



KENYA – UAE BUSINESS GUIDE

Your Comprehensive Guide to Doing Business in the United Arab Emirates

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in Dubai and Northern Emirates**

2026 Edition

Empowering Kenyan Entrepreneurs to Thrive in the UAE

Executive Summary

Kenya and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) enjoy deepening and mutually beneficial economic ties. In 2024, Kenya–UAE bilateral trade reached **Ksh 445 billion (\$4 billion)**, with the UAE serving as Kenya's **second-largest import source** and **sixth-largest export destination** market.

In January 2025, the two countries signed a landmark **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** to further liberalise trade and investment. The Kenya's National Assembly ratified the agreement in November 2025 while the UAE Cabinet ratified in March 2025.

This guide covers all key legal, regulatory, and practical aspects of establishing and operating a business in the UAE, including:

- Company formation and 100% foreign ownership rules
- Visas and residency permits (including Golden and Green Visa options)
- Corporate tax, VAT, and customs duties
- Banking, finance, and currency considerations
- Sector-specific opportunities for Kenyan businesses
- Cultural etiquette and business conduct
- Compliance, IP protection, and legal risk management
- Checklists, templates, and a key contacts directory

About This Guide

All sections emphasise official data and authoritative sources, including UAE Ministry of Economy and Tourism, Federal Tax Authority, Dubai DED, GDRFA, Kenya's Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry, Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, and World Bank/IFC publications. This guide was prepared by the Commercial Attaché, Consulate General of the Republic of Kenya in Dubai and Northern Emirates to support Kenyan entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses in navigating the UAE market.

Chapter 1: The UAE Economy — A Snapshot

1.1 Location, Structure & Key Facts

The United Arab Emirates is a constitutional federation of seven emirates — Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, and Fujairah — strategically located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Indicator	Details
GDP (2024)	USD 555.7 billion
Real GDP growth (2025 forecast)	5.0% (non-hydrocarbon 4.9%; hydrocarbon 5.4%)
Real GDP growth (2026 forecast)	5.2%
Population (2024)	11.3 million (88.4% expatriate)
Currency	UAE Dirham (AED), pegged at USD 1 = AED 3.6725
Official language	Arabic (English is the language of business)
Time zone	GMT+4 (no daylight saving)
Corporate tax rate	9% on profits > AED 375,000 (introduced June 2023)
VAT rate	5%
UAE passport global rank	1st globally
World Bank Ease of Business	Ranked 16th globally

1.2 GDP Composition — Non-Oil Sectors Dominate

The UAE has successfully diversified away from hydrocarbons. Non-oil GDP accounts for 77.84% of the total, with trade, manufacturing, finance, and construction as the leading pillars.

Sector	GDP Share (2024)
Mining & Quarrying (oil & gas)	22.2%
Wholesale & Retail Trade	12.5%
Financial & Insurance Services	10.2%
Manufacturing	9.4%
Construction	8.3%
Transportation & Storage	6.5%
Public Administration & Defence	6.1%
Real Estate	5.1%
Professional & Technical Services	4.8%
Utilities (Electricity, Gas, Water)	4.5%

1.3 Economic Outlook

The UAE is one of the fastest-growing advanced economies in the world. The CBUAE's December 2025 report confirms strong real GDP growth: 3.9% in Q1 2025 and 4.5% in Q2 2025, driven by non-hydrocarbon sectors. The 'We the UAE 2031' vision targets raising GDP to USD 822 billion within the decade.

GCC Context

GCC regional growth is projected at 4.0% for 2025 and 4.5% for 2026. The UAE and Saudi Arabia together account for 83% of the GCC's USD 73.5 billion FDI inflows in 2024. The UAE consistently outperforms the GCC average.

1.4 UAE Foreign Trade — A Global Powerhouse

The UAE's non-oil foreign trade rose 23.6% year-on-year in H1 2025, reaching USD 441.7 billion. The UAE serves as a critical re-export hub connecting East and West.

Trade Metric (H1 2025)	Value / Detail
Total non-oil foreign trade	USD 441.7 billion (+23.6% YoY)
Non-oil exports	USD 98.0 billion (+45.3% YoY)
Re-exports	USD 90.6 billion (+11.0% YoY)
Imports	USD 252.9 billion (+21.5% YoY)
Top export: gold	54.3% of non-oil exports
Top import source	China (18.2%), India (6.9%), USA (5.3%)
Top re-export destination	Saudi Arabia (15.5%), Iraq (10.4%), India (6.8%)

1.5 UAE CEPA Programme

The UAE's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) program, under Projects of the 50 and aligned with the Centennial 2071 vision, maps out strategic partner countries - that include Kenya - to enhance global trade integration, diversify the economy beyond oil, and attract investment. It strengthens key sectors while positioning the UAE as a competitive global business hub.

The UAE has signed 33 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) as of October 2025, targeting 45 by year-end. These agreements have contributed USD 36.7 billion to non-oil trade in 2024 — a 42% year-on-year increase. Kenya's CEPA (signed January 2025, ratified by the UAE in March 2025 and Kenya in November 2025) projects bilateral trade growing from USD 4.01 billion in 2024 to USD 7.2 billion by 2032, with growth sectors in agribusiness, logistics, energy, manufacturing, and services.

Kenya CEPA Highlights

The Kenya-UAE CEPA (negotiations completed in February 2024, and signed January 2025) provides preferential tariff access, investor protection, and frameworks for joint investment in ICT, banking, tourism, infrastructure, and renewable energy. Kenya's National Assembly ratification was completed in November 2025; UAE ratification was completed in March 2025.

Chapter 2: Kenya-UAE Bilateral Relations

2.1 Trade Relations

Kenya and the UAE have maintained warm trade and economic relations since the 1980s. The UAE is now Kenya's 2nd largest import partner (after China) and Kenya's 6th largest trading partner overall.

Year	Kenya Imports (USD M)	Kenya Exports to UAE (USD M)	Total Trade (USD M)	Trade Balance
2021	394	870	2,239	UAE surplus USD 1.45B
2022	643	814	2,436	UAE surplus USD 1.15B
2023	846	1,383	3,132	UAE surplus USD 1.44B
2024	1,177	1,749	4,004	UAE surplus USD 2.83B

2.2 Kenya's Top Exports to UAE

Kenya's export mix to the UAE is dominated by gold, followed by high-value agricultural products:

Product	2024 Export Value (USD '000)
Gold (unwrought, non-monetary)	874,188
Goat meat (fresh/chilled/frozen)	87,031
Black tea (fermented, packaged)	68,499
Fresh avocados	30,709
Fresh pineapples	20,449
Fresh cut flowers (non-rose)	16,091
Fresh cut roses	15,049
Mangoes and guavas	7,026
Lamb carcasses and half-carcasses	5,440
Wheat bran / animal fodder	5,278

Strategic Opportunity

Kenya holds a 0.26% share of UAE's total imports (USD 1.17B of USD 444.7B). The CEPA and Kenya's competitive advantage in tea, fresh produce, meat, and flowers offer significant headroom for growth. Gold dominates but agricultural exports are the sustainable long-term growth engine.

2.3 Kenya's Top Imports from UAE

The UAE is Kenya's second-largest import source after China. Kenya's total imports from the UAE grew from USD 643 million in 2022 to USD 1.18 billion in 2024 — an 83% increase in two years. The table below shows Kenya's top import categories by HS code, based on UAE export statistics to Kenya.

HS	Product (Kenya imports FROM UAE)	2022 (USD M)	2023 (USD M)	2024 (USD M)
27	Mineral fuels & oils (petroleum products)	213.6	891.7	1,179.5
71	Natural/cultured pearls, precious stones & metals	84.2	82.2	339.2
84	Nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery & mechanical appliances	214.9	149.6	246.3
85	Electrical machinery, equipment & parts	501.4	275.4	140.8
87	Motor vehicles, parts & accessories	112.6	94.7	125.1
74	Copper and articles thereof	68.3	68.2	78.3
39	Plastics and articles thereof	110.6	74.1	76.2
24	Tobacco & manufactured tobacco substitutes	18.2	56.0	65.5
22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	44.3	42.3	50.4
91	Clocks, watches and parts	0.6	0.8	49.5

Source: ITC calculations based on UN COMTRADE statistics; Note: the sharp rise in mineral fuels in 2023–2024 reflects increased petroleum product imports as Kenya's fuel import arrangements shifted.

