



Ann-Kristin Reinkenhoff, Thomas Ahlmann

# SECOND HAND – SECOND THOUGHTS?

On Structures, Processes and Players  
in the Global Trade in Used Clothes

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# Foreword

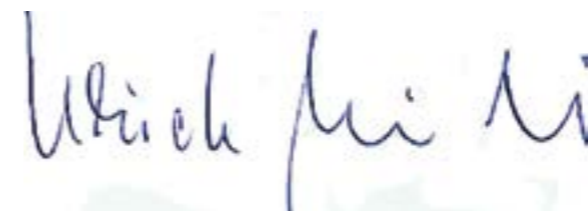
## Dachverband FairWertung e.V.

It is with great pleasure that we present the current report on the question of exporting used clothes to third countries. Ever since it was founded, our association, a merger of charitable used clothes collectors in Germany, has been committed to standards and transparency in the market. Responsibility and fairness continue to form the fundamental values of our ever-growing network. Because this is how we see ourselves, we believe it is our duty to help shape the global wealth creation chain above and beyond our own actions as collectors.

For this reason, FairWertung has been critically observing the world trade in used clothes for more than 20 years. As early as 2005/2006, in cooperation with Brot für die Welt, we submitted the much respected and fundamental study "Dialogue Programme Africa" to the then Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst [Protestant Church Development Service]. The focus was on the socio-economic consequences of the second-hand trade with countries in the Global South.

The recent reports of used clothes washing up on African shores have revived the controversies surrounding the global trade in used clothes. Recent pictures once again question current practices and hold us to account. With this report, "Second Hand – Second Thoughts? On Structures, Processes and Players in the Global Trade in Used Clothes", we therefore now want to take a closer look at the ecological consequences of the trade in used clothes. For this project, we commissioned Ann-Kristin Reinkenhoff to conduct research in this fascinating subject.

With this critical consideration of the existing systems, FairWertung is now once again making a fundamental contribution to the debate. We are opening the discussion to the sector and all interested players.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ulrich Müller". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name of the CEO.

Ulrich Müller, CEO FairWertung e.V.



# Acknowledgement

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# Summary

The ecological impacts of the global second-hand trade were examined in this report. It is based on field studies, the evaluation of available data and interviews with experts in western Europe and Ghana. The west African country acts as an example for the importing countries on the Global South.

The global second-hand trade extends the useful life of textiles that would otherwise be thrown away. However, when exported the place where the end of the useful life is reached moves to the importing country in question. In Ghana, this usually means landfill. Accordingly, the pictures from various reports of textile waste on landfills in Accra, in the Korle Lagoon and on beaches were confirmed. Whereas wastes in the Global North apparently 'disappear' in waste incineration plants, wastes in Ghana remain visible. Environmentally sound and safe disposal is not prioritised in Ghanaian everyday life, which is partly due to a lack of public disposal structures and low environmental awareness. There is also a lack of adequate handling capacity. This results in disposal on landfills, but also on beaches, in running waters or the burning of waste in the open air.

However, on the basis of the available figures, excessive import of second-hand textiles cannot be proved. Given an assumed imported quantity of 152,600 t second-hand per year, the Ghanaian per capita import (<4.7 kg) is a third of the average European consumption (15 kg) per year.

The waste quantity of 40% in imports often cited in reports was not verified. The proportions in the bales studied from European sorting were much lower. The unsaleable parts in the European bales were mainly due to mis-sorting in European sorting and varying understandings of sorting categories. Furthermore, a deliberate

false declaration of textile waste as second-hand was not observed.

In principle, we can see functional trade in the informal sector, which ensures that the population is supplied with affordable clothes. At the same time, it also forms an important employment sector.

To reduce the extent of non-marketable items even further, there is a need for mandatory full sorting in Europe and measures to minimise mis-sorting. Moreover, potential standardisation of the sorting categories should be looked into. Lists of goods from importing countries with items that are saleable in principle could help to sever markets better. Furthermore, projects on waste prevention and formation with and in partner countries of the Global South should be developed and a technology transfer of ecologically practical handling and recycling methods should be facilitated.

Waste textiles are a global problem, which is why a global strategy is needed to develop a sustainable and circular sector in which products should be designed in such a way that they last longer, can be reused and repaired more easily and are recyclable. The European Union has a particular responsibility here.

**Photo 1:** Private home in Mognori, Savannah Region, Ghana (2022, A. Reinkenhoff private)

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# FIRST THOUGHTS ABOUT SECOND HAND



# Introduction

*Saulala, Mitumba, kafa ulaya, Okirika, sola, mupedzanhamo orpepe<sup>1</sup> and thrift:* there are many names in the world for second-hand<sup>2</sup> clothes. In Ghana they are usually known as *Oburoni Wawu, dead white men's clothes*.

Second-hand clothing is omnipresent in the west African country. Almost everyone seems to be wearing used clothes and the range in the “bend down boutique”<sup>3</sup> at the edge of the road, from the hawkers in the stop-and-go traffic or at markets is correspondingly wide. Weekly deliveries with new ‘old’ clothes reach Ghana from all over the world every week; and the coastal nation is currently considered to be one of the biggest markets for second-hand textiles worldwide<sup>4</sup>.

However, the colourful second-hand markets do not shape the current perception of global trade. The depressing pictures of waste textiles on Ghanaian beaches, landfills in Kenya (Dandora) and the Atacama Desert in Chile are reviving the discussion about the global trade in used clothes<sup>5</sup>. The extent and efficiency of the trade is questioned from an ecological perspective. Reports use narratives of the “swamping”<sup>6</sup> and “flood”<sup>7</sup> of used clothes in the importing countries. Accusations of environmental pollution, low quality, unsorted imports, illegal waste exports or cheating the local population reminiscent of dependent colonial conditions can be heard.<sup>8</sup>

Against the backdrop of the EU textile strategy, the subject is once again becoming more topical and is attracting more interest from the public. The package of measures presented by the European Commission in 2022 provides for implementation of a sustainable textile market by 2030. In this political context, the question about the need for political regulation of the European used clothes market also arises. Whether vintage favourite or fast-fashion mistake: sooner or later all textiles reach the end of their useful life and there is no scalable means of returning fabrics.

The aim of this report is to create an objective basis for discussion in order to be able to derive responsibilities and recommendations for action. To do this, a critical debate with the trading structures in western Europe and Ghana was chosen as a framework for the research. Here, the particular focus lies on possible ecological impacts in importing countries, such as Ghana.



**Photo 2:** Shop for second-hand shoes in the outer area of Kantamanto Market in Accra, Ghana (2022)



# Procedure

»The second-hand clothing trade poses several research problems [...] [I]t is hard to come by basic figures for total sales, number of companies, and volume and value of clothing collected, sold in nonprofit thrift stores, disposed of commercially and exported.«<sup>9</sup>«

It is obstacles such as these that complicate research within the “unusual industry”<sup>10</sup>. A lack of uniform international definitions of ‘used clothes’, a great product diversity and a lack of comparability of quantitative and qualitative data make things even more difficult.

The globally active and networked industry and its structures, processes and various players often appear opaque to outsiders. To nevertheless portray and research the functioning and impacts of the used clothing and second-hand trade as an example, a multi-perspective approach was consciously chosen. The basic focus was on a qualitative ethnographic procedure in

the field, supplemented by research in literature. The research field focused on the one hand on western European collection, sorting and recycling.

On the other hand, the focus was on the Ghanaian second-hand trade in western European imports<sup>11</sup>, especially in the capital Accra. Therefore, expert interviews were conducted with market players in Germany, the Netherlands and in Accra and Kumasi (Ghana). In addition to interviews and conversations, the findings were based on participants and systematic observations in the field. Furthermore, a scientific advisory council reflected on the findings.

## TEXTILES AND USED CLOTHES

The limitation of the term used clothes is based on the collecting practice in the sector. The term textiles brings together all textile materials (including fur and leather items) from the clothing and footwear category as well as house textiles. It also includes accessories, bedding, bags and soft toys. Carpets, mattresses, technical textiles or upholstery fabrics do not come under the textiles term for the purposes of this report. According to this, all of the above-mentioned textiles become used clothes through being discarded.

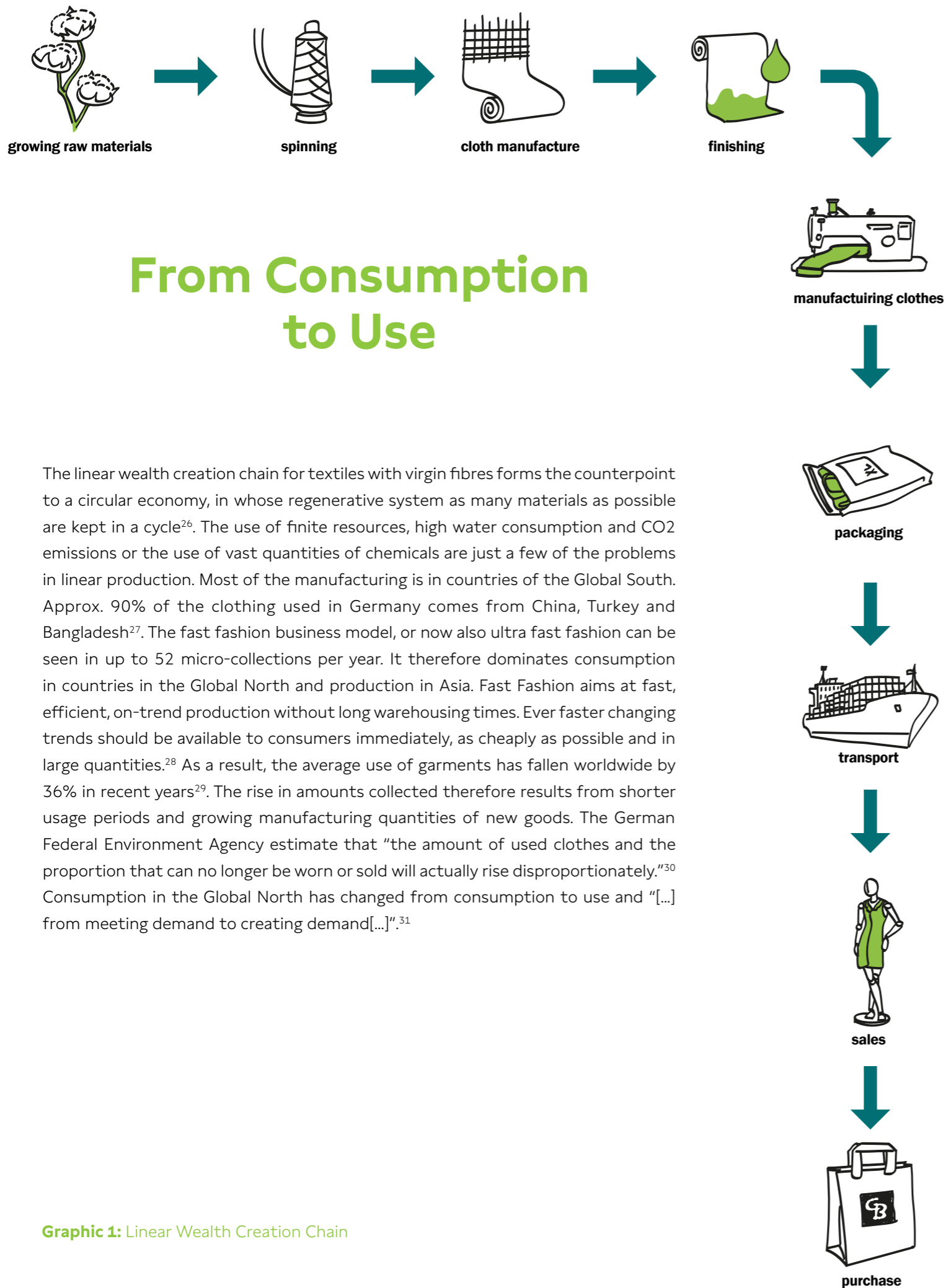
## THE USED CLOTHES MARKET IN GERMANY

The manufacture of new goods in the textiles and clothing industry doubled between 2000 and 2015<sup>12</sup>. The estimated annual textile consumption per head in Europe is 15 kg on average<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, 6.6 million tonnes of textiles were consumed in Europe in 2020<sup>14</sup>. Clothing is thus the highest revenue consumer goods segment in non-food trade<sup>15</sup>.

At the end of the linear textiles chain in Germany, around 1 million tonnes of used clothes are collected every year<sup>16</sup>. According to estimates, there are therefore around 5.8 million tonnes in the EU as a whole<sup>17</sup> that are disposed of by private households every year. That corresponds to a quantity of 11 kg discarded by one European per year<sup>18</sup>. With a rate of around 70%, Germany has the highest collection rate and is well above the European and global average<sup>19</sup>. Other European countries line up well behind, such as France with 36% or Italy with 11%<sup>20</sup>. However, after 2025 this rate will rise when the fundamental obligation to collect used clothes separately enters into force. The vast majority of the quantities collected by the collectors is sold on to commercial firms.

According to estimates, currently well under 10% are passed on locally by collectors as second-hand<sup>21</sup>.

