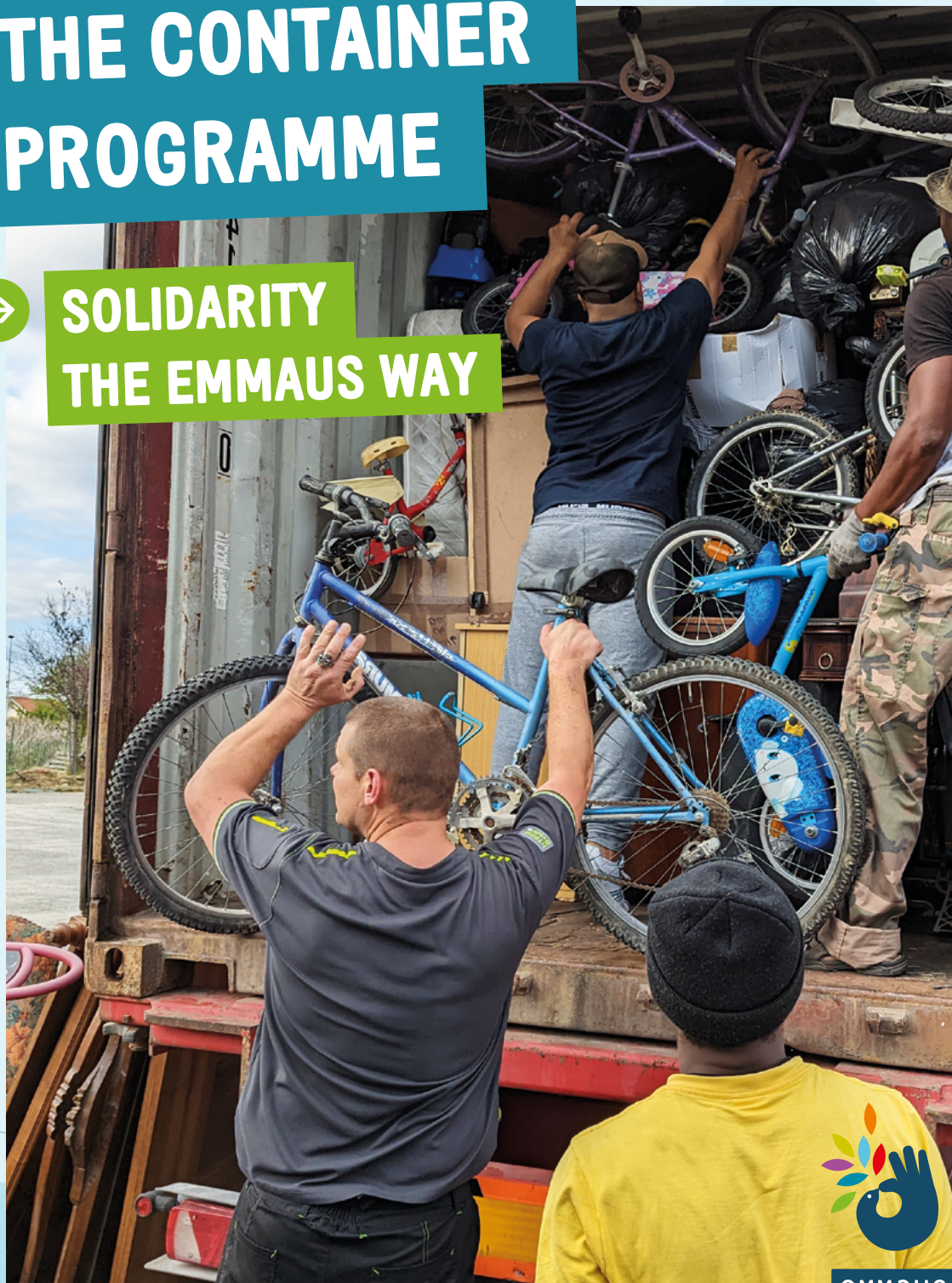


THE CONTAINER PROGRAMME



**SOLIDARITY
THE EMMAUS WAY**



emmaus

INTERNATIONAL

ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

→	EMMAUS CONTAINERS FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT
→	STAGES IN A CONTAINER'S JOURNEY
→	THE CONTAINER PROGRAMME: SOLIDARITY IN ACTION
→	A LINK IN THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULAR ECONOMY
→	A SOLIDARITY-BASED ALTERNATIVE IN A NEOLIBERAL WORLD
→	A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE, WITH CONDITIONS
→	ADVICE FOR SENDER AND RECIPIENT GROUPS
→	SOLIDARITY CONTAINERS IN A CHANGING WORLD
→	METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOKLET
→	GLOSSARY
→	OTHER TOOLS

PAGE

4

6

8

12

14

16

18

22

24

28

31

EDITORIAL

Dear reader,

In a changing world, Emmaus is adapting to act in solidarity; the Container Programme is an example of this. The booklet you are about to read is addressed to all Emmaus groups, whether they are participants in the Programme or curious to learn more about it.

A demonstration of concrete solidarity and interpersonal exchange, the Container Programme is emblematic of the Movement and makes it possible to organise exchanges of goods and practices among Emmaus groups around the world. Today, in a capitalist and globalised economy, while the Programme is facing numerous challenges, we must continue to orient our actions around social and environmental justice.

That is why the Emmaus International (EI) Secretariat is offering this booklet as a tool to help you understand how the Programme operates and what impact it has, with concrete examples of past actions and data to dismantle common preconceptions.

Our goals are to continue our efforts, improve our practices and prepare ourselves for the future.

We hope that this booklet will answer some of your questions and raise new ones. Together, we will work to overcome whatever challenges we encounter.

Happy reading!

Adrien Chaboche

Chief Executive, Emmaus International

EMMAUS CONTAINERS FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

→ THE CONTAINERS: A HISTORY OF EMMAUS SOLIDARITY

Containers have been a gesture of solidarity within Emmaus since the 1970s. In 1974, refugees from Emmaus Las Urracas (Chile) in France described the situation faced by victims of the Chilean dictatorship; this led the Emmaus groups in Le Plessis-Tréville and Bougival (France) to decide to send a first container of clothing to Chile.

Other containers followed from several European countries. During that same time, Emmaus groups in northern Europe (Denmark, Sweden, Finland) sent

second-hand goods to Africa in support of the liberation movements there.

In the 1990s, the shipments expanded among Emmaus groups in Africa and the Americas, making it possible for these groups to receive goods that were rarely or never available locally and to generate funds to support their economic and social activities. The Emmaus International (EI) Secretariat has been involved in coordinating the Programme since 1996.

→ HOW THE PROGRAMME OPERATES TODAY

Today, the Container Programme facilitates the sharing of donated goods within the Movement by sending solidarity containers from Emmaus groups in Europe to those in Africa and the Americas. To date, it is not possible to send solidarity containers to groups in Asia due to customs restrictions. Since 2005, solidarity shipments to Eastern European groups are no longer part of the Programme and are instead handled by the Emmaus Europe secretariat.

The goods received enable Emmaus groups to equip themselves, organise second-hand shops, support local populations, and fund their own activities and operations. Selecting the goods, loading and unloading the containers, and reusing what is received are all opportunities for interpersonal exchanges.

Emmaus International coordinates the Programme and supports the shipments to ensure that the containers have high-quality contents and are distributed fairly among the recipient groups. All the solidarity containers sent between Emmaus groups are part of the Programme, which is organised in annual cycles from May to April.

The EI Secretariat is the main contact point for

groups, providing advice on where to send the containers and support in the shipping and reception of goods.