Chapter 3: Legal and Company Formation

3.1 Foreign Ownership — The 2022 Reform

The landmark Federal Decree-Law No. 32 of 2021 (effective January 2, 2022) removed the historic 51% Emirati ownership requirement for most business activities. Foreign investors may now own up to 100% of mainland companies, except in 'strategic impact activities' such as defence, banking, insurance, telecommunications, and money printing.

Key Change

The UAE no longer requires a local Emirati partner for most businesses. The New CCL also removed the requirement for foreign branches to appoint a UAE national Local Service Agent (LSA). However, some Emirates' Departments of Economic Development (DEDs) exercise discretion in certain sectors — pre-inquiry is recommended.

3.2 Business Structures

Structure	Description & Key Points
LLC (Limited Liability Company)	Most popular form. 100% foreign ownership permitted for most activities. 1–50 shareholders. Can operate anywhere on the UAE mainland.
Branch Office	Extension of foreign parent company. No separate legal personality. Parent fully liable. Licensed for any activity except 'general trading'.
Representative Office	Non-commercial activities only (market research, business development). Cannot conduct sales.
Free Zone Entity	100% foreign ownership; 0% import duties within zone; full profit repatriation. Cannot trade directly on UAE mainland without a local agent.
Public Joint Stock Company	For insurance/banking (except foreign bank branches). Minimum capital AED 30 million. Shares offered to public.
Private Joint Stock Company	Minimum 2 shareholders. Minimum capital AED 5 million. Shares not publicly offered.

3.3 Mainland vs. Free Zone — The Critical Choice

Feature	Mainland (DED)	Free Zone
UAE market access	Full, direct	Via local agent or distributor
Government contracts	Eligible	Generally not eligible
Foreign ownership	Up to 100% (most sectors)	100%
Import duties	5% standard rate	0% within zone
Corporate tax	9% on profits > AED 375K	0% on qualifying income
Physical office	Required (Ejari)	Often flexible/virtual options

3.4 Key Free Zones for Kenyan Businesses

Free Zone	Best For
JAFZA (Jebel Ali)	Trade, logistics, manufacturing — adjacent to the world's 9th busiest port
DMCC (Dubai Multi Commodities Centre)	Tea, coffee, gold, diamonds, commodities — KTDA and Kenyan tea exporters already operate here
ADGM – Abu Dhabi Global Markets; DIFC (Dubai International Financial Centre)	Financial services, fintech, legal — English common law courts
Dubai Internet City	Technology, software, digital services
RAKEZ (Ras Al Khaimah)	Cost-effective manufacturing and SME operations
Masdar (Abu Dhabi)	Renewable energy, clean technology, sustainability
KIZAD (Abu Dhabi)	Industrial, manufacturing, logistics — integrated with Khalifa Port

3.5 Registration Process

- Step 1: Select business activity from 2,000+ listed activities
- Step 2: Choose legal form (LLC, branch, free zone entity, etc.)
- Step 3: Reserve trade name with the relevant authority
- Step 4: Obtain initial approval from DED or Free Zone Authority
- Step 5: Prepare and notarise Memorandum & Articles of Association
- Step 6: Sign tenancy contract and register with Ejari
- Step 7: Submit complete application and pay licence fees
- Step 8: Apply for investor/partner residence visa
- Step 9: Open corporate bank account
- Step 10: Register for VAT (if turnover > AED 375,000) and Corporate Tax with the FTA

Processing Time

The Basher portal enables licences to be issued in minutes for straightforward activities. Typical DED procedures take approximately 4 business days. Free Zone authorities often operate within 1–3 working days.

Chapter 4: Taxation and Customs

4.1 Corporate Tax

The UAE introduced a federal corporate tax under Federal Decree-Law No. 47 of 2022, effective for financial years starting on or after June 1, 2023.

Rate	Application
0%	Net taxable income up to AED 375,000
9%	Net taxable income above AED 375,000
0% (Qualifying Free Zone)	On qualifying income earned from free zone activities, subject to conditions
15% DMTT	Domestic Minimum Top-up Tax for MNEs with global revenue; EUR 750M (effective Jan 1, 2025)

No Personal Income Tax

The UAE imposes no personal income tax, no capital gains tax, and no inheritance tax. Residents retain 100% of their earnings — a major attraction for entrepreneurs and high-net-worth individuals.

4.2 Value Added Tax (VAT)

- Standard VAT rate: 5% on most goods and services
- Zero-rated: exports outside GCC, certain essential goods, international transport
- Exempt: bare land, residential property transfers, local passenger transport
- Mandatory registration threshold: AED 375,000 annual turnover
- Voluntary registration threshold: AED 187,500

4.3 Customs Duties

- Standard rate: 5% of CIF (Cost, Insurance, Freight) value on most imports
- GCC-origin goods: exempt under the GCC Customs Union
- Free Zone imports: exempt from customs duties while within the zone
- Alcohol, tobacco, and luxury items attract higher duties
- Under the Kenya–UAE CEPA, preferential tariff rates will apply once it is **entered into force**

4.4 FATF Grey List Removal

In February 2024, the UAE was removed from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list following major reforms to its AML/CFT/sanctions framework. This significantly improved investor confidence and reduced compliance costs for businesses operating in the UAE.

4.5 Kenya–UAE Double Taxation

A Double Tax Avoidance Agreement (DTA) signed in November 2011 between Kenya and the UAE. The CEPA signed in 2025 may further address withholding tax and profit repatriation arrangements. Kenyan investors should consult a UAE-registered tax adviser for the latest status. Refer to mof.gov.ae and tax.gov.ae for official updates.

Chapter 5: Residency, Visas & Permits

5.1 Investor / Partner Visa

Once a UAE company is established, foreign owners can sponsor a residence visa and work permit (labour card). The process involves: entry permit → medical test → Emirates ID application → visa stamping.

5.2 Golden Visa (10-Year)

The UAE Golden Visa grants long-term residency to investors, entrepreneurs, and exceptional talents. Key categories include:

- Real estate investors holding property valued at AED 2 million or more
- Business investors with a minimum AED 2 million capital investment in a UAE company
- Entrepreneurs with approved start-ups or innovative projects
- Exceptional talents in science, arts, sports, and other specialised fields

Golden Visa Benefit

Golden Visa holders can sponsor family members and do not need an employer sponsor. The visa is renewable and provides long-term stability for investors and their families.

5.3 Green Visa (5-Year)

The Green Visa provides 5-year self-sponsored residency for business owners and investors, without requiring an employer. Eligible categories include investors, business partners, freelancers, and skilled professionals meeting income thresholds.

5.4 Other Visa Options

- Sole Entrepreneur Visa — for start-up founders
- Freelancer Permits — available through zones such as Dubai Media City and Dubai Knowledge Park
- Remote Work / Virtual Visa — for digital professionals
- Family Sponsorship — minimum salary thresholds apply (AED 4,000–10,000 depending on accommodation status)

5.5 Work Permits

All employees must obtain a UAE work permit through the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE). Employers must issue a labour contract, apply for health cards, and comply with Emiratisation quotas where applicable.

5.6 Short-Term Business Visits

Kenyan nationals may obtain short-term business or tourist visas (30 or 90 days) for exploratory visits, meetings, and trade missions. These are typically arranged through airlines, hotels, or a UAE sponsor.

