

International Flows of Secondhand Clothing: Data Summary

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Overview

Tracking international flows of worn clothing presents significant challenges due to data inaccuracies, lack of comprehensive data, and inconsistent reporting standards across countries. Despite these challenges, the UN Comtrade data offers valuable insights into the movement of second-hand clothing worldwide. This data summary leverages the UN Comtrade Database to analyze the global trade of second-hand clothing.

Included in this analysis:

- The top importing countries for 2017 and 2022, avoiding disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A breakdown of the source countries for the largest importers of second-hand clothing and import-export hubs
- A global snapshot of some key exporters and the volume shifts between 2005 and 2020.
- A summary of the export flows out of Australia.

Data reliability

All data in the tables below is sourced from the UN Comtrade Database. However, the database has limitations due to the imprecise nature of country-level trade reporting. Database reviews indicate that UN Comtrade data can be unreliable as it depends on accurate and consistent reporting by both importing and exporting countries. It should be noted that import data has been reported as being more reliable and precise than export data due to customs authorities' tax imports. While the UN Comtrade Database provides a solid baseline for international flows, some discussion points compare UN Comtrade data with other reliable sources for validation, where reliable sources were found.

UN Comtrade Commodity Codes

Used textiles are classified under commodity codes Harmonized System (HS) 6309 'worn textiles and clothing' which are generally fit for reuse, and HS 6310 for 'sorted and unsorted used rags and textile scraps,' which may be unfit for reuse and considered waste.

However, due to regulatory avoidance of HS 6310, both usable and unusable textiles are often traded under HS 6309, leading to uncertainty about the true nature and quality of these exports. Some import and export data is reported in dollar value and some is reported in volume (kilograms).

All data in this summary uses commodity code HS 6309 'worn textiles and clothing' unless stated otherwise and is reported in tonnes which has been directly converted from kilograms in the volume data available. This data summary does not include any UN Comtrade data that has been converted from dollar value to volume.

Import-export hubs

Import-export hubs are identified as countries that are significant transfer locations for used textiles. These countries receive high volumes of used textiles which are then sorted and re-exported to other destinations. For this data summary, Malaysia, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, Poland, Netherlands, Belgium, and Canada have been identified as import-export hubs.

Top 30 Global Importers of Worn Textiles and Clothing

Table 1: 2017 UN Comtrade Import Data - Top 30 Global Importers

Ranking	Reporting Year	Importing Country	Qty (tonnes)
1	2017	Pakistan	656174
2	2017	India	355563
3	2017	Malaysia	244993
4	2017	Angola	193348
5	2017	Tunisia	147820
6	2017	Canada	144853
7	2017	Kenya	135803
8	2017	United Arab Emirates	133245
9	2017	Netherlands	132029
10	2017	Ghana	126236
11	2017	Ukraine	121619
12	2017	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	103825
13	2017	Chile	99656
14	2017	Guatemala	81263
15	2017	United Rep. of Tanzania	80828
16	2017	Honduras	79397
17	2017	Cameroon	76509
18	2017	Hungary	74022
19	2017	Uganda	73218
20	2017	Togo	69126
21	2017	Poland	64330
22	2017	Madagascar	64046
23	2017	Belgium	60066
24	2017	Lithuania	58717
25	2017	Romania	56607
26	2017	Thailand	55891
27	2017	Cambodia	54999
28	2017	Türkiye	51795
29	2017	Italy	50732
30	2017	Germany	47484

