

Textile Transparency Report 2023

UFF Denmark

Collection and distribution of textiles





Project information

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1. About the report

The Humana People to People network are working for more transparency and traceability in the business sector for used textiles.

Traceability in the value chain of used textiles is a crucial aspect of promoting sustainability, resource efficiency, quality assurance, ethical practices, and consumer empowerment within the textile industry.

Textiles collected for reuse have received increasing public attention in recent years. It has been documented that the reuse of textiles provides environmental benefits by keeping the textiles in use for a longer time and reducing the consumption of new textiles. Also, positive socio-economic effects like profits for charitable purposes, job creation etc. On the other hand, negative claims indicate that export of used textiles to Africa, Asia and South America creates waste problems there and outperform local textile industry. The critics have to some extent succeeded in creating distrust in the second-hand clothing (SHC) sector, locally as well as globally. It affects political decisions and European legislation regarding international textile production and trade. To enable politicians to build legislations on facts, transparency and documentation of the SHC sector, its volumes and flows, environmental and socio-economic effects are crucial.

The purpose of this report is to investigate and document on a factual basis where the textiles from UFF Denmark end up, and what purpose they serve. In line with the Humana People to People Code of Conduct, all sorting centres used by UFF Denmark are obliged to be transparent about their activities and to report their sales of textiles for reuse, material recycling and waste, specified by customer and country.

2. UFF Denmark

The organisation UFF Denmark¹ works strictly by the Waste Hierarchy. The focus is on the top of the hierarchy, waste prevention and reuse. Consequently it is of high importance to preserve the collected clothing as well as possible, avoiding that humid or dirty items contaminate the dry and clean. And to the best ability ensure that the textiles gets new users.

UFF Denmark collects used clothes, shoes and textiles from recycling stations and different private and public sites in all Sjælland as well as central Jylland. In addition, UFF Denmark buys some used textiles from other Danish collection organisations.

¹ UFF-Humana mennesker til mennesker, Danmark



Apparel and textiles are collected in dedicated containers and picked up by drivers in vans. The drivers remove obvious waste from the collection at the collection point. Some of this waste can be left at the recycling stations, the rest is taken to the warehouse, separated from the good clothes to prevent contamination with dirt or moisture. At the warehouse, the textiles are weighed in and packed for export to sorting centres.

In the packing process, more waste is discovered and removed. Eventual non-textile waste is sorted into the other standard waste categories for recycling. The waste from collection and packing is handled by local waste management companies and is not included in the results in this report.

Following Denmark's Climate Plan for a green waste sector and circular economy, used textiles are in Denmark collected in 2 streams, one for reusable textiles and another for recyclable textile waste. The first stream has existed for decades, and UFF Denmark and other collectors have taken care of the collection. The municipalities have the responsibility for collection of the second stream with full implementation starting in July 2023. UFF Denmark has received and pre-sorted 'textile waste' collected by a few municipalities since 2022. The purpose of the pre-sorting is to detect and reject humid and polluted textiles at an early stage so only good textiles are passed on to professional fine-sorting.

Table 1 shows the amount of collected textiles that UFF Denmark sold to ten different sorting centres. Four of them received more than 100 tonnes of textiles from UFF Denmark and have been asked to fill out report-forms. Umana in Poland received only 20 tonnes. But since Umana have received more than 100 tonnes from another Humana collector, they have been asked to fill out the report-form, and at the same time also reported for UFF Denmark. These five reporting sorting centres have received 82 % of the amounts that UFF Denmark sold, and they have reported in detail. The remaining five sorting centres received small amounts, less than 100 tonnes each, and have not been asked to report. There are some minor differences between the amount that UFF Denmark reports sold versus the amount reported received from the sorting centres. This is explained by shipments in transit.



Table 1. Amount of textiles from UFF Denmark 2023, tonnes and percentages.

Sorting centre	Amount sold (report from UFF Denmark)	Amount received from UFF Denmark (report from sorting centre)	Total amount received at sorting centre	UFF Denmark share of total amount received at sorting centre
HPP Slovakia	676	737	7 825	9 %
HPP Bulgaria	605	605	13 294	5 %
JSC Resna Poland	536	536	1 187	45 %
HPP Lithuania	135	135	38 685	0,3 %
Umana Poland	20	20	1 478	1,3 %
Other (5)	450	not reporting		
Total sold	2 422			
Total sold to reporting sorting centres	1 972			
Total received at sorting centres		2 033		
Deviation sold – received (tonnes)		61		
Deviation sold – received (%)		2,5 %		
Reported from sorting centres as share of total sold		82 %		



3. Results

3.1. Utilisation of the collected textiles

A total of 63,7 % of what UFF Denmark collected in 2023 ended up as textiles delivered for reuse² (Figure 1). 23,9 % ended up as textiles delivered for material recycling, while 0,4 % ended up as textiles delivered for other waste treatment. 12,1 % out of what UFF Denmark collected are not counted as apparel or textiles and are delivered for waste treatment from the sorting centres, either as material recycling (0,5 %) or other types of waste handling (11,6 %).