Chapter 6: Banking and Finance

6.1 Opening a Business Bank Account

Most UAE banks require thorough KYC documentation. Key requirements typically include:

- Valid trade licence and company registration documents
- Passport copies and Emirates ID of all shareholders and signatories
- Company Memorandum and Articles of Association
- Detailed business plan and description of operations
- 6-month bank statements (personal and/or business)
- Local reference or introduction (recommended)

Bank	Notes
Emirates NBD	Largest UAE bank; full corporate banking suite
First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB)	Largest by assets; strong regional coverage
ADCB	Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank; competitive SME offerings
Mashreq Bank	Strong digital banking; popular with SMEs and start-ups
Standard Chartered	International bank; familiar to Kenyan businesses
HSBC UAE	Global bank; good for cross-border trade finance
Dubai Islamic Bank	Leading Islamic finance institution – also operating in Kenya
RAKBANK	Competitive rates for small businesses

6.2 Finance and Funding Options

- Emirates Development Bank — government-backed SME and project financing
- Abu Dhabi SME Hub (Hub71) — grants, soft loans, and equity support for start-ups
- Dubai SME Programme — business development support and finance access
- Free Zone incentives — zero import duties and tax benefits reduce operating costs
- International trade finance — available through global banks operating in UAE
- IFC/World Bank programmes — available to eligible Kenyan companies expanding regionally

6.3 Currency and Remittances

The UAE Dirham (AED) is pegged to the USD at 3.67. Capital and profit repatriation are fully permitted with no restrictions. Kenyan investors must comply with UAE's AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering / Counter Terrorism Financing) regulations, which align with FATF standards.

Chapter 7: Market Entry Strategies

7.1 Direct Export

Kenyan exporters can sell directly to UAE importers or distributors. Dubai functions as a major re-export hub to the Middle East and Asia. Key entry points include registration with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and participation in major trade fairs:

- Gulfood — world's largest annual food and beverage trade show (Dubai World Trade Centre, 26–30 Jan 2026)
- Cityscape Global — real estate and urban development (Dubai, October)
- GITEX Global — world's top tech expo (Expo City Dubai, 8–11 Dec 2026; AI Everything Kenya x GITEX Kenya, Nairobi, 19–21 May 2026)
- Big 5 Global — construction and building materials (Dubai World Trade Centre, Nov 2026)

7.2 Joint Ventures and Partnerships

Forming an onshore joint venture with an Emirati partner remains common in construction, trading, and government-facing sectors. A UAE partner can open doors to local contracts and government tenders.

7.3 Franchising and Licensing

The UAE's Commercial Agencies Law (Federal Law No. 18/1981 as amended) and the 2021 Agency Law update clarify master franchising rules. Foreign brands wishing to enter the UAE typically appoint a local UAE national or company as a master franchisee. Kenyan brands with strong consumer propositions could explore this route.

7.4 Free Zone Entry

Establishing a Free Zone entity enables 100% ownership, full profit repatriation, and sector-specific facilities. A local commercial agent can facilitate mainland sales where needed.

7.5 E-Commerce

The UAE's e-commerce market is among the fastest-growing in the region. Kenyan businesses can sell through Amazon.ae, Noon, or sector-specific platforms. Note that standard VAT and customs duties apply to goods sold through e-commerce.

Chapter 8: Sector-Specific Opportunities

The following sectors offer the strongest synergies and opportunities for Kenyan businesses and investors in the UAE:

8.1 Real Estate & Construction

UAE continues major investment in property and infrastructure following Expo 2020's legacy and the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan. Foreign investors can purchase freehold property in designated areas. Real estate investment of AED 2M+ qualifies for the Golden Visa. Kenyan construction firms and property investors are active participants in this market.

8.2 Trade & Logistics

Dubai (JAFZA / Jebel Ali Port) is a global re-export hub. Kenya's Mombasa–Dubai shipping lanes are well-established. Emirates SkyCargo and Kenya Airways provide direct air connections, facilitating floriculture and perishable exports. DP World's involvement in Kenyan ports further strengthens logistics connectivity.

8.3 Tourism & Hospitality

The UAE received 19.6 million tourists in 2025 and seeking to double by 2031. Opportunities exist for Kenyan tour operators to partner with UAE travel agencies for East Africa safaris, and for investments in hospitality, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events), and halal tourism.

8.4 ICT & Technology

Dubai Internet City, Dubai Silicon Oasis, Hub71 (Abu Dhabi), and DIFC FinTech Hive are leading tech ecosystems. Kenya's strengths in fintech, mobile money (M-Pesa), and software development are highly valued. Opportunities exist in cybersecurity, smart city technology, and digital financial services.

8.5 Renewable Energy & Sustainability

The UAE is investing heavily in renewables — including Masdar's global portfolio, the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park, and the Barakah nuclear plant. Kenya's renewable energy expertise (geothermal, solar) aligns with UAE's net-zero 2050 strategy, creating partnership and consulting opportunities.

8.6 Halal Products & Food

The UAE halal food market is valued at approximately USD 16.3 billion in 2025 and continues to grow. Kenyan exporters of halal-certified poultry, beef, fruits, and cosmetics have strong market access. The UAE's national Halal mark and established certification bodies provide a clear pathway for Kenyan producers.

8.7 Franchising

Consumer brands in F&B and retail dominate the UAE franchise sector. Kenyan service brands in education, hospitality, and health may also find receptive audiences, particularly among the East African diaspora community based in the UAE.

8.8 Artificial Intelligence & Advanced Technology

The UAE has made artificial intelligence a national strategic priority under its National AI Strategy 2031, with its AI market projected to grow from USD 3.47 billion in 2023 to USD 46.3 billion by 2030. Abu Dhabi committed to becoming the world's first fully AI-native government by 2027. The UAE's AI ecosystem is anchored by world-class entities including G42, MGX, the Technology Innovation Institute (TII), Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI), and

major partnerships with global technology companies such as Microsoft, Google, AWS, Oracle, and OpenAI.

Opportunities for Kenyan Businesses and Professionals:

- Software development and AI application delivery — Kenya’s growing tech talent pool (Nairobi is home to Africa’s largest tech ecosystem) is well-positioned to serve UAE AI integration projects, particularly in fintech, health-tech, and agri-tech verticals.
- Cybersecurity services — the UAE’s rapid digital expansion creates strong demand for cybersecurity professionals and managed security service providers. Kenyan firms with expertise in network security, identity management, and compliance can compete for contracts via Hub71, Dubai Internet City, and direct government tenders.
- Data centre and cloud support services — the UAE is building out massive data centre capacity (Khazna Data Centres, Microsoft, AWS, Oracle). Kenyan professionals in cloud architecture, data engineering, and AI operations are in demand as the country scales this infrastructure.
- AI-enabled agricultural and supply chain solutions — Kenya’s deep expertise in agricultural value chains and mobile-based data platforms can be adapted for UAE food security and supply chain optimisation initiatives. The UAE’s AI Dahra Holding and ADQ are actively investing in food security technology.
- Participation in UAE tech hubs — Hub71 (Abu Dhabi), Dubai Internet City, and GITEX Global (Expo City Dubai, 8–11 Dec 2026) are primary entry points. Kenya’s Konza Technopolis has confirmed GITEX participation; Kenyan AI start-ups can apply to Hub71 for subsidised office space, mentorship, and investor access.

Key contacts: Hub71 (hub71.ae), Dubai Internet City (dic.ae), UAE Ministry of State for AI (ai.gov.ae), GITEX Global (gitex.com). The Kenya ICT Authority and Konza Technopolis are the primary Kenyan counterparts for bilateral tech cooperation.

8.9 General Trading — Goods and Commodities

The UAE is one of the world’s most open trading economies. Its non-oil foreign trade reached USD 441.7 billion in H1 2025 alone, growing 23.6% year-on-year. Dubai functions as a global re-export hub, with goods flowing outward to over 180 countries. General trading licences in the UAE allow businesses to import, export, distribute, and re-export a wide range of goods — a critical advantage for Kenyan traders seeking to access not only the UAE market but the broader Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

How Kenyan Traders Can Operate:

- General Trading Licence (mainland DED) — covers import, export, distribution, and local sale of multiple product categories under a single licence. Suitable for Kenyan traders seeking to stock and distribute goods across the UAE.
- JAFZA Free Zone entity — Jebel Ali Free Zone is the preferred base for re-export trading. Goods enter at 0% import duty within the zone, are stored, consolidated, and re-exported globally. This is ideal for Kenyan traders using the UAE as a distribution hub for East African goods entering the GCC and Asian markets.
- DMCC (Dubai Multi Commodities Centre) — the world’s top-ranked free zone for commodities trading. KTDA DMCC already operates here. Suitable for Kenyan exporters of tea, coffee, cocoa, spices, and agricultural commodities seeking to warehouse and trade into global markets from Dubai.
- Commercial agency arrangements — foreign Kenyan companies can appoint a UAE-registered commercial agent to distribute and sell their goods within the UAE without establishing a local entity. The agent must be registered with the UAE Ministry of Economy.