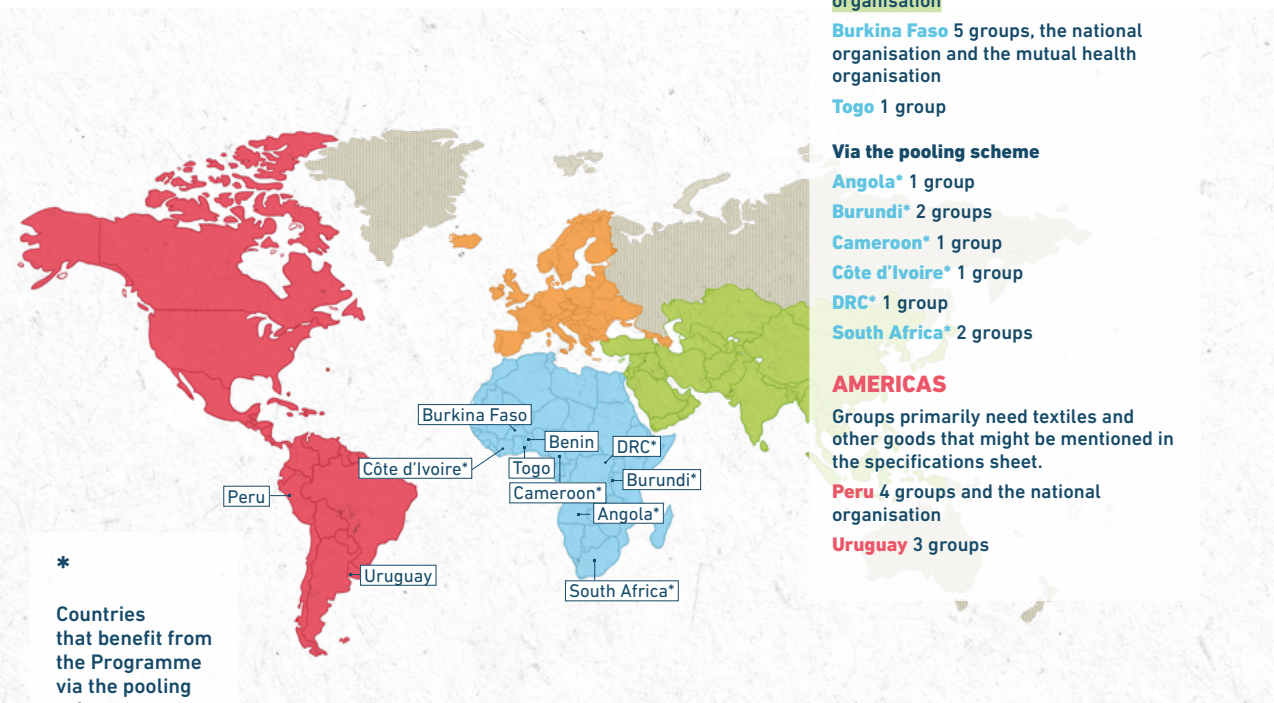
When an Emmaus sender group ships a solidarity container to an Emmaus recipient group, the sender generally takes care of the shipping costs (incl. **sea freight rate**) until the container reaches the agreed destination port. The recipient group then covers the remaining fees, namely those related to local unloading, customs clearance and post-carriage.

There is a restricted fund for the Programme, the **International Container Fund (ICF)**. Groups can apply to it for funding to support the shipment of a container, or Programme-related travel by Emmaus group members.

→ The terms highlighted in green are defined in the glossary on page 28.

WHERE DO PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM THE CONTAINER PROGRAMME TODAY?

Customs restrictions, among other issues, have reduced the number of countries where containers can be received. Currently, about 30 groups are Programme beneficiaries, either directly or through the principle of **pooling** after arrival.

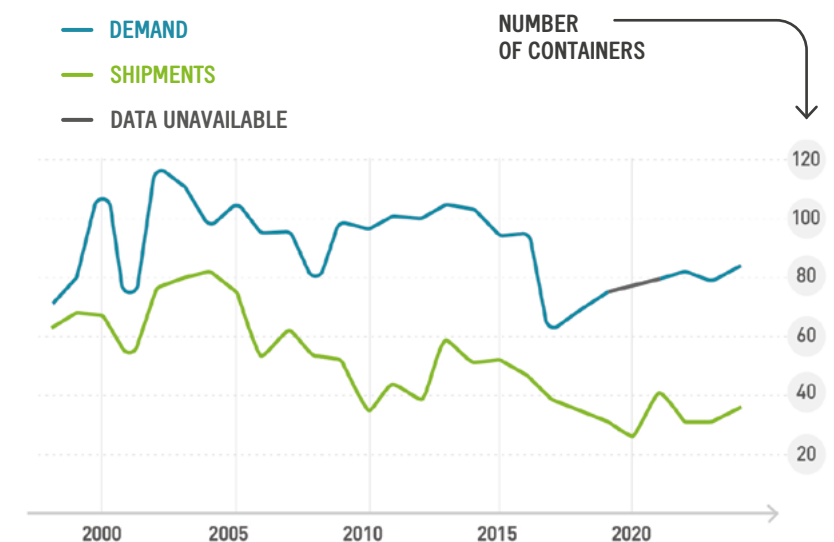


CONTAINER SHIPMENT TRENDS FROM 1998 TO 2024

Since 2008, it has become less common to actually meet the demand for containers. This can be explained mainly by a decline in the number of shipments sent per group rather than a decline in the number of sender groups.

Some groups have left the Programme and others have joined; the total number of groups has remained fairly stable even though the participating groups have changed.

In this context, the EI Secretariat has stepped in to ensure that each recipient group is sent at least one container per cycle.



STAGES IN A CONTAINER'S JOURNEY

This timeline lays out the key stages in the process of sending a container from the European Customs Union to Africa and the Americas.

The EI Secretariat has detailed procedures that are available upon request. They were developed and are updated thanks to the **freight forwarders** as

well as the sender and recipient groups. The stages below are generally applicable in all European countries, but there are specificities based on current national regulations; that is why it is necessary to always verify the regulations before any shipment.

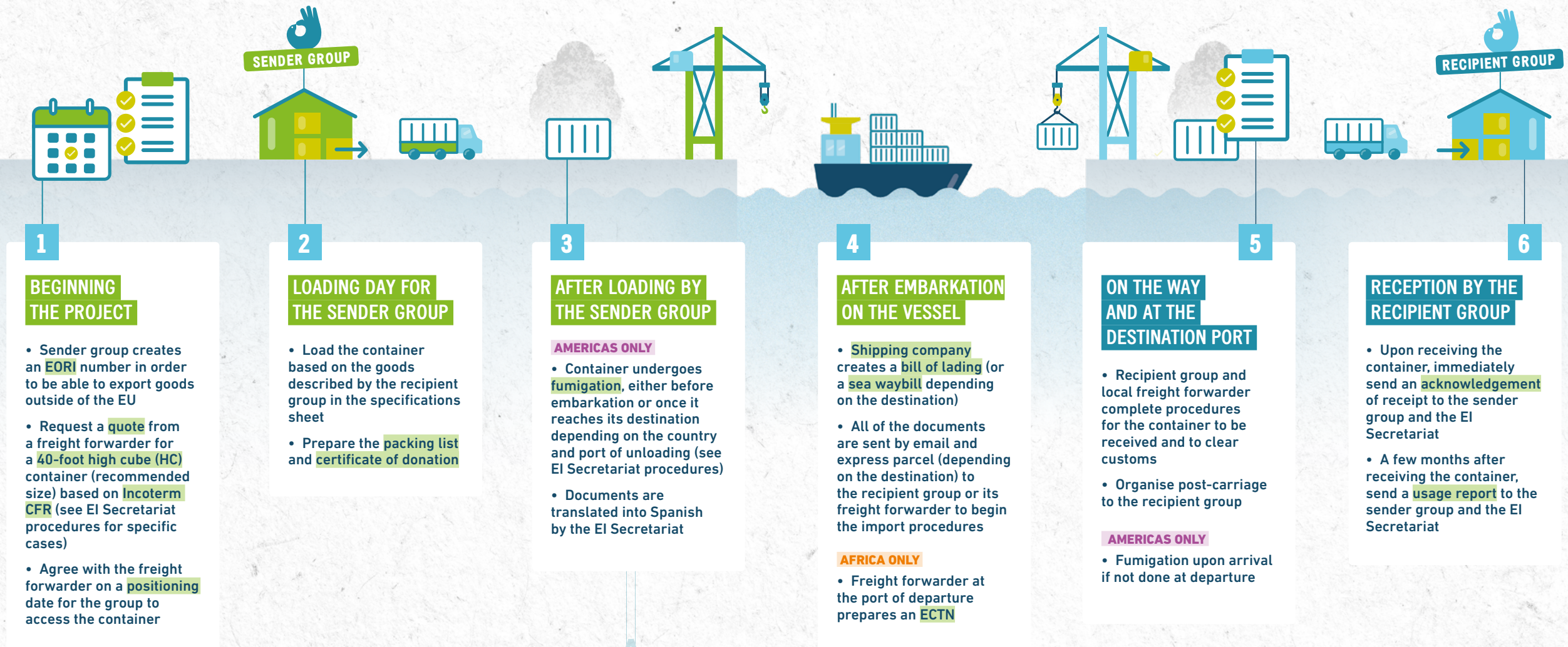
Regardless of the sender or recipient group's location, maritime and customs procedures must be strictly followed. A violation can lead to the container being delayed and significant administrative and financial penalties being imposed.

