express-mailed at least 15 days before shipment arrival at the port in Djibouti, so the employer can obtain the privilege document/import permit.

Do not ship before receiving clearance from the destination agent. The consignment must not be sent before receiving the green light to proceed from the destination agent. Premature shipping can cause customs clearance problems and incur demurrage charges for the shipper's account.

All original documents must arrive before the shipment. The destination agent must receive all original documents before the consignment arrives.

One electrical appliance per type: Only one unit of each type of electrical appliance is permitted (one TV, one CD player, one DVD player, etc.). Additional units are subject to duty.

Consolidation rules: Only consolidate 2 shipments of the same nature (both diplomatic or both non-diplomatic). If different-status shipments are consolidated, there will be clearance delays and violation of diplomatic immunity.

Container deposits:

- Ethiopian Shipping Line (ESL) containers: ETB 15,500 for a 20' container, ETB 31,000 for a 40' container
- Non-ESL containers: a guarantee letter from the consignee's employer to ERCA, or a cash deposit equivalent to duty and tax of each container
- Some shipping lines (Messina, PIL) require additional cash deposits to their agent in Addis Ababa
- The destination agent will not make deposits on behalf of the consignee

CIF value assessment: Customs considers the CIF value of a 20' container at USD 950 and a 40' container at USD 1,800.

Bill of lading requirements: Port of discharge should be Djibouti port. The body must state "Shipment in transit to Ethiopia." AWB must not state "As Agreed." The packing list must contain values in USD/EUR with no PBO descriptions.

Currency: Ethiopian birr (ETB). Foreign exchange controls are strict.

Duties & Taxes

Duty-free exceptions for non-diplomats:

- Exception 1: If a company's investment in Ethiopia exceeds 5 million ETB, they can import personal belongings worth USD 10,000 on a duty-and-tax-free basis. This does not include vehicles.

- Exception 2: Individuals coming to Ethiopia for the first time (confirmed by a government office) who intend to reside long-term are allowed to import belongings worth USD 5,000. This does not include vehicles.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

- Narcotics and illegal drugs of any kind — strictly prohibited
- Pornographic materials — prohibited
- Subversive materials (books, magazines, photographs, etc.) — prohibited
- Firearms, ammunition, and weapons — prohibited
- Explosives — prohibited
- Right-hand drive vehicles — prohibited
- Vehicles with tinted windows — prohibited

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Traveler Allowances

Per VisaHQ:

- 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 250g tobacco
- 2 litres of alcoholic beverages
- Perfume in reasonable quantities for personal use

Restricted Items

- Electrical appliances — only one of each type permitted; duplicates subject to duty
- Decoders and satellite dishes — authorization required from the Telecommunication Office prior to container arrival at Addis terminal, upon presentation of documents relative to the imported goods
- Radio transmitters and walkie-talkies — permit from the Telecommunications Department required PERMIT REQUIRED

Consignment Instructions

Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air/sea shipments.

Do NOT ship before receiving the green light from the destination agent. This is the single most important instruction for Ethiopia. Premature shipping causes customs problems and demurrage charges that the shipper must pay.

Port of entry is Djibouti. Ethiopia is landlocked. The recommended port of entry for sea shipments is Djibouti. The bill of lading must show Djibouti as the port of discharge and state "Shipment in transit to Ethiopia" in the body. Goods are then transported overland to Addis Ababa.

Original documents must arrive before the shipment. Express-mail all originals at least 15 days before the shipment arrives in Djibouti.

Shipper must be in Ethiopia. With original passport and work permit/diplomatic exemption. No exceptions.

Container deposits are mandatory. ESL containers require ETB 15,500 (20') or ETB 31,000 (40'). Non-ESL containers require employer guarantee letters or cash deposits. The destination agent will not make deposits on behalf of the consignee.

No PBO descriptions on the packing list. All items must be individually described with values in USD or EUR.

Do not consolidate diplomatic and non-diplomatic shipments. This violates diplomatic immunity and causes clearance delays.

Pet import: start 2 months early. The multi-ministry authorization process takes 1.5-2 months. Work permits take 3-6 weeks. Factor this into the relocation timeline.