Table 2: 2022 UN Comtrade Import Data - Top 30 Global Importers

Ranking	Reporting Year	Importing Country	Qty (tonnes)	Comparison against 2017 data (tonnes)
1	2022	Pakistan	806648	+ 150474
2	2022	United Arab Emirates	359010	+ 225764
3	2022	Chile	313525	+ 213868
4	2022	Angola	208359	+ 15011
5	2022	Malaysia	193223	- 51771
6	2022	India	186543	- 169020
7	2022	Kenya	177364	+ 41560
8	2022	Tunisia	140773	- 7047
9	2022	Guatemala	137186	+ 55923
10	2022	Thailand	127585	+ 71694
11	2022	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	125229	+ 21404
12	2022	Benin	112312	+ 69638
13	2022	Ghana	109579	- 16657
14	2022	Canada	100190	- 44662
15	2022	Hungary	97647	+ 23626
16	2022	United Rep. of Tanzania	95380	+ 14552
17	2022	Ukraine	88793	- 32826
18	2022	Philippines	86784	+ 62421
19	2022	Togo	77682	+ 8556
20	2022	Türkiye	73365	+ 21570
21	2022	Poland	67874	+ 3544
22	2022	Germany	64064	+ 16580
23	2022	Italy	63830	+ 13098
24	2022	Netherlands	63673	- 68357
25	2022	Romania	61899	+ 5292
26	2022	Cambodia	60340	+ 5341
27	2022	Nicaragua	52239	+ 9668
28	2022	Lithuania	52181	- 6536
29	2022	Bulgaria	48967	+ 2694
30	2022	Belgium	47533	- 12533

Table 3: 2017 UN Comtrade Import Data - Top 30 importers without Export-Import Hubs

Ranking	Reporting Year	Importing Country	Qty (tonnes)
1	2017	Angola	193348
2	2017	Tunisia	147820
3	2017	Kenya	135803
4	2017	Ghana	126236
5	2017	Ukraine	121619
6	2017	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	103825
7	2017	Chile	99656
8	2017	Guatemala	81263
9	2017	United Rep. of Tanzania	80828
10	2017	Honduras	79397
11	2017	Cameroon	76509
12	2017	Hungary	74022
13	2017	Uganda	73218
14	2017	Togo	69126
15	2017	Madagascar	64046
16	2017	Lithuania	58717
17	2017	Romania	56607
18	2017	Thailand	55891
19	2017	Cambodia	54999
20	2017	Türkiye	51795
21	2017	Italy	50732
22	2017	Germany	47484
23	2017	Bulgaria	46273
24	2017	Rep. of Korea	45474
25	2017	Russian Federation	45368
26	2017	Belarus	45056
27	2017	Benin	42674
28	2017	Nicaragua	42571
29	2017	Malawi	39229
30	2017	Czechia	31658

Table 4: 2022 UN Comtrade Data - Top 30 importers without Export-Import Hubs

Ranking	Reporting Year	Importing Country	Qty (tonnes)
1	2022	Chile	313525
2	2022	Angola	208359
3	2022	Kenya	177364
4	2022	Tunisia	140773
5	2022	Guatemala	137186
6	2022	Thailand	127585
7	2022	Dem. Rep. of the Congo	125229
8	2022	Benin	112312
9	2022	Ghana	109579
10	2022	Hungary	97647
11	2022	United Rep. of Tanzania	95380
12	2022	Ukraine	88793
13	2022	Philippines	86784
14	2022	Togo	77682
15	2022	Türkiye	73365
16	2022	Germany	64064
17	2022	Italy	63830
18	2022	Romania	61899
19	2022	Cambodia	60340
20	2022	Nicaragua	52239
21	2022	Lithuania	52181
22	2022	Bulgaria	48967
23	2022	Rep. of Korea	47029
24	2022	Tajikistan	41202
25	2022	Zambia	40276
26	2022	Slovakia	38206
27	2022	Rwanda	35438
28	2022	El Salvador	34798
29	2017	Malawi	39229
30	2017	Czechia	31658

Discussion

Largest Importer 2017; Angola

According to the 2017 UN Comtrade data, Angola was the largest importer of worn textiles and clothing, excluding import-export hubs. This significant import volume is driven by economic factors associated with the country's large population and requirement for affordable clothing options. While some reports do not list Angola among the top global importers, other sources highlight its rapidly growing market for second-hand clothing. This trend is consistent with broader patterns across many African countries, where trade in second-hand clothing thrives due to cost-effectiveness and informal markets.

Additional data sources:

- A Swedish Report on the [Distribution of second-hand Clothes in Angola](#)
- Article on Angola being the largest consumer of used clothes from [Europe and the United States](#).