Priority product categories where Kenyan traders have competitive advantage:

- Agricultural commodities — tea, coffee, macadamia nuts, sesame seeds, and dried pulses for re-export into the GCC and Asia.

- Leather goods, textiles, and artisan products — Kenya's leather industry and textile manufacturers can access UAE wholesale and retail distribution chains. JAFZA and Dubai Design District offer relevant platforms.
- Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) — Kenyan-manufactured consumer products (beverages, personal care, processed foods) can be distributed through UAE hypermarkets (Carrefour, LuLu, Spinneys). The 'Made in Kenya' initiative led by the Kenya Consulate is actively facilitating introductions to Carrefour's regional procurement network.

Important: The UAE's open trading environment creates risks of fraud. Kenyan traders must conduct rigorous due diligence on buyers, insist on irrevocable Letters of Credit or advance payment for new trading relationships, and register suspicious activities with the relevant authorities. Never release goods or shipping documents before confirmed payment receipt.

8.10 Pharmaceutical Products

The UAE pharmaceutical and healthcare products market represents a significant and growing opportunity. The UAE is a net importer of medicines, medical devices, and health products, with imports totalling USD 16.31 billion in pharmaceuticals and related products in 2024. The sector is governed by the Emirates Drug Establishment (EDE), established under Federal Decree-Law No. 28 of 2023 as the sole federal regulator for all medical and pharmaceutical products across the UAE — including within free zones.

EDE Regulatory Scope (products requiring registration):

- Human medicines, vaccines, and biologics
- Medical devices and equipment
- Healthcare products and nutritional supplements
- Cosmetic products and veterinary medicines
- Agricultural inputs including fertilisers, pesticides, and GMO products

Opportunities for Kenyan pharmaceutical businesses:

- Generic medicine exports — Kenya's pharmaceutical manufacturers (including EAPC, Universal Corporation, and Elys Chemical Industries) produce WHO-GMP compliant generics that can be registered with EDE for distribution in the UAE and re-exported across the GCC.
- Natural health products and nutraceuticals — Kenya's biodiversity (moringa, baobab, aloe vera, black seed) supports a growing range of natural health products with strong demand in the UAE wellness and supplement market.
- Distribution and wholesale — Kenyan healthcare trading companies can establish UAE entities to import global pharmaceutical brands and distribute across the GCC. Dubai Healthcare City and Jebel Ali Free Zone are established pharmaceutical distribution hubs with cold-chain facilities.
- Healthcare services and clinical partnerships — Kenya's internationally recognised hospitals (Aga Khan, Nairobi Hospital) and medical professionals can explore clinical partnerships with UAE entities such as M42, PureHealth, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, and Mubadala BIO (launched May 2025).

Regulatory pathway: All pharmaceutical products must be registered with the EDE before being marketed or distributed in the UAE. The EDE reviews safety, efficacy, and quality data. WHO-GMP certification from the Kenya Pharmacy and Poisons Board significantly accelerates EDE approval. The World Health Expo (Arab Health), Dubai Exhibition Centre, 9–12 Feb 2026, is the primary platform for establishing UAE healthcare distribution partnerships.

8.11 Motor Vehicles & Spare Parts

Motor vehicles and automotive parts represent one of the UAE's largest import and re-export categories. The UAE imported USD 20.55 billion in motor vehicles in 2024 and USD 4.34 billion in parts and accessories — ranking among the top five import commodities. Dubai functions as the Gulf's primary automotive re-export hub, with vehicles redistributed across East Africa, the GCC,

Central Asia, and beyond. This creates direct and significant opportunities for Kenyan businesses on both the import and distribution sides.

Opportunities for Kenyan businesses:

- Vehicle sourcing and importation to Kenya — Kenya is a major recipient of UAE-sourced used and new vehicles. Kenyan automotive traders regularly source Japanese, European, and American vehicles through UAE dealers and auctions (notably Dubai’s Emirates Auction, Al-Futtaim, and Al Habtoor). Establishing a UAE trading entity provides direct auction access, better pricing, and faster logistics through Jebel Ali Port to Mombasa.
- Automotive spare parts distribution — Dubai’s Ras Al Khor and Al Quoz industrial areas are the GCC’s largest spare parts markets. Kenyan automotive parts traders can source OEM and aftermarket parts for Japanese (Toyota, Nissan, Isuzu) and European brands at wholesale prices, consolidate, and ship to Kenya via sea or air freight.
- Electric vehicle (EV) market entry — the UAE’s rapidly expanding EV ecosystem (supported by the EVIS Electric Vehicle Summit, ADNEC Abu Dhabi, 13–14 Oct 2026) creates early-mover opportunities for Kenyan importers to establish EV distribution networks. Chinese EV brands entering the UAE through JAFZA present attractive sourcing options for the Kenyan market as the government progresses its EV adoption agenda.
- Used commercial vehicles — heavy trucks, buses, and construction equipment traded through UAE are a significant import category for Kenya’s infrastructure sector. Kenyan traders can establish UAE entities to participate directly in heavy vehicle auctions and wholesale markets, reducing intermediary costs.

Practical setup considerations: A JAFZA or mainland Dubai trading entity with a general trading or automotive trading licence is the standard structure. Importation to Kenya requires compliance with Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) import duty schedules, Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) vehicle inspection standards, and NTSA registration requirements. The UAE’s strong logistics infrastructure — Jebel Ali Port to Mombasa is a well-established route operated by major shipping lines including MSC, Maersk, and CMA CGM — makes the supply chain reliable and cost-effective.

8.12 Warehousing, Distribution & Logistics

The UAE is the logistics capital of the Middle East and one of the top five global logistics hubs, ranked 13th in the World Bank Logistics Performance Index. Dubai alone handles over USD 400 billion in trade annually, with Jebel Ali Port — the world’s 9th busiest container port — serving as the primary gateway for East–West trade. For Kenyan businesses, the UAE’s logistics ecosystem is not just a market destination but a strategic distribution platform providing access to 3+ billion consumers across the GCC, South Asia, East Africa, and beyond.

The UAE logistics sector contributed USD 36 billion to GDP in 2024, growing at 6.5% per annum. The sector is underpinned by world-class infrastructure: Jebel Ali Port (JAFZA), Khalifa Port (Abu Dhabi), Dubai International Airport (DXB — world’s busiest international cargo airport), and Al Maktoum International Airport (DWC). Dubai South is the UAE’s flagship logistics city, co-located with Al Maktoum Airport and the Dubai Logistics Corridor, combining air, sea, and road connectivity in a single integrated free zone.

