

Textile Transparency Report 2023

UFF Norway

Collection and distribution of textiles 2023





Project information

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Author(s)	Olav Skogedal Kristiane Rabben	Number of pages	12
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Contact person	Kåre Dahne Kaj Phil Matus Kotulak		
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Project manager	Olav Skogedal	Controlled by	Kristiane Rabben



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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 Norway end up, and what purpose they serve. In line with the Humana People to People Code of Conduct, all sorting centres used by UFF Norway 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 Norway

UFF Norway works strictly by the Waste Hierarchy. The focus is on the top of the hierarchy, waste prevention and reuse, and 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. The organisation UFF Norway¹ collects used clothing from collection points and recycling stations all over Norway. The drivers screen the separately collected textiles at the collection points and remove obvious waste. Another corresponding pre-sorting of the collected textiles is carried out at the local warehouses where the clothes are packed for export. Both textile waste and non-textile waste that is rejected in this process is delivered to local waste management.

¹ Foreningen UFF-Butikkene i Norge (UFF Norway)



UFF Norge has 14 smaller warehouses across Norway where the collected textiles are repackaged in sacks. Shipping containers are used for transporting the textiles to all sorting centres that collaborate with UFF Norway. Some textiles are weighed when they are received at the sorting centre, while the weight of textiles exported in containers is calculated based on the container's gross mass.

Collected textiles in Nordland, Troms and Finnmark are sorted locally at UFF's own sorting center in Bodø, called Arctex (established in 2023). At this sorting centre, they have professional sorters who remove waste and divide the textiles into at least five categories. Compared to other sorting centers in Europe, this is a simplified sorting with the aim of removing waste and increasing value. The sorting itself consists of a conveyor belt with four associated sorting places.

UFF has 12 second-hand shops in Norway, of which a few operate as self-service shops. The stores are supplied with high-quality reusable clothing, sorted from UFF Norway's original clothing at the sorting centers abroad and returned to UFF Norway. To a very limited extent, the shops are also supplied with clothes from the Arctex sorting centre.

Table 1 shows the amount of collected textiles that UFF Norway sold to thirteen different sorting centres. Eight of them received more than, or around, 100 tonnes of textiles, and have been asked to fill out report-forms. These eight sorting centres have received 97% of the amounts that UFF Norway sold, and they have reported in detail. The remaining five sorting centres received small amounts and have not been asked to report. There are some minor differences between the amount that UFF Norway 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 Norway 2023, tonnes and percentages.

Sorting centre	Amount sold (report from UFF Norway collection)	Amount received from UFF Norway (report from sorting centre)	Total amount received at sorting centre	UFF Norway's, share of total amount received at sorting centre
Bultex, Bulgaria	2 969	2 973	3 617	82 %
Textile House, Slovakia	1 154	1 156	26 238	4 %
TEXX Team, Bulgaria	922	1 020	7 356	14 %
HPP, Lithuania	750	768	38 685	2 %
HPP, Bulgaria	612	681	13 294	5,1 %
HPP, Slovakia	221	240	7 825	3 %
JSC Resna, Poland	152	138	1 187	12 %
UFF Norway Arctex, Bodø	93	83	83	100 %
Other (5)	216	Not asked to report		
Total sold	7 089			
Total sold to sorting centres that has reported	6 872			
Total received at sorting centres		7 460		
Deviation sold – received (t)		587		
Deviation sold – received (%)		8,3 %		
Reported from sorting centres as share of total sold		97 %		



3. Results

3.1. Utilisation of the collected textiles

A total of 82,2 % of what UFF Norway collected in 2023 ended up as textiles delivered for reuse² (Figure 1). 11,3 % ended up as textiles delivered for material recycling, while 1,2 % ended up as textiles delivered for other waste treatment. 5,3% out of what UFF Norway collected are not counted as apparel or textiles and are delivered for waste treatment from the sorting centres, either as material recycling (1,1 %) or other types of waste handling (4,2 %).