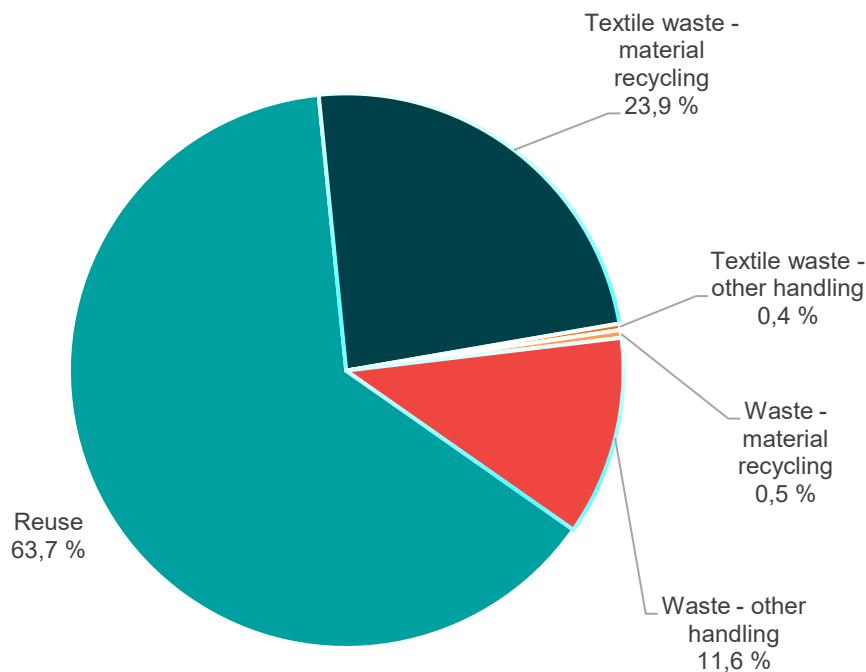


Figure 1. Distribution of purposes for textiles originally collected by UFF Denmark in 2023

² Calculation from all reporting sorting centres, assuming that quality from the specific collecting organisation is equal to the total for the sorting centres (see detail in chapter 4)