On average, the amount collected comprises around 75% clothing of all kinds, added to 6% household textiles, 11% footwear and 8% non-textile waste.<sup>22</sup> 55% of the collected textiles (without shoes) are suitable for reuse and are traded globally as second-hand clothes.<sup>23</sup> All other items, which are no longer suitable for reuse, undergo recovery through recycling where possible. However, worldwide, only <1% are sent to fibre-to-fibre recycling.<sup>24</sup> Both the reuse and the recycling mainly take place outside Germany and the European Union. Germany occupies fourth place in worldwide export of used clothes.<sup>25</sup>



## From Consumption to Use

The linear wealth creation chain for textiles with virgin fibres forms the counterpoint to a circular economy, in whose regenerative system as many materials as possible are kept in a cycle<sup>26</sup>. The use of finite resources, high water consumption and CO2 emissions or the use of vast quantities of chemicals are just a few of the problems in linear production. Most of the manufacturing is in countries of the Global South. Approx. 90% of the clothing used in Germany comes from China, Turkey and Bangladesh<sup>27</sup>. The fast fashion business model, or now also ultra fast fashion can be seen in up to 52 micro-collections per year. It therefore dominates consumption in countries in the Global North and production in Asia. Fast Fashion aims at fast, efficient, on-trend production without long warehousing times. Ever faster changing trends should be available to consumers immediately, as cheaply as possible and in large quantities.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the average use of garments has fallen worldwide by 36% in recent years<sup>29</sup>. The rise in amounts collected therefore results from shorter usage periods and growing manufacturing quantities of new goods. The German Federal Environment Agency estimate that “the amount of used clothes and the proportion that can no longer be worn or sold will actually rise disproportionately.”<sup>30</sup> Consumption in the Global North has changed from consumption to use and “[...] from meeting demand to creating demand[...]”.<sup>31</sup>

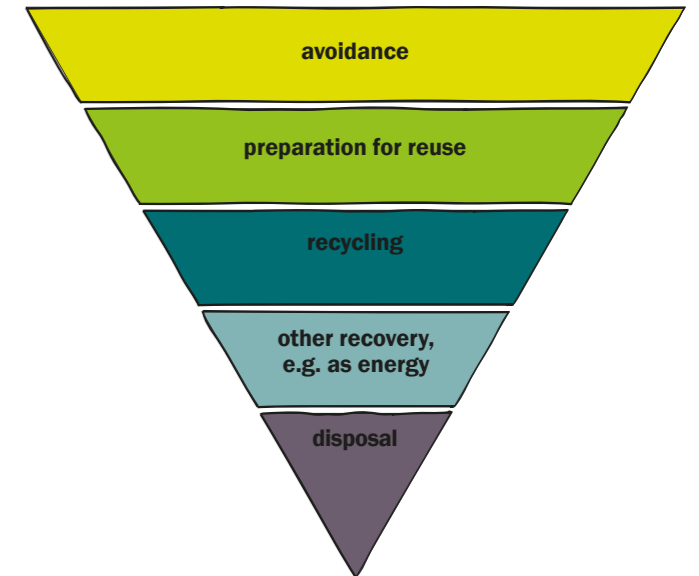
Graphic 1: Linear Wealth Creation Chain

## Legal Framework Conditions

The German Circular Economy Act (Kreislaufwirtschaftsgesetz - KrWG) is the central piece of federal legislation to regulate waste streams and therefore also used clothes. “Waste [...] shall mean all substances or objects which the holder discards, or intends or is required to discard,”<sup>32</sup> according to Article 3 of the KrWG. In Article 3 5a para. 1, textiles are specifically named as municipal waste. This means that textiles discarded by private households come under the waste regime. The KrWG does not include a more precise definition of which textile items this legislation covers. The treatment of the waste stream is fundamentally based on the individual stages of the waste hierarchy (see diagram). What is of particular relevance in the context of this report is the end of waste status according to Article 5 para. 1 KrWG. According to this, the waste status of old clothes, for example, ends when:

1. it has undergone a recycling or other recovery process, and its type and nature is such that it is commonly used for specific purposes,
2. a market or demand exists for it,
3. it fulfils all technical requirements for its respective purpose, as well as all legal provisions and applicable standards for products, and
4. its use does not lead to overall detrimental environmental or human health impacts.<sup>33</sup>

The end of waste status can be achieved by preparing for reuse. In the case of used clothes, this is sorting. This means that the decision on the end of waste status is taken when the used clothes are being sorted.



Graphic 2: Waste hierarchy

### CHARITY USED CLOTHES COLLECTIONS

For many people, donating used clothes is much rather passing on textiles that they can no longer use and less pure waste disposal. The majority of Germans also associate donating the textiles that they no longer need with a wish to support charitable objectives and social value added. According to the EU Textiles Strategy, charitable organisations involved in reuse have the “potential to create local, green and inclusive companies and jobs in the EU”.<sup>34</sup>



# Collection and Waste Collection

More consumption of new goods – more collections, this is an ‘age-old truth’ in the used clothes sector.<sup>35</sup> At this point we can see a basic feature of the used clothes market: the collectors and sorting companies do not have any influence on the range and the qualitative composition of the (collected) goods. Collections therefore vary in terms of items and quality. However, the proportion of reusable items is usually the largest part of what has been collected. The most common form of collection is collection by means of container, a bring system. According to industry estimates, there are well over 100,000 containers in situ in Germany. The anonymous, familiar, nationwide collection that can be accessed at any time accounts for around 96%<sup>36</sup> of used clothes collections. Street collections, collections in bricks-and-mortar shops (indoor collection) and personal donation in charitable institutions account for the remaining collections. In addition, some companies and organisations have also been offering donation by parcel (online collection) for several years now.<sup>37</sup>

Clothes donated to second-hand shops or the clothes sections of charitable organisations are usually inspected on site. The surplus or textiles that cannot be sold to the institution’s target group are sold to sorting plants. The aim of all collections is to collect as many saleable and functional textiles as possible to protect materials. In Germany, they are collected by three groups of players: charities, local authority waste disposal companies and commercial firms. Unlike other substance streams, such as glass or paper and cardboard,<sup>38</sup> the collection of used clothes is currently free of charge for the public and those who place them on the market. The costs of collection and sorting are covered by selling on those proportions of the donations that are suitable as second-hand clothing. Due to a lack of capacities in Germany, recyclers export large quantities of originals<sup>39</sup> abroad. For example, French and German used clothes are mainly sorted in the Netherlands or Poland (see diagram).

According to market reports, in recent years there have been increasing quantities or cross-border shipments of unsorted or partially sorted used clothes to countries outside Europe.<sup>40</sup> As a result, textiles that are no longer saleable and functional leave the EU and are removed from European waste law regulations and the implied controls.

**“We have to find a solution for everything we find there”<sup>41</sup>**

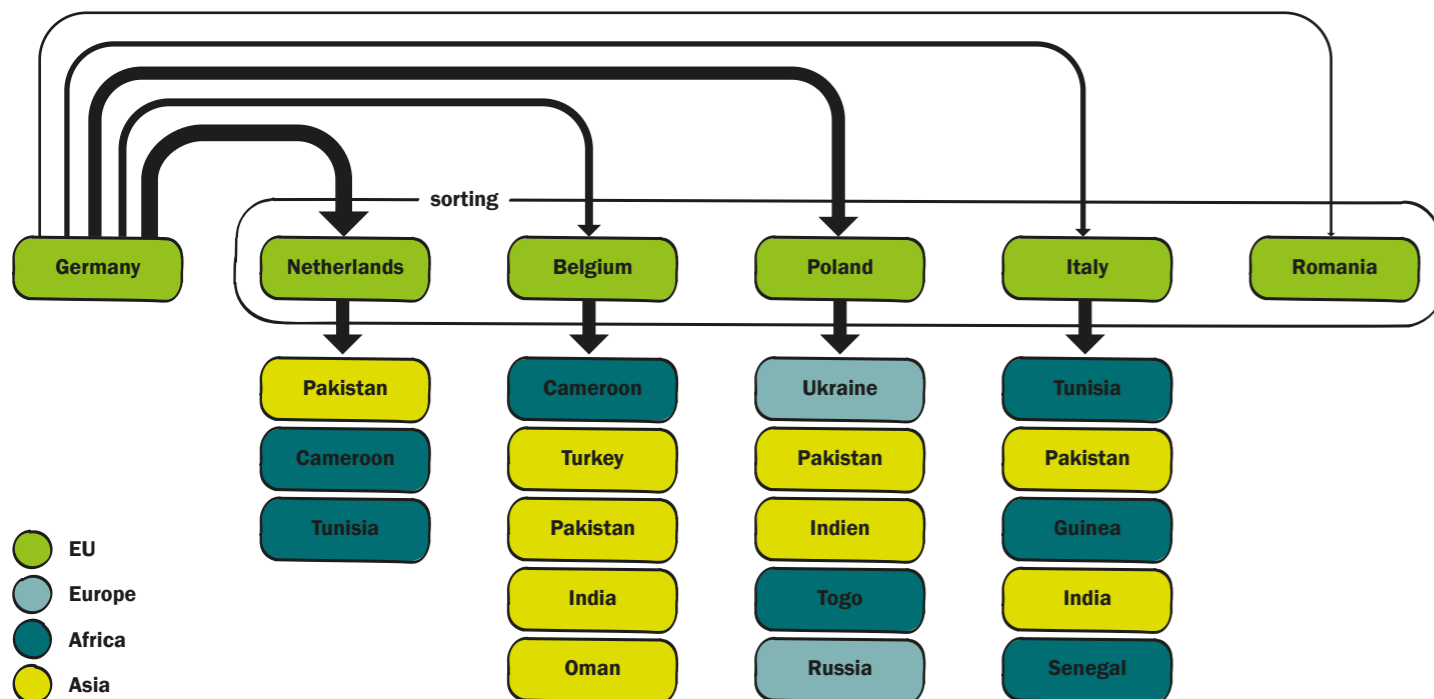
Of the total amount collected, the proportion of clothing and household textiles is 81%, shoes account for another 11% and the remaining 8% are untraceable materials.<sup>42</sup> Of the 81% textiles, around 55% are sold as second-hand items after sorting.<sup>43</sup> The remaining 26% are sent for recycling. Of these, 10% are cut to make cleaning cloths. The other 16% are shredded using mechanical recycling and used as fleece for insulation material, for example. They are sent for energy recovery, i.e., burnt, and are used to generate energy. They are not disposed of in western European countries anymore since no landfilling of waste is planned.<sup>44</sup>

Sorting the used clothes waste stream is an essential prerequisite for ensuring preparation for recovery in line with the waste hierarchy. The sorting process aims to separate as many usable, saleable and functional used

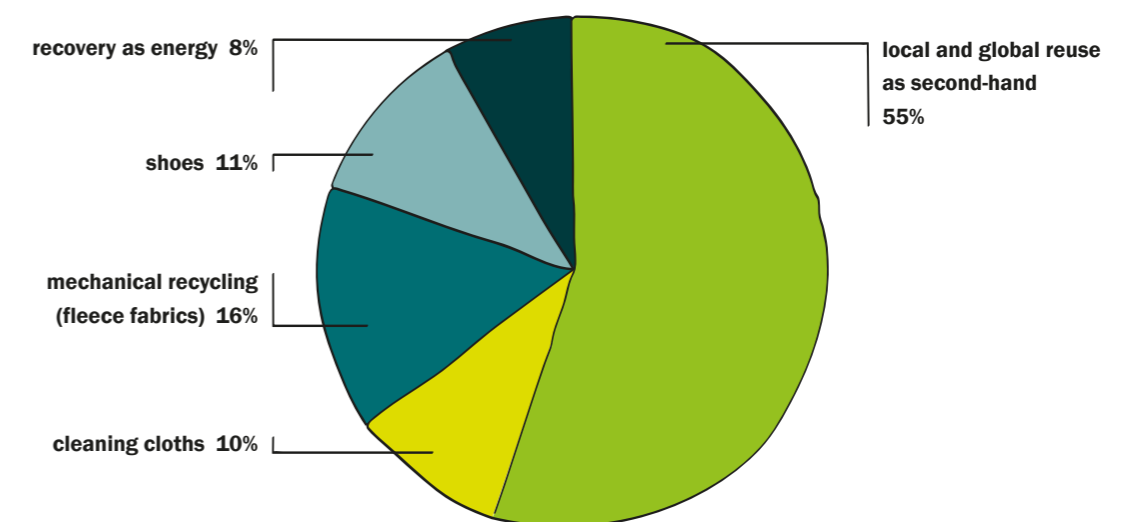


**Photo 3:** Fine-sorting at a sorting facility in the Netherlands (2022)

clothes that can be marketed as second-hand items. In principle, three sorting methods on the market can be identified: negative sorting, partial sorting and full sorting. Negative sorting means only a rough and superficial perusal of the collected used clothes, where obviously foreign bodies and impurities are removed.<sup>45</sup> Partial sorting comprises a “manual removal of valuable, wearable and saleable products”.<sup>46</sup> The remaining amounts are compressed and sold on. By contrast, full sorting means a comprehensive and, where possible, holistic sorting of all donated used clothes by hand in several sorting stages. In the following, the full sorting process will be examined more closely.



