DPU: delivered at place unloaded – Incoterm with unloading risk

DPU (Delivered at Place Unloaded) is one of the eleven Incoterms rules and denotes delivery from the unloading point. The seller bears all costs and risks up to the contractually agreed place and beyond that until unloading is complete. DPU is the only rule that expressly assigns unloading to the seller, and in 2020 it replaced the former DAT rule.

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Key facts at a glance

01 DPU (Delivered at Place Unloaded) means that the seller delivers the goods to the agreed place and unloads them there.

02 Risk passes as soon as the goods are ready for unloading at the destination or can be received after unloading is complete.

03 DPU is the only Incoterms rule under which unloading is expressly the seller's task.

04 Import clearance, import duties and taxes in the country of destination are borne by the buyer.

05 DPU is suitable for all modes of transport and can be used in sea, air, rail and road freight as well as in multimodal transport.

06 DPU was introduced with Incoterms 2020 and replaces the former DAT rule.

Definition: DPU

DPU is an ICC Incoterms rule that ties the place of delivery to the loaded but still-to-be-unloaded goods. It is the only rule under which the seller must expressly carry out the unloading.

Classification within Incoterms 2020

The Incoterms 2020 distinguish seven rules for all modes of transport (EXW, FCA, CPT, CIP, DAP, DPU, DDP) and four rules for sea and inland waterway transport (FAS, FOB, CFR, CIF). DPU is the only rule under which unloading is expressly assigned to the seller. The rule was introduced because the former DAT rule (Delivered at Terminal) only defined terminals, whereas in practice other places

such as factory gates, construction sites or warehouses were frequently agreed.

Allocation of costs and risks under DPU

The seller bears all transport costs and risks from the point of departure to the destination, including unloading. Duties, import clearance and taxes in the country of destination are borne by the buyer. Import responsibility and the associated risks lie with the buyer, while the seller handles export clearance. Compared with DAP, the seller takes on an additional performance level under DPU; compared with DDP, import clearance does not fall to the seller.

Methods and approach when agreeing DPU

DPU should be agreed precisely, with exact places and a sound transport plan, since the place and unloading are central contractual points.

Name the place of delivery specifically

The destination should be named as precisely as possible, for example by factory, hall, storage zone or plant location. An imprecise formulation can lead to interpretation problems in the event of a dispute. It is often recommended to fix the exact unloading point and opening hours in writing.

Coordinate transport and unloading modalities

Before agreeing on DPU, the seller should check whether they can actually carry out or commission the unloading at the destination. Missing unloading equipment at the destination or structural conditions (e.g. no ramp, cramped factory premises, unloading restrictions on construction sites) can lead to additional costs or delays. In practice, sellers and buyers often agree additional logistical details such as loading/unloading times, appointments and procedures.

Distinction from DAP and DDP

Under DAP (Delivered at Place), the seller's obligation ends with the goods made available unloaded; unloading is the buyer's responsibility. Under DPU, unloading is added. Under DDP (Delivered Duty Paid), the seller additionally handles import clearance, duties and taxes. For exporters, DDP is often risky, as they take on foreign tax and customs law; DPU is the lower-risk alternative here.

Key KPIs and checkpoints for DPU

DPU is primarily a delivery clause, but it can be monitored in procurement and logistics via derived KPIs.

Delivery performance at the destination

Classic logistics metrics such as delivery reliability or on-time delivery can be related to the DPU place. Since the seller is responsible until unloading, punctuality should be measured at the destination, not only from the goods handover at the buyer's factory.

Unloading costs and demurrage

Waiting times at the unloading point, demurrage and detention charges as well as additional lifting equipment or handling costs can significantly influence the DPU price. In practice, it is worth tracking unloading costs and delays separately and taking them into account in pricing.

Damage and complaint rate

Since risk passes only after unloading is complete, transport damage initially falls within the seller's responsibility. The rate of complaints and damage cases is therefore an important control point for procurement and supplier evaluation.

Risks and controls under DPU

DPU entails specific risks for sellers and buyers, particularly at the unloading interface and at the boundary between seller and buyer obligations.

Risks for the seller

The seller bears the risk until unloading is complete. At the destination, they often lack operational control, for example over local unloading equipment, factory rules, safety regulations or access restrictions. In practice, conflicts arise when the buyer causes waiting times or unloading is structurally impossible. Before agreeing on DPU, the seller should therefore examine the local conditions, similar to a supplier audit.