Why this matters for Kenya: The most significant structural constraint on Kenya’s export growth to the UAE is not demand — the UAE market is actively seeking Kenyan products — but supply-chain reliability, cold-chain integrity, and distribution consistency. UAE logistics infrastructure directly addresses these gaps and, when properly leveraged, can multiply the impact of every other trade initiative.

a) UAE Logistics Hubs — Overview for Kenyan Businesses

Logistics Hub	Type	Strengths for Kenyan Businesses	Key Operator
Jebel Ali Port / JAFZA	Sea — container & general cargo	Primary gateway for Kenyan sea freight; Mombasa–Jebel Ali route is well-established; 0% import duty within zone; world-class re-export platform	DP World
Dubai Intl Airport (DXB) — SkyCargo	Air — perishables & express	World's largest international cargo airport; direct Nairobi–Dubai freighter service; temperature-controlled facilities for flowers, fresh produce, and halal meat	Emirates SkyCargo
Al Maktoum Airport / Dubai South	Air — integrated logistics city	Future world's largest airport; dedicated logistics free zone; bonded warehousing; e-commerce fulfilment hub	Dubai Aviation Corp.
Khalifa Port / KIZAD (Abu Dhabi)	Sea — industrial logistics	Deepwater port with lower congestion than Jebel Ali; integrated industrial zone; growing Kenya–Abu Dhabi cargo corridor	AD Ports Group
DMCC (Jumeirah Lake Towers)	Commodity trading & warehousing	World's largest free zone for commodities; KTDA already warehouses Kenyan tea here; bonded storage for tea, coffee, nuts, minerals	DMCC Authority
Dubai CommerCity	E-commerce free zone	First dedicated e-commerce free zone in MENA; fulfilment for Amazon.ae, Noon, and regional platforms; enables Kenyan brands to sell directly to UAE consumers	TECOM Group

b) Warehousing — Using UAE as a Regional Stock Hub

The UAE's free zone bonded warehousing model allows Kenyan exporters to consolidate, store, and distribute goods across the GCC and beyond without paying UAE import duty until goods enter the domestic market or are re-exported. This model is particularly suited to Kenyan exporters of tea and coffee (via DMCC), fresh produce (cold-chain at JAFZA and DXB SkyCargo), and consumer and FMCG goods (JAFZA and Dubai South).

- **Free zone bonded warehouses:** Goods held in JAFZA, DMCC, or Dubai South can be re-exported to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, India, Pakistan, and East Africa without incurring UAE import duties — making the UAE a zero-cost distribution hub.
- **Cold-chain warehousing:** DXB SkyCargo and JAFZA operate state-of-the-art temperature-controlled facilities critical for Kenyan flowers (2–8°C), fresh produce (0–4°C), and frozen halal meat (-18°C). Kenya's biggest logistics bottleneck — cold-chain integrity — can be addressed at the Dubai end.
- **Consolidation services:** Kenyan SME exporters can use Dubai as a consolidation point, grouping small shipments from multiple exporters into full container loads (FCL) for cost-effective onward regional distribution. This reduces per-unit freight costs by 25–40%.
- **Commodity warehousing at DMCC:** KTDA DMCC already warehouses Kenyan tea in Dubai. This model is directly replicable for Kenyan coffee, macadamia nuts, sesame seeds, and dried pulses — capturing the Dubai re-export price premium for Kenyan producers.
- **Pharmaceutical cold-chain:** JAFZA's dedicated pharmaceutical logistics zone offers GDP-compliant (Good Distribution Practice) cold-chain warehousing for medicines, vaccines, and biologics — relevant for Kenyan pharmaceutical importers and distributors.

c) Distribution — UAE as Gateway to GCC and Global Markets

Dubai's position as the GCC's distribution capital means a single UAE-based distributor can serve customers across all six GCC states, Iran, East Africa, and South Asia from one location. For Kenyan exporters, securing a UAE-based distributor is often more efficient and cost-effective than establishing country-by-country GCC market presence.

- **JAFZA wholesale distributors:** Over 7,000 companies in JAFZA engage in regional wholesale distribution. Kenyan exporters should identify UAE-based exclusive distributors with GCC-wide coverage for food, personal care, and consumer goods.
- **E-commerce fulfilment:** Amazon.ae, Noon, and Namshi operate fulfilment centres in Dubai that Kenyan brands can use to sell directly to UAE and GCC consumers. Dubai CommerCity provides a structured entry point with e-commerce-specific licensing and logistics infrastructure.
- **Re-export to East Africa via Dubai:** The UAE is a major re-exporter to East Africa. Kenyan businesses can establish UAE trading entities to import global goods — machinery, electronics, vehicles, spare parts, pharmaceuticals — and re-export to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia through the Jebel Ali–Mombasa corridor.
- **GCC-wide FMCG distribution:** LuLu Hypermarket, Spinneys, Carrefour, and Waitrose UAE all source regionally from UAE-based distributors. A UAE distribution entity enables a Kenyan FMCG brand to reach 63 million GCC consumers through a single distribution agreement.

d) Logistics Services — Kenyan Companies in the UAE Logistics Sector

Kenya's growing logistics expertise — anchored by Nairobi as East Africa's hub, Mombasa Port, and expanding cold-chain infrastructure — creates potential for Kenyan logistics companies to establish UAE operations or partnerships with UAE logistics leaders for the East Africa corridor.

- **DP World — Kenya corridor:** DP World operates both Jebel Ali (Dubai) and the Mombasa container terminal in Kenya. This creates a natural partnership avenue for Kenyan logistics companies seeking UAE market access or seeking to improve Mombasa–Jebel Ali service reliability.
- **Cold-chain corridor development:** The Nairobi–Dubai perishable cold chain (dominated by Emirates SkyCargo and Kenya Airways Cargo) handles Kenya's flowers, avocados, and vegetables. Kenyan logistics companies can capture value by providing pre-cooling, last-mile cold-chain, and pack-house services on the Kenya side.
- **Freight forwarding branches:** Kenyan freight forwarding companies can establish UAE branch offices to provide door-to-door services from Kenya to the UAE, managing all documentation, customs clearance, and local delivery. This is particularly valuable for SME exporters who lack UAE-side logistics expertise.
- **Automotive and spare parts logistics:** Dubai's Ras Al Khor and Al Quoz industrial areas are the GCC's largest automotive parts markets. Kenyan importers can consolidate OEM and aftermarket parts for Toyota, Nissan, and Isuzu vehicles at a single Dubai hub, reducing per-unit shipping costs by 30–40% versus sourcing directly from manufacturers.

e) How to Set Up — Regulatory Pathways

Kenyan companies establishing warehousing or logistics operations in the UAE should select their structure based on the nature of their activity:

Structure	Best For	Key Benefits	Approx. Setup Cost
JAFZA LLC or Branch	Sea freight, general trading, re-export, warehousing	0% import duty within zone; 100% foreign ownership; direct Jebel Ali Port access; full profit repatriation	AED 15,000–25,000/yr licence
Dubai South Free Zone entity	Air cargo logistics, e-commerce fulfilment	Co-located with Al Maktoum Airport; flexible warehousing; 100% ownership; VAT and duty exemptions	AED 12,000–20,000/yr licence

Structure	Best For	Key Benefits	Approx. Setup Cost
DMCC entity	Commodity trading and warehousing (tea, coffee, nuts, minerals)	World's top commodity free zone; KTDA precedent; bonded storage; global buyer access	AED 18,000–30,000/yr licence
Mainland DED — Logistics/Transport Licence	UAE domestic distribution, last-mile delivery	Access to full UAE mainland market; government contracts eligible; 100% foreign ownership now permitted (2022 reform)	AED 10,000–18,000/yr licence
Dubai CommerCity entity	E-commerce fulfilment (direct-to-consumer)	Dedicated e-commerce infrastructure; Amazon.ae and Noon integration; streamlined customs	AED 15,000–22,000/yr licence

Note: All free zone entities require a registered office/warehouse space. Virtual/flexi-desk options are available from AED 5,000–10,000/year for trading licences without physical warehouse needs. Kenyan businesses requiring full warehousing should budget AED 25–45 per sq ft/year for JAFZA warehouse space depending on specification and temperature control requirements.