Largest Importer 2022; Chile

In 2017, Chile was the 7th largest importer (excluding the import-export hubs) of worn textiles and clothing globally importing just under 100,000 tonnes of materials. In 2022, this increased to 313,525 tonnes making it the largest importer for that year. This corresponds with other reports of significant dumping of second hand clothing in the Atacama desert in Chile¹.

Comparison against other data sources; Kenya

Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Economic Survey reported 183,830 tonnes of secondhand clothing in 2021 and between 2017-2021 the five-year average of secondhand clothing imports was 160,638 tonnes per year². This is generally in alignment with the UN Comtrade Database reporting 135,803 in 2017 and 177,364 in 2022.

Limited import data; Ghana

While it has not been identified as a Import-Export Hub, it should be noted that Ghana also exports used clothing to neighbouring countries with 7% of the imported volume exported in 2017³.

High import volumes' Canada

The United States is a major exporter to Canada, contributing significantly to the material volumes imported into the country. Policies allowing duty-free or reduced-duty imports further encourage high import levels, making Canada a key player in the global used clothing market in the Americas.

Significant decrease between 2017 & 2022, Netherlands

The Netherlands volumes reduced by more than 50% between 2017 and 2022. This could potentially be attributed to textiles waste awareness and regulatory changes promoting circularity.

India

While India has been identified as an import-export hub for the purposes of this data summary, it is also a key recycling destination. India is a top importer of HS 6310 'sorted and unsorted rags and textiles scraps' much of which is intended as feedstock for recycling—a major industry in the country. India also has specific tariffs and restrictions on the amount of wearable imported clothing that must be re-exported under the Kandla Special Economic Zone (KASEZ), a free trade zone in India⁴

¹ Dumping of Used Clothing in the Chilean Desert, [New Cloth Market](#).

² Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, [Economic Survey 2022](#).

³ An Evaluation of the Socio-Economic and Environmental Impact of the Second-Hand Clothes Trade in Ghana. [Ghana Used Clothing Dealers Association](#).

⁴ Norris, L. (2015). The limits of ethicality in international markets: Imported second-hand clothing in India. [Geoforum](#), 67, 183-193.

Import & Export Flows

The pie charts presented in this section offer a comprehensive visual representation of the trade networks surrounding worn clothing and textiles. These visualizations shed light on the source countries that supply the largest importing nations based on 2017 and 2022 data. Additionally, the charts provide insights into the pivotal role played by import-export hubs, which serve as crucial destinations in the global distribution of these commodities.

Top Importing Countries (excluding import-export hubs): Source Country of Materials

Angola

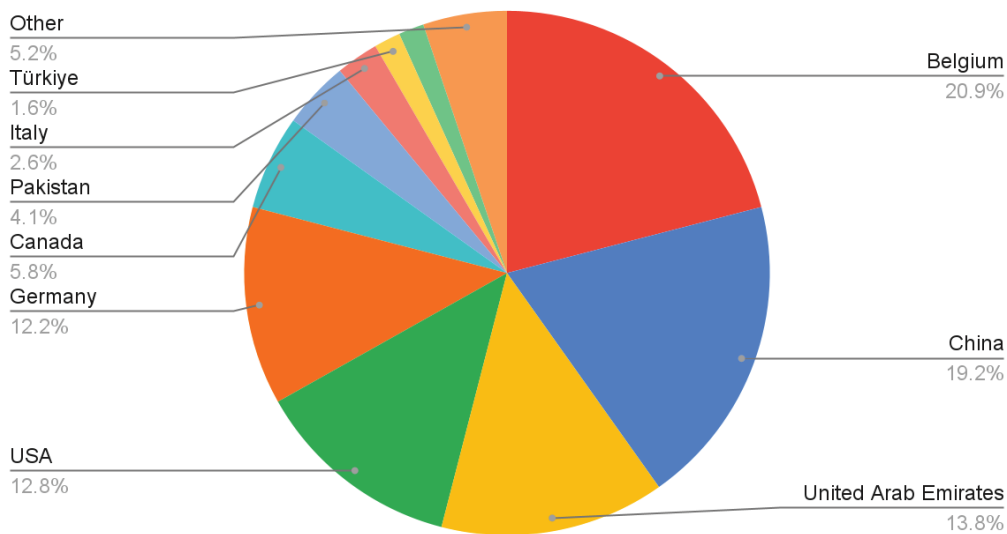


Figure 1. Percentage breakdown of Angola's major source countries (2017)

