Introduction to message exchange with Finnish Customs

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Contents

This guide deals with how to apply for customer authorisation in the message exchange with Finnish Customs. Detailed technical instructions in the guidebook "Direct message exchange with Finnish Customs: Technical guidebook", which is available on Customs' website https://tulli.fi/en/about-e-services/services/message-exchange.

1   Service channels for e-services

The customer can transact with Customs electronically, using either online services or message exchange as a service channel. In message exchange, the customer's data systems send the messages electronically to Customs' data systems.

It is worth changing over to **message exchange** when the company has a lot of transactions with Customs. Processing declarations of a message exchange customer is faster, as the files and registers of the company can be utilised directly. In addition, message exchange has procedure-specific advantages, for example related to guarantees. When starting an export procedure, the company also avoids having to visit a customs office, with some exceptions.

Message exchange can be used in customs declarations for import and export, for declaring the entry and exit of goods as well as for transit (T1 and T2 transit declarations and electronic TIR Carnet declarations) and for customs warehousing. Åland tax border declarations as well as declarations for intra-EU trade, can also be submitted via message exchange. Customs' message specifications to be used in message exchange, are described in the [message descriptions on Customs' website](#).

Online declaration is free of charge and does not require a separate authorisation or specific software.

Customs online services can be used by identified users. Identification takes place via the Suomi.fi service. A few of the Customs online services can also be used by unidentified users. In such cases, submitting a declaration starts with a blank application form. An unidentified online declarant must always visit the Customs office of departure when the goods are placed under the customs procedure.

More information:

[How to transact with Customs](#)

[Customs' e-services](#)

1.1   Factors affecting the choice of service channel

When choosing the service channel, the volume of customs transactions is a significant factor. A rule of thumb is that, the more diverse and the larger the volume of the Customs declarations by the company are, the more message exchange saves work compared to declaring online.

Declaring online is aimed especially at occasional declarants, so it has been made as simple as possible. Message exchange, in turn, requires a somewhat broader competence in transactions with Customs.

A separate computer system is not needed for declaring online, but data cannot be transferred directly from the company's computer systems to the online form. Message exchange systems can be integrated directly into the data systems of the company, in which case data can be transferred

from them to the customs declaration faster and more correctly than when entered manually. In addition, customs clearance software can contain registers of changing data (such as exchange rates, commodity codes, import and export restrictions) managed by the software supplier.

2 Message exchange

In message exchange (web service), the data system of the customer can transmit messages to the Customs systems and retrieve produced response messages. The customer can also start using the Message Notification Service, then the message exchange happens almost in real time.

For message exchange, the company needs declaration specific software. Customs does not provide the required software; rather, the customer should instead contact their own software supplier.

Message exchange with Customs is based on international standards, which enable a secure integration of data systems. The standards used are described in the technical guidebook for direct message exchange.

2.1 Operators and roles in direct message exchange

With the application for message exchange, the applicant defines the role of the company in message exchange. The choice affects what information is required from the applicant. The alternative roles are the following:

- **Message declarant**
  - o The message declarant is the party who has the responsibility to provide declaration data or similar data to Customs and who does this by using message exchange. The message declarant can be a principal, a representative (for example a forwarding agency) or other.
  - o The message declarant can transmit the messages independently, or use a service provider to transmit the messages. It is also possible to transmit some of the messages independently, and to use a service provider for some of the messages.
  - o If the message declarant uses a service provider (one or several), the service provider's EORI number must be entered in the application. The company can be registered as a message declarant, when the service provider has tested the messages successfully.
  - o If the message declarant transmits the messages independently, additional questions on the software implementation will be asked. In that case, the company also tests the messages as usual.
- **Service provider**
  - o The service provider is a party who can take over certain technical roles related to direct message exchange, and build and transmit the required messages on another company's behalf.
  - o The service provider does not have to give the name of the message declarant on whose behalf the provider acts. The service provider tests all messages pertaining to the chosen applications.
- **Software supplier**
  - o The software supplier develops software to be used for message declaration and applies for customer status for testing of the software. The software supplier does not have an actual role in the production of customs declarations. Registrations and authorisations required for testing the company are only done in the customer testing environment.