f) Key UAE Logistics Partners for Kenyan Businesses

Company	Type	Relevance to Kenya	Entry Point
Emirates SkyCargo	Air cargo — perishables & express	Direct Nairobi–Dubai service; primary carrier for flowers, fresh produce, and high-value exports; cold-chain facilities at DXB	Emirates SkyCargo Nairobi office
Kenya Airways Cargo	Air cargo	Supplements Emirates SkyCargo on Nairobi–Dubai route; important for perishables capacity	KQ Cargo, JKIA Nairobi
DP World (JAFZA)	Sea logistics — container & general	Operates Mombasa Port; natural partner for the Mombasa–Jebel Ali sea freight corridor	DP World UAE / DP World Kenya
MSC / Maersk / CMA CGM	Container shipping lines	Major operators on Jebel Ali–Mombasa route; weekly sailings; reefer (refrigerated) container services	Local shipping agents, Nairobi
Agility Logistics	Integrated logistics	Strong East Africa presence; warehousing, customs brokerage, freight forwarding UAE to Kenya	Agility Dubai office
DHL Express UAE	Express & e-commerce	Kenya–UAE express parcel and document service; supports Kenyan SME e-commerce to UAE consumers	DHL UAE, Dubai
Aramex	Regional e-commerce & freight	UAE-founded; strong Kenya network; cost-effective for SME exporters; last-mile delivery in UAE	Aramex Nairobi / Dubai offices
DMCC Commodity Warehousing	Bonded commodity storage	KTDA DMCC warehouses Kenyan tea; same model applicable for coffee, macadamia, sesame	DMCC Authority, Jumeirah Lakes Towers

Strategic Priority — Logistics as the Backbone of Kenya's UAE Trade Strategy

Invest in logistics infrastructure and partnerships alongside product export initiatives. Cold-chain integrity, reliable freight, and efficient distribution are prerequisites for scaling Kenya's fresh produce, halal meat, tea, and FMCG exports. Key recommended actions: (1) Facilitate a Kenya-UAE Logistics Partnership Forum with DP World, Emirates SkyCargo, and major Kenyan exporters to address cold-chain gaps on the Nairobi-Dubai corridor. (2) Develop a Kenya Export Consolidation Hub model at JAFZA — allowing smaller Kenyan exporters to pool logistics costs. (3) Expand the KTDA-DMCC warehousing model to coffee, macadamia, and other Kenyan commodities to capture Dubai re-export premiums.

g) Major Shipping Lines Serving the Mombasa-Jebel Ali Corridor

Sea freight is the primary mode for Kenyan exports and imports to and from the UAE. The Mombasa-Jebel Ali route is one of the most active trade corridors between East Africa and the Gulf, with regular weekly sailings operated by all major global container lines. Transit time is typically 18-22 days. The following shipping lines operate scheduled services on this corridor and are the principal carriers used by Kenyan exporters and importers.

Shipping Line	HQ / Flag	Services & Kenya Relevance	Booking Contact
MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company)	Geneva, Switzerland	World's largest container line by fleet capacity. Operates direct and relay services on the Mombasa-Jebel Ali route. Strong reefer (refrigerated) container capacity for Kenyan fresh produce and halal meat. Regular weekly calls at Mombasa Port.	msc.com MSC Nairobi office
Maersk Line	Copenhagen, Denmark	World's 2nd largest container line. Offers direct East Africa-Middle East services including Mombasa-Jebel Ali. Strong cold-chain capabilities for perishables. Maersk has a significant Nairobi presence and digital booking platform (Maersk.com). Also offers logistics and warehousing services at Jebel Ali through Maersk Logistics.	maersk.com Maersk Nairobi
CMA CGM	Marseille, France	3rd largest container group globally. Regular Mombasa-Jebel Ali services. CMA CGM group also operates ANL and APL brands. Competitive rates for dry cargo and reefer. CMA CGM Air Cargo available for urgent Nairobi-Dubai shipments.	cmacgm.com CMA CGM Nairobi
Evergreen Line	Taipei, Taiwan	Major Taiwan-based carrier with East Africa-Middle East services. Competitive on Mombasa-Jebel Ali dry cargo. Well-established among Kenyan general cargo exporters.	evergreen- line.com
Hapag-Lloyd	Hamburg, Germany	5th largest container line globally. Operates on East Africa-Middle East trade lanes. Known for reliability and reefer container services. Suitable for high-value Kenyan exports requiring temperature control.	hapag-lloyd.com Hapag-Lloyd Nairobi
PIL (Pacific International Lines)	Singapore	Singapore-based carrier with dedicated East Africa services including Mombasa-Jebel Ali. PIL is particularly popular among East	pilship.com

Shipping Line	HQ / Flag	Services & Kenya Relevance	Booking Contact
		African traders for competitive rates on break-bulk and containerised cargo.	
ONE (Ocean Network Express)	Singapore	Formed from merger of NYK, MOL, and K Line (Japan). Operates East Africa–Middle East services. Strong Japan–UAE–East Africa triangle trade; suitable for Kenyan automotive parts importers sourcing Japanese vehicle spares via UAE.	one-line.com
ZIM Integrated Shipping	Haifa, Israel	Israeli carrier with growing East Africa–Middle East presence. Competitive on Mombasa–Jebel Ali and offers direct services to Gulf ports. Increasing market share in East Africa trade lanes.	zim.com
COSCO Shipping (OOCL)	Shanghai / Hong Kong, China	China's largest state-owned shipping group; OOCL is its premium brand. Operates Asia–Middle East–East Africa services. Relevant for Kenyan importers sourcing goods from China via UAE transshipment at Jebel Ali.	cosco.com oocl.com
Safmarine (Maersk Group)	Cape Town, South Africa	Africa-focused carrier within the Maersk Group. Particularly strong on intra-Africa and Africa–Middle East lanes. Well-known among Kenyan SME exporters for competitive rates and local service focus.	safmarine.com

Air Cargo Carriers Serving the Nairobi–Dubai Corridor

For time-sensitive, high-value, and perishable cargo — Kenya's flowers, fresh produce, halal meat, and gold — air freight is the primary mode. The following carriers operate scheduled freighter or passenger belly-hold cargo services between Nairobi (JKIA) and Dubai (DXB / DWC).

Carrier	Type	Route & Cargo Focus	Contact
Emirates SkyCargo	Dedicated freighter + belly hold	Nairobi JKIA – Dubai DXB. World's largest international air cargo carrier. Primary carrier for Kenyan cut flowers (daily reefer freighters), fresh produce, avocados, and halal meat. Temperature-controlled facilities at DXB Cargo Village. Cold-chain integrity from Nairobi to UAE retail shelves.	skycargo.com Emirates SkyCargo Nairobi
Kenya Airways Cargo (KQ)	Belly hold cargo	Nairobi JKIA – Dubai DXB via passenger flights. Supplements Emirates SkyCargo capacity especially during Kenyan horticultural peak seasons. Important for SME exporters and time-sensitive produce that cannot secure Emirates SkyCargo space.	kenya-airways.com KQ Cargo, JKIA
Qatar Airways Cargo	Dedicated freighter + belly hold	Nairobi – Doha – Dubai/Abu Dhabi. Freighter services with strong reefer capacity. Used for Kenyan fresh	qatarairways.com/cargo

Carrier	Type	Route & Cargo Focus	Contact
		produce transiting Doha to UAE and onward to Asian markets.	
Ethiopian Airlines Cargo	Dedicated freighter + belly hold	Nairobi – Addis Ababa – Dubai. Africa's largest cargo carrier. Competitive rates and growing reefer capacity. Often used by Kenyan exporters as an alternative when Emirates SkyCargo space is constrained.	ethiopianairlines.com/cargo
flydubai Cargo	Belly hold cargo	Dubai DXB – Nairobi direct. Budget carrier growing on the Nairobi–Dubai route. Suitable for non-perishable cargo and documents. Lower rates than Emirates SkyCargo.	flydubai.com
Turkish Airlines Cargo	Belly hold + freighter	Nairobi – Istanbul – Dubai. Wide-body aircraft with competitive belly-hold cargo capacity. Good option for Kenyan exporters shipping to UAE and onward to Europe or North America.	turkishairlinescargo.com

h) Practical Guidance for Kenyan Exporters

Selecting the right carrier depends on the nature of your cargo, required transit time, and budget. The following guidance applies to the Mombasa–Jebel Ali and Nairobi–Dubai corridors:

