

NSL GUIDE

Shipping Container Types & Sizes

Choosing the right **shipping container size** keeps your freight cost per unit low and your cargo safe. The table below shows typical internal dimensions and capacity. Exact figures vary slightly by shipping line and container age.

Container dimensions and capacity

Container	Internal L × W × H (m)	Capacity (CBM)	Max payload (approx.)	Best for
20ft Standard (20GP)	5.90 × 2.35 × 2.39	33	~28,000 kg	Heavy cargo: rice, stone, steel, salt
40ft Standard (40GP)	12.03 × 2.35 × 2.39	67	~26,500 kg	General cargo, furniture
40ft High Cube (40HC)	12.03 × 2.35 × 2.69	76	~26,300 kg	Light, bulky cargo: garments, textiles
45ft High Cube	13.56 × 2.35 × 2.70	86	~27,700 kg	Very high-volume cargo (selected lanes)
20ft Reefer	5.44 × 2.29 × 2.27	28	~27,000 kg	Meat, seafood, pharma
40ft High Cube Reefer	11.58 × 2.29 × 2.50	67	~29,000 kg	Fruit, vegetables, frozen food
20ft / 40ft Open Top	5.89 / 12.03 × 2.35 × 2.35	32 / 66	~28,000 / 26,500 kg	Tall cargo loaded by crane
20ft / 40ft Flat Rack	5.62 / 12.06 × 2.24–2.40 × 2.23–1.95	—	~30,000 / 40,000 kg	Machinery, vehicles, out-of-gauge

How to choose the right container

- **Heavy and dense cargo** (rice, marble, salt): a 20ft is usually full by weight before volume. Check road weight limits in Pakistan and at destination.
- **Light but bulky cargo** (garments, towels, furniture): a 40ft high cube gives about 15% more space than a standard 40ft.
- **Under about 13–15 CBM**: **LCL consolidation** is often cheaper than a full container.
- **Temperature-sensitive goods**: use a **reefer container**.
- **Oversized machinery**: flat racks or open tops — see **project cargo**.

Loading tips

Spread weight evenly along the container floor, use dunnage and lashing to stop movement, and never exceed the payload shown on the container door. Since 2016, the gross weight of every export container must be verified (VGM) before loading.

Frequently asked questions

How many pallets fit in a 20ft container?

Typically 10 standard (1.2 × 1.0 m) pallets or 11 Euro pallets in a single layer in a 20ft container, and 20–21 or 23–24 in a 40ft.

What is VGM?

Verified Gross Mass — the certified total weight of a packed container, required by SOLAS rules before it can be loaded on a vessel.

Need help with a shipment?

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