The use of direct message exchange requires the following from the customer:

- The company applying for status as a message declarant must have an [EORI number](). If the company is foreign and does not have a Finnish EORI number, the EORI number must be provided to Customs.
- Software with which the customer builds the right kind of application and frame message and which is connected to the web service of Custom's direct message exchange
- The sender of the messages needs to obtain a server certificate from the Digital and Population Data Service Agency for building and transmitting messages.
- Sufficient competence in the customs procedure in question, so that the message exchange goes smoothly
- Declaration-specific customer testing completed successfully
- Registering as a Customs message customer
- The company must train its personnel in how to transmit and follow-up messages in the testing and productions phases

3 Applying for an authorisation to use message exchange

Message exchange between the company and Customs requires registration. During the registration process, the customer testing must be completed successfully from each application.

In order to ensure that the message exchange goes smoothly, the prospective customer must have knowledge of the messaging procedure and customs transactions. Before customer testing, consultation will be provided to the customer. The requirements for message exchange customer status vary depending on the procedure and the system. For example, message exchange customer status in import requires an authorisation for payment deferment, and message exchange in export requires Customs' registered export customer status.

Applying for an authorisation to use message exchange:

- To become a message exchange customer in the Customs Clearance System (UTU), you apply via [the Authorisations and Decisions Service]() in Customs' online services.

- [The application for message exchange in other systems]() as well as [the instructions for completing the message exchange application]() are available on Customs' website. With the application you can apply to become a message exchange customer in the following systems:
    - Export Declaration System (ELEX)
    - Transit Declaration System
    - Arrival and Exit Declaration System (AREX)
    - Recapitulative statement system for tax border customers (ALA)
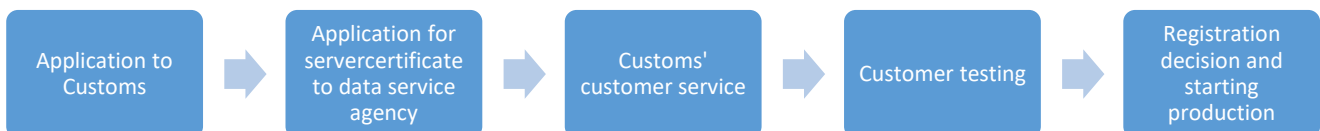   - Intrastat Declaration System

| Application to Customs | → | Application for servercertificate to data service agency | → | Customs' customer service | → | Customer testing | → | Registration decision and starting production |

Image 2: Registration process for message customers

4   Testing

The message customer has to test the functionality of the software and the connections with Customs. If the case involves a new company with message exchange, a technical testing of the connection is done before the actual customer testing. The aim of the technical testing is to ensure that the company's software is compatible with Customs' web service for direct message exchange.

The objective of testing is to ensure that the company can send as error-free messages as possible in accordance with the specifications. During the testing, the company transmits declaration messages with varying data content (for example *complete*, *supplementary, amended* declarations), to which Customs then responds with messages (*acceptance*, *error*, *request for additional information* etc.). Customs also recommends that the testing of the message exchange be carried out again if changes are made to the customer's systems after an accepted testing.

More information: Testing

4.1   Parties in testing

The software of the message exchange customer is tested separately for each company, and no testing of individual company offices is carried out. The data systems are also tested separately if the company uses several data systems. In the case of a consolidated corporation with several business IDs, it is necessary to test all business IDs separately. If only one company transmits messages on behalf of all companies of the consolidated corporation, only that company has to pass the testing.

The software supplier's representative may assist the company in testing, but the company applying for message exchange customer status is always responsible for the testing.

Testing practices:

1. As a rule, the party that **transmits** the messages (= whose server certificate is used), tests all cases associated with the requested application.
   a. If the software used has already been successfully tested by another operator (e.g. a software supplier), the testing requirement may be reduced. This also applies to a situation where someone other than the sender **builds** the message, and the message builder has successfully tested the messages.
   b. If it can be verified that the sender will not actually use more than certain message types, the testing requirement may be reduced.
2. **The message declarant** is ultimately responsible for the declarations (declaration format and data content).
   a. If the **message declarant** does not transmit any messages, the message declarant is not required to carry out any testing.
3. Customs recommends that the **software implementer** tests all the test cases and in that case, the testing requirement of the user of the software may be reduced.