**Graphic 3:** Export flows of German used clothes



**Graphic 4:** Average composition of registered old textiles

The numbers of staff that this requires makes full sorting a cost-intensive step, that negative and partial sorting partially avoid. With statutory minimum wages, as well as social and environmental standards, western European companies have considerable problems competing with eastern European, north African or Arabian sorting plants. Added to this is the increasing shortage of staff.<sup>47</sup>

**"Giving all clothing a new life. That's the main target."<sup>48</sup>**

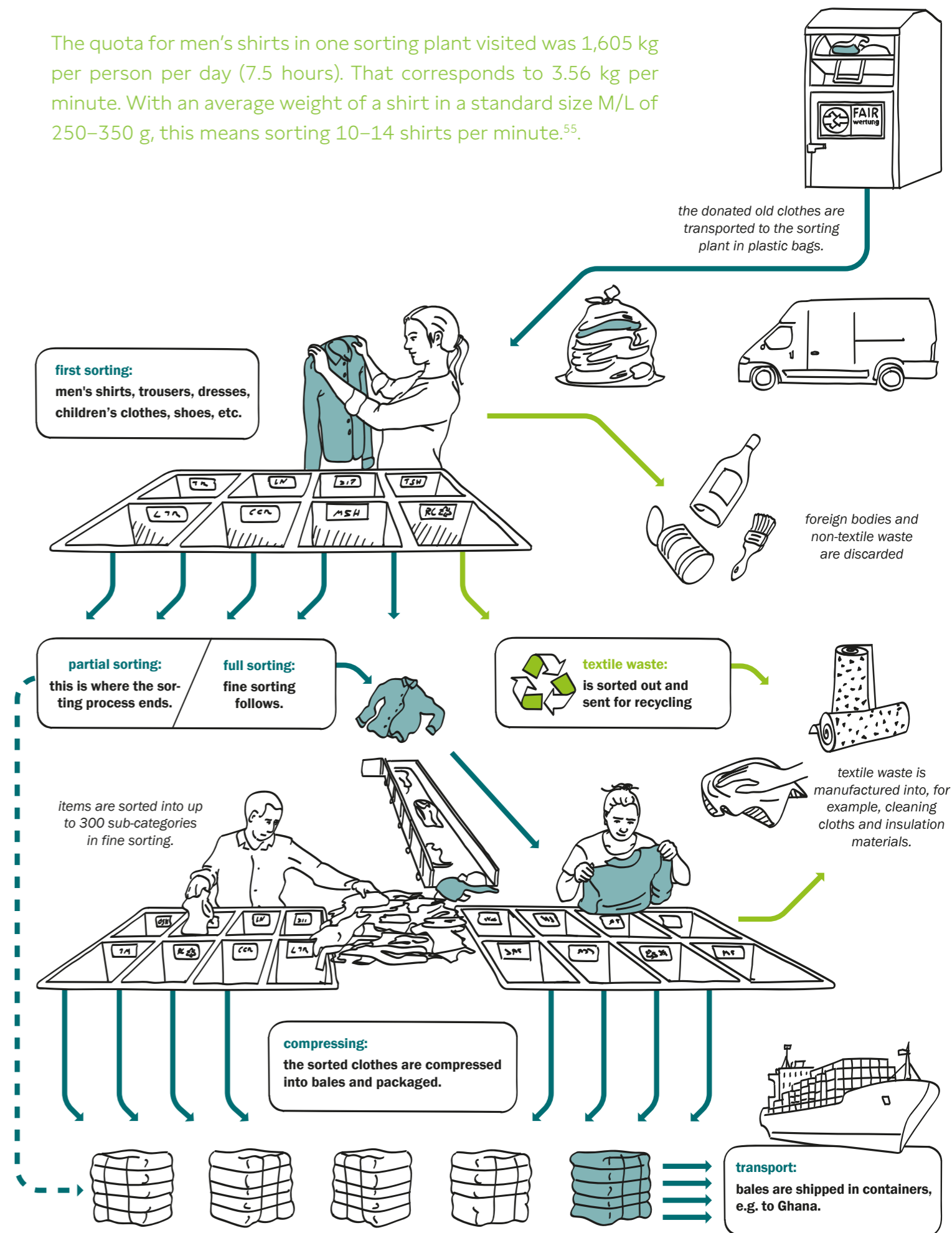
Below is a description of what exemplary full sorting can look like. In a (full) sorting plant, the collected textile sacks are sent along a conveyor belt to sorters, who carry out a first sorting. Here, the donated textiles are sorted into 40 to 50 different categories; this is done only by hand. In Europe, this work is mainly done by women. Examining every individual item of clothing requires specific brand, trend and material knowledge paired with experience and speed. In a Dutch sorting plant, an average of 2,775 kg are sorted in first sorting per employee per day in this way. As well as distinguishing between the type of textile, e.g. Children's clothes, anorak, shoes or tablecloth, they also decide what should be sent for second sorting in the next step. Items of clothing that can obviously be sent only for material recovery (recycling, energy recovery), are screened out at this stage. Other items and non-textile waste are also separated (plastic, metal, wood, etc.). Sorters usually work with a weight standard set by the employer and have to meet certain quotas every day. The quota per sorter varies in second sorting. Depending on the item, every sorting table is given new textiles for sorting at intervals of 15-25 minutes. The time available to decide which category or grade a shirt should be assigned to

is mere seconds. In first sorting, the time is even less. Within second sorting, the used clothes are grouped into a total of 200 to 300 (product) categories.

Men's shirts are a possible top-level category that is split into more than 20 sub-categories. A classic modern men's shirt containing cotton in average sizes (S-L/XL) is assigned to three to four quality groups. The quality steps and their requirements vary in every sorting plant. By way of example, this subdivision can take this form: the best quality, Grade A (known as Creme-Ware in German, NL: Extra) is in a practically or actual new condition, without any stains or other quality defects. Grade A also comprises high-quality and basically intact clothing. In Grade B, traces of use can be seen that could be repaired if required, the same applies to stains. Grade C contains shirts that are damaged and worn at the collar, for example, but that are otherwise wearable. The collar could be replaced by a new one during a repair, stated the Manager of a sorting plant. As a result of the strong demand for men's clothes in general,<sup>57</sup> especially men's shirts, there is also customer demand for lower qualities.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, women's blouses in this condition can only be sent for recycling.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the classic men's shirt, the second sorting subdivides into obvious material differences (cord, denim, flannel), trends (vintage) or large sizes (XL<) as well as screening for recycling.

Second sorting is matched to orders from customers. The order is placed in list form with various categories. Then, the quantities ordered - depending on the items in stock - are made up with as few deviations as possible. The business relationships between the sorting companies and the importers often go back years or decades.<sup>60</sup> They are usually based on trust and

The quota for men's shirts in one sorting plant visited was 1,605 kg per person per day (7.5 hours). That corresponds to 3.56 kg per minute. With an average weight of a shirt in a standard size M/L of 250-350 g, this means sorting 10-14 shirts per minute.<sup>55</sup>



Graphic 5: Sorting procedure of full-sorting

**MIS-SORTING**

Mis-sorting is part and parcel of everyday life in a sorting plant. It refers to the accidental allocation of an item of clothing to the wrong category. In spite of a trained and experience eye, mistakes happen because the short assessment times make the system susceptible.<sup>56</sup>





**Photo 4:** First-sorting at a sorting table in a sorting facility in the Netherlands (2022)

empirical knowledge of which items can be assigned to the respective product category. This is therefore a plant-specific categorisation. For example, an order cannot easily be placed with a different sorting plant because items are sorted into different categories and content there.

Communication between the sorting plant and customer is carried out using direct personal communication by telephone, messenger services or email. In this way, there is sometimes also feedback from the customers and the sorting may be revised for the future.<sup>61</sup> The manager of a sorting plant talks about mutual accountability: "We have to receive information from the customer about the demands in their countries. We are sorting 80 tons a day by hand to various customers and human mistakes are made. We cannot check 100% and we must rely on good communication with our customers and to follow local trends. (Per week four containers are going to Africa, of a total of 16 per week)."<sup>62</sup>

After sorting, the second-hand items are packed in plastic and compressed into bales weighing 45 to 55 kg.

Often transparent films are used so that the colourful second-hand mix inside can be seen. According to the company manager of a sorting plant, long-standing customers sometime request specific colours for the packaging because they associate a certain quality of goods with it.<sup>63</sup> Shoes, winter coats or other textiles that are sensitive to pressure are just packed in tear-proof sacks. Every bale or sack is marked with a sticker or printed label when ordered which provide information on the importing country, the contents and the importer. After compression, the bales remain in large warehouses until they are sold as second-hand textiles. For this, they are loaded into freight containers. A container (26,740 kg) holds around 480–590 (45–55 kg) textile bales.<sup>64</sup> The completely filled lorries transport the textiles directly to the destination or the nearest cargo port. Used clothes destined for recycling are also packed and sent to recycling plants by lorry.

Since the used clothes have undergone complete preparation for reuse by means of full sorting, the waste status ends for the saleable and functional portions. Some of the waste textiles have become a second-hand

product. According to the online portal (2020), around 50% of the used clothing from Europe remains in Europe, Ukraine and Russia, 35% are exported to Africa, 13% to Asia and 2% to North and South America.<sup>65,66</sup>

### **"Waste that once became waste and rubbish can't suddenly only be made of 'reusable materials'." <sup>67</sup> Or can it?**

Textiles that are not suitable to be sold as second-hand items are sent for recovery, in line with the KrWG. The recycling currently practised can be subdivided into cutting into industrial cleaning cloths and the manufacture of non-woven materials. The basic requirement for further use as cleaning cloths is high absorbency. Textiles with as high a cellulose content as possible, i.e., mainly fabrics containing cotton, such as T-shirts, sweaters or household goods, as suitable for this.<sup>68</sup> That corresponds to around 10% of the volumes collected. The cloths used in the automotive industry, for example, replace paper or fabric cloths made of virgin fibres.<sup>69</sup>

The remaining 16% of recoverable textiles are ripped up using mechanical recycling. The lengths of the original fibres have now been greatly shortened and they cannot - without the addition of virgin fibres - be spun into a similar high-quality yarn again. Furthermore, it contains a large material mix from various fibres. The wool-like mass is processed into non-wovens. They are used as fleece materials for automotive interior panels or fleece for painters and decorators. Both the recovery

as cleaning cloths and as non-wovens are downcycling of the virgin fibres. These industries do not support themselves, but are cross-financed by the sale of the second-hand textiles. After use, these recycled products are also sent for energy recovery. When all of the textiles that can be reused or recycled have been sorted, around 8% of the textiles remain, which are also sent for energy recovery.<sup>70</sup> The sorting and recycling companies then pass them on to the waste incineration plants/recovery plants. Disposing of this used clothes waste costs the sorting companies around €160 to €200/t.<sup>71</sup> In addition, some used clothes are also used as input in substitute fuel plants.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to the common method of mechanical recycling, more research is being conducted into chemical recycling methods. Chemical recycling comprises the breaking down and purification of fibre substances into their basic chemical building blocks. Both natural fibres and chemical fibres can be recycled chemically. For example, cotton is recycled into cellulose chemical fibres such as viscose. Monomers or oligomers can be retrieved from polyester or nylon.<sup>73</sup> However, this has only been used mainly on a laboratory scale or in pilot projects for textile materials to date. Individual plants are being built or have already started work. Research assistant Amrei Becker from the Institute for Textile Technology at RWTH Aachen predicts a highly scaled and nationwide use of chemical recycling of used clothes from 2030.<sup>74</sup>

## **INTERIM CONCLUSION**

With a collection rate of approx. 70%, Germany has a nationwide and accepted collection system. In the context of preparation for reuse there are qualitative differences. Full sorting comprising first and second sorting is the method that is most capable of providing a comprehensive supply of items for the global second-hand trade that are suitable for the market. If the items are prepared for reuse using the full sorting method, 55% of the used clothes (not including footwear) collected in

Europe can be sorted for reuse as second-hand items. The remaining 45% are sent for recycling and material recovery. The Netherlands and Poland have the biggest sorting capacities in Europe. It is to be assumed that the amounts collected will rise markedly after 2025 with the obligation to collect used clothes separately in the EU. Experts agree that, above all, the proportion of items that are no longer functional will rise.

# SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT SECOND HAND

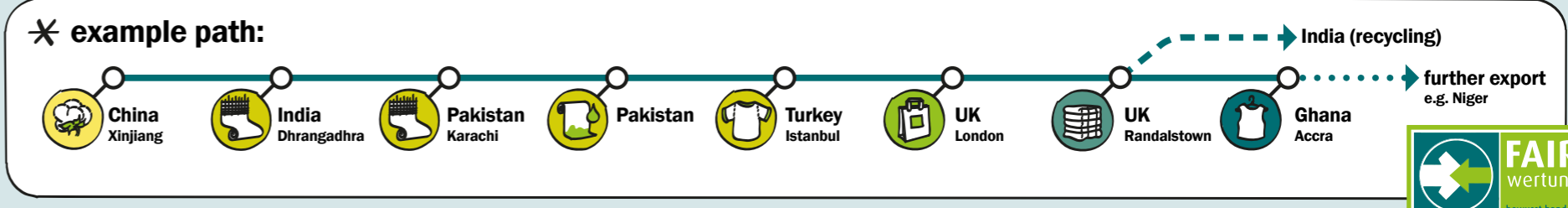
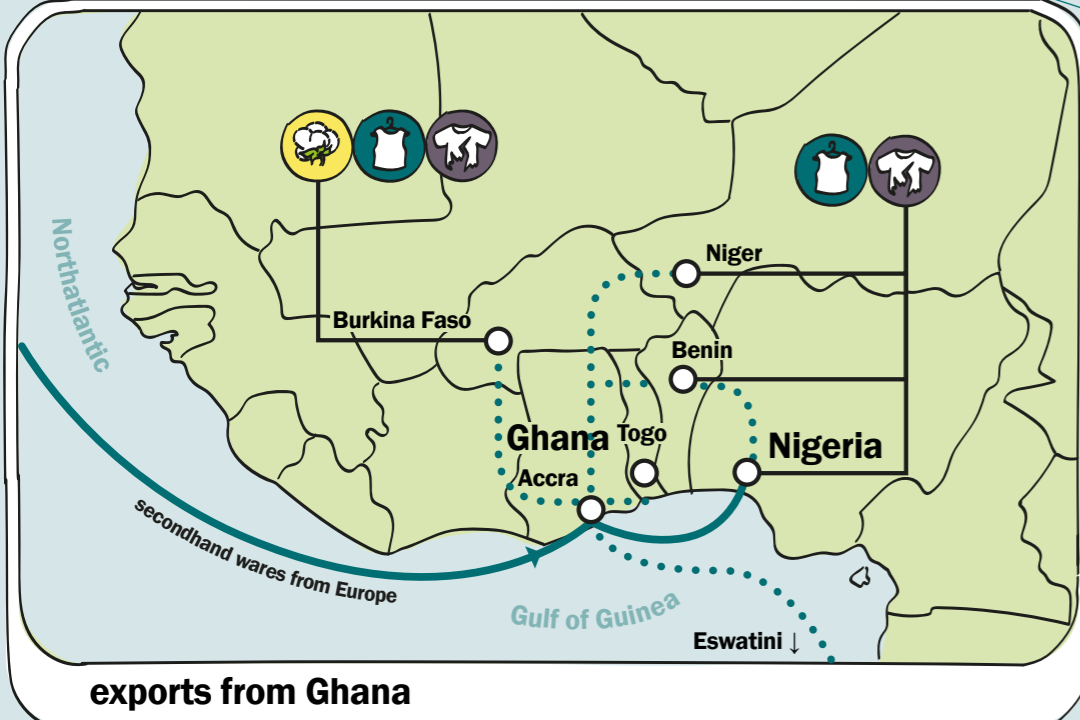
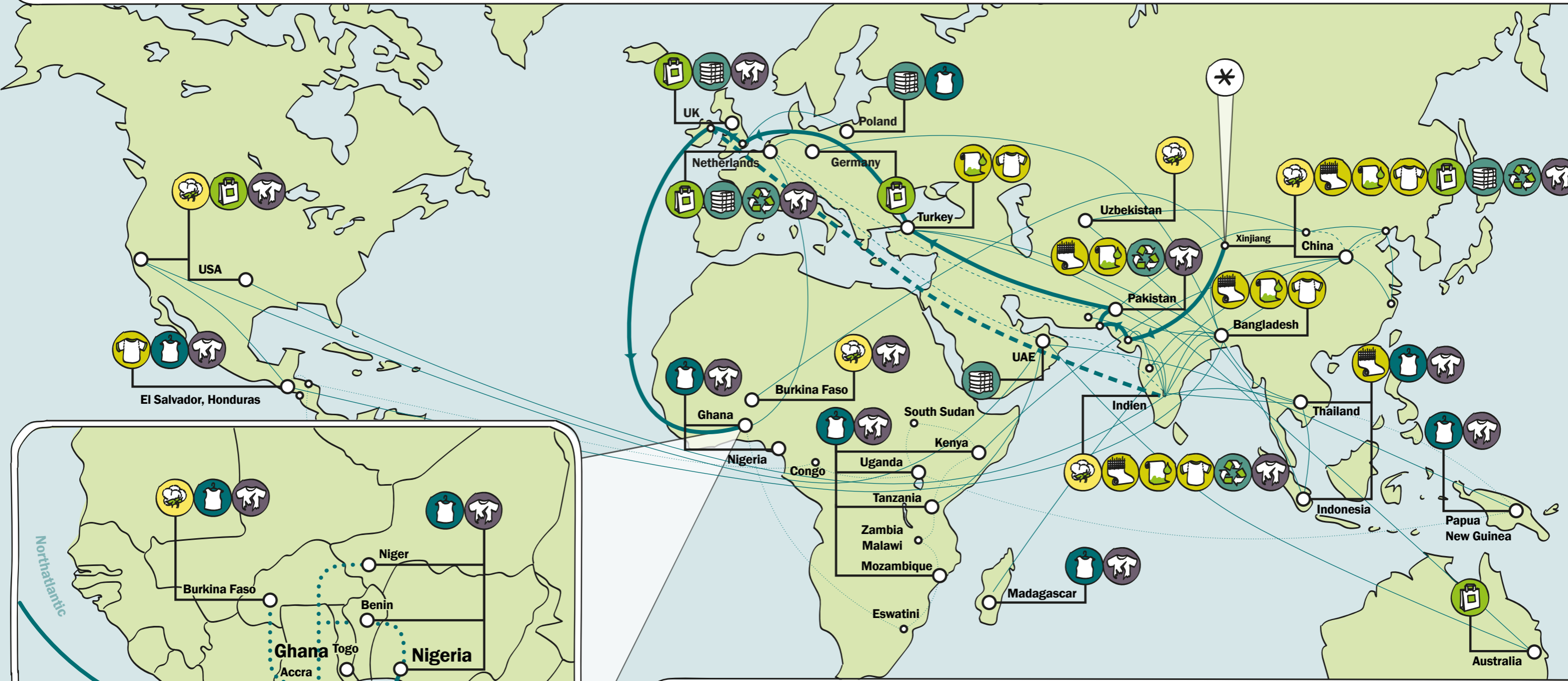
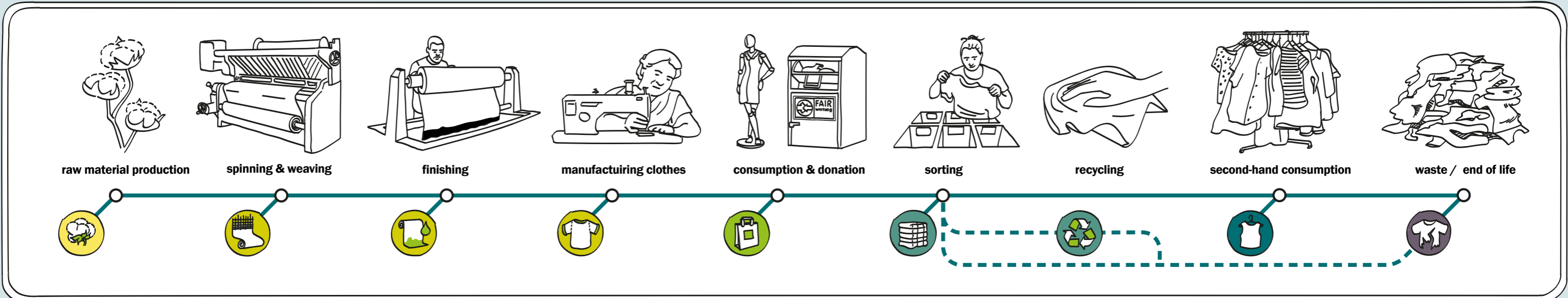
## Global Trade Flows

Globalisation processes and global dependencies can be identified in the textile and clothing industry and in the used clothes and second-hand sector. In terms of value, in 2020 the USA (\$600 million)<sup>75</sup> was the biggest exporting country of used<sup>76</sup> clothing.<sup>77</sup> It was followed by China (\$404 million), the United Kingdom (\$315 million), Germany (\$304 million) and South Korea (\$276 million).<sup>78</sup> The biggest global imports in terms of value were recorded by Ghana (\$182 million), Ukraine (\$158 million), Pakistan (\$136 million) United Arab Emirates (\$132 million) and Nigeria (\$124 million).<sup>79</sup> It must be emphasised here that the country collecting the used clothes does not automatically have to be the recovery and export country of the second-hand goods. Used clothes are primarily collected in Europe, North America, Australia, China and South Korea<sup>80</sup> and then traded as unsorted original or partially sorted goods. For volumes collected in Germany, for example, this means that sorting takes place in Belgium and Italy as well as in the Netherlands and Poland. Dubai (UAE) is also a major hub for sorting. The sorting regions or centres act as trading hubs for the international used

clothing market (see diagram). As a continent receiving high volumes of imports, Africa receives its items from the United Kingdom, China and Canada. The individual countries vary greatly in their import quantities, furthermore some countries, including Rwanda and Niger, currently have second-hand import bans.

A look at the five biggest exporting and importing countries reveals the basic trade flows in second-hand and used clothes. New goods are mainly manufactured in south-east Asia, consumed in the Global North and sent to countries of the Global South as second-hand goods. The volume flows of second-hand goods therefore mainly focus on countries with low per capita purchase power. According to the German Federal Environment Agency in 2017, worldwide textile consumption was an average of 8 kg per person.<sup>81</sup>





Graphic 6: Example lifecycle and usage routes of textiles from production to disposal



# Second-Hand Trade in Ghana

## GHANA – “GATEWAY TO AFRICA”<sup>82</sup>

Ghana lies in the middle of West Africa, on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea (Atlantic). The population of 32.8 million live in 16 regions. The capital Accra with a population of around 2.3 million is the biggest city in the country and the centre of the Greater Accra Region. With an area of 238,537 km<sup>2</sup>, its size can be compared to countries like Romania or the UK. The official language is English. In addition, more than 50 more local languages are spoken. Due to its location around 5° to the north of the equator, it has a tropical climate with dry and rainy seasons. The days and nights are more-or-less the same length all year round and the average day-time temperature in the south is an average 30°C with humidity of 70-90%. The climate in the north is much drier. In the daytime, the temperatures there are over 30°C, but at night it can cool down to less than 20°C. Christians, who mainly live in the south, are the biggest religious group; the north is primarily Islamic. There are also some traditional religions, such as Ga or Akan. The former British colony's name of Gold Coast, as the country is still sometimes called, referred to the large gold deposits. For more than four centuries, Ghana was subject to various colonial powers. In 1957, it was the first African country to gain independence from the United Kingdom. The presidential republic is considered to be a stable democracy with buoyant economic growth.<sup>83</sup> However, the north of the country is less well connected to supply networks, has lower incomes and is much more sparsely populated than the southern regions. The currency is the Ghanaian Cedi (GHC). The Ghanaian minimum wage is around ₵375 per month.<sup>84</sup>

According to the German Federal Statistical Office, the average gross national income is \$2,360.<sup>85</sup>

The data situation with respect to Ghanaian second-hand trading is poor to contradictory. With an import volume of \$182 million, used clothing is among the top 20 most imported goods.<sup>86</sup> There are no official data on total import quantities in weight. Based on monthly import volumes, according to own estimates the global import volumes are<sup>87</sup> around 152,600 t. That corresponds to an import volume of around 2,900 t or 110 containers of used clothing per week. According to current data on European export quantities to Ghana, the exports from the EU 27 countries are around 48,800 t per year.<sup>88</sup> Import volumes to Ghana have risen massively with a growth rate of 24.8% from 2015 to 2020.<sup>89</sup> Kantamanto Market in Accra is the

hub of Ghanaian second-hand trade. With 39.8% of the second-hand imports, the United Kingdom, the former colonial power, is the main exporter to Ghana.<sup>90</sup> This is followed by China at 17.6%. According to OEC, goods from Germany account for 4.46%.<sup>91</sup> However, the imported goods are exported again for use in Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as being used in Ghana.<sup>92</sup> The total export turnover from Ghana amounts to \$764,000.<sup>93</sup>

## FIGURES AT A GLANCE

**Import volume Ghana (2020): \$182 million**

**Cost of full container (with cargo): €27.000–32.000 + fees and duty<sup>94</sup>**

**Total import costs per container: €35.000–40.000**

**40-foot container max. load: 26.740 kg**

**Textile bale: 45–55 kg**

**Import used clothing per year: 152.600 t**

**Import container with used clothing per year: 5.706 containers**

**Import used clothing per week: approx. 110 containers = 2,935 t**

**Bales per week: 53.363–65.213**

**Items per week (300-500g/item): 5.8 million–9.7 million items**

**Per head consumption in Ghana (not including export to neighbouring countries): < 4,65 kg**

Photo 5: Kejetia Market in Kumasi, Ghana (2022)



## „Ghana Beyond Aid“<sup>95</sup>

Ghana has been undergoing a strong economic upswing since the late 1990s. In 2017, the current president, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, declared “Ghana Beyond Aid” as the motto of his presidency.<sup>96</sup> An ideal by means of which Ghana wants to rid itself of post-colonial dependencies and existing stereotypes.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, the republic is heavily dependent on foreign imports. Therefore, since the start of 2022, the tense world economic situation has also been making itself felt in Ghana. In 2022, the Cedi lost more than 50% against the US dollar.<sup>98</sup> Rising food and petrol prices as a consequence are having a strong impact on life in society. The currency fluctuations have a direct impact on trade with used clothes. Firstly, because the transactions are carried out in US dollars or euros, and because the rising cost of living is reducing the consumption of textiles.<sup>99</sup>

Ghana is considered to be a “stabilising country in the region”.<sup>100</sup> “On a regional comparison, Ghana has a stable democracy with above-average economic growth.”<sup>101</sup> The coastal country and, above all, the capital Accra are one of the economic centres of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).<sup>102</sup> This is reflected in the second-hand trade.

Ghana has a long coastline in the south, which has made it into a major hub for the sea trade for centuries. Neighbouring Togo in the east and Cote d’Ivoire in the west also have international ports, whereas the neighbouring landlocked country of Burkina Faso to the north is heavily dependent on Ghanaian imports.<sup>103</sup>

## Shopping Options in Ghana

In Ghana there are basically three common forms of buying clothes for personal use: buying second-hand or new items and having bespoke clothing made by tailors. Newly made items can be either clothing, mainly made in Ghana from traditional wax print<sup>104</sup> fabrics, or new items that – as in Europe too – mainly originate from textile manufacture in Asia. The consumption of new items is usually more expensive<sup>105</sup> than *foose*, as second-hand textiles are called in the vernacular. That is why the majority of the population all over the country wear second-hand. For many people in Ghana, buying second-hand is the best way of getting high-quality

and fashionable clothes. Having the financial means to buy new items is definitely considered a sign of wealth and status in Ghana, as an online trader stated in an interview.<sup>106</sup> In addition to Kantamanto Market in the city centre, there are many options for buying clothes in the whole city. The offering is mainly made up of traders offering second-hand textiles and no new items. The second-hand textiles are available for purchase from four different types of trader:

1. Traders with a shop: These are often small, free-standing containers or huts at the side of the road. They have a limited range of one specific type of goods, e.g., women’s clothes.
2. Street traders: They sell textiles on open-air stalls on certain days. The location can vary.
3. Hawkers: Goods are offered on the move and on foot. The hawkers usually have only single items with them or sell textiles that need little presentation. A typical example of this are sewn towels that are used to wipe dirt or sweat. The stop-and-go traffic is used to offer the goods to car drivers to buy.
4. Online traders: Selected goods are offered via messenger services and social media. Sometimes, orders for specific items can be placed.