Cargo Type	Recommended Mode	Preferred Carriers	Key Considerations
Cut flowers & fresh roses	Air freight (mandatory)	Emirates SkyCargo (primary); KQ Cargo (secondary)	Book 48–72 hours in advance; pre-cool to 2–4°C; JKIA cold room pre-booking essential
Fresh avocados, pineapples, mangoes	Air freight (premium) or reefer sea (economy)	Air: Emirates SkyCargo / Ethiopian; Sea: MSC, Maersk (reefer FCL)	Sea reefer is cost-effective for bulk volumes; air for premium retail orders
Halal meat (chilled or frozen)	Air freight (chilled) or reefer sea (frozen)	Air: Emirates SkyCargo; Sea: MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM	Halal certificate and vet health cert required; frozen sea freight (-18°C) for volume shipments
Tea (bulk CTC or packaged)	Sea freight (FCL or LCL)	MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM, PIL, Evergreen	DMCC warehousing available on arrival in Dubai; 20-day transit from Mombasa
Coffee (specialty or bulk)	Sea freight or air (specialty)	Sea: MSC, Maersk; Air: Emirates SkyCargo for specialty	Temperature and humidity controlled containers recommended for specialty coffee
General cargo / FMCG / manufactured goods	Sea freight (FCL or LCL)	MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM, PIL, Hapag-Lloyd	LCL (less than container load) consolidation available at Mombasa for SME exporters

Cargo Type	Recommended Mode	Preferred Carriers	Key Considerations
Motor vehicles & spare parts (import from UAE)	Sea freight (RoRo or FCL)	MSC, Maersk, CMA CGM, Evergreen	RoRo (roll-on/roll-off) available for vehicles; KRA import duty and KEBS inspection on arrival
Pharmaceuticals & medical products	Air freight (express) or sea reefer	Air: Emirates SkyCargo, Qatar Airways; Sea: Maersk (reefer)	GDP-compliant cold-chain required; EDE registration needed before import into UAE
E-commerce parcels (small/urgent)	Air express	DHL Express, Aramex, FedEx, UPS	Door-to-door; customs pre-clearance; 2-4 day transit Dubai to Nairobi

Note: Freight rates fluctuate based on fuel surcharges, seasonal demand, vessel capacity, and global supply chain conditions (including (i) Red Sea disruptions since 2023/24 which have added 10-14 days to routes diverting via the Cape of Good Hope (ii) Strait of Hormuz portends a key logistical challenge due to the US/Israel - Iran War. Always obtain current quotes directly from carriers or licensed freight forwarders. Key freight forwarders operating in both Nairobi and Dubai include: Siginon Global Logistics, DHL Global Forwarding, Bolloré Logistics, Panalpina (DSV), Agility Logistics, and Freight in Time.

Chapter 9: Cultural and Business Etiquette

9.1 Building Relationships

Personal rapport is the foundation of business in the UAE. Meetings typically begin with small talk — covering family, travel, and general well-being — before any commercial discussion. Building trust over multiple meetings is normal and expected before major commitments are made.

9.2 Greetings and Protocol

- Greet with 'As-salamu alaykum' (peace be upon you) — a sign of cultural respect
- Handshakes are standard; men should wait for a woman to extend her hand first
- Address counterparts by title (Mr., Dr., Sheikh) unless invited to use first names
- Exchange business cards respectfully — receive and review cards carefully before setting aside

9.3 Communication Style

- English is widely used in UAE business settings
- Maintain a respectful and modest tone at all times
- Indirect communication is common — read between the lines
- Silence is normal and should not be filled unnecessarily
- Always confirm agreements in writing following verbal commitments

9.4 Meeting Conduct

- Punctuality is appreciated, though meetings may start slightly late
- Follow up all meetings with a thank-you email and summary of agreed actions
- Do not rush to conclusions — relationship-building takes time
- Avoid sensitive topics: politics, religion, and regional conflicts
- UAE working days are Monday to Friday (Friday ends at 12 noon)

9.5 Dress Code

- Men: Business suit or traditional Emirati kandura
- Women: Conservative formal business (Abaya) attire covering arms and knees
- In shopping malls, mosques, and government buildings, more conservative dress is expected

9.6 Ramadan Considerations

During the holy month of Ramadan, business schedules are typically adjusted with shorter working hours and slower afternoon periods. Eating, drinking, and smoking in public during daylight hours is prohibited. Showing sensitivity to this observance is greatly appreciated.

Chapter 10: Legal, Compliance & Risk Management

10.1 Legal Framework

The UAE legal system operates at federal and emirate levels. Federal laws govern most commercial activities, while each emirate has additional regulations. Free Zones operate under their own judicial frameworks (notably DIFC and ADGM, which are based on English common law).

10.2 IP Protection

Intellectual Property in the UAE is protected through the Ministry of Economy, which handles trademark registrations. The UAE is a member of WIPO and enforces IP rights through specialised IP courts in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It is strongly recommended to register trademarks, patents, and copyrights before market entry.

- Trademark registration: UAE Ministry of Economy (economy.gov.ae)
- Patent filing: National route or via Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) patent filings
- Copyright: Automatic upon creation; registration provides additional enforcement tools

10.3 Anti-Corruption and Compliance

The UAE enforces strict anti-bribery laws. The Penal Code prohibits facilitation payments and imposes heavy penalties for corrupt practices. Businesses must conduct thorough due diligence on local partners and intermediaries. The UAE ranks favourably on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index relative to the region.

10.4 Data Privacy

The UAE's Personal Data Protection Law (PDPL) aligns with international standards similar to GDPR. Companies handling customer data must comply with data localisation requirements and obtain appropriate consents. Free zone jurisdictions (DIFC, ADGM) have their own data protection regulations.

10.5 Dispute Resolution

Commercial disputes may be resolved through UAE local courts, international arbitration, or Free Zone courts. The UAE is a signatory to the 1958 New York Convention on arbitration. It is advisable to include arbitration clauses in contracts. Dubai International Arbitration Centre (DIAC) is a leading regional arbitration body.

10.6 Political and Geopolitical Stability

The UAE is rated as politically stable with very low internal security risk. Investors should remain aware of regional geopolitical considerations and comply with all applicable international sanctions and trade regulations.

Chapter 11: Practical Checklists & Templates

11.1 Company Setup Checklist

- Determine business activity and appropriate legal structure
- Choose between mainland (DED) or free zone registration
- Reserve trade name via the relevant authority
- Obtain initial approval (MOE or Free Zone Authority)
- Prepare and notarise Memorandum of Association
- Sign tenancy contract and register with Ejari
- Submit complete application and pay licence fees
- Obtain trade licence
- Apply for investor/partner residence visa
- Open corporate bank account
- Register for VAT (if turnover exceeds AED 375,000)
- Register for Corporate Tax with the Federal Tax Authority
- Obtain any sector-specific permits (food, health, etc.)

11.2 Visa Application Checklist

- Obtain entry permit (apply via relevant authority or airline)
- Complete medical fitness test at approved UAE health centre
- Apply for Emirates ID at ICP (icp.gov.ae)
- Complete visa stamping at GDRFA or ICP office
- Obtain MoHRE work permit (for employees)

11.3 Export to UAE Checklist

- Confirm Harmonised System (HS) code for goods
- Verify product meets UAE standards and certification (ESMA)
- Obtain halal certification where required
- Confirm phytosanitary/veterinary certificates for food products
- Arrange freight insurance and appropriate Incoterms
- Submit customs entry declaration and pay applicable duties
- Register with Dubai Chamber of Commerce for buyer connections

11.4 MOU / JV Agreement — Key Clauses

- Parties: Full legal names, registration numbers, addresses
- Scope and objectives of the venture
- Contribution of each party (capital, skills, assets)
- Ownership structure and profit/loss sharing
- Governance and decision-making authority
- Confidentiality and IP ownership
- Duration and termination conditions
- Dispute resolution mechanism (arbitration preferred)
- Governing law (UAE Federal Law or chosen jurisdiction)