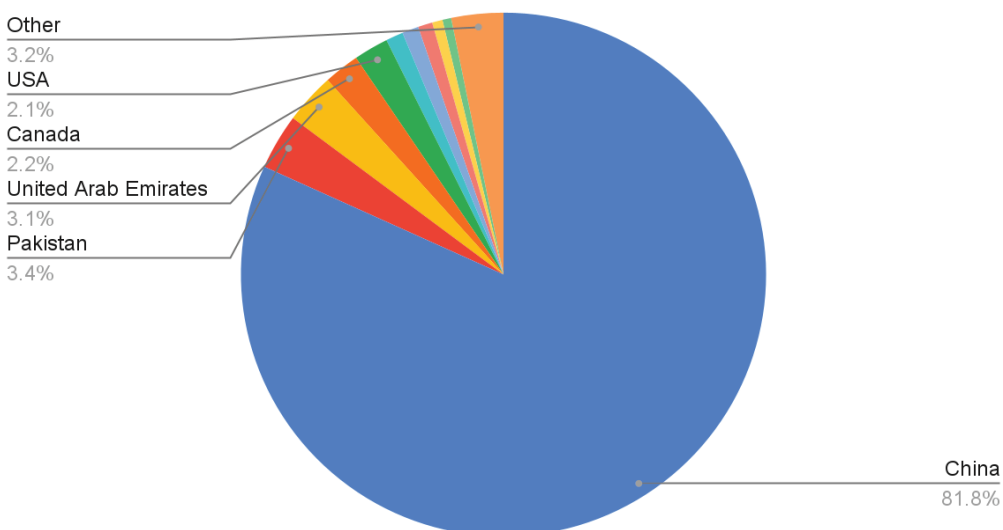


Figure 2. Percentage breakdown of Angola's major source countries (2022)

Angola was the number one importer of worn clothing in 2017 with 193348 tonnes and number two in 2022 with 208359 tonnes according to the quantities reported in the UN Comtrade database. A significant change was seen in 2022 with China supplying more than 80% of the total volume of materials.

Tunisia

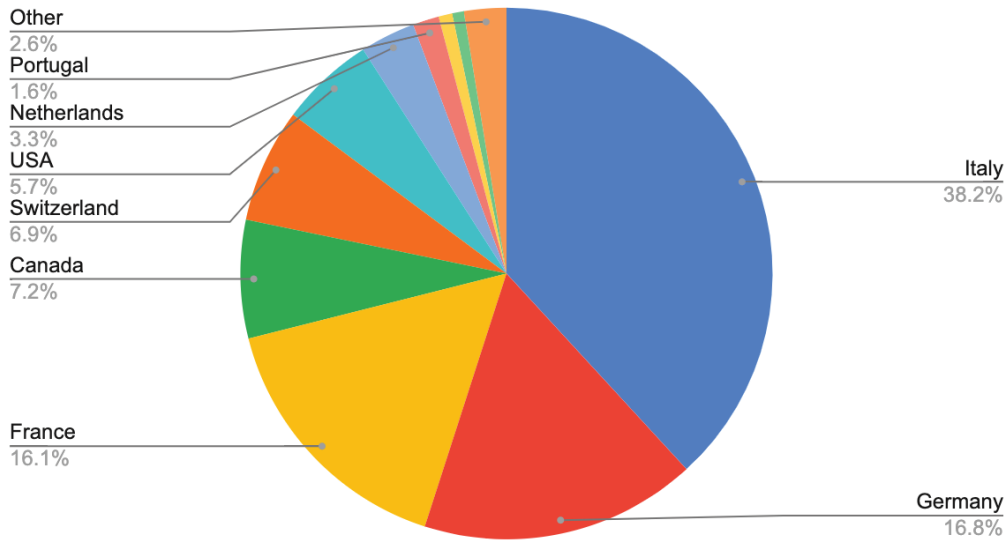


Figure 3. Percentage breakdown of Tunisia's major source countries (2017)