Kejetia Market in Kumasi, Ghana (2022)





Photo 6: Aerial view Kantamanto Market (2023)

## Microcosm Kantamanto Market

The centre of Ghanaian second-hand trade and clothing consumption is one of the biggest second-hand markets in the world: Kantamanto Market in the west of Accra. According to estimates, 70% of all second-hand textiles that reach Ghana go through Kantamanto Market.<sup>107</sup>

### Kantamanto Market – Consumption, Ties and Culture

Kantamanto Market is the final destination and transit hub for the trade in second-hand textiles in the whole of Ghana. It is the starting point both for professional traders and for private end consumers - a microcosm all of its own. Imported second-hand goods account for the majority of the items on offer. However, it is not a market just for textiles. It is home to various trades associated with textiles; for example, sewing and alteration workshops, dye works or textile care (ironing and processing). Occasionally, other goods, such as food, small farm animals (mainly poultry), spices, electronics or car and kitchen accessories are also available. Kantamanto Market is organised centrally. This means that the traders usually have to pay a stall fee for the around

5,000 shops. Around 30,000 people are employed in an area of approx. 28,300 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>108</sup> In addition to the actual sales area (28,300 m<sup>2</sup>), another surrounding space for warehouses is part of the market site. This takes up a further 60,700 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>109</sup> At 89,000 m<sup>2</sup> the total market area occupies an area corresponding to almost 12.5 football pitches. An area that would occupy 2/3 of the gross sales area of the Centro Shopping Centre in Oberhausen.<sup>110</sup>

The area around the market is characterised by warehouses and streets lined by shops. After arrival in Tema Harbour, the containers are taken by lorry to this part of the market where they are taken by hand to the individual warehouses or directly to the market interior. The streets are dominated by countless multi-storey warehouses for textile bales. The depots there are usually rented by importers and are not the property of the users. The market interior comprises an area almost completely roofed by corrugated sheet, fabric or wood. Ties are often used for fastening and to connect and hang up coverings and goods. 80–120 cm wide paths link the large market area. For this reason, goods of any kinds are mostly transported on people's heads. This work is

often done by women, who are known as kayayeis.<sup>111</sup> No matter whether food or textile bales weighing up to 55 kg, everything is transported on their heads.<sup>112</sup>

Adjoining shops line the narrow paths on the left and right through the entire market. The individual shops are around two- to six-square-metre niches that are filled from floor to ceiling with the exhibited goods. There is usually nothing other than the items available for sale in these niches. They are usually hung on coat hangers or over wooden rods so that they can be seen easily without entering the sales premises. The hanging goods are the best quality items available for sale. Some of the shops are fitted with tables or display areas. The goods piled on them are the poorer quality items. Sales-people stand and sit in and in front of the niches. In Kantamanto Market there is no strict division by product, but there are often larger groupings of salespeople of a specific item in the different areas. The shops that sell to end consumers usually specialise in one product, e.g., only sandals, only jeans or only men's business shirts. The range does not vary seasonally due



Photo 7: Shops selling second-hand clothes at Kantamanto Market in Accra, Ghana (2022)



Photo 8: Kayayeis at Kantamanto Market in Accra, Ghana (2022)

to the low temperature variations. Similar clothing is worn and sold all year round. Furthermore, there are sections of the market that are reserved more for distributors. Correspondingly, traders sell large quantities of textiles to traders there. The goods are then sold on or outside the market. Another specific area is the collection of sewing workshops and dye works.

Various types of industrial sewing machines can be found here, which are operated by electricity or by a foot pedal or hand wheel. The sewers here mainly carry out orders from traders, for example, cut flannel bedding or towels can be hemmed to make sweat cloths or school uniform. The individual sewing niches between the retailers' shops, however, are aimed at the end consumers who want the items they have bought to be altered.



Items	Good quality ghc (€)	No dirt ghc (€)	Low quality ghc (€)
Women's clothes	50–100–150 (3,8–11,5)	50–100 (3,8–7,7)	30–80 (2,3–6,2)
Towels (large)	100–160–200 (7,7–15,4)	/	100 (7,7)
Towels (medium/small)	70–120 (5,4–9,2)	/	50 (3,8)
Jeans	100–250 (7,7–19,2)	/	/
Men's shirts	50–120 (3,8–9,2)	/	5–20 (0,4–1,5)

Graphic 7: Overview for second-hand prices at Kantamanto Market (2022/23)

There are no fixed prices; much rather, there is bargaining and haggling for the best possible price for both parties. Absolute statements about the prices of items are therefore difficult.<sup>113</sup> Textiles are mostly sold by eye because there are no changing cubicles in the market. Moreover, alteration by tailors is a common practice to make clothes fit. At one purchase of a pair of jeans observed, the price paid was ₵90 (€6) and shortening and altering the trousers ₵15 (€1), i.e., 1/6 of the purchase price.<sup>114</sup>

The market is an organised, functioning and self-contained system. Although its appearance may not appear to conform to 'European customs' of order or efficiency, rules apply, with clear allocations of responsibilities and hierarchies. Kantamanto Market is surrounded by its own atmosphere and culture, which is greatly shaped by the interaction in everyday life at the market.

### On Processes and Players

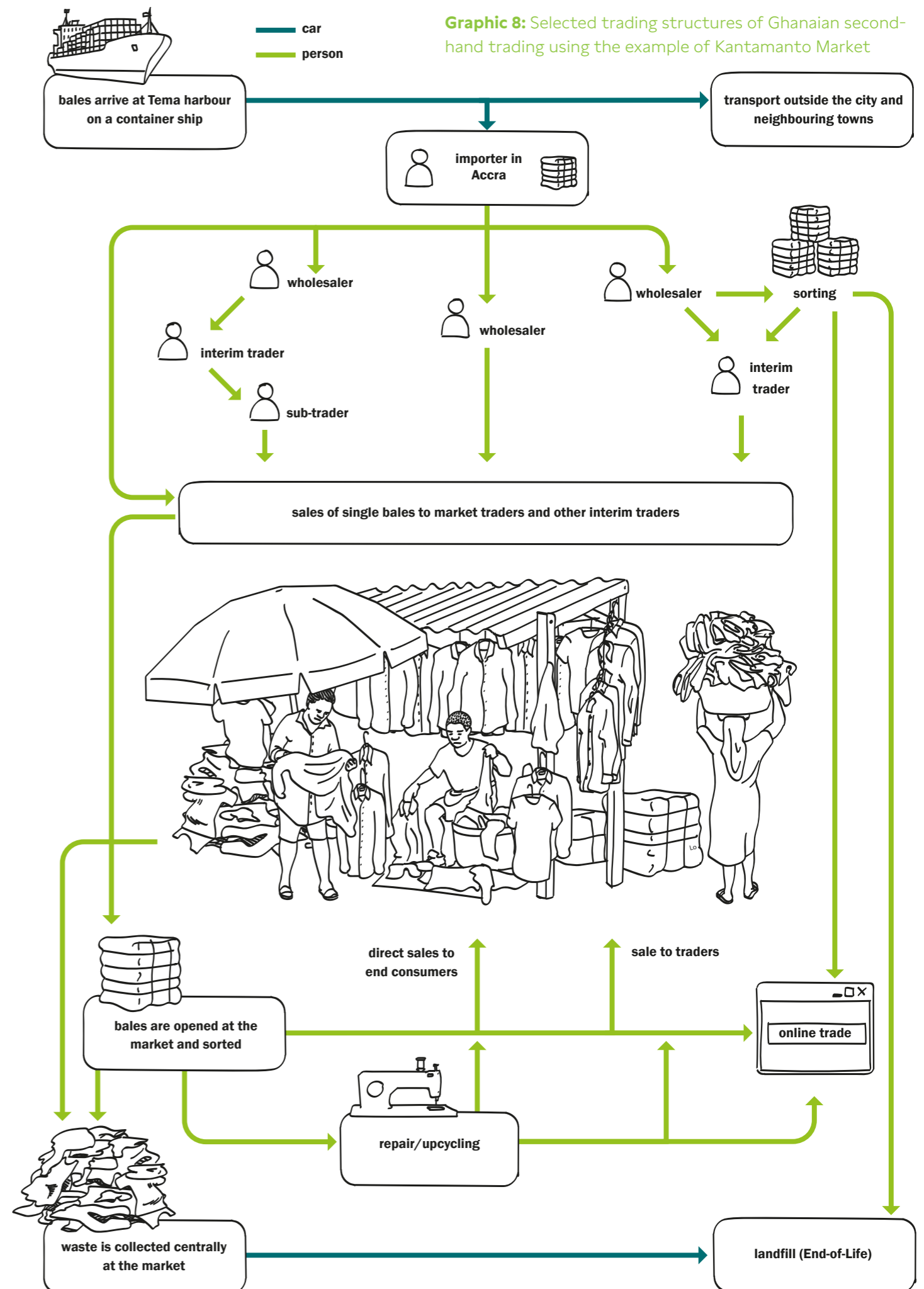
The basic features of the entire trading system with second-hand textiles in Ghana is pyramid-shaped and therefore hierarchical. At the same time, it is characterised by its complexity, because various players are in many-faceted relationships with each other in an informal sector. After the processes in Europe described earlier, the imported second-hand textiles reach Ghana by ship. The market is supplied by the international port at Tema, among others. Tema Harbour is around 40 km away from Kantamanto Market. Once arrived at the port, the containers are taken by lorry to every part of

the country or to neighbouring countries (see diagram). However, they are usually taken straight to Accra and Kantamanto Market. This usually happens every Thursday morning. Traders gather in the night and wait for the containers that have been ordered from all over the world. Once arrived at the warehouses, there are various paths that the bales can take after their arrival.

All of the bales are initially unloaded by hand and taken into the importers<sup>115</sup> or wholesalers' warehouses. They are also loaded onto smaller vans for further transport, or the bales are transferred directly into the hands of a single trader for immediate opening and selling on. After arrival in a warehouse, the route is usually identical. Wholesalers have ordered bales from importers and, in turn, sell their goods to distributors and sub-traders. In the process it can be said that at every point of selling on, the quantity of purchased bales reduces and the price per bale rises.<sup>116</sup> All transport is with the help of the kayayeis or male porters. The people transporting goods on their heads are usually paid by the distance covered.<sup>117</sup>

After the bales are opened, they are once again sorted by the traders. The goods are evaluated according to the trader's standards and divided into the following three categories observed: immediately saleable, upcyclable/repairable or unsaleable item.<sup>118</sup>

The unsaleable items become waste due to the lack of a market for them. They are collected in large bags.



The immediately saleable items are hung up and presented as visibly as possible. At the same time, interaction with customers often starts while the bales are still being opened. Pieces for potential customers are sorted out even when the bales are being opened. Here, customers can either be another trader level (retailer) or an end consumer. If they are retailers, the goods are now offered to end consumers in their shop in Kantamanto Market, their own online shop or as a street trader. These are the possible routes whereby the imported second-hand textiles get from Tema Harbour to the shop inside the market, other parts of the city or even outside Accra.

The trading hierarchy described can have more or fewer levels or sub-traders. Furthermore, there are complaints processes at Kantamanto Market when customers are dissatisfied with the quality after the bale has been opened. The criticism is taken to the sub-trader concerned and a new price is negotiated. The trade is characterised by a great deal of organisation with various players involved. This enables the nationwide distribution and transport of second-hand textiles. Some interviewed importers also said that they sort and recompress certain bales themselves after arrival.<sup>119</sup> These bales were then mainly reserved for long-standing customers outside Accra. They were prepared to pay more money for the sorted and therefore higher quality bales.<sup>120</sup> The reduced choice in more northerly regions and the long transport distances also lead to acceptance of higher prices. Moreover, complaints are much more difficult with the greater distances between sellers and buyers. At this point, several importers stressed in several conversations that sorting in their own country enabled sorting according to local demand.

Some conversations also drew attention to the consequences of currency rate risks. For importers, the exchange rate is the biggest risk in trade; added to this are rising customs duties. The customs duties to be paid fluctuate greatly and some had doubled in the past.<sup>121</sup> Inflation and poor exchange rates could lead to financial problems and indebtedness for sub-traders.<sup>122</sup> In terms of the average Ghanaian gross national income of \$2,360 per year (= \$196/month), the sale of a bale for ₵1,000–4,000 (\$80–320; as of: February 2023) can represent a very big investment for sub-traders. There is no data



**Photo 9:** Bus before departing for the North of Ghana, leaving Old Fama in Accra, Ghana (2022)

available for Ghana on the actual profit on a sold bale to end consumers. The economic risk within the market structure increases with every level of subtraders, which can also be shown from the numbers of bales purchased per distributor and sub-trader. As a consequence, the lower levels hardly have any means of saving capital and rising in the structure. Much rather, at the lower levels, there is a constant need for reinvestment with small profit margins. Nevertheless, people seem to aspire to work in the second-hand trade in Ghana.

Observations on journeys through more rural areas to the north of Accra show that the offerings from second-hand traders on the streets and villages fall as the infrastructure becomes weaker. The consumption of textiles in the north is therefore supported by private supply from family members from the south. Here, the strong personal and family networks within Ghanaian society that help to influence trade must be pointed out.

## Waste, Disposal and End-of-Life

Textile waste usually accumulates in Ghana, just like in Europe, in three possible places: in households (post-consumer waste), as manufacturing waste (post-production-waste) and as unsaleable (new) goods. Before the final disposal of textiles, consumers usually try to use them for as long as possible. They are mended, passed on within the family and, when worn out, used for cleaning.<sup>123</sup>

At Kantamanto Market, traders collect unsaleable textiles. Textile wastes are stored in central warehouses.<sup>124</sup> The warehouses are small, lockable rooms at the market where the waste sacks can be stored until they are taken away. This service has to be paid for. At the time of the next collection, the owner of the waste storage facility takes the sacks to the nearest collection point, where they are loaded onto vans by hand. As well as landfill, burning after local sorting is a standard practice, as an importer explained in a conversation.<sup>125</sup> The burning of waste could also be seen on landfills and at the edge of Kantamanto Market.

Textile wastes are made of unsold, unsaleable items as well as non-functioning and unwearable textiles. The NGO The Or Foundation<sup>126</sup> assumes that up to 40% of all second-hand textiles leave Kantamanto Market as waste.<sup>127</sup> Due to the lack of transparency in data on imports, usage locations in Ghana and waste quantities, such information cannot be fully followed. An average waste proportion of 40% per bale refers to imports from all importing countries. An increased volume of waste is much more likely for exports without prior full sorting. This proportion was not observed on Kantamanto Market in bales from German or Dutch origin and was also not reported.