ACTION BY SENDER GROUP

and service providers

ACTION BY RECIPIENT GROUP

and service providers



THE CONTAINER PROGRAMME: SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

→ SHARING IN THE FACE OF INEQUALITY

In countries of the Global North, a significant accumulation of goods strengthens the giving economy and improves people's access to affordable, high-quality second-hand goods. That is not necessarily the case everywhere in the world. In Benin, for example, the giving economy is almost non-existent; goods are used until they fall to pieces. In Peru, donations are more common, but textiles are rarely donated because their quality does not allow for a long life cycle. Facilitating access in recipient countries to goods that are difficult to find or of better quality is to participate in the redistribution of resources.

The accumulation of goods in the Global North has also made it possible for a large number of groups in Europe to develop a stable business model based on collecting, repairing and reselling second-hand goods. At the same time, certain traditional activities of groups in the Global South, such as market gardening or handicrafts, do not always lead to a stable business model. Even when these activities are profitable, they can be hampered by political decisions.

A container brings much more than just goods: it reduces inequality, meets local needs in context and helps generate local activities.



Emmaus Fougères, France

“IT IS NOT ABOUT EASING OUR CONSCIENCE; IT IS A COLLECTIVE PROJECT AND THE CORE OF WHO WE ARE.”

Emmaus Angoulême, France

Are recipient groups reliant on the containers?



In 2024, recipient groups acquired an average of 37% of their total resources through their participation in the Container Programme. This percentage varied greatly from one group to another, ranging from 5% to 95% due largely to different economic, geographical and social contexts, which offer different opportunities.

For example, recipient groups in the Americas can more easily collect second-hand items (aside from textiles) locally, which enables them to generate more income outside of their activities related to the containers. For their part, some national organisations rely entirely on containers for their operations because they have no other income-generating activities.

In a world of inequality, the containers are a rightful redistribution between groups in the Global North and South. Recipient groups count on this support to continue their struggle against exclusion.

→ SUPPORT THAT IS MATERIAL, FINANCIAL AND MUCH MORE

The Container Programme benefits both the sender groups and the recipient groups. Beyond the economic benefits, it creates opportunities for sharing, dialogue, building relationships between groups, and putting in physical and logistical effort. Each stage along the way is a chance to come together and live our core values as a Movement.

FOR SENDER GROUPS



Pride, motivation, solidarity

Preparing and sending a container is a unifying moment for the group. It's a chance not only to come together around the values of international solidarity, mutual support and work but also to develop a key collective project together for the community.



Stock turnover

Faced with a flood of donations, groups can use container preparation to freshen up their inventory. Goods chosen for containers must meet the needs of recipient groups in both quantity and quality. Items that are not useful to the sender group can sometimes be so for the recipient group. What a great opportunity to make room in storage while also showing solidarity!

FOR RECIPIENT GROUPS



Expanded activities

The arrival of a container entails more direct work (administration, unloading, recovery and resale of goods), making it possible to hire more people and pay salaries. Moreover, the revenue from sales supports the development of numerous economic, social and solidarity activities (see p. 10 and 11).



Local community roots

More than just a regular consignment shop, Emmaus second-hand shops are a friendly place to come and socialise. Residents, clients, companions and volunteers gather there to chat and support each other.

“THE SECOND-HAND SHOP IS THE BEATING HEART OF OUR ORGANISATION.”

Emmaus Pahou, Benin

FOR BOTH SIDES



Human connection

Sending or receiving a container means coming together and pitching in on a shared project. It's a moment of friendship and mutual support that strengthens the bonds between companions, volunteers and staff members, both within and between groups.

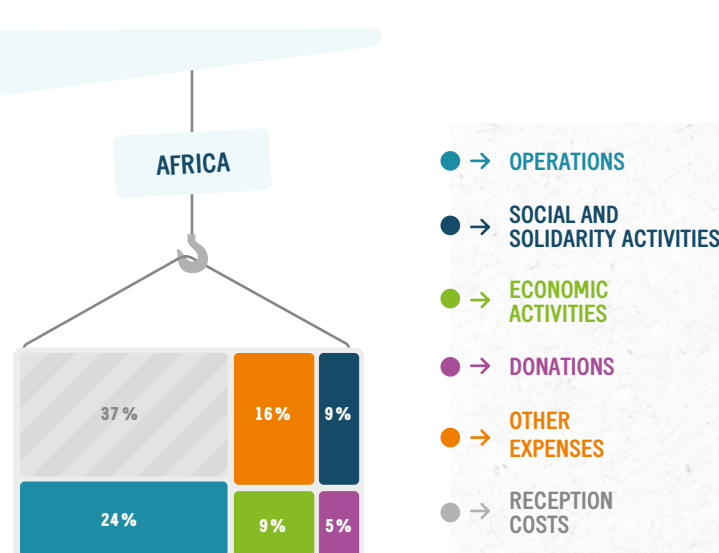


Skills development

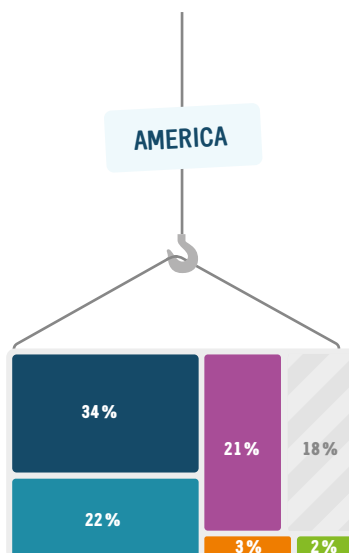
Thoroughness and organisational skills are essential for sending as well as receiving a container. Be it selecting or promoting the goods, logistics or maritime paperwork, each container is an opportunity for group members to learn and increase their skills.

→ HOW ARE THE RESOURCES DISTRIBUTED?

Potential examples of how container resources are used based on a sample of 25 containers studied (20 in Africa, 5 in the Americas). The distinct realities of each group lead to differences in how the container resources are used from one group to the next.



More information about the methodology on p. 24–26.



“THE CONTAINERS CREATE JOBS DIRECTLY. IT’S DIFFERENT THAN A DIRECT FINANCIAL DONATION; IT’S SOLIDARITY IN ACTION.”

Emmaus Aportes, Uruguay

RECEPTION COSTS



Reception costs vary from country to country and depend on the port of unloading, the recipient group’s location, and exemption agreements in place between the group and government authorities.

OPERATIONS



Each group has operating costs that are essential for proper management: renting a space, salaries, banking fees, insurance, etc.

Example

- ➔ In Burkina Faso, the group **Zod-Neéré** used 31% of its revenue from a container to pay for electricity and the salaries of nine employees for three months.

SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ACTIVITIES



Thanks to the containers, recipient groups can implement social and solidarity activities.

Example

- ➔ In Angola, the group **Lunda** used 19% of its revenue from a container to purchase materials and set up a vocational training programme (in sewing, welding, hairstyling) so as to help people gain or regain employment.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES



The goods brought in by containers make it possible to maintain or diversify the groups’ economic activities.

Example

- ➔ In Burundi, the group **AIPH** invested 33% of its revenue from a container to purchase a plot of land for a project to produce and sell biochar.

DONATIONS



Receiving a container enables the recipient group to expand its local solidarity efforts. With the goods received, the group can in turn make donations to support local populations.

Examples

- ➔ In Peru, receiving a container allowed the group **Piura** to distribute clothing and shoes to 870 families living in mountainous areas.
- ➔ In Benin, the group **AFA** established the “Library for All” programme, which regularly supplies nine local secondary schools thanks to the containers received.