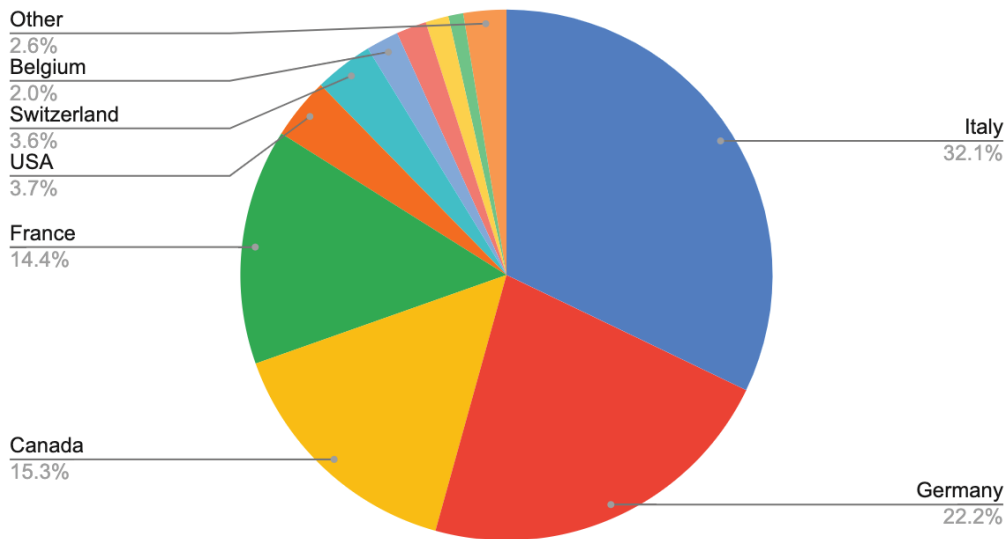


Figure 4. Percentage breakdown of Tunisia's major source countries (2022)

Tunisia was the second largest importer in 2017 with 147820 tonnes and the fourth largest in 2022 with 208359 tonnes. The source countries were predominantly in Europe and Canada.

Kenya

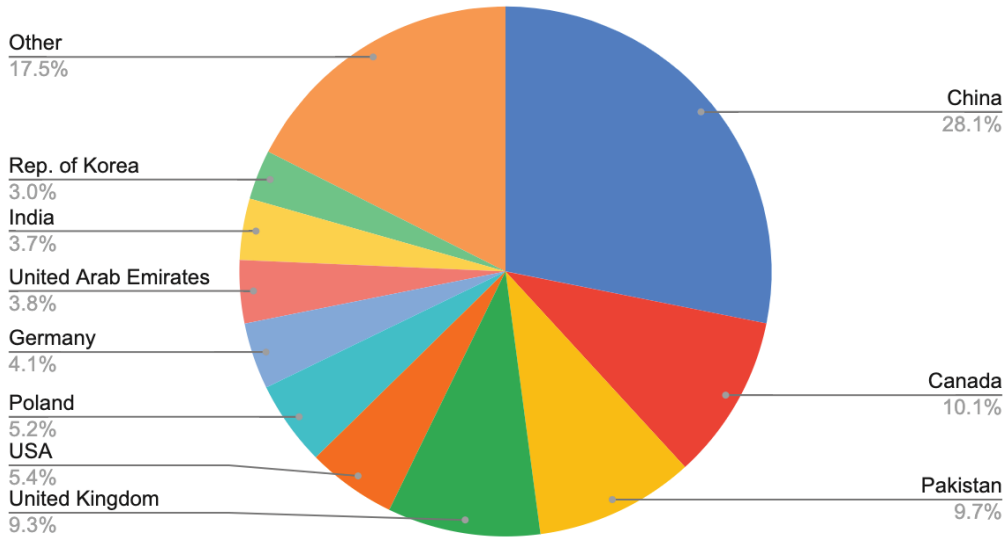


Figure 5. Percentage breakdown of Kenya's major source countries (2017)