The metropolis of Accra<sup>128</sup> is generally dealing with a waste problem. In principle, (municipal) waste is not collected separately. Household waste is either



**Photo 10:** Waste storage of Kanatamanto Market in Accra, Ghana (2022)

disposed of by private waste collection companies or by the consumers themselves. Waste is taken to legal or illegal/uncontrolled landfills. In addition, it is disposed of on public beaches, in sewers or water bodies. Waste incineration is also common. The most commonly seen waste in the city or on the streets is plastic. Due to the inadequate groundwater quality in Ghana, drinking water is sold in plastic bottles (without a deposit). Added to this are large quantities of plastic bags for snacks and foodstuffs from street traders. After consumption, they often end up in open sewers. There are not usually public waste bins.<sup>129</sup> In addition, disposal in running waters is standard practice - even for textile waste. In their own statements, members of the public speculate that the waste would be washed away in heavy rainfall.<sup>130</sup> In the rainy season, this leads to blockages in the sewage system and there can be floods.



The effects were clearly visible at a visit to the landfill in Old Fama to the north west of Kantamanto Market. The landfill is located on both side of the River Odaw, a tributary of the Korle Lagoon, and the waste mountains are flush with the river banks. Walking around on the waste and wind and rain keep disturbing the deposits and waste gets into the canal. From there, it is conveyed to the Korle Lagoon, which is one of the most polluted lagoons in the world.<sup>131</sup>

The lagoon flows into the Gulf of Guinea. In addition to billions of plastic particles, the textiles tangled into long strands can be found on the estuary beach. Due to the flows and waves, the individual pieces combine with other waste, such as fishing nets or the plastic cables that hold the textile bales together. This phenomenon is something like when trouser legs and sleeves get tangled with bra straps and socks after being washed in a washing machine. These 'textile tentacles' can be found on various beaches in Accra. They are often buried deep in the sand and, due to their length and weight, are very hard or impossible to move by muscle power alone. Correspondingly, they could only be removed with the intensive use of mechanical labour.

Added to this is the lack of capacity for waste removal. Landfills, such as the Kpone Landfill created for Tema and Ashaiman in 2013, had already reached its capacity limits after six years and not the planned 25 years.<sup>132</sup> The landfill was used much more for waste from Accra than intended. There were also long-lasting fires that are common on landfills in Ghana. Videos and photographs show large quantities of waste textiles that have probably contributed to the landfill being overloaded so quickly.<sup>133</sup>



**Photo 11:** Landfill in Old Fama by the Odaw River in Accra, Ghana (2022)



**Photo 12:** Landfill for municipal waste in Old Fama, Accra, Ghana (2022)



**Photo 13:** Textile tentacles in the mouth of Korle Lagoon in the gulf of Guinea in Accra, Ghana (2022)



**Photo 14:** Agboghloshie Market close to landfill in Old Fama, Ghana. Shoe sale, shoes have been collected on landfill (2022)

As a result of the large quantities of non-biodegradable waste, waste mountains form on the landfills, which can greatly exceed a height of six to seven metres. Removing these amounts of waste would therefore only be possible with a great deal of mechanical work and there are no alternative means of removal. This means that waste remains visible in the long term. The waste mountains are 'managed' and provide a source of income for inhabitants of local settlements. Plastic, but also textiles that are still saleable and, above all, shoes are collected by waste pickers. Textiles are reused again, but not recovered, as non-functioning textiles do not have any financial value added as recycling material in Ghana and are not therefore collected separately. Plastic, by contrast, has become an increasingly in-demand recycling raw material. Collections of plastic bottles, water pouches<sup>134</sup>, rigid plastic canisters and other plastic items can be seen in the whole country. In the view of an employee in a plastic recycling facility, however, there are not enough skilled workers for collection and sorting to do justice to the amount of plastic in Ghana.<sup>135</sup>





**Photo 15:** Plastic collection in the Arts Center in Accra, Ghana (2022)

# THIRD THOUGHTS ABOUT SECOND HAND

## INTERIM CONCLUSION

After arrival of the ordered items from the Global North, second-hand textiles are sold via a hierarchical trading system. The central hub is Kantamanto Market (Accra). In comparison to the European per-capital consumption of textiles, excessive import or consumption cannot be assumed. Clothing is worn until the end of use, which is why repair and further use practices are used.

Textile waste comes from unsold and non-functioning goods as well as after the use of all textiles - new items and second-hand. The visible volumes or waste are also due to inadequate waste infrastructures, overloaded landfills and insufficient environmental awareness in the population.



# Discussion

The route of European waste textiles from collection and European sorting to trade and disposal in Ghana was described in the preceding chapters. Findings and recommendations for action are now to be derived on the basis of the observations.

## Every useful life ends sometime and someWHERE

In Europe, consumers dispose of a large proportion of clothing as used clothes before the end of the useful life of the garment has been reached. The useful life of these clothes is maximised or extended by the global second-hand trade. The volume flows show that a large proportion of the second-hand garments not used in the Global North are traded in countries of the Global South. Second-hand clothing secures the basic supply of affordable clothing for the population. In principle, it is therefore a sustainable trade. But how do pictures of textile waste on landfills and on beaches in Ghana fit into this?

Via the trade, the textiles reach the end of their useful lives in the importing countries.<sup>136</sup> They therefore

become waste there. In Ghana, waste is disposed of in streets or on beaches, for example, because there are no publicly accessible alternatives. Awareness and/or knowledge of the potential consequences of waste disposal in the sewers or in nature is often limited or of low priority. There is no nationwide local-authority or state organised waste management in place and no state (waste) controls take place. The actual sources and routes taken by textile waste are therefore hard to follow. The pollution of the Korle Lagoon and the sections of beach nearby, as shown in the international reports, can be explained by the Old Fama waste landfills along the tributaries of the River Odaw. The large identifiable waste stream of textiles on landfills and on beaches does not just come from private households; private disposal is only one of the reasons for the pollution.

Therefore, the question as to whether excessive quantities of unsaleable items and/or unusable items are being unnecessarily or even deliberately traded should be decisive for evaluating the global trade in second-hand textiles.

## HYPOTHESIS 1: WASTE REMAINS VISIBLE DUE TO INADEQUATE WASTE MANAGEMENT.

Due to the properties of many textiles,<sup>137</sup> land-fill and disposal in nature or the sewage system in many importing countries is associated with considerable environmental impacts. This is the case of new items as well as second-hand textiles. Importing countries such as Ghana should be supported in setting up a general waste

management system and programmes for the environmental education of the inhabitants should be funded. In addition, a global solution for the return of fibres to textile cycles is needed.

## 'Too many' textiles?

In the discussion about the international second-hand trade, critics often use the image of 'flooded import markets'. And a walk through Kantamanto Market can indeed give the impression of an overwhelming amount of second-hand clothing.

However, the available data for Ghana cannot prove this narrative and the subjective impression. The import figures in recent years have risen markedly. But with the theoretical per-capita import of < 4.6 kg in 2020 for Ghana that this results in, the west African country is still well under the statistically proved per-capita consumption of 15 kg in Europe. The figure for Ghana is probably well below this because a not inconsiderable proportion of the imports are exported on to neighbouring countries.

The size of Kantamanto Market – the biggest second-hand market in west Africa – corresponds to 2/3 of the gross sales area of the Centro shopping centre in Oberhausen. Centro in Oberhausen (North Rhine-Westphalia) is only one of many shopping centres in the region. However, overconsumption in the Global North is a most inappropriate yardstick to evaluate sustainable consumption. At this point, however, it is helpful to classify the import quantities in Ghana. Furthermore, the fact that goods are purchased by Ghanaian importers from all over the world speaks against 'excess imports'. It seems unlikely that the players would import quantities in the long term that the market cannot absorb or for which there is no real demand. The quantities of second-hand textiles available in Ghana are therefore not at all in proportion to the imports and bursting wardrobes in Europe and the Global North.

## HYPOTHESIS 2: THE IMPORTED QUANTITIES MEET A REAL DEMAND IN THE IMPORTING COUNTRIES.

The figures do not provide evidence of excess imports of second-hand items. Much rather, the evaluation of 'too many' clothes and shoes in Ghana would be inappropriate (European) patronisation.

## "The magic is in the mix!"<sup>138</sup>

In principle, four reasons were observed as to why textiles become waste in Ghana:

1. Items that become waste without being used because they are not saleable for various reasons. For example, they do not meet the cultural or climatic conditions.
2. Items that arrive as textile waste. For example, they are so worn or stained that they can no longer be worn.
3. Items that simply don't find a buyer.
4. Items that become waste after use.

The first and second case are mostly relevant to the discussion in this report because textiles in these cases cover an unnecessary transport route because they are only disposed of in the importing country. Critics often accuse the second-hand trade of trading in considerable unsuitable quantities or of performing a (financially advantageous) disposal function for the Global North.<sup>139</sup>

We could not see and it has not been reported that textiles that were sorted as no longer wearable were exported en masse to the Global South, mainly for cost reasons. The Chairman of the Association of Used Clothing Importers of Ghana explained that they would not pay for waste.<sup>140</sup> Added to this is the fact that it is not economically viable for European sorting plants to fill bales with large quantities of non-saleable textiles

due to the freight and customs costs. In the long term, such a practice would endanger the trade because customers would fall away and change their suppliers.

Nevertheless, there is constantly talk of a waste proportion of 40% in second-hand exports. This proportion was not observed among the German and Dutch bales investigated. According to these investigations, the proportion of unsaleable items was much lower. In conversations locally, customers explained that they depended on a proportion of at least 80% saleable items in a bale, otherwise the business would not be viable for them. It is therefore to be assumed that, on average, the traded bales from Germany and the Netherlands contain a much lower proportion of unsaleable goods and textile waste than 40%.

However, the value of 40% is more realistic if we assume that only negative or partial sorting is carried out in some exporting countries. This suspicion was expressed by several exporters in Europe. Moreover, the statement of one importer that he prefers to do the fine sorting in

Ghana also speaks for this.<sup>141</sup> Because the sorting done in the exporting country is not sufficient or does not meet the local needs. This is supplemented by the Chairman of the Association of Used Clothing Importers of Ghana, who stressed that in future a textile recycling facility is to be established in Ghana.<sup>142</sup>

(Final) sorting with Ghanaian wages and the lowest to no disposal costs is generally more profitable for the importers. With this practice, however, large quantities of unsaleable items would remain in the bales that reached Ghana. In this form, a proportion of 40% is certainly conceivable. Moreover, there is no import ban on textile waste in Ghana.

The trade in second-hand items is proving to be a functioning market in terms of quantity and quality - if there is full sorting in the exporting country - that provides items for the target markets. Approaches for an even more accurate handling of the used clothes in the exporting countries could definitely be derived from the conversations and observations.

### **HYPOTHESIS 3: ONLY MANDATORY FULL SORTING PRIOR TO THE EXPORT OF SECOND-HAND TEXTILES CAN REDUCE THE QUANTITIES OF WASTE IN BALES.**

Partial or negative sorting should not be recognised as preparation for reuse. Full sorting should be made mandatory and correct implementation must be monitored. Sorting in the importing country would mean large quantities of waste in the exports and disposal in the import in countries.

### **Communication is key – talk, talk, talk**

European sorting plants supply heterogeneous markets. The deliveries therefore have to be matched to the relevant customers or the target market. The basis for this is exact knowledge of the climatic and cultural conditions in the destination countries. Moreover, preferences and styles differ from 'western European' ideas - as does the understanding of quality. For example, in Germany a white towel represents purity and quality.<sup>143</sup> By contrast, traders in Ghana prefer colourful towels. But the situation could be completely different again in a neighbouring country. Ultimately, preferences and styles differ according to the time and the region.

There is therefore first of all a need for sufficient interaction between the importers and exporters. This most certainly takes place: the company manager of a sorting plant explains that customers in various African countries are only interested in midi and maxi dresses, but she had sorted them into the category of dresses. She therefore adapted the sorting, but then there were no customers for short women's dresses. They then had to find customers for whom the climatic and cultural conditions matched the purchase of mini dresses.<sup>144</sup>

To reduce the remaining unsaleable proportion of items even further, such as babies' sleeping bags, children's

beach towels with hoods, long-sleeved children's clothing or café curtains,<sup>145</sup> exported to Ghana, two problematic areas have been seen that refer to the flow of information. Because of their daily contact with end consumers, market traders have the best impression of the changing demand. However, not all of the information flows from them to the importers or the sorting plants. In the opposite direction it does not always seem to be clearly communicated what items should be expected in each declaration. The meaning of declaration and therefore the content expected may be clear between importers and exporters - but they are not self-explanatory for the traders. What exactly does a trader at Kantamanto Market understand by "children cotton rummage", "ladies silk blouses" or "household small pieces"?<sup>146</sup> Are all of the ladies' blouses made of real silk or do they just have a silky look? What exactly should be expected from "household small pieces"?

Added to this is the fact that no uniform and cross-company or even generally applicable declaration of categories has been laid down in the used clothes sector.

These demands go hand in hand with a 'deeper' or more time-consuming sorting and thus rising costs for the exporters. The sorting structure in the European Union is in global competition here and is facing existential challenges.

### **HYPOTHESIS 4: AN IMPROVED COMMUNICATION FLOW AND MORE TRANSPARENCY MINIMISE UNSALEABLE QUANTITIES.**

The trade can be made even more efficient with standardisation of declarations and categories across sectors and international borders. Positive/negative import lists with items or uniform declarations could help with this.



## 100% Material and 100% Responsibility – The Future of European Sorting

Unlike the manufacturers of new goods, a sorting plant is not in a position to adapt its offerings to any demands. Items that have previously been manufactured, bought and donated by end consumers can only be sorted and sent for reuse or recovery. In the past, the business of sorting plants was based on finding markets for second-hand goods. Conversations and impressions in the Netherlands and Ghana, however, indicated that it is now more about finding goods for existing markets. The question of how a population in Germany that is more than twice as old (Ø 44.7 years)<sup>147</sup> is to meet the demand for young fashion in the importing countries (e.g., Ghana Ø 20.5)<sup>148</sup> in future is just one of many.

