



☰ Maintenance > Migration Guide

Maintenance

Migration Guide

This guide migrates a OpenClaw Gateway from one machine to another **without redoing onboarding**.

The migration is simple conceptually:

Copy the **state directory** (`$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR` , default: `~/.openclaw/`)
– this includes config, auth, sessions, and channel state.

Copy your **workspace** (`~/.openclaw/workspace/` by default) – this includes your agent files (memory, prompts, etc.).

But there are common footguns around **profiles**, **permissions**, and **partial copies**.

Before you start (what you are migrating)

1) Identify your state directory

Most installs use the default:

State dir: `~/.openclaw/`

But it may be different if you use:

`--profile <name>` (often becomes `~/.openclaw-<profile>/`)

`OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR=/some/path`

If you're not sure, run on the **old** machine:



Look for mentions of `OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR` / profile in the output. If you run multiple gateways, repeat for each profile.

2) Identify your workspace

Common defaults:

`~/.openclaw/workspace/` (recommended workspace)

a custom folder you created

Your workspace is where files like `MEMORY.md` , `USER.md` , and `memory/*.md` live.

3) Understand what you will preserve

If you copy **both** the state dir and workspace, you keep:

Gateway configuration (`openclaw.json`)

Auth profiles / API keys / OAuth tokens

Session history + agent state

Channel state (e.g. WhatsApp login/session)

Your workspace files (memory, skills notes, etc.)

If you copy **only** the workspace (e.g., via Git), you do **not** preserve:

sessions

credentials

channel logins

Those live under `$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR` .

Migration steps (recommended)

Step 0 — Make a backup (old machine)

On the **old** machine, stop the gateway first so files aren't changing mid-copy:

```
openclaw gateway stop
```

(Optional but recommended) archive the state dir and workspace:

```
# Adjust paths if you use a profile or custom locations
cd ~
tar -czf openclaw-state.tgz .openclaw

tar -czf openclaw-workspace.tgz .openclaw/workspace
```

If you have multiple profiles/state dirs (e.g. `~/.openclaw-main` , `~/.openclaw-work`), archive each.

Step 1 — Install OpenClaw on the new machine

On the **new** machine, install the CLI (and Node if needed):

See:

At this stage, it's OK if onboarding creates a fresh `~/.openclaw/` — you will overwrite it in the next step.

Step 2 — Copy the state dir + workspace to the new machine

Copy **both**:

```
$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR (default ~/.openclaw/ )
```

```
your workspace (default ~/.openclaw/workspace/ )
```

Common approaches:



```
scp the tarballs and extract
```

```
rsync -a over SSH
```

```
external drive
```

After copying, ensure:

```
Hidden directories were included (e.g. .openclaw/ )
```

```
File ownership is correct for the user running the gateway
```

Step 3 — Run Doctor (migrations + service repair)

On the **new** machine:

```
openclaw doctor
```

Doctor is the “safe boring” command. It repairs services, applies config migrations, and warns about mismatches.

Then:

```
openclaw gateway restart  
openclaw status
```

Common footguns (and how to avoid them)

Footgun: profile / state-dir mismatch

If you ran the old gateway with a profile (or `OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR`), and the new gateway uses a different one, you’ll see symptoms like:

```
config changes not taking effect
```

```
channels missing / logged out
```

empty session history



Fix: run the gateway/service using the **same** profile/state dir you migrated, then rerun:

```
openclaw doctor
```

Footgun: copying only `openclaw.json`

`openclaw.json` is not enough. Many providers store state under:

```
$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR/credentials/
```

```
$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR/agents/<agentId>/...
```

Always migrate the entire `$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR` folder.

Footgun: permissions / ownership

If you copied as root or changed users, the gateway may fail to read `credentials/sessions`.

Fix: ensure the state dir + workspace are owned by the user running the gateway.


Footgun: migrating between remote/local modes

If your UI (WebUI/TUI) points at a **remote** gateway, the remote host owns the session store + workspace.

Migrating your laptop won't move the remote gateway's state.

If you're in remote mode, migrate the **gateway host**.

Footgun: secrets in backups

 `$OPENCLAW_STATE_DIR` contains secrets (API keys, OAuth tokens, WhatsApp creds). Treat backups like production secrets:

store encrypted

avoid sharing over insecure channels

rotate keys if you suspect exposure

Verification checklist

On the new machine, confirm:

`openclaw status` shows the gateway running

Your channels are still connected (e.g. WhatsApp doesn't require re-pair)

The dashboard opens and shows existing sessions

Your workspace files (memory, configs) are present

Related

[Doctor](#)

[Gateway troubleshooting](#)

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