4.2   Agreeing on testing and business consultation

Customs will schedule a time for the testing, once the application for message exchange customer status has been processed. A free consultation visit will be arranged before testing begins. The consultation can be provided over the phone, by email or in person in the company's or Customs' facilities. The consultation meeting covers the following:

- message exchange: which messages the company must be able to transmit and receive

- data content of the messages: what the company needs to consider when completing electronic declarations and producing messages
- material for technical testing: declarations created by Customs for testing, and messages built from the declarations as well as arriving response messages
- if necessary, the company's identifying serial number and control reference number, which are used in both testing and production
- the company's own questions

It is recommended that both the declaration expert and the message exchange expert of the company take part in the consultation meeting. Consultation is free of charge.

5   Launch of message exchange

After the testing has been successfully completed, Customs will transmit to the company the registration decision and the accompanying test report containing information about the tested messages, and about problems that may have occurred during the testing. After receiving the registration decision, the company can start using the message exchange service and agrees with Customs' testing official on the time when the first declaration message will be sent.

5.1   Follow-up of messages, acknowledgements and keeping a log file

The customer is responsible for making sure that the messages are received by Customs in time. The message declarant is responsible for making sure that a response is received for each message sent. A response notification from Customs must be replied to as requested. If Customs e.g. sends an error notification as a response message, it must be replied to with a corrected message. Customers must also archive the messages they have sent.

In direct message exchange, the message exchange customer also has full responsibility in a case where the customer has decided to use a service provider for transmitting, or building and transmitting messages.

Some of the Customs systems send a positive or negative control message about customs declaration messages that have reached the server used by Customs. After receiving a positive control message, the customer has to wait for the Customs application level message. The Intrastat system does not send an acceptance message. Only an error message is sent, if the declaration contains a major error.

Messages must not be resent automatically. Instead, the state of the transaction must be confirmed from the company's own service network before resending messages in the following cases:

- the message sender receives a negative control message
- no control message is received
- after a positive control message, no acceptance/rejection message is received from Customs within a time including the processing time given by Customs and the maximum processing time given by the used networks.

It is primarily the customer who has the burden of proof, if

- the data in the Customs system differs from the data in the customer's system
- the declaration is received by Customs after the deadline, even though the customer has sent it in time A log system may be used as proof. If it is a question of proving the integrity of the message content, the log should contain the whole message in a readable form. A log with information on the sender, the recipient, the identification and time of the interchange, is sufficient proof of the sending time. In the statistics on intra-EU trade (Intrastat)

the statistical numbers in the declaration must also be included in the log. However, even if the customer shows proof of the log, a delay or discrepancy of the declaration may cause administrative consequences or other actions by Customs authorities.

Customers are to archive the messages they have submitted as well as the corresponding paper documents concerning the procedure in question.

5.2 Problem situations

In problem situations related to message exchange, companies should start solving the problem by contacting their own Help Desk. If the problems of the message exchange are related to customs clearance, Customs' Electronic Service Centre is to be contacted.

If message exchange with Customs is not possible, a fallback procedure will be used.

5.3 Changes in message exchange

If the company's system is upgraded or changed to a new one, Customs must be notified so that a decision on whether testing is needed can be made together with the Electronic Service Centre. A new version or software cannot be deployed prior to approval by Customs.

An amendment application is selected if

- there is a change to the software
- the company extends the use of message exchange to another system
- the company wishes to end its message exchange customer status, e.g. due to corporate arrangements
- the message declarant changes or ends its cooperation with the service provider

Amendment applications to message exchange are made via Customs' Authorisation Service (Apply for an amendment of a valid authorisation decision "Decision on message exchange (SSA)".)

In the systems where the customer uses an Application form (customs form 934e) to apply for message exchange with Customs, changes are notified with an amendment application. Before sending the application, please read the instructions on how to complete the application.

Appendix 1: Additional information

Finnish Customs
[Tulli.fi front page](#)

Summary declarations
[Entry and exit declarations](#)

Export to third countries
[Export](#)

Import from third countries
[Import](#)

Transit
[Transport and storage](#)

Intra-EU import and export
[Intrastat – statistics on intra-EU trade](#)

EDIFACT
[Unece](#)

XML
[Extensible Markup Language (XML)](#)

EU Commission
[Taxation and Customs Union](#)

The World Customs Organization WCO
[The World Customs Organization WCO](#)