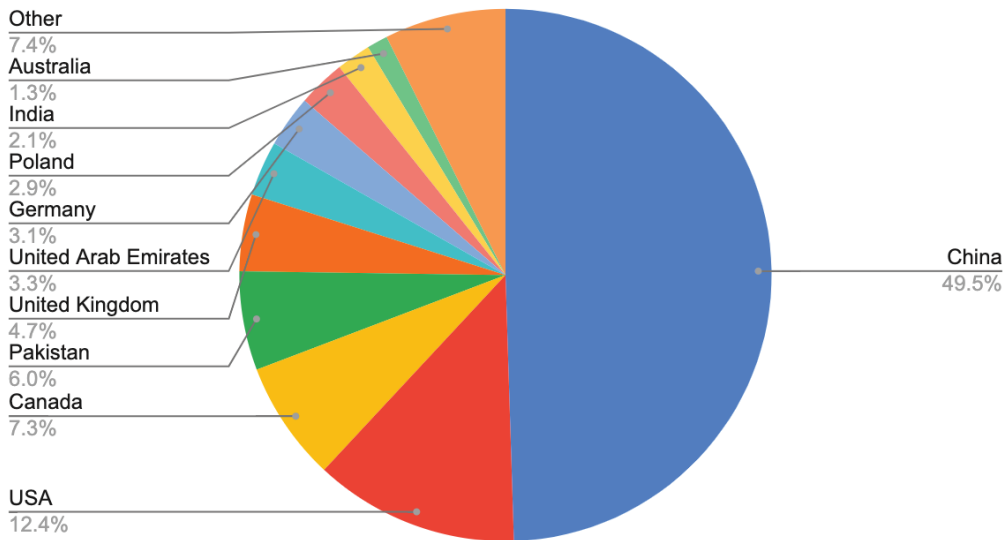


Figure 6. Percentage breakdown of Kenya's major source countries (2022)

Kenya was the third largest importer of second-hand clothing and textiles in 2017 and 2022, importing 135803 tonnes and 177364 tonnes respectively. China's export quantity increased by more than 20% between 2017 and 2022.

Chile

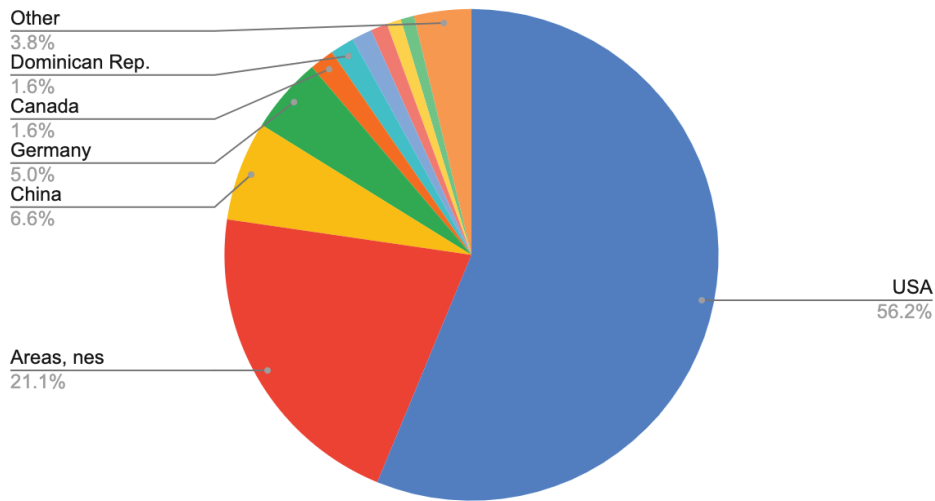


Figure 7. Percentage breakdown of Chile's major source countries (2017)