OTHER EXPENSES



These expenses are related to investments or maintenance costs within a group.

Example

- ➔ In Uruguay, the group **Nuevo Paris** used 35% of its revenue from a container to renovate its own premises: façade repairs, roof replacement, repainting and a new lighting system in the retail space.

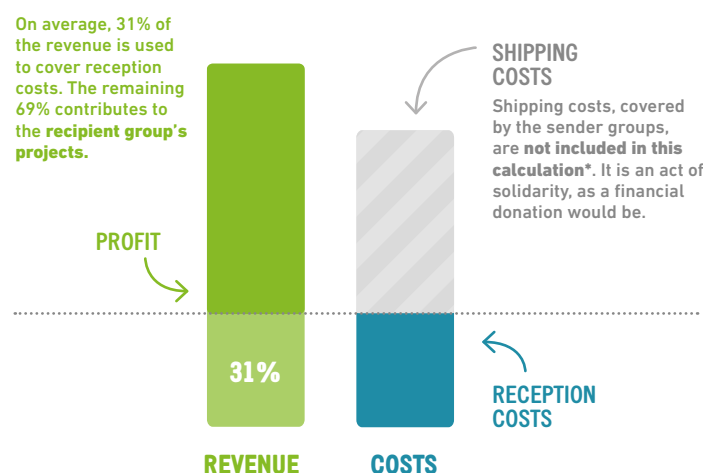
Is it cost-effective to ship a container?

Shipping costs for a container can cause some groups to be hesitant about the cost-effectiveness of a container rather than a direct financial donation.

In addition to the shipping costs (€3,500–€7,500 depending on the destination and the economic conditions), there are reception costs (€2,000–€4,000), which are covered by the recipient groups.

Recipient groups and the El Secretariat ensure that the revenue generated exceeds the reception costs* so that there is a profit to reinvest in the groups’ activities. Thus, it is essential to send goods that are high-quality and well-suited to the local needs (see p. 16–17).

This chart is based on average data from 22 containers received between 2023 and 2024.



Furthermore, a container brings unique benefits related to this gesture of solidarity: access to goods that are hard to find locally and the ability to donate to the population and directly create jobs.

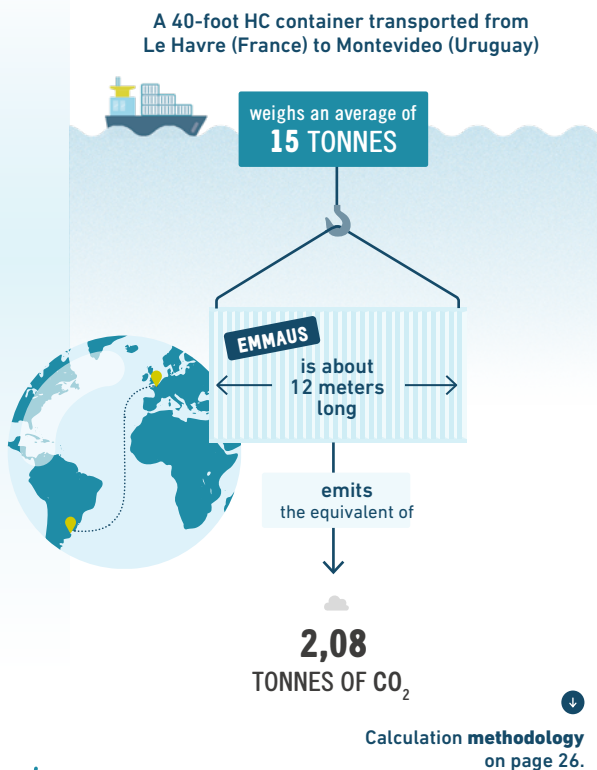
A LINK IN THE INTERNATIONAL CIRCULAR ECONOMY

→ WHAT IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE CONTAINERS?

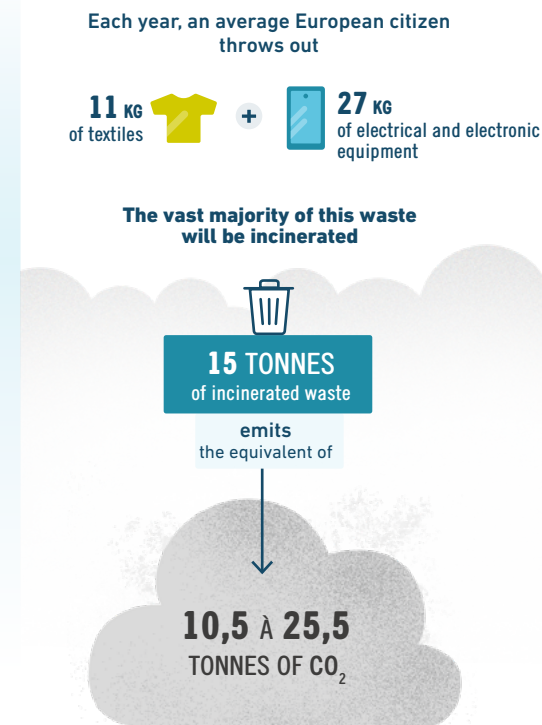
Maritime transport is known to have an environmental impact: greenhouse gas emissions, other atmospheric emissions, losses of containers at sea, noise pollution, etc. Nonetheless, these impacts, including those within the Emmaus Container Programme, should be placed in context. The textile, electronics and equipment industries also pollute.

Year after year, the amount of waste increases. We buy more products and throw them away more quickly. Conversely, the Container Programme is based on transporting second-hand items. Extending their lifespan, even via container, remains the most sustainable option.

→ CARBON EMISSIONS OF A CONTAINER



→ CARBON EMISSIONS OF RUBBISH



REUSE: A KEY PRINCIPLE OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Textiles, electronics, appliances — global consumption is skyrocketing. Between advertisements pushing us to buy and programmed obsolescence, nothing encourages us to make things last. And yet, using products for a longer time is a true solution.

Reuse is a foundational principle that lies at the heart of the circular economy

- 1 REDUCE
- 2 REUSE
- 3 REPAIR
- 4 RECYCLE

→ THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PRODUCT

LINEAR ECONOMY →

CIRCULAR ECONOMY →

Refineries, spinning mills and factories then transform the extracted raw materials into consumer products. Wood pulp turns into viscose, cotton is spun, crude oil becomes plastic and polyester.



Making one pair of jeans requires **7,000 to 11,000 litres of water**. That's **285 showers!**



EXTRACTION

Raw materials (water, crude oil, cotton, wood, etc.) are extracted from the natural world to produce products. These materials usually come from drilling sites or large farms that have a significant impact on ecosystems and communities.



To continue on this consumerist path, we'd need **1.7 Earths!**



MANUFACTURING

Container ships, trains and trucks travel thousands of kilometres at each step of the process to deliver supplies to shops around the world.



Before it reaches a shop, a pair of jeans travels up to **65,000 km**. That's **1.5 times** around the Earth!



DISTRIBUTION



possible repairs

EMMAUS

The Emmaus Container Programme gets involved here

REUSE

Some items can still be used for their original function. That is when the concept of reuse can be fully realised.



406 families near Lima (Peru) received clothing and shoes in good condition thanks to a solidarity container in 2024.

USE

After all these steps, the product finally reaches our hands. That's the time to take good care of it and make it last longer.



The average **t-shirt** is worn for **35 days** before being discarded.



RECYCLING

Many materials can be recycled but very few can be recycled entirely. Recycling, though it remains insufficiently developed, continues to be a promising solution when reuse is no longer possible.



In 2023, **less than 1%** of used textiles were recycled to produce a new item of clothing.



LANDFILLING INCINERATION

END OF LIFE CYCLE

Rather than being reused as resources, most waste products are landfilled or incinerated, emitting greenhouse gases and polluting the soil and air.



Every second, the equivalent of **7 bin lorries** of waste is discarded.

A SOLIDARITY-BASED ALTERNATIVE IN A NEOLIBERAL WORLD

→ A SOLIDARITY COMMUNITY

Supporting each other, physical exertion, friendship and smiles... Loading and unloading days are Emmaus solidarity at its best. Volunteers, companions, staff members and sometimes even local residents are all working hard together.