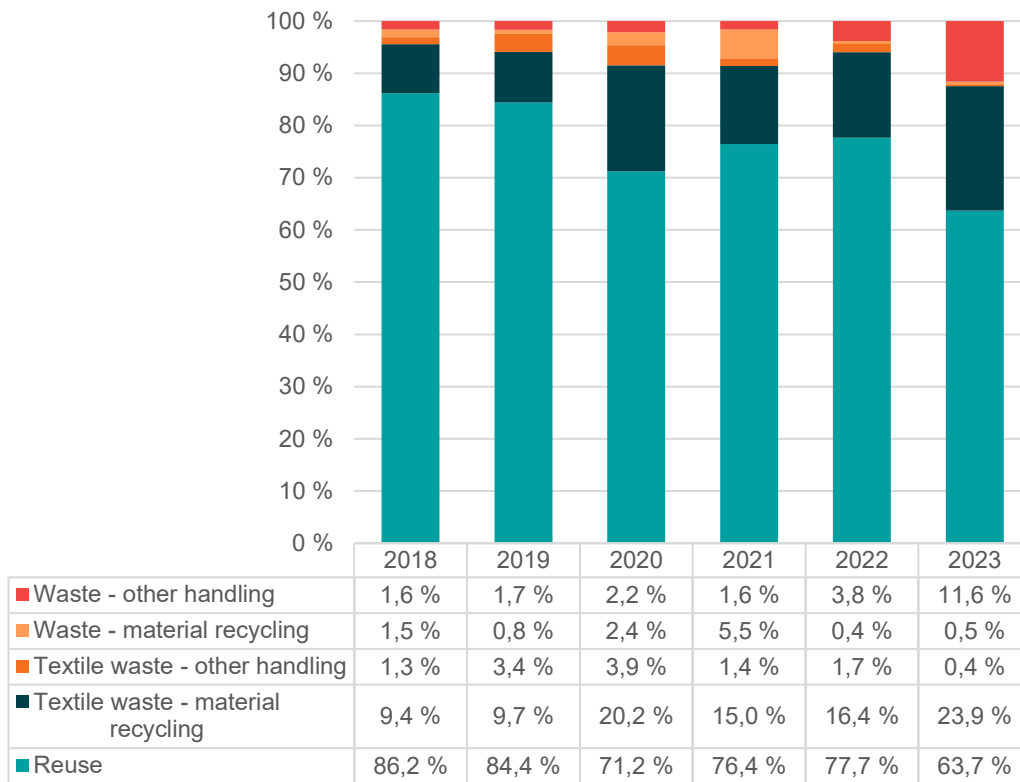


Figure 2 shows that the amounts of reuse has decreased, while the amounts of recycled textiles and non-textile waste has increased in 2023, compared to previous years. The reason for this is that particularly one sorting centre has reported very low on the amount of reuse and high on the amount of textile recycling. For the same reason the results show increased amounts of non-textile waste.

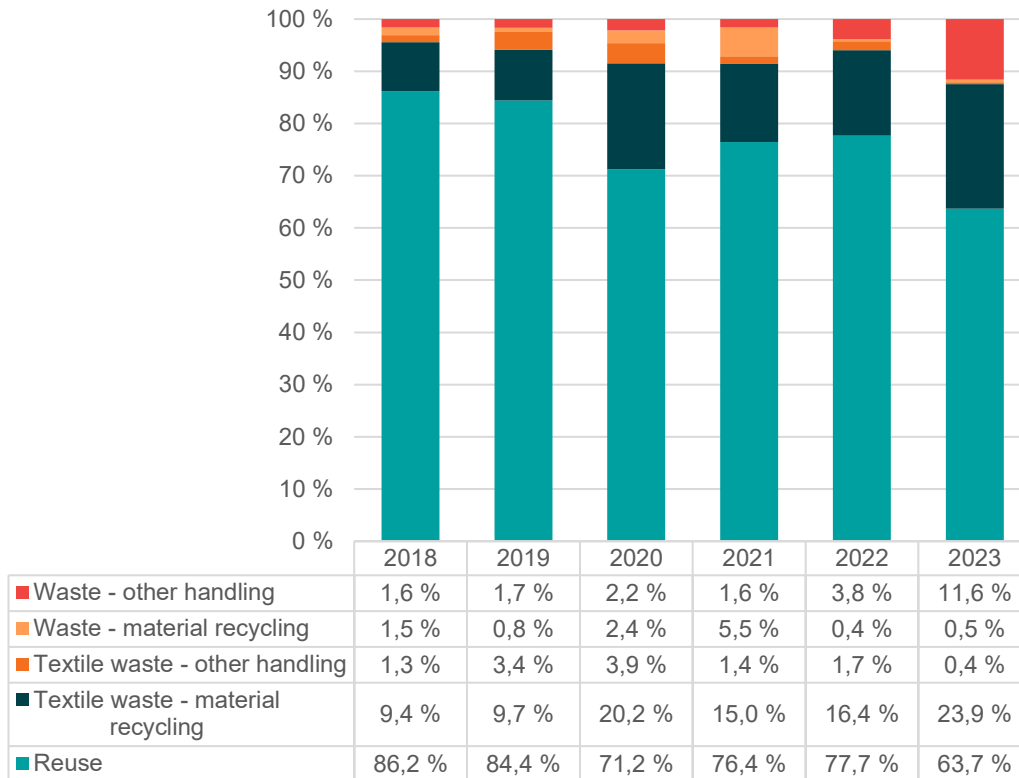


Figure 2: Utilisation of used textiles originally collected by UFF Denmark in the period 2018- 2023.

Changes from year to year can be a result of changes in sales to different sorting centres. The different sorting centres' shares of reuse and recycling depend primarily on the quality of textiles they receive, but also on the markets they supply. The sorting centres must always deliver the goods which the market demands. The SHC market is dynamic, demands will change over time and the sorting centres must comply.

In 2020, adjustments were done to the reporting method, which may have clarified the distinction between the term's 'reuse' and 'material recycling', thereby causing an apparent reduction in the share of 'reuse'. The difference between 2020 and previous years is also likely to be connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on the market for second hand textiles.

As textiles from UFF Denmark only make up a small share of the sorted textiles at all sorting centres, see Table 1, it is likely that textiles collected elsewhere are also affecting the share of textiles going to reuse and waste.



Description of the qualities

An important part of the second-hand business is to handle the collected textiles in the best possible way. Sorting the textiles into several specific categories is necessary to meet the customers' needs. Most sorting centres sort the textiles into more than 100 unique categories. In order to present what happens with the textiles collected by UFF Denmark requires only documentation of a few main categories which are referred to throughout this report.