Risks for the buyer

The buyer must ensure that the agreed place has the necessary infrastructure and that they can take delivery of the goods. For imports, the buyer handles import clearance, duties and taxes – here, procedures, the legal situation and customs tariffs in the country of destination must be clarified. Unclear terms and conditions or poor coordination with order processing can lead to delays.

Controls and contractual details

Recommended measures include: written regulation of the unloading place, documentation of the unloading process (e.g. delivery note, photo, unloading confirmation), a clear agreement on when risk passes, and coordination with transport insurance cover. For import shipments, the buyer should prepare import clearance and coordinate with the seller's forwarder. In case of doubt, a legal review is recommended on a case-by-case basis.

Current developments around DPU

Since Incoterms 2020, DPU has been an established rule; current trends relate to digital process integration and sustainability.

Digital processing and automation

Modern procurement systems and supplier portals capture delivery clauses, deadlines and unloading notifications digitally. A higher degree of automation for invoicing and automated shipment tracking reduces manual coordination. Requirement management and catalogue management can also store delivery clauses in a standardised manner.

Sustainability and CO2e

With delivery clauses such as DPU, the CO2e emissions of the transport are increasingly also considered. Since the seller organises the transport, the scope for designing low-emission routes or modes of transport lies with them – an argument that is gaining importance in supplier evaluation.

DPU in just-in-time and supply chain concepts

In just-in-time and call-off delivery concepts, scheduling depends heavily on the unloading point. DPU requires close coordination between seller, forwarder and receiving plant, since delays in the unloading process have a direct impact on production planning. Forecast management and agreed time slots help to avoid disruptions.

Typical metrics

Metric	Typical value
Delivery reliability at the DPU place	> 95 % *In practice, often defined as an on-time measurement at the unloading location*
Complaint/damage rate	< 2 % *Transport damage lies in the seller's risk until unloading*
Share of unloading costs	typically 1–5 % of the transport value *Varies depending on the goods, lifting equipment requirements and site conditions*

Practical example

A mid-sized machinery manufacturer delivers a production line to a customer abroad within the EU. As the plant consists of several heavy-lift modules and assembly takes place at the customer's factory, the parties agree on DPU with the name of the hall specified as the unloading place. The seller organises transport, heavy-lift lifting equipment and an unloading team; the buyer handles import clearance and customs. Risk transfer is documented as soon as the last component has been unloaded and the delivery note has been countersigned by the receiving plant.

- Precise specification of the unloading place, hall and time window in the contract

- Advance check of local conditions: access, lifting equipment, ramps, safety regulations
- Documentation of unloading with a photo protocol and unloading confirmation
- Clear assignment of import clearance and customs costs to the buyer

Conclusion

DPU is the only Incoterms rule under which unloading expressly forms part of the seller's tasks. The seller therefore takes on more responsibility than under DAP, but fewer risks than under DDP. For procurement, DPU is relevant because cost, risk and performance transfer must be precisely defined and the destination should be specified carefully. Anyone using DPU should contractually nail down logistical boundary conditions, unloading equipment and responsibilities and support implementation with key figures. On a case-by-case basis, a review by procurement, logistics and, if applicable, the legal or customs department is worthwhile.

Frequently asked questions

? What does DPU mean under Incoterms?

DPU stands for Delivered at Place Unloaded. The seller delivers the goods to the agreed destination and also performs unloading there. Risk then passes to the buyer, who handles import clearance, duties and taxes.

? What is the difference between DPU and DAP?

Under DAP, the seller's delivery obligation ends when the goods are made available at the destination, still unloaded on the transport vehicle. Under DPU, unloading is part of the seller's obligation. DPU is therefore the more performance-intensive option and, since Incoterms 2020, has replaced the former DAT rule.

? Who pays the duties under DPU?

The buyer bears import clearance, import duties and taxes in the country of destination. The seller is responsible for export clearance as well as all transport and unloading costs up to the agreed place.

? When is DPU suitable for procurement?

DPU is suitable when the buyer wants to take delivery of the goods fully unloaded at the factory or project site but wants to control import clearance themselves. Typical use cases include plant deliveries, heavy-lift and project cargo, and deliveries to construction sites.

? What risks does the seller face under DPU?

The seller bears the risk until unloading is complete, but often has little control over local conditions, waiting times or safety regulations at the destination. Unloading obstacles, lack of infrastructure or delays can lead to additional costs. Before agreeing to DPU, the seller should examine the local conditions.

? Does DPU also apply to sea containers?

Yes, DPU is suitable for all modes of transport, including multimodal transport with a sea leg. For containers, delivery ends at the agreed inland destination, not necessarily at the port. For pure port scenarios, rules such as FAS or FOB may be considered as alternatives.

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