This convivial atmosphere extends beyond the handful of loading/unloading days. A second-hand shop is much more than just a consignment shop for clients; it is a friendly space where one can linger, have a chat and feel welcome.

Emmaus Piura, Peru



→ STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE

At Emmaus, solidarity knows no borders. With groups in over 40 countries across four continents, political, economic and social contexts can sometimes be quite different. Nevertheless, all the groups work tirelessly to defend the values of the Movement.

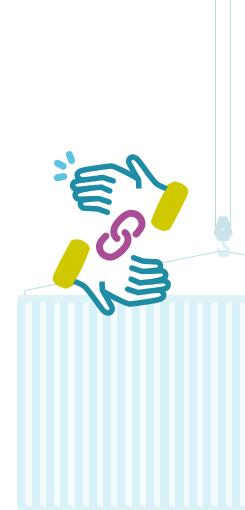
Distributing donations and forging local partnerships allows the recipient group to create a strong local foothold grounded in solidarity. For instance, groups in Benin developed a partnership with Africa Design School whereby students were able to collect unsold items at the second-hand shop and give them a new life using upcycling techniques. Their creations were then auctioned off, and the proceeds went to Emmaus Benin to support the mutual health organisations.



Exhibit at "Françoise's Garden", Benin

"Collection Up-bicycling" created by the Africa Design School in Cotonou (Benin). Modern furniture made with bicycles, walkers and teak slats.

The Container Programme furthers these efforts. It strengthens the bonds between groups from different countries and facilitates intercultural exchanges that foster tolerance and fellowship. In places where people are suffering under structural injustices, the containers help reduce its impact, support companions, adapt to local contexts and needs, and shore up each group's activities.



Emmaus Pahou, Benin



Emmaus Aportes, Uruguay

Do the containers destabilise local economies?

Emmaus containers sometimes give rise to concerns about their impact on local economies.

However, in recipient group countries, it is common to transport discount clothing and items in far larger quantities but without tailoring the shipments to meet local needs.

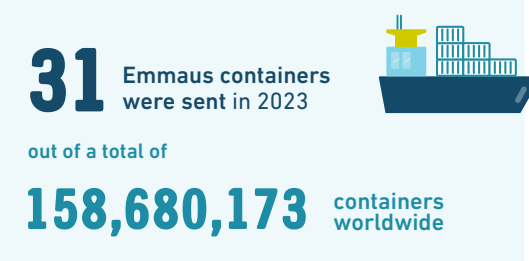
These countries also import large amounts of new, usually lower-quality products from overseas. The aforementioned two factors are sources of instability for the local economy and can hamper the development of local, sustainable production.

In contrast, Emmaus containers that are aligned with local needs enable low-income people to buy more affordable supplies, which are often of better quality. The containers are part of an approach grounded in the solidarity and circular economies, an alternative to mass commerce and the dominant market model. Every year, 30 or so Emmaus containers travel around the world in keeping with these values.

→ WHAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CAN I CHOOSE FROM?

With regard to maritime transport, there are a limited number of service providers to choose from because the market has few suppliers (**shipping companies**) and significant demand (from the shippers). This oligopolistic trend leaves little leeway for sender groups in choosing a shipping company and negotiating shipping costs.

The supply is greater in the freight forwarding industry. Aside from a few major, international freight forwarders, the market has a more diverse set of players, both in size and in variety. One can thus call on smaller service providers who are "local" and can adapt to the realities of an Emmaus shipment. That is what most groups have done in recent years. The EI Secretariat would be happy to provide you with names of recommended freight forwarders!



Emmaus Bougival, France



A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE, WITH CONDITIONS

To maximise the benefits of sending a container, it is essential to adhere to several criteria at various stages of the Programme.



1

BEFORE BEGINNING THE PROJECT



CONTACT THE EI SECRETARIAT

The EI Secretariat will support you throughout the process and ensure that the shipment and reception go smoothly. The Secretariat also recommends priority destinations based on criteria set by the Emmaus International Board and the regional boards of Africa and the Americas.



REFER TO THE SPECIFICATIONS SHEET

The recipient group must fill out the specifications sheet in preparation for a shipment.



SET A TIMETABLE

Adhering to deadlines helps sender and recipient groups stay well-organised. Working as a team, the sender group can distribute the workload among its members. Even if everyday obligations throw off the calendar, the recipient group needs the container and is counting on its arrival.



2

WHILE PREPARING THE CONTAINER



VERIFY THE QUALITY OF THE DONATIONS

- Initial sorting by the Emmaus groups
- Clothing / Quality items, not damaged



MAKE SURE THAT ITEMS ALIGN WITH LOCAL NEEDS

The specifications sheet is your guide. A donation that is suited to the local needs and contexts is not for the rubbish bin.



COMMUNICATE

Participating in the Programme is a chance to talk not only with other sender groups about the preparation process but also with the recipient group to get to know them and build a relationship around solidarity.



BENEFITS

- Get together
- Learn
- Bonding between groups

3

ON CONTAINER LOADING DAY



ORGANISE

Find advice for a perfect loading day starting on page 18 of the booklet.



FOLLOW THE PROCEDURES

Sending and receiving a container must be done in compliance with current maritime and customs regulations. If procedures are not followed, the container may be held up at the border, incurring significant administrative or financial penalties.



BENEFITS

- Loading is efficient
- Container arrives safely



4

DURING THE RECEPTION PROCESS



BE RESPONSIVE

Import procedures must be carried out by the recipient group and its freight forwarder as quickly as possible.



ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT

Once the container reaches its destination, contact the sender group and the EI Secretariat to confirm it arrived safely and provide initial feedback on the goods.



BENEFITS

- Receive goods for your group's activities
- Strengthen bonds
- Continuous improvement strategy
- Encourage the sender group to repeat the process

5

A FEW MONTHS AFTER RECEPTION



SEND A USAGE REPORT

The report details how the container content was used: sales, solidarity initiatives, new activities. It is helpful for the EI Secretariat and the sender group.



BENEFITS

- Demonstrate concrete results of the Programme and new activities
- Inspire sender groups to continue participating in the Programme
- Help the EI Secretariat vigorously promote the Programme



THE SECRETARIAT'S KEY ROLE

A supporter and coordinator, the EI Secretariat is there at every stage of the Container Programme. Staff advise during preparation, track shipments, assist with administrative procedures and formalities, edit practical guides, collect qualitative and quantitative data on the Programme, and promote it to organisations, partners and institutions. The Secretariat is also responsible for coordinating the ICF and connecting sender groups with recipient groups in accordance with the programme approved by the decision-making bodies.



ADVICE FOR SENDER GROUPS



On positioning day, the group has three hours to load the container.
Every hour beyond that incurs an additional fee. Here are some tips for the big day!

→ DEFINE THE KEY ROLES

This is it, the big day has arrived! Everyone has been called in and is ready to go. Loading 76 m³ of goods can't be done alone, especially in only three hours.

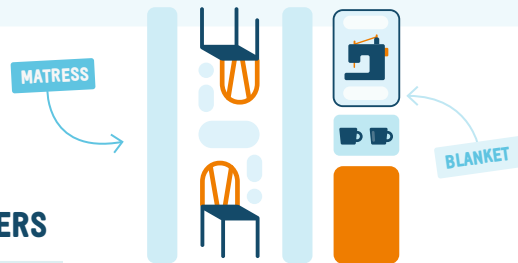
To be efficient, forklifts are a must for this task but so is a great team, with brains and brawn! And if you form a human chain, it's quite practical for loading the lighter packages.

TETRIS MASTERS

2–3 people or more

Are you a master of Tetris at heart? If so, your team is counting on you to optimise how everything is placed in the container during the loading process.

To avoid leaving gaps and to stack the furniture together, plan to have **extra mattresses** and **blankets** on hand. The recipient group will also be glad to have them.



SCRIBES

1 – 2 people

Strategically positioned at the container door, the scribes keep track of the items loaded and generate an exact, comprehensive packing list. To help them, people who are loading can say aloud what is being placed in the container as items are added during the loading process.



If you exceed the three-hour limit during your first loading days, don't worry. It is better to go over the time limit and load the container well rather than rushing. And by the way, preparation beforehand is key for a successful loading day!