At this point, it remains indisputable that extending the useful life is the most sustainable use of textiles, because second-hand use replaces new items and even the emissions associated with the transport of second-hand items bear no relation to the negative environmental impacts of newly manufactured goods.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, every form of recycling or thermal recovery consumer resources. Nevertheless, the established system of the European used clothes sector is facing some serious challenges.

Fast fashion and the associated falling quality of the garments are throwing the previous workings of the system into doubt. As quality reduces, textiles are used

that only last for a few machine washes, fade or are not hard-wearing. The ratio of items in a collection that are suitable for second-hand use to the items that are no longer wearable is shifting further and it is becoming more difficult to cross-finance the collection, sorting and handling of proportions that are no longer wearable from the second-hand trade. As a CFO said in an interview: “We accept 100% of the material and 100% of the responsibility for sustainable wealth creation within the scope of what is legally possible.”<sup>150</sup>

Added to this are locational disadvantages for European sorting plants and recycling companies in global competition. Rising energy costs and an acute shortage of skilled workers are already throwing the international competitiveness of European sorting into doubt.<sup>151</sup> “[...] It will be difficult for European companies the coming 5 to 10 year to stay competitive since our costs a rising quicker then in other parts of the world. says the manager of a sorting company.”<sup>152</sup>

The existing trend of sending used clothes unsorted or just partially/negatively sorted to countries outside Europe will tend to increase even more under these circumstances. As a result, these quantities of waste would evade the EU waste regime and, above all, effective controls for sustainable treatment.

### HYPOTHESIS 5: A EUROPEAN CIRCULAR ECONOMY NEEDS SUPPORT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS.

A European circular economy for textiles with high social and ecological standards needs a regulatory framework that will ensure the competitiveness of European sorting. Mandatory full sorting, an export ban on unsorted, partially or negatively sorted used clothes are

the framework for investment security that will help to establish necessary sorting and recycling capacities. They will be needed with the EU-wide mandatory separate collection from 2025.

Photo 14: Warehouse for imported second-hand-bales at Kantamanto Market in Accra, Ghana (2022)





# Summary

'To have second thoughts' – to have doubts; to reconsider something.

Reports about textile waste in countries of the Global South show that it is high time to harbour 'second thoughts' about the second-hand trade.

Used textiles are everywhere in Ghana, they meet basic needs for clothing and provide an income to many people. Demand - in cases of full sorting - is already being adequately met. But some measures could improve the situation. However, in principle, there is a functional second-hand trade.

Along the entire used clothing chain, players criticise the generally poor quality of textiles. Second-hand items from globally active brands and fast fashion providers on Ghanaian markets show that these (lower) qualities have arrived on the international second-hand trade. This is one possible explanation for rising import quantities and textile waste: with falling quality and implicit reduced useful life, consumers in the Global South are also forced to purchase more frequently and, therefore, more items.

At this point, the actual responsibility of the countries of the Global North becomes clear. This lies in market power of being able to influence the range and thus the quality and properties of products globally. The point is not about the European decision as to whether trade is 'good or bad' overall for a sovereign country in the Global South. What is important is to use product standards to ensure the useful life, repairability and recyclability of products. Moreover, only articles that are saleable and functional as second-hand items should lose their waste status. All other items should be dealt with within the EU under the regime of the European Waste Framework Directive.

Finally, we must also question what right this report, for example, has to evaluate or criticise the Ghanaian import trade and Ghanaian waste management. With a nation-state mentality, the power to decide whether to retain or change such circumstances lies with the Ghanaian government and population. At the same time, the consequences of the textile waste problem transcend individual national borders. Therefore, this is not about allocating blame as to whether waste gets into the Atlantic in Ghana, in France, the USA or Brazil. Much rather, the goal should be to prevent waste in general, establish sustainable waste systems and develop solutions for textiles at the end of their useful life.

For this, political frameworks need to be set in the near future that (1) define clear export guidelines for used clothes and monitor the trade; (2) support the expansion of handling capacities for used clothes in the European Union; (3) encourage the development and market implementation of recycling methods and recycled products and (4) initiate programmes for more sustainable consumption. Furthermore, projects on waste prevention and formation with and in partner countries of the Global South should be developed and a technology transfer of ecologically practical handling and recycling methods should be facilitated.

# Recommendations for Action and Demands

**Communication and Exchange:** Make trading relationships even more efficient with better agreements. Clear communication between all players with respect to declaration and real demand. Exchange programmes from experts can help to assess the local markets even more effectively.

**Optimisation of Operational Processes:** Mis-sorting should be further minimised. Digitisation could enable new, more efficient sorting methods and mitigate the shortage of skilled workers.

**Create General Political Conditions:** No matter where used clothes reach the end of their useful lives, appropriate recycling and waste systems are needed. Recycling structures must be expanded and funded worldwide. The global attractiveness of recycled fibres must be increased, e.g., by means of mandatory minimum proportions of recyclable fibres in new products as provided for in the EU Textiles Strategy. Local and regional sorting capacity must be strengthened.

**Institutionalisation of the Tracking and Monitoring of Use Clothes Streams:** An extensive periodic collection of industry data on used clothes stream is needed to create a reliable data basis. The declaration of second-hand products and waste must be clearly defined.

**Promoting Programmes for Environmental Awareness and Waste Management:** Local education programmes can contribute to the establishment and use of collection systems. A social interest in environmentally sound disposal for the use of waste systems that is not harmful to health must be fostered. The expansion of waste management helps to create jobs.

**Expanding Local Reuse:** The social acceptance of second-hand goods must be further increased. Subsidising European reuse can make a positive contribution to this.

**Introduction of EPR for a Circular Textile Economy:** Manufacturers of new items must be made to take responsibility what happens to their textiles.

**Sustainable Product Design - Long Life, Repairability and Recyclability:** Newly manufactured textiles must follow a sustainable product design. They must be designed for long life and continuing use. Offerings for repairability must be encouraged. The recyclability of the products must be ensured.

**Full Sorting to Prevent Waste:** Full sorting should be the only practice for preparing for reuse.



**END NOTES**  
**GLOSSARY**  
**LITERATURE**

# End Notes

<sup>1</sup> “salaula” (Zambia) a Bemba word meaning “picking out and rummaging through a pile of goods”. “mitumba” is Swahili for something like “bale” and is mainly used in eastern African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania. In Lagos (Nigeria), “kafa ulaya” and “okirika”, “dead white men’s clothes”. In the Republic of Congo, second-hand textiles are called “sola”, which means something like “picking out” and “mupedzanhamo” can be translated as the “place where all problems end” (cf. Brooks 2015: 147 [Trans. AR]). On Haiti, second-hand clothes are called pepe. “Thrift” means economy and second-hand items can be bought in thrift shops.

<sup>2</sup> In the following, the term second hand is used to refer to used clothes that have been classed as marketable and functioning as a result of preparation for reuse.

<sup>3</sup> “The bend down boutique” (Conversations UJ 11./12.2022; cf. Brooks 2015: 147 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>4</sup> OEC 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Previously, the discussion concentrated more on the socio-economic impacts of the trade on the importing countries (cf. FairWertung 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Glocker & Wögerer o. J.; vgl. Cobbing et al. 2022: 6.

<sup>7</sup> Riechau; Palitza & Reimann 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Coobing et al. 2022; Arte 2022; The OR Foundation (o. J); Farmbauer 2021; Zeit Online 2022.

<sup>9</sup> “The second-hand clothing trade poses several research problems. It is hard to come by basic figures for total sales, number of companies, and volume and value of clothing collected, sold in nonprofit thrift stores, disposed of commercially and exported” (Tranberg Hansen 2000: 18 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>10</sup> “Unusual/special industry” (Tranberg Hansen 2000: 18 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>11</sup> The bales viewed and opened in Ghana mainly came from German and the Netherlands. No precise statements can be made about bales with a different origin.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017: 18.

<sup>13</sup> This is made up of 6 kg for clothing, 6.1 kg for household textiles and 2.7 kg for footwear (EEA 2022).

<sup>14</sup> EEA 2022.

<sup>15</sup> The data refer to 2021 (Statista 2022b).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The collection potential is much higher. (cf. Wagner et al. 2021: 35, as of 2018)

<sup>17</sup> European Commission 2022: 1.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission 2022: 1.

<sup>19</sup> On a global average, the collection rate is 25% (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017: 37).

<sup>20</sup> Denmark 44%, France 36%, Italy 11%, Netherlands 37%, UK 31%, Sweden 19% (Watson et al. 2018:18f.). Some of these percentages are based on estimates from different years and studies. We should therefore be critical when comparing them, but they do allow some conclusions to be drawn and show tendencies in the national differences.

<sup>21</sup> “Approximately only 1–2% (estimate from expert survey) of the second-hand goods from sorted used clothes in Germany can be sold.” (Wagner et al. 2021: 309).

<sup>22</sup> Fashion for good & Circle Economy 2022: 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017: 37.

<sup>25</sup> OEC 2020a.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lehmacher 2016: Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017: 23; Müller, Schmidt & Bofinger 2022: 1.

<sup>27</sup> UBA 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz 2015: 242f.

<sup>29</sup> “All numbers include all uses until the garment is discarded, including reuse after collection and resale.” (Ellen MacArthur 2017: 19).

<sup>30</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 315.

<sup>31</sup> König 2008: 27.

<sup>32</sup> KrWG 2012.

<sup>33</sup> KrWG 2012: Article 5 para. 1

<sup>34</sup> European Commission 2022: 10.

<sup>35</sup> Int. SC 20.09.2022/27.09.2022; Int. UB 19.09.2022; Int. OL 17.10.2022.

<sup>36</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 35.

<sup>37</sup> Parcel collection and indoor collections often include an incentive for the donor when they make a donation. Vouchers are given for new goods that are supposed to act as an incentive to donate and buy new.

<sup>38</sup> For packagings, such as glass or paper and cardboard, the parties that place them on the market in Germany are required, on the basis of the “system participation obligation”, to “[...] participate in one or more systems to ensure the nationwide acceptance of returns before placing products on the market” (German Packagings Act (VerpackG)2017: Article 7 para. 1). To date, there has been no such obligation for textiles. However, it is being discussed with respect to extended producer responsibility (EPR) (cf. European Commission 2022: 8). It has been in place in France since 2007 (Wagner et al. 2021: 292).

<sup>39</sup> In this context, original means unsorted used clothes that have not undergone any sorting.

<sup>40</sup> EUWID 2022.

<sup>41</sup> “We have to find a solution for everything we find there,” (Int. KC 20.09.2022 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>42</sup> Fashion For Good & Circle Economy 2022: 11.

<sup>43</sup> Fashion For Good & Circle Economy 2022: 11.

<sup>44</sup> Incineration plants are declared as recovery plants because incineration is also recovery and not disposal (cf. Wagner et al. 2021: 313).

<sup>45</sup> In this process, large quantities of unsaleable and non-functioning textiles probably remain in the unsorted quantities (cf. Wagner et al. 2021: 302f.).

<sup>46</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 303.

<sup>46</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 303.

<sup>47</sup> Training a sorter takes at least 3 weeks and up to 8 weeks to reach a level of efficient sorting.

<sup>48</sup> “Giving all clothing a new life. That’s the main target.” (Int. KC 20.09.2022 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>49</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 303.

<sup>50</sup> Int. SO 20.09.2022; Int. KT 21.09.2022; Int. KC 20.09.2022.

<sup>51</sup> Int. SO 20.09.2022; Int. KT 21.09.2022; Int. KC 20.09.2022.

<sup>52</sup> Int. SO 20.09.2022.

<sup>53</sup> Wagner et al. 2021 303.

<sup>54</sup> The process is the same for all of the other categories in line with their diversity (e.g. trousers, shirts, dresses, shoes, etc.). The sorting of shoes is a special case because the majority of pairs of shoes are separated during collection and sorting. The single shoes are exported to Pakistan, for example, and there put back in pairs as far as possible. (Int. KT 21.09.2022; Int. KC 20.09.2022). This step could be prevented if consumers were to tie the shoes together before donating them.

<sup>55</sup> The calculation is designed to illustrate the required speed and contextualise the volumes of possible mis-sorted items. Absolute figures cannot be given at this point because the weights of shirts can vary greatly depending on the material and size.

<sup>56</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 280.

<sup>57</sup> The donations are made up of approximately 70% women’s used clothes and 30% men’s used clothes. (Int. KC 20.09.2022).

<sup>58</sup> Int. KC 20.09.2022.

<sup>59</sup> Int. KC 20.09.2022.

<sup>60</sup> Int. KC 20.09.2022; Int. KT 21.09.2022; Int. SO 20.09.2022.

<sup>61</sup> Int. KC 20.09.2022; Int. SO 20.09.2022; Int. EO 17.11.2022.

<sup>62</sup> “I think you have to depend on your customers, because here we’re doing 80 tons a day. Per week there is four containers going to Africa, you cannot follow it all.” (Int. KC 20.09.2022 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>63</sup> Int. KT 21.09.2022.

<sup>64</sup> Int. KT 21.09.2022.



<sup>65</sup> The data have been specially calculated (cf. OEC 2020c). The figures always refer to the sales value and not the volume value. No information could be found about how OEC collects data.

<sup>66</sup> At this point, we are once again faced with the lack of a holistic definition for used textiles. The figures stated here refer to the product category “Used Clothing”, but it is not clear exactly what is covered by this term.

<sup>67</sup> Wittl 1996: 91.

<sup>68</sup> They are separated from non-textile parts (zips, buttons, etc.) in specialised companies. They are then cut into 30x30cm squares. Due to the individual shapes of the starting material, this is also largely done by hand.

<sup>69</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 311.

<sup>70</sup> Fashion for good & Circle Economy 2022: 11 (These figures refer only to clothing and not shoes).

<sup>71</sup> Int. KC 20.09.2022.

<sup>72</sup> Wagner et al. 2021: 315.

<sup>73</sup> Whether we can still talk about recycling at this point is a matter for discussion. After all, the fibres are being treated at the molecular level (cf. Int. AB 07.10.2022; Int. OL 17.10.2022).

<sup>74</sup> Int. AB 07.10.2022.