- Reuse: textiles that are used again for the same purpose as originally intended
- Textile waste, material recycling: textiles processed into recycled textile fibres used for other products.
- Textile waste, other handling: incineration, with or without energy recovery and/or landfill.
- Waste, material recycling: non-textile waste, processed into secondary raw materials for other products.
- Waste, other handling: non-textile waste for incineration, with or without energy recovery and/or landfill.

3.2. Geographical distribution of sold textiles

The geographical distribution of sorted textiles and waste originally collected by UFF Denmark is displayed in Figure 4 and Figure 4.

The Asia region includes Turkey and United Arab Emirates. The Nordic region is shown separately, and consists of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

Figure 4 shows the regions and volumes of textiles UFF Denmark sold to between 2016-2023. In 2023 the share sold to Europe was the largest and has also been the previous years. From 2022 to 2023 the share sold to Europe increased by 14 percent points. The share sold to Africa decreased with 17 percent points while shares sold to Asia and the Nordics has been steady, compared to the year 2022.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the qualities that UFF Denmark exported in 2023. Sorters in Europe received 32,1 % reuse, Asia 9,1 %, Africa 20,3 % and the Nordics 2,3 %. Sorters in Asia received 12,9 % of textiles for material recycling, while European sorting companies got 10,9 %. Most of the non-textile waste was documented by European sorting centrals.



In line with the discussion in the previous chapter, the change from year to year might be more strongly linked to the selection of sorting centres, which have different sets of customers for sorted textiles.

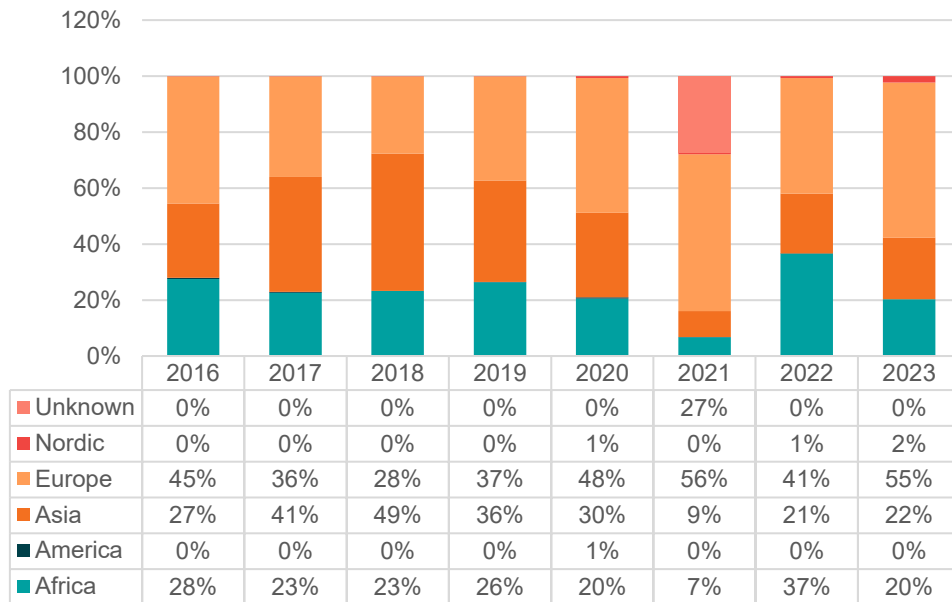


Figure 3: Recipient continents for used textiles originally collected by UFF Denmark, 2016-2023.