BEFORE LOADING:

→ USE PRACTICAL TOOLS

→ THE SPECIFICATIONS SHEET

IS YOUR TRUSTY GUIDE

To prepare and set aside goods before loading day, the sender group refers to the specifications sheet; it serves as a guide during preparations, listing the types of goods and proportions thereof requested by the recipient group. The proportions are given for reference and not meant to be followed down to the exact percentage point. However, it is essential to adhere to the content listed. Loading goods that were not requested could delay the container once in port, and unsuitable or unusable goods cause difficulties for the recipient group.

Have you got questions about an item? Ask the EI Secretariat or the recipient group if it could cause problems upon arrival!



You can share a **preliminary packing list** with the Secretariat and the recipient group. That way they can approve the goods set aside for loading day in advance.

→ MAXIMISE THE CONTAINER'S IMPACT



Pay attention to quality

For a container to be useful and profitable at its destination, the goods inside must be of high quality, without damage, and in good working order. Some groups occasionally set aside unsold items for their next container. This allows them to turn over their stock at the second-hand shop while also guaranteeing a container filled with "boutique-quality" items. In that case, one must still make sure that the goods set aside are indeed in line with the specifications sheet.

"ON LOADING DAYS,
SOLIDARITY COMES OUT OF OUR PORES!"
Emmaus Angoulême, France

→ THE MOCK CONTAINER

Lastly, to be sure that you'll be able to fill the container on the big day, you can acquire **one or more mock containers for this solidarity project**. With a mock container, you can set aside goods over time and see how the final load is progressing. It is a practical way to anticipate the container shipment date and follow the agreed timetable.



Package with care

To preserve all the potential of the goods being sent, it is essential to use packaging that is protective against moisture and breakage.

If the packaging is durable and can be reused by the recipient group, even better! For textiles in particular, recipient groups now often indicate on the specifications sheet what type of packaging they'd prefer.



Remember: It is important to also keep the unloading stage in mind when considering packaging. Recipient groups don't always have the right handling equipment to unload 100-kg bales of clothing, for example.

ADVICE FOR RECIPIENT GROUPS



A container shipment going smoothly also depends on the recipient group being well-prepared and communicative. That part is up to you!



Learn about the process in advance

Every country has its own legal context and specific regulations for importing donations; these vary by the type of goods, country of origin and purpose of the donations. Any Emmaus group wishing to receive a container must first verify the modalities to do so and complete the administrative procedures to comply therewith and ensure a smooth import process that is free of complications.

Additionally, once the container reaches its destination, the recipient group and its local freight forwarder must be responsive to complete the import process and prevent any hold-ups with the container.



Share your experiences and knowledge amongst the groups of your country, and/or reach out to other organisations that are used to receiving donations containers. That way you can optimise your preparation!

Take the time to fill out the specifications sheet

For the sender group to be able to prepare their container as well as possible, the recipient group must fill out the specifications sheet — both the administrative info section and the list of needs — in full and with as much detail as possible. The success of a container relies on this sheet, so don't hesitate to take your time in filling it out!



Communicate with the sender group

Preparing a container requires time and investment on the part of the sender group. It is also essential that the recipient group provide feedback on the safe arrival of the container, its quality and what was accomplished by the group thanks to the container. Recipient groups can use the templates created by the EI Secretariat (acknowledgement of receipt and usage report) to provide this feedback.



Showcase the goods received

The quality of a container's contents is key to optimising the profitability of the shipment but so is showcasing the goods! Prices at solidarity sales, the layout of the second-hand shop — the recipient group must take so many parameters into account to increase the appeal of the goods for clients and beneficiaries. Recipient groups, please do share any great tricks you may have!



THE KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT

COLLABORATE

It is difficult to carry a container project alone (or while struggling to catch your breath)! To set the pace, two or three people should be the contact persons for the project. However, for this solidarity to work and be sustainable, the entire group must get involved collectively: staff, companions, volunteers and the board. And why not get the region involved, too? Some groups have been trying this. In addition to being a chance to share the goods and the costs, a container project with several groups brings people together and fosters unity. Experienced groups, please don't hesitate to share your knowledge and tips with the newcomers!



Head office Emmaus Benin

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

For a successful container project, interpersonal exchanges between sender and recipient group are the cherry on top! Recipient group members can visit the sender group during preparations for the shipment, and vice versa during the container's reception. These conversations facilitate selecting goods that are relevant and aligned with the recipient group's needs; they also strengthen mutual understanding of each person's reality. Getting together is part of Emmaus' DNA!

“PREPARING A CONTAINER IS ABOUT UNITY, AND THAT'S A MUSCLE. EVERYONE PARTICIPATES THANKS TO THE DONATIONS SET ASIDE BY THE VOLUNTEERS AND COMPANIONS.”

Emmaus Annemasse, France



Emmaus Nuevo Paris, Uruguay

SOLIDARITY CONTAINERS IN A CHANGING WORLD

On top of the Movement's internal concerns regarding the containers (quality shipments, meeting local needs, fair distribution, etc.), there are also external challenges tied to regulations, policy and economics, which could have a large or small impact on the future of the Programme.

REGULATORY CHALLENGES

The European Union (EU) is gradually strengthening its regulations concerning textile waste, in particular by tightening conditions for exporting used textiles to non-EU countries in order to reduce illegal shipments. Exporters will need to sort the textiles more carefully, be rigorous about packaging, and provide detailed documentation. Inspections will be more strict.

Although this change is positive for the quality of second-hand shipments and it prevents shipments of waste to non-EU countries, it may complicate the exchanges between Emmaus groups. Similar measures are expected in other sectors (electrical and electronic equipment, furniture, etc.).

The EI Secretariat is monitoring these changes and preparing to support the groups to ensure that shipments can continue in this new context.

POLICY AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

→ Container shipments depend on the **trade and customs policies** of each country. Some groups can no longer receive solidarity containers or never could, due to import restrictions. Tightening conditions for reception constitutes a threat to the longevity of the Programme.

→ The **quality of container** shipments depends partly on the **quality of the donations** made to Emmaus groups. However, there has been a decline in the quality of donations in the past few years. Among the reasons for this trend are:

- The lack of regulations in a capitalist system that encourages excessive production, often at the expense of a product's durability;
- The rise of commercial players in the second-hand industry, who monopolise the high-quality donations and profit from the sale of second-hand items between individuals online.

Beyond sending containers, it is the entire business model based on collecting and reselling items that is at risk if States and international organisations do not intervene to regulate overproduction and rein in the commercial players of the second-hand industry.

→ **Variations in maritime shipping rates** are also a cause for concern when sending containers. Prices skyrocketed in 2022/2023 after the COVID pandemic, demonstrating that there was a threshold beyond which the groups no longer could or would send containers. Even though the prices have decreased again, they are less stable than before and more subject to geopolitical tensions.

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE WAYS TO ORGANISE OURSELVES IN THE FACE OF THESE EXTERNAL CHALLENGES?

IN A WORLD WHERE



SHIPPING COSTS
ARE VARIABLE



THE QUALITY OF
GOODS IS LOWER



REGULATIONS ARE
CHANGING

SHOULD WE

- Strengthen the **practice of several groups from the same region jointly sending** a container, especially to share the costs and collect goods that are suitable and of high quality?
- Organise opportunities to share **best practices for upcycling techniques** in order to give a second life to goods that are of lower quality or have reached their end-of-life?
- Favour **sending equipment with substantial added value** (e.g. sewing machines, semi-industrial equipment) so as to support the development of sustainable activities by the recipient group?
- **Strengthen Emmaus' involvement** in the fight for the circular economy and against overproduction at the international level?



Emmaus Trujillo, Peru



F.I.S., Bosnia



What's more, although reusing goods reduces pollution, recycling must be considered for goods that arrive in their end-of-life. In the Americas, some groups were able to professionalise their work in recycling and household packaging through a **solid urban waste programme** (2011–2016).

In West Africa, this work takes the form of a project to structure the recycling industries for textiles, plastic and organic materials.

The world is changing, and Emmaus is adapting to continue its struggle for social and environmental justice!

Today, all of these options are on the table for the Programme, with support from the EI Secretariat and thanks to solidarity measures and capacity-building. The containers continue to be an essential lever for social and solidarity initiatives among the groups, but the current climate obliges us to make changes to the Programme, explore new approaches, adapt the recipient group business model, and identify other means of action.