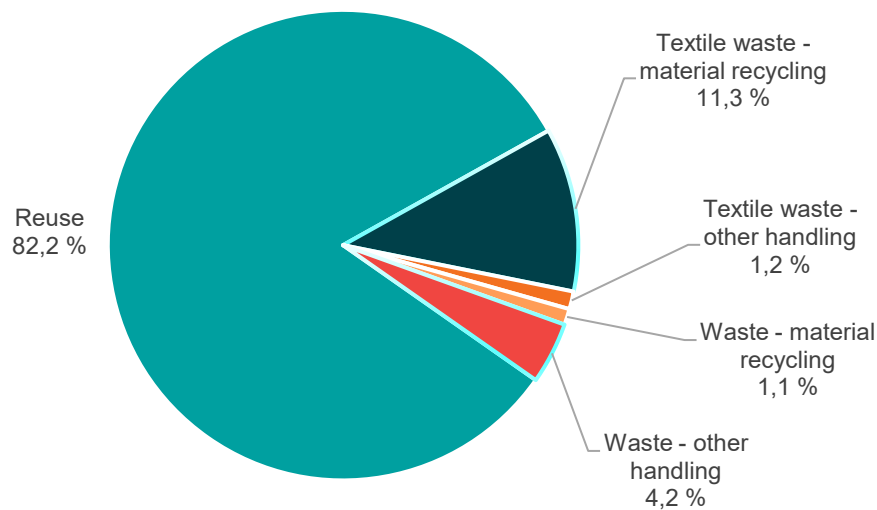


Figure 1. Distribution of purposes for textiles originally collected by UFF Norway in 2023

Compared to previous years (figure 2) the reuse rate for 2023 is higher than in 2020 – 2022. The material recycling is slightly lower in 2023, compared to results from the four previous years. The waste rate is more or less the same as previously.

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)

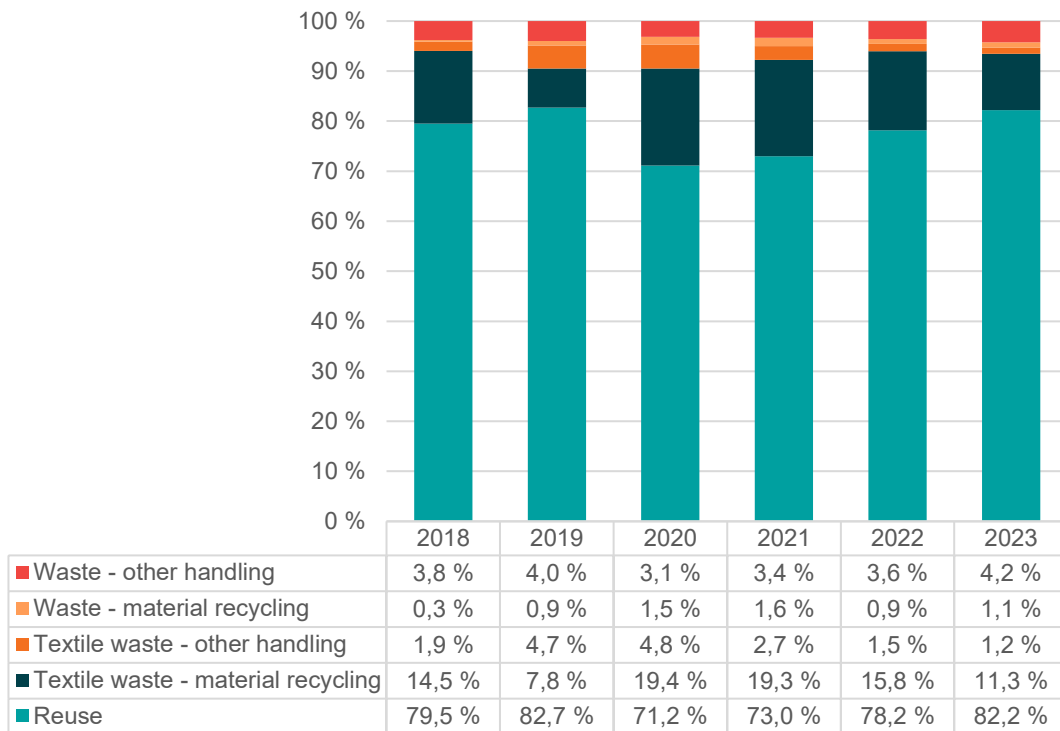


Figure 2: Utilisation of used textiles originally collected by UFF Norway in the period 2018- 2023.

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 Norway only make up a small share of the sorted textiles at all sorting centres except Bultex, it is likely that textiles collected elsewhere are also affecting the share of textiles going to reuse.



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 Norway 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 Norway 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.

Comparing the year 2023 to 2022, results show a larger share of textiles sold to Europe, and a small reduction in sales to Africa and Asia.

The textiles sold to Africa are entirely for the purpose of reuse. In Asia, textiles from UFF Norway are used both for reuse and for material recycling.

Figure 4 shows that all waste that occurs due to sorting is treated locally in Europe.

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.