<sup>75</sup> All of the import quantities cited below are based on data from the OEC. They have been chosen for reasons of availability and comparability. Further data can be accessed via Comtrade or ITC.

<sup>76</sup> At this point, we are once again faced with the lack of a holistic definition for used textiles. The figures stated here refer to the product category “Used Clothing”, but it is not clear exactly what is covered by this term.

<sup>77</sup> OEC 2020. Measured in terms of the volume value, distribution looks very different because, for example, Pakistan or the United Arab Emirates import large quantities of used clothes for sorting and recycling. The price of second-hand goods is more expensive per kilogram than used clothes.

<sup>78</sup> OEC 2020.

<sup>79</sup> OEC 2020.

<sup>80</sup> According to the OEC online portal, these are the main export regions for used clothes. However, the basis is

always the sales value and not the volume value.

<sup>81</sup> UBA 2022.

<sup>82</sup> “Ghana – Gateway to Africa” (Conversation BL 19.11.2022 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>83</sup> In 2021, the gross domestic product per head in Ghana was estimated at around 2,521 US dollars (Statista 2022c).

<sup>84</sup> Since 2021, the Ghanaian minimum wage has been 12.53 per day, which corresponds to ₵375 per month. Average wages in Ghana vary greatly depending on the sector and region.

<sup>85</sup> Federal Statistical Office 2023.

<sup>86</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>87</sup> With an annual import of \$182 million and the average costs per container of €29,500 (\$31,900) (taken from the interview), 5,706 containers reach the country every year, i.e., around 110 per week. However, this number can vary, depending on the price.

<sup>88</sup> Trzepacz et al. 2023: 12.

<sup>89</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>90</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>91</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>92</sup> Ghana exports second-hand textiles worth \$334,000 to its biggest market, Burkina Faso, and worth \$194,000 to Niger (OEC 2020b).

<sup>93</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>94</sup> Int. EP 29.11.2022.

<sup>95</sup> “Ghana Beyond Aid” (Kopsieker 2019: 1 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>96</sup> Kopsieker 2019: 1.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. speech by Akufo-Addo at the press conference during the state visit by Emmanuel Macron in Accra in December 2017 and the speech at the 73rd UN General Assembly in September 2018.

<sup>98</sup> International Trade Administration 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Int. EO 17.11.2022/08.12.2022.

<sup>100</sup> GIZ 2022.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Economic Community of West African States; Members: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana,

Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Cabo Verde, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

<sup>103</sup> OEC 2020b.

<sup>104</sup> The colourful fabrics that shape the image of ‘traditional’ clothing in many African regions are the African wax prints, based on the original method of manufacture.

<sup>105</sup> As in Europe, the costs of new items can vary greatly, which is why no absolute figures are given here.

<sup>106</sup> Int. KB 02.12.2022.

<sup>107</sup> Ahiabile & Triki 2021.

<sup>108</sup> The Or Foundation 2022.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Centro Oberhausen is the biggest shopping centre in Europe and has a gross sales area of 125,000 m<sup>2</sup> (Pop Up Shops 2021).

<sup>111</sup> The term ‘kayayeis’ is limited only to women who transport goods on their heads.

<sup>112</sup> For better balance of all the goods, a damp bundle of cloth is usually placed on the head, on which the items to be carried are placed.

<sup>113</sup> Conversations KM 15.11./17.11./07.12./08.12./09.12.2022.

<sup>114</sup> Conversations UJ 11./12.2022.

<sup>115</sup> The terms chosen to describe the players concerned have been chosen freely and do not automatically represent an accurate translation.

<sup>116</sup> Int. EP 29.11.2022.

<sup>117</sup> Int. EP 29.11.2022.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Conversations KM 15.11./17.11./07.12./08.12./09.12.2022.

<sup>119</sup> Int. EP 29.11.2022; Int. EO 17.11.2022/08.12.2022; Int. DB 11.12.2022.

<sup>120</sup> Int. EO 17.11.2022/08.12.2022.

<sup>121</sup> Int. EO 17.11.2022/08.12.2022.; Int. EP 29.11.2022.

<sup>122</sup> Int. EO 17.11.2022/08.12.2022.

<sup>123</sup> Conversations BL 24.11.2022.

<sup>124</sup> Conversations BT 17.11.2022.

<sup>125</sup> Int. DB 11.12.2022.

<sup>126</sup> According to its own information, The Or Foundation is an American public charity and NGO, which has been active in Ghana since 2011. Its aim is: “Working at the intersection of environmental justice, education and fashion development, [...] [and] to identify and manifest alternatives to the dominant model of fashion.” (The Or Foundation o. J.).

<sup>127</sup> The Or Foundation 2022: 27.

<sup>128</sup> The Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), is responsible for waste management, among other things.

<sup>129</sup> A few waste buckets were seen only in the sales areas of Kantamanto Market.

<sup>130</sup> Conversations NB 18.11.2022; Conversations UJ 11./12.2022.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Onuoha 2016: 7; Owusu Boadi & Kuitunen 2002.

<sup>132</sup> The planned expansion was no longer implemented because the landfill that opened in 2013 was already full in 2018, according to the external report from the Ministry of Works and Housing (Salifu 2019: 39).

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Salifu 2019 and Dead White Men’s Clothes (o. J.).

<sup>134</sup> Drinking water is sold in little plastic pouches. They are ripped open with the teeth and then drunk. The remaining film is disposed of in the public space.

<sup>135</sup> Conversations OH 05.12.2022.

<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, there is no worldwide end-of-life solution for textile fibres and neither mechanical nor chemical recycling can currently ensure complete return to the cycle.

<sup>137</sup> Textiles nowadays are mostly not biodegradable and therefore do not rot, or only to a limited extent. Materials made of chemical fibres or mixed materials from various fibres make correct disposal more difficult. In particular, man-made fibres gradually decompose into micro plastics, which are deposited in nature. Moreover, chemicals from the manufacturing process in textiles are released into soils and water bodies if they are land-filled without controls.

<sup>138</sup> “The magic is in the mix!” (Int. KC 20.09.2022 [Trans. AR]).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Hütz-Adams 1995; Cobbing et al. 2022.

<sup>140</sup> Int. KP 11.12.2022.

<sup>141</sup> Conversations MO 08.12.2022.

<sup>142</sup> Int. KP 11.12.2022

<sup>143</sup> In addition to the general wish for colourful items, at this point it must be mentioned that most households in Ghana wash their laundry by hand. It is therefore more time-consuming to keep white and light-coloured items clean.

<sup>144</sup> Int. KT 21.09.2022.

<sup>145</sup> These are short curtains that are hung across windows, usually in the middle or at the top. They are purely decorative or provide a small degree of privacy.

<sup>146</sup> "Children cotton rummage, ladies silk blouses, household small pieces" Trans. AK].

<sup>147</sup> Statista 2022a.

<sup>148</sup> Statista 2022.

<sup>149</sup> EUWID 2023.

<sup>150</sup> Int. SC 20.09.2022/27.09.2022.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Int. SC 27.09.2022.

<sup>152</sup> "The way our costs are rising, we cannot keep it up for another 5 to 10 years, because then we out price ourselves compared to the rest of the world", (Int. KC 20.09.2022 [Trans. <sup>AKJ</sup>].<sup>133</sup> Vgl. Salifu 2019 und Dead White Men's Clothes (o. J.).

# Glossary

## Waste

"Waste [...] waste shall mean all substances or objects which the holder discards, or intends or is required to discard,"<sup>1</sup> according to Article 3 of the KrWG.

## Waste Hierarchy

The waste hierarchy is a fundamental concept in the field of waste management and is in the interests of environmental protection. It is a key element of the German Circular Economy Act (Kreislaufwirtschaftsgesetz - KrWG) and lays out a ranking order of waste management measures from the top priority to the lowest.

- The **prevention** of waste occupies the top position in the waste hierarchy. The aim is to prevent waste and not allow it to arise in the first place. Measures such as extending the product's useful life, promoting reuse and the possibility to repair and avoiding packaging are potential strategies to prevent waste.<sup>2</sup>
- In second place is **preparation for reuse**. The aim is to use the product again for the same purpose for which it was originally manufactured. "It comprises every recovery method where waste can be prepared by inspection, cleaning or repair so that it can be used again."<sup>3,4</sup> In the case of textiles, such preparation is achieved by sorting.
- **Recycling:** This concerns the material recovery of raw materials and the extraction of secondary raw materials that can be used in manufacturing again. Sufficiently high quality should be achieved for secondary raw materials that they can be used as a replacement for primary raw materials. If the material properties of the wastes are used to produce secondary raw materials, we talk about material recovery. In chemical recycling, by contrast, the waste is broken down chemically so that the components can be used as replacement raw materials.
- **Other recovery** comprises the recovery of energy from waste. Recovery as energy is when waste is burned in waste incineration plants. The heat and electricity generated in this way can be used for the manufacture of new products.<sup>6</sup>
- **Disposal:** Disposal is in last place in the waste hierarchy. It means disposal after thermal pretreatment. "The purpose of the pretreatment is to sort the waste, make pollutants harmless and enable environmentally sound final storage of the waste. The untreated landfilling of biodegradable municipal waste has been prohibited in Germany without restrictions since 2005."<sup>7</sup>

The waste hierarchy is an important guideline for developing waste management strategies and should help to reduce waste volumes and encourage a sustainable use of resources.

## Used Clothes

The limitation of the term used clothes is based on the collecting practice in the sector. The term textiles brings together all textile materials (including fur and leather items) from the clothing and footwear category as well as house textiles. It also includes accessories, bedding, bags and soft toys. Carpets, mattresses, technical textiles or upholstery fabrics do not come under the textiles term for the purposes of this report. According to this, all of the above-mentioned textiles become used clothes through being discarded.



## Grade A

The highest quality proportion of second-hand textiles in a collection are called Grade A, *Creme-Ware* or *Extra*. Grade A accounts for around 3-5% in an average collection and is primarily marketed as second-hand in western Europe or North America.

## End of Waste Status

The end of waste status can be achieved by preparing for reuse. In the case of used clothes, this is sorting. According to Article 5 para. 1 KrWG refers to the state when wastes lose their waste status and, for example, are products again. The end of waste status has been achieved when

“it has undergone a recycling or other recovery process, and its type and nature is such that

1. it is commonly used for specific purposes,
2. a market or demand exists for it,
3. it fulfils all technical requirements for its respective purpose, as well as all legal provisions and applicable standards for products, and
4. its use does not lead to overall detrimental environmental or human health impacts.”<sup>8</sup>

Das Ende der Abfalleigenschaft kann durch die Vorbereitung zur Wiederverwendung erreicht werden. Bei Alttextilien stellt dies die Sortierung dar.

## Fast Fashion / Ultra Fast Fashion

Fast Fashion refers to a business and manufacturing model for textiles. It aims at fast, on-trend production without long warehousing times. Ever faster changing trends should be available to consumers immediately, as cheaply as possible and in large quantities. The progression is ultra fast fashion where the times between new items being launched on the market are even shorter and the useful life of individual garments reduces.

## Circular economy

A circular economy is the opposite of a linear wealth creation chain. Resources should be used in such a way that waste is minimised and materials are recovered. Unlike the linear “Throwaway society”<sup>9</sup>, the circular economy tries to create a closed system in which materials are repeatedly reused and recycled. This extends the life cycle of products. After the end of the useful life of a product it is also possible to keep its resources and materials in the existing system and to continue to use them. This helps to reduce environmental pollution, protect natural resources and make the economy more sustainable.

## German Circular Economy Act (Kreislaufwirtschaftsgesetz - KrWG)

The “Act to Promote Circular Economy and Safeguard the Environmentally-Compatible Management of Waste”, also called Circular Economy Act, is the central German legislation to regulate waste streams, and thus also applies to used clothes.

## Linear Wealth Creation Chain

The linear wealth creation chain is based on new Virgin fibers that after further processing steps makes a product, which becomes waste after use. The resources used are not reused. It is the opposite of the circular economy.

## Negative Sorting

Negative sorting means a rough and superficial perusal of the collected used clothes, where obviously foreign bodies and impurities are removed.<sup>10</sup>

## Non-woven

Non-woven refers to fleece fabrics that are not made of woven textiles. They are fibre surfaces made from fibres after mechanical recycling, for example. They are then used as automotive interior panels or fleece for painters and decorators.

## Original

In the used clothing sector, original refers to a collected item, e.g., a used clothing sack, from which no items have yet been removed. In other words, no form of sorting has taken place.

## Second-Hand

The term *second-hand* is used to refer to used clothes that have been classed as marketable and functioning as a result of preparation for reuse.

## Partial Sorting

Partial sorting comprises a “manual removal of valuable, wearable and saleable products”<sup>11</sup>. The remaining amounts are sold on.

## Textiles

The term textiles brings together all textile materials (including fur and leather items) from the clothing and footwear category as well as house textiles. It also includes accessories, bedding, bags and soft toys. Carpets, mattresses, technical textiles or upholstery fabrics do not come under the textiles term for the purposes of this report.

## Virgin fibers

Virgin fibres refer to new fibres that are not based on recycled fabrics. This applies to all types of fibres.

## Full Sorting

### • First/Pre-Sorting

First sorting is the first step in the full sorting process. Sorters open collected used clothing sacks and sort the donated textiles into 40 to 50 different categories; this is done only by hand. Non-textile wastes and textiles not suitable for sale as second-hand items are sorted out and the pre-sorted textiles are then subjected to a subsequent second sorting.

### • Second Sorting

The textiles assigned to categories in first sorting are sorted into 200 to over 300 categories in second sorting. Depending on the item, every sorting table is given textiles for sorting at intervals of 15-25 minutes. Every garment is assessed and added to a sorting category in a very short time.

## Reuse

The reuse of a product means use of an article again in its original use. For example, if a T-shirt is worn again after being bought in a second-hand shop, it is being reused as a T-shirt.

## Further Use

The further use of a product means use of an article again in a way different from its original purpose. For example, if a T-shirt is used as a cleaning cloth after its primary use as clothing it is being used again with a new purpose.

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