Emmaus Villafranca, Italy

THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOKLET

→ ORIGINS OF THE BOOKLET AND THE CONTAINER PROGRAMME IMPACT STUDY

In 2016, the Board of Emmaus International decided to create a dedicated working group to strengthen and revitalise the Container Programme. With that in mind, the working group organised the International Container and Transport Meeting (RICT) in 2019, which brought together sender and recipient groups from the Container Programme (international) and the Transport Programme (Europe). In this meeting, several issues were identified, including the need to study and highlight the impact of the Programme in order to respond to doubts among the groups and re-engage them.

In 2020, the COVID pandemic suspended most of the everyday activities of Emmaus groups around the world. Each organisation focused on the activities that were vital to their survival. Emmaus International provided emergency support and paused substantive work on solidarity programmes, including the Container Programme. The work resumed in 2023 thanks to a training on measuring social impact (MSI) that was given to EI staff by a specialised provider in order to conduct an impact study of the Container Programme.

RICT 2019, Angoulême, France



→ FRAMING AND MODALITIES OF THE MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT PROCESS

GOALS OF THE MSI

- **Increase engagement** around the importance of the Container Programme and respond to doubts held by the groups.
- **Improve the Programme's operations and impact** by collecting best practices and know-how from the groups.
- **Reflect on the Programme's strategy** in light of societal, environmental, regulatory and other changes.

THE MSI PROCESS WAS CONDUCTED USING VARIOUS MODALITIES

- 1 **A field study** of the sender and recipient groups, which contributed to pages 8–9, 14–15, and 16–21 of the booklet.
- 2 **An analysis of reports** from recipient groups, which contributed to pages 8, 10, 11 of the booklet.
- 3 **Calculations and data** related to the maritime industry, and reuse and recycling, derived from various reports cited in the bibliography, which contributed to pages 12–13 and 22–23 of the booklet.

Emmaüs Arles, France



FIELD STUDY

Owing to budget and time constraints, the EI Secretariat favoured the option of a field study that was more qualitative than quantitative. This approach made it possible to illustrate the potential impact of the containers rather than measuring all the forms of impact in detail.

THE FOLLOWING TOOLS WERE DEVELOPED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY WITH THE RESPONDENT GROUPS:

- **Focus group** interview template for **members of sender groups** (managers, staff, companions, volunteers)
- **Semi-structured interview** template for those in **managerial roles at recipient groups** (container contact persons, and chairs)
- **Focus group** interview template for **members of recipient groups** (staff, companions, volunteers)
- **Semi-structured** interview template for **beneficiaries and clients of the recipient groups**



THE FIELD STUDY WAS CONDUCTED OVER SEVERAL TRIPS FOR THAT PURPOSE IN LATE 2023 AND EARLY 2025:

- 3 trips to **sender groups in France**
- 1 trip to **Benin**: comprehensive study with one recipient group and a partial study with three others
- 1 trip to **Peru**: comprehensive study with two recipient groups and collection of information from two others

ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL REPORTS

To better understand the impact of the Programme, the EI Secretariat uses internal tracking tools to collect quantitative and economic data.

By selecting the most complete usage reports, **a sample of 25 containers** received **between 2018 and 2024** was established and then analysed. The information extracted can be found in the "Distribution of container resources" (page 10-11) section of the booklet.

At the same time, recipient groups conveyed their needs for the 2025 cycle of the Container Programme. As part of that, 20 groups responded to a question about the portion of container proceeds in their overall budget for 2024. This feedback contributed to the section "Are recipient groups reliant on the containers?" (page 8) and helped to better ascertain the true role of the containers in the groups' financial stability.

Lastly, internal tracking tables made it possible to compare the costs related to sending and receiving containers with the funds they generate. These comparisons are featured in the section "Is it cost-effective to ship a container?" (page 10) and provided concrete elements to the discussion of the Programme's economic efficiency.

CALCULATIONS AND DATA BASED ON EXTERNAL REPORTS

Finally, the MSI also included calculations and data based on sources outside of Emmaus.

CARBON FOOTPRINT CALCULATIONS

The carbon footprint information on page 12 is presented in CO₂ equivalents. They incorporate the greenhouse gases recognised by the Kyoto Protocol.

The container carbon footprint calculations are based on the 2015 methodology from the Clean Cargo Working Group (in compliance with international standards from ISO, IMO and GLEC). The data used for these calculations are from 2023 and based on the following assumptions:

- Well-to-wake method: accounts for emissions from the entire life cycle (from extraction to combustion) of the fuel used to transport the container
- Vessel was loaded to 70% of its capacity

CARBON EMISSIONS FROM WASTE CALCULATIONS

According to Zero Waste Europe, the incineration of one tonne of household waste emits 0.7–1.7 tonnes of CO₂.

DATA USED TO CALCULATE HOW MUCH WASTE IS DISCARDED PER SECOND

- Globally, 2.1 billion tonnes of waste are discarded each year (UNEP, 2022)
- Bin lorry with a load capacity of 10 tonnes

KEY FIGURE FOR CONTAINERS

The number of containers around the world cited on page 15 of the booklet is taken from a 2024 study on maritime transport conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (page 16).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

- BSR, **Clean Cargo Working Group Carbon Emissions Accounting Methodology**, 2015
- Collard, **L'économie circulaire**, Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, 2020
- Desqueyroux et André, **Recyclage et Réutilisation**, revue Environnement Risques et Santé, 2018
- European Parliament, **Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2008/98/EC on waste**, 2025
- IPCC, **Sixth Assessment Report**, Chapter 10: Transport, 2022
- Jardiller, **L'économie circulaire dans l'industrie textile**, Institut National de l'économie circulaire, 2018
- Parajuly et al., **Future e-waste scenarios**, StEP (Bonn), UNU ViE-SCYCLE (Bonn) & UNEP IETC (Osaka), 2019
- Šajn, **Environmental impact of the textile and clothing industry, what consumers need to know**, European Parliament Research Service, 2019
- Smart Freight Centre, **Clean Cargo 2023 Global Ocean Container Greenhouse Gas Emission Intensities**, 2024
- Textile Exchange, **Materials Market Report**, 2024 revised January 2025
- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, **Review of maritime transport, Navigating maritime chokepoints**, 2024
- United Nations Environment Programme, Executive summary. In **Emissions Gap Report 2024: No more hot air ... please! With a massive gap between rhetoric and reality, countries draft new climate commitments**, 2024
- United Nations Environment Programme, **Global Waste Management Outlook 2024**, 2024
- Zero Waste Europe, **L'incinération des déchets produit du CO₂ en toute impunité, L'exemple lituanien pourrait fournir la réponse en incluant la transformation des déchets en énergie dans le SEQUE-UE**, 2019

WEBSITES

- ADEME Infos, **Connaissez-vous le jean « made in Hauts-de-France » ?**, 2024, consulted in June 2025
<https://infos.ademe.fr/industrie-production-durable/2024/connaissez-vous-le-jean-made-in-hauts-de-france/>
- Envie, **Envie alerte sur la pollution générée par nos vêtements lors de leur lavage**, consulted in July 2025
<https://www.envie.org/nos-actualites/actualites/envie-pollution-microplastiques-lavelinge-charente-maritime/>
- European Parliament, **Production et déchets textiles : les impacts sur l'environnement (infographies)**, 2020 MAJ 2024, consulted in May 2025
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/fr/article/20201208ST093327/production-et-dechets-textiles-les-impacts-sur-l-environnement-infographies>
- Global Footprint network, consulted in June 2025
<https://www.footprintnetwork.org/>
- Nature Climate Change, **The price of fast fashion, 2018**, consulted in May 2025
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-017-0058-9>

GLOSSARY

40-FEET HIGH CUBE (HC)

Container that is 40 feet long and has an exterior height greater than that of a standard 40-foot container (30 cm more, or 2.98 m instead of 2.59 m).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT

Upon receiving a container, the recipient group sends the EI Secretariat and the sender group an acknowledgement of receipt, using the template from the EI Secretariat. This document confirms the safe arrival of the container and indicates any potential difficulties at the destination (e.g. container held up in port, post-carriage issues, damaged goods).