Chapter 12: Key Contacts Directory

12.1 Kenyan Government & Diplomatic Missions

Organisation	Role / Website
Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry	miti.go.ke – market access; export and investment promotion
Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs	mfa.go.ke – economic and commercial diplomacy
Kenya Embassy – Abu Dhabi	Kenyauaeembassy.com - Diplomatic representation for UAE
Consulate General of Kenya – Dubai & Northern Emirates	Primary support for Kenyan businesses and nationals in Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, and Umm Al Quwain
Kenya Investment Authority (KenInvest)	investkenya.go.ke — promotes and facilitates investment in Kenya
Kenya Export Promotion and Branding Agency	makeitkenya.go.ke — supports Kenyan exporters in accessing international markets
Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA)	kra.go.ke — Kenyan tax and customs authority

12.2 UAE Government Authorities

Authority	Role / Website
UAE Ministry of Economy & Tourism	economy.gov.ae — company registration, commercial agencies, IP
Federal Tax Authority (FTA)	tax.gov.ae — VAT, corporate tax registration and compliance
Dubai DED	dubaided.gov.ae — mainland company licensing in Dubai
Abu Dhabi DED	abudhabi.ae — mainland company licensing in Abu Dhabi
GDRFA Dubai	gdrfad.gov.ae — visas, residency, Golden/Green Visa applications
ICP (Federal Identity)	icp.gov.ae — Emirates ID and federal immigration
Dubai Customs	dubaicustoms.gov.ae — customs declarations and duties
National Economic Registry	growth.gov.ae – data for listed economic licenses in the UAE
MoHRE	mohre.gov.ae — work permits, labour contracts, Emiratisation

12.3 Key Free Zone Authorities

Free Zone	Sector Focus / Website
JAFZA	jafza.ae — Jebel Ali Free Zone (trade, logistics, manufacturing)
DMCC	dmcc.ae — commodities – tea & coffee, gold, diamonds, crypto
DIFC	difc.ae — financial services, fintech, legal
Dubai Internet City	dic.ae — technology, software, digital media
DAFZA	dafza.ae — aviation, aerospace, logistics
RAK FTZ	rakez.com — cost-effective option for SMEs
Sharjah Publishing City	spc.ae — media, publishing, education

12.4 Chambers of Commerce & Support

Organisation	Role / Website
Kenya National Chamber of Commerce	kenyachamber.or.ke - Kenya-based business support
UAE Federal Chambers	Uaechambers.com - UAE business community, coordinating efforts among individual emirate chambers
Abu Dhabi Chamber	abudhabi.ae/chamber - Abu Dhabi business community
Dubai Chamber of Commerce	dubaichamber.com - trade facilitation, networking, market access
Dubai SME	sme.ae — SME support, finance access, training
Hub71 (Abu Dhabi)	hub71.ae — start-up ecosystem, funding, mentoring

12.5 Major Banks

Bank	Website
Emirates NBD	emiratesnbd.com
First Abu Dhabi Bank (FAB)	bankfab.com
Mashreq Bank	mashreqbank.com
Standard Chartered UAE	sc.com/ae
HSBC UAE	hsbc.ae
RAKBANK	rakbank.ae
Dubai Islamic Bank	dib.ae

12.6 Logistics Providers

Provider	Role / Website
DP World	dpworld.com — port operations, logistics, supply chain
Emirates SkyCargo	skycargo.com — air freight, perishables (direct Nairobi-Dubai)
Kenya Airways Cargo	kenya-airways.com — cargo services including fresh produce
DHL UAE	dhl.com/ae — express and freight forwarding
Aramex	aramex.com — regional e-commerce and freight specialist

Annex: KEMDP UAE Events Calendar 2025–2026

Under the Kenya Export Market Development Program (KEMDP), the following UAE trade events serves as priority platforms for Kenyan exporters, investors, and government and private sector representatives for the 2025–2026 cycle. Events are organised by sector to assist Kenyan stakeholders in planning participation and maximising business outcomes.

Category 1: Food, Agriculture, Livestock & Fresh Produce

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
15 Oct 2025 – 10 May 2026	Global Village	Global Village, Dubai	6-month product showcasing; trade & tourism awareness. High-traffic cultural, trade & shopping hub.
18–20 Jan 2026	World of Coffee (4th Edition)	Dubai World Trade Centre	Cupping rooms, roasters village, barista & design awards. Middle East's largest coffee expo.
26–30 Jan 2026	Gulfood Exhibition	DWTC & Expo City	Global F&B sourcing; B2B linkages. World's largest annual F&B exhibition.
4-6 May 2027	Gulfood360 Africa/Kenya	Nairobi	Global F&B sourcing; B2B linkages. World's largest annual F&B exhibition.
8–10 Sep 2026	Agra Middle East	Dubai World Trade Centre	Value chain networking; food security collaborations. Agriculture & livestock platform.
Nov 2026	Middle East Organic & Natural Expo	Dubai World Trade Centre	Organic, halal, vegan & natural products promotion. MENA's top organic expo.
3–5 Nov 2026	Gulfood Manufacturing	Dubai World Trade Centre	Food tech, processing & manufacturing. Leading global food tech expo.
24–26 Nov 2026	Global Food Week (ADIFE)	ADNEC, Abu Dhabi	Trade partnerships; F&B linkages. Major global sourcing event.

Category 2: Investment, Finance & Economic Cooperation

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
13–15 Apr 2026	AIM Congress	Dubai World Trade Centre	FDI attraction; SME & startup engagement. Global investment forum.
11–12 May 2026	Dubai Fintech Summit	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai	Fintech partnerships; digital innovation. Aligns with Dubai D33 agenda.
Dec 2026	Abu Dhabi Finance Week	Al Maryah Island, Abu Dhabi	Sovereign wealth, family offices, fintech. MENA's premier business & investment summit.

Category 3: Tourism, Hospitality & Travel

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
4–7 May 2026	Arabian Travel Market (ATM)	Dubai World Trade Centre	Tourism promotion; hospitality investment. Leading global tourism expo.
29 Sep – 1 Oct 2026	Future Hospitality Summit	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai	Hospitality investment; tourism innovation. Global hospitality platform.
31 March - 1 April 2026	Future Hospitality Summit Africa	Radisson Blu Hotel, Nairobi Upper Hill, Kenya	African Hospitality investment; tourism innovation. Global hospitality platform.

Category 4: Health, Medical & Wellness

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
9–12 Feb 2026	World Health Expo (Arab Health)	Dubai Exhibition Centre, Expo City	Healthcare partnerships; investment showcase. Leading global medical expo.

Category 5: Energy, Petroleum & Green Transition

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
13–15 Jan 2026	World Future Energy Summit	ADNEC, Abu Dhabi	Energy, circular economy & water. World's premier future energy event.
2–5 Nov 2026	ADIPEC	ADNEC, Abu Dhabi	Energy innovation & global networking. World's largest energy event.

Category 6: ICT, Digital Economy & Innovation

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
19–21 May 2026	AI Everything Kenya x GITEX Kenya	Sarit Expo Centre / KICC, Nairobi	Kenya leg of GITEX Global. AI, tech & innovation partnerships.
8–11 Dec 2026	GITEX Global	Expo City, Dubai	AI, cybersecurity & tech partnerships. World's top tech expo.

Category 7: Governance & Public Sector Leadership

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
3–6 Feb 2026	World Government Summit	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai	Policy innovation; governance partnerships. Global policy leadership platform.

Category 8: Infrastructure, Construction & Real Estate

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
Nov 2026	Big 5 Global	Dubai World Trade Centre	Infrastructure & building sector partnerships. Largest construction expo in the region.
21 - 23 October 2026	Big 5 - Construct Kenya	Sarit Expo Centre, Nairobi	Infrastructure & building sector partnerships. Largest construction expo in the East African region.

Category 9: Transport, Electric Mobility & Future Systems

Date	Event	Venue	Key Focus / Note
13–14 Oct 2026	EVIS – Electric Vehicle Summit	ADNEC, Abu Dhabi	EV partnerships; sustainable mobility. High-level EV summit.

Source: Kenya Export Market Development Program (KEMDP) 2025–2026 – UAE Events, compiled by the Consulate General of the Republic of Kenya, Dubai;. Dates and venues subject to confirmation by organisers.

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