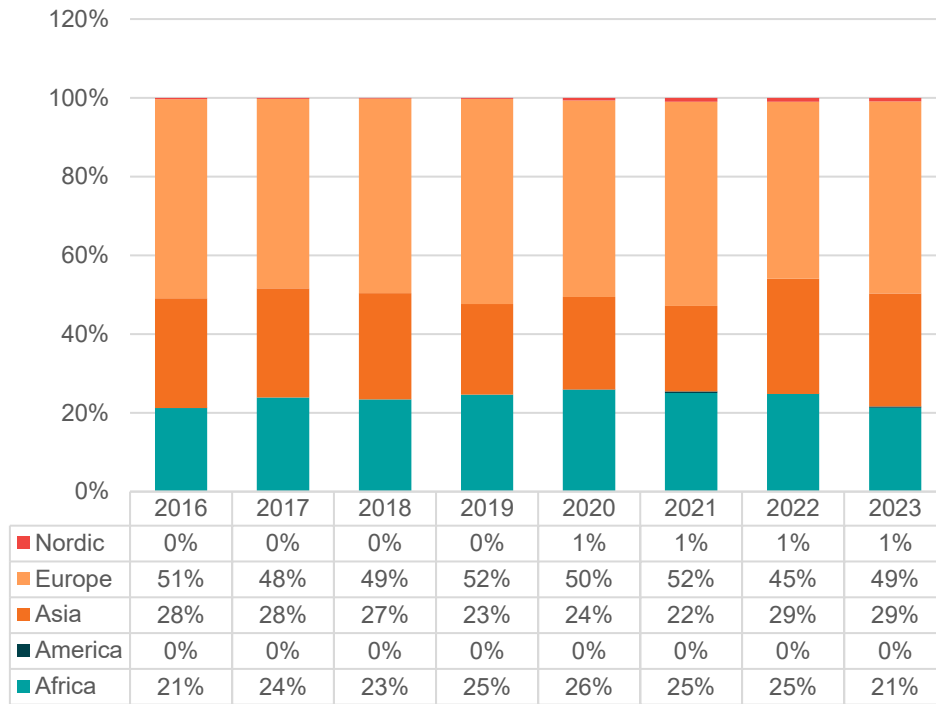


Figure 3: Recipient continents for used textiles originally collected by UFF Norway, 2016-2023.

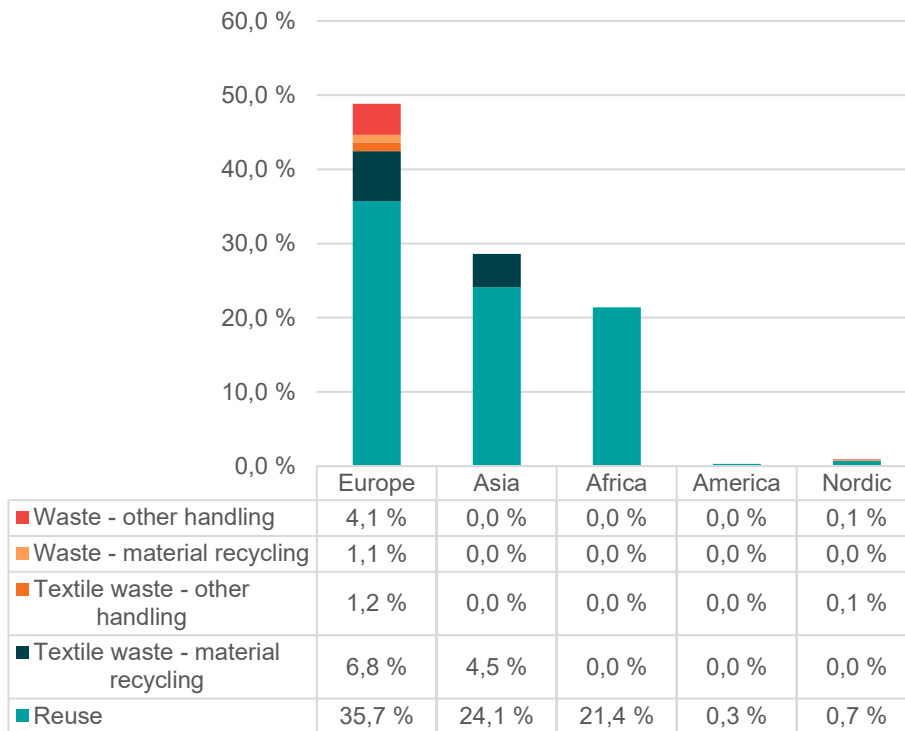


Figure 4: Continents and purpose of used textiles originally collected by UFF Norway in 2023.



4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

This report is based on data collected from UFF Norway 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 Norway 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 centers 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 center, 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.