BILL OF LADING (B/L)

→ B/L

The bill of lading has three purposes:

- 1 This document issued by the shipping company constitutes the maritime transport contract between the latter and the shipper (sender group). The terms and conditions of the maritime transport are stated on the back of the B/L.
- 2 The bill of lading serves as a receipt for the goods. It certifies that the goods have been accepted or loaded by the carrier and that the latter has undertaken to deliver them in the same condition to the recipient group at the destination (upon presentation of this document).
- 3 This document also constitutes a title deed to the goods. It must be shown by the recipient group or by its forwarder to the shipping company at the destination to prove that it is the rightful recipient of the goods.

Normally, shipping companies can only issue 3 original B/Ls and 3 copies for each consignment. Originals are negotiable and transferable, which means that titles to the goods can be transferred to another party up until delivery.

CERTIFICATE OF DONATION

A document certifying that the equipment is being sent as a donation and not as part of a commercial transaction.

EORI → ECONOMIC OPERATOR REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION

All economic operators established in the European Union customs territory that import or export goods from or to a country outside of the European Union must have an EORI number. This number makes it possible to identify the operator in its interactions with customs authorities.

ECTN → ELECTRONIC CARGO TRACKING NOTE

Compulsory import document for some African countries. This is the only official document recognised by customs to determine the value of the goods. It also states the freight rate value and whether it has been paid in the exporting country. The container cannot leave the port without this document.

FEET

Anglo-Saxon unit of measurement equivalent to about 30.48 cm. Containers are generally 20 or 40 feet long.

FREIGHT FORWARDER

An intermediary that organises the transport of goods on behalf of the shipper or recipient. It handles booking the means of transport and initiating all customs and transport procedures.

FREIGHT QUOTATION (QUOTE)

Business proposal issued by a freight forwarder detailing the costs and conditions to transport a container based on the place of origin and destination, the type of container, the chosen Incoterm, etc.

FUMIGATION

In some countries, the law requires that containers of second-hand textiles and shoes be treated to prevent the spread of parasites. A fumigation certificate is delivered to attest that fumigation has been completed.

INCOTERM

Incoterms (International Commercial Terms) define the responsibilities of a seller and a buyer in an international sale, in particular, the distribution of costs and risks tied to transporting goods.

Under the Container Programme, there is no sales contract because the shipments are donations. However,

freight forwarders use Incoterms to determine the distribution of costs and responsibilities between the groups. The most commonly used Incoterm is CFR (cost and freight): the sender group bears the costs (incl. freight) until the destination port, and the recipient group takes care of the local costs of unloading, customs clearance and post-carriage.

ICF → INTERNATIONAL CONTAINER FUND

Costs for sending containers between Emmaus groups are generally determined based on Incoterm CFR (cost and freight). In case of financial difficulties, groups can apply for support from the ICF, an Emmaus International solidarity fund dedicated to the Container Programme.

The ICF can fund:

- A portion of the shipping costs for groups having difficulties financing the entire shipment.
- Non-recurring expenses for recipient groups (parking, demurrage, exceptional customs duties, etc.).
- Training and exchange initiatives related to the containers.
- Travel between groups in the course of preparing or receiving a container.
- Administrative costs related to the Programme (translations, sending documents etc.).

LETTER OF DONATION

Document that includes the information on the donation certificate and the packing list. This letter is required by the customs authorities in some Latin American countries.

MOCK CONTAINER

A used container no longer fit for travel that is acquired by a sender group to store goods until they are shipped to a recipient group.

MUTUAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

Emmaus International supports mutual health organisations in four countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, India, Bangladesh) in order to help the most marginalised people reclaim their right to health. These organisations bring together more than 5,000 members and operate thanks to local solidarity and support from the Movement. Every year, the organisations in Benin and Burkina Faso receive containers of second-hand items to support their operations, along with medical supplies to kit out the local health centres.

NATIONAL ORGANISATION

A national organisation is created in every country with at least three member groups of Emmaus International. Its purpose: support groups in the country, coordinate their actions, support the creation of new groups, and represent Emmaus to national authorities and partners. It also safeguards the values of the Movement and liaises with Emmaus International.

PACKING LIST

The packing list itemises and identifies the packages loaded in the container. It is required for customs clearance of the container for both import and export.

POOLING AFTER ARRIVAL

In Africa, due to customs restrictions, only Emmaus groups in Benin, Togo and Burkina Faso can receive containers directly. In order for all African groups to be able to benefit from this solidarity, the region has established a pooling scheme: groups able to receive containers act as intermediaries for those who cannot. Thus, the intermediary groups receive the containers, sell the items received and redirect the proceeds to the final recipient group.

POSITIONING DATE

Date on which a container is made available in the sender group for loading.

SEA FREIGHT RATE / MARITIME FREIGHT

Shipping costs. The freight rate is based on the type of container requested (e.g. 40 feet), the ports of origin and destination, the season (high or low) and the economic conditions.

SEA WAYBILL

Like the B/L, a sea waybill is a document that comprises the contract of carriage between the shipping company and the carrier of the goods. It also serves as a receipt for the goods. Unlike the B/L, however, it is not a title deed to the goods and is not negotiable. A sea waybill makes it possible to speed up customs clearance and release of the goods by presenting a simple copy of the original B/Ls. However, it cannot be used in all destinations (see the detailed procedures from the Secretariat).



E.S.O. Burkina-Faso

SHIPPING COMPANY

Enterprise offering maritime transport services.

SOLID URBAN WASTE RECYCLING PROGRAMME

Supported by Emmaus International, this programme was implemented by some groups in Latin America



E.S.O. Burkina-Faso



between 2011 and 2016. This pilot initiative provided capacity-building to 14 groups in five countries for technical, organisational and legal management of urban waste while integrating a strong social and environmental dimension.

SPECIFICATIONS SHEET

To prepare the shipment of a container, the sender group must refer to the specifications sheet sent (and regularly updated) by the recipient group.

This sheet contains all the information needed for customs and maritime procedures for the shipment: name and address of the recipient group; contact person; contact person of the organisation carrying out customs clearance at the destination; etc. This information sheet also includes a list of requested items and articles that are not authorised for import. This is an Emmaus-specific document.

USAGE REPORT

For each container received, recipient groups send a usage report to the EI Secretariat and the sender group. This report states the total proceeds from the sale of container items and explains how the funds were used. The report must be sent in the months following receipt of a container and completed using the template provided by the EI Secretariat.



Emmaus Villanfranca, Italy

SELECTION OF TOOLS AVAILABLE



ON THE EMMAUS INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS' AREA

Login ID available on request to

conteneurs@emmaus-international.org

- Framework document for the Container Programme (incl. how the International Container Fund operates)
- Tracking table showing shipments for the current Programme cycle



FROM THE EI SECRETARIAT UPON REQUEST BY EMAIL AT

conteneurs@emmaus-international.org

- Example sheets :
 - packing list
 - certificate of donation
 - acknowledgement of receipt
 - usage report
- Detailed procedures for shipments to Africa and the Americas
- Specification sheets for recipient groups
- Contact information for freight forwarders



ON THE EMMAUS INTERNATIONAL YOUTUBE CHANNEL

[emmausinternational](https://www.youtube.com/emmausinternational)

- Emmaus mutual health organisations



ON THE EMMAUS EUROPE WEBSITE

- European transport guide

CONTACT

Emmaüs International
47 avenue de la Résistance
93104 Montreuil Cedex – France
Tel. +33 (0)1 41 58 25 50
Fax +33 (0)1 48 18 79 88

contact@emmaus-international.org
conteneurs@emmaus-international.org
www.emmaus-international.org

→ Find our websites
and social media here



CREDITS

The Container Programme: Solidarity the Emmaus Way,
Emmaus International, 2025

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Patrick Atohoun

PROJECT MANAGER

Marie Lucas

CONTRIBUTORS

Juliana Borgniet, Clarisse Bourdon,
Grégoire Chauveau, Lise Daviet,
Kadija El Goufi and Marie-Louise Truyol

STORYTELLING AND DESIGN

Atelier Récits de Synthèse
Aline de Pazzis and Louise Ras

CO-EDITORS

Marie Lucas and Louise Ras

TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

Willa Murre

PHOTOS

Emmaus groups
Cover photo Emmaus Pamiers, France



emmaüs

INTERNATIONAL

ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