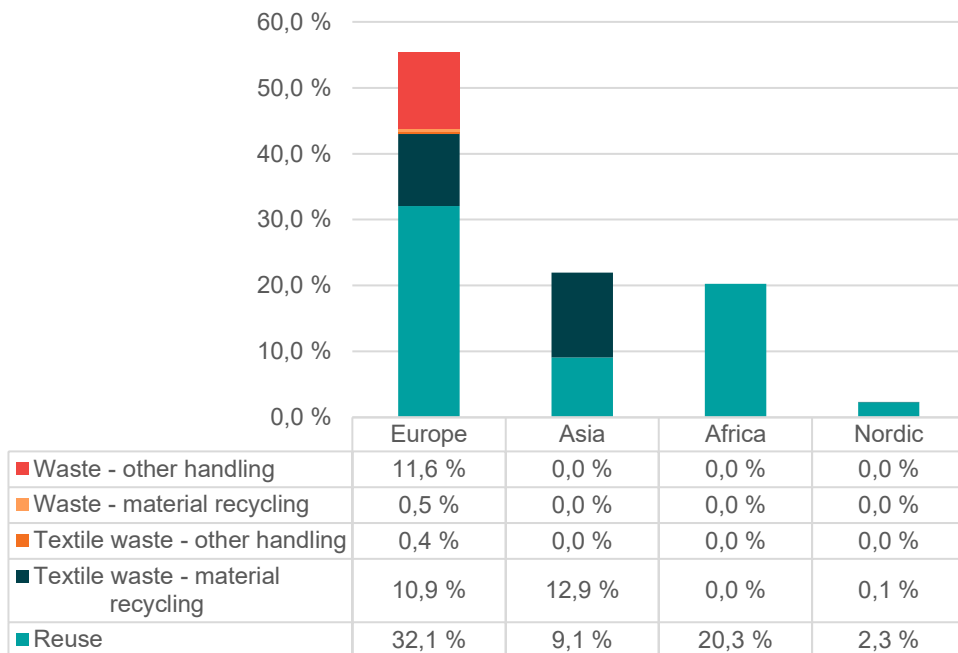


Figure 4: Continents and purpose of used textiles originally collected by UFF Denmark in 2023.



4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

This report is based on data collected from UFF Denmark and data from sorting centres receiving the collected textiles from these collection organisations.

Collection organisations

Data from the collection organisations was collected through a survey in the form of a spreadsheet. UFF Denmark was asked to provide quantitative information on the amounts of textiles they collected, sold, and sold to whom in 2023, as well as qualitative data on their collection system and how they register data on the textiles and waste they handle.

Sorting centres

The list of sorting centres to be contacted was established based on reports received from the collection organisations. Two forms were used: one for sorting centres that receive more than 1,000 tonnes from all participating Humana collection organisations, and one simplified form for sorting centres that receive between 100 and 1,000 tonnes from all participating Humana collection organisations.

The sorting centres were asked to provide data on all textiles that they have received and sorted at their location. This is required of them according to the Humana People to People Code of Conduct.

Comparison with previous results

Collected data was registered in the database which Mepex has compiled as part of the work with previous years' reports. In the registration process, the data was checked for inconsistency and quality, and where necessary the sorting centres were asked to clarify. All communication with the sorting centres has taken place in writing.

Audits

As part of the quality control of reported data, each year Mepex conducts audits of selected sorting centres to ensure that their routines and practices for registration, sorting quality and reporting are credible. This year, 'on site audits' was performed at UFF Humana Bodø Sorting centre in Norway and Umana in Poland.

4.2. Assumptions and calculations

Assumption on quality and averages

Most sorting centres do not have specific information of the utilisation of textiles collected by any specific collection organisation, as the textiles are mixed with textiles from other collection organisations in the sorting process.



A distribution of the utilisation of the textiles (reuse, recycling and waste management) is established for each sorting centre. We assume that for each sorting centre, the quality of the textiles from the Humana organisation is at least equal to the average quality of the total amounts of textiles received at the sorting centre. The overall usage distribution for each collection organisation is then calculated as a weighted average based on the amount of textiles sold to each sorting centre.

Calculations

The calculations are made based on reports from the sorting centres. Percentages are calculated in relation to the amount of textiles arriving at the sorting centres. This means that waste removed by the collector prior to export is not included in the calculation.

Textiles accounted for is calculated as the share of textiles sold from the collection organisation to sorting centres which have reported, in relation to the total amount of textiles sold by that collection organisation.

4.3. Sources of uncertainty

Shipments in transit

There are some examples of minor differences between the amounts of textiles reported as received by the sorting centres and the amounts reported as sent by the collection organisation. This difference is in most cases attributed to the transit of shipments, i.e., shipments sent late in the year and received at the sorting centres early in the next year. We have no reason to think that these differences influence the overall results, as the quality of the original is assumed to be quite stable.

Interpretation of the survey form

The sorting centres are asked to report on the purposes that the sorted textiles are used for, hereunder reuse of clothes, shoes, textiles and accessories. In 2023, the option “sold for further sorting” was added, to reduce the possibility for counting textiles more than once.

We are aware that the definitions of reuse and recycling given in the reporting form are interpreted in slightly different ways, which might affect the balance between reuse and material recycling.

Furthermore, the sorting centres use different labelling systems for their qualities, which means there is an interpretation done to match the survey form.

In some cases, typically for low price mixed qualities sold to Asia, the sorting centres are not sure whether the sold textiles are reused or being recycled. As a principle, textiles are accounted for as gone to material recycling when it is unclear whether the textiles have gone to reuse or recycling.