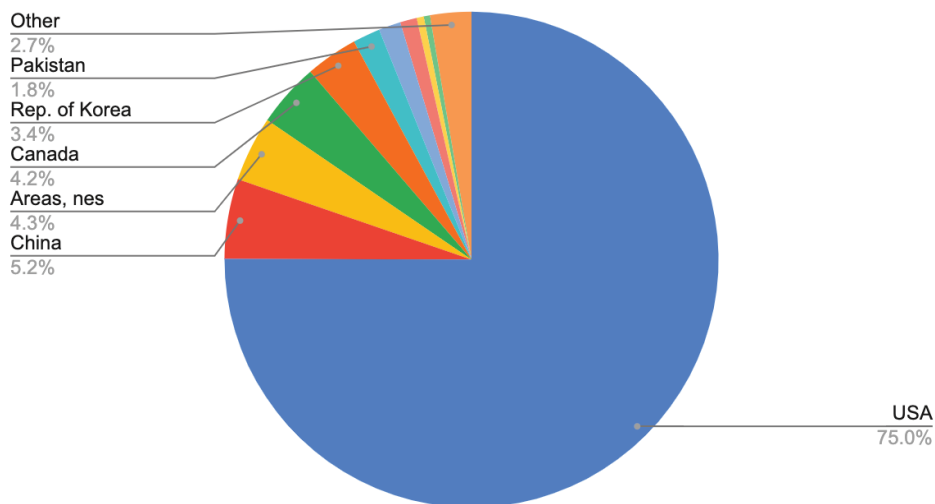


Figure 8. Percentage breakdown of Chile's major source countries (2022)

Chile was the seventh largest importer in 2017 with 99656 tonnes and the largest importer in 2022 with 313525 tonnes. This was a 214% increase in volume in 5 years. *Area, nes* is a UN Comtrade term that means 'not elsewhere specified', as seen in the Chilean data. In 2017, the USA exported 56027 tonnes of worn clothing and textiles to Chile making up more than 50% of the country's imports. This increased to 75% in 2022. There appears to be a data discrepancy in the UN Comtrade database. The reported figure for Chile's imports of second-hand clothing and textiles into its own territory stands at 1,228 tonnes. This anomalous entry may represent an error or duplication in the data.

Congo

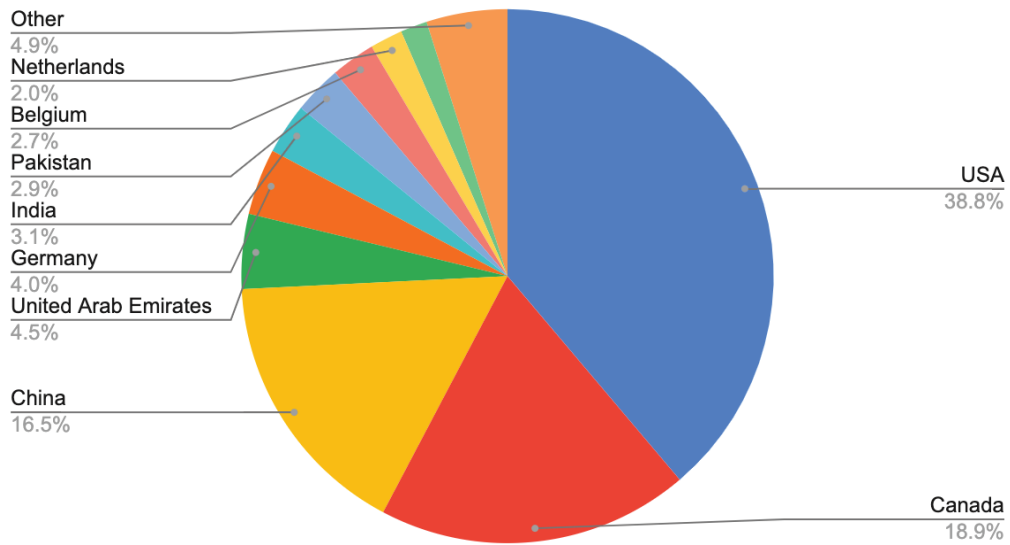


Figure 9. Percentage breakdown of Congo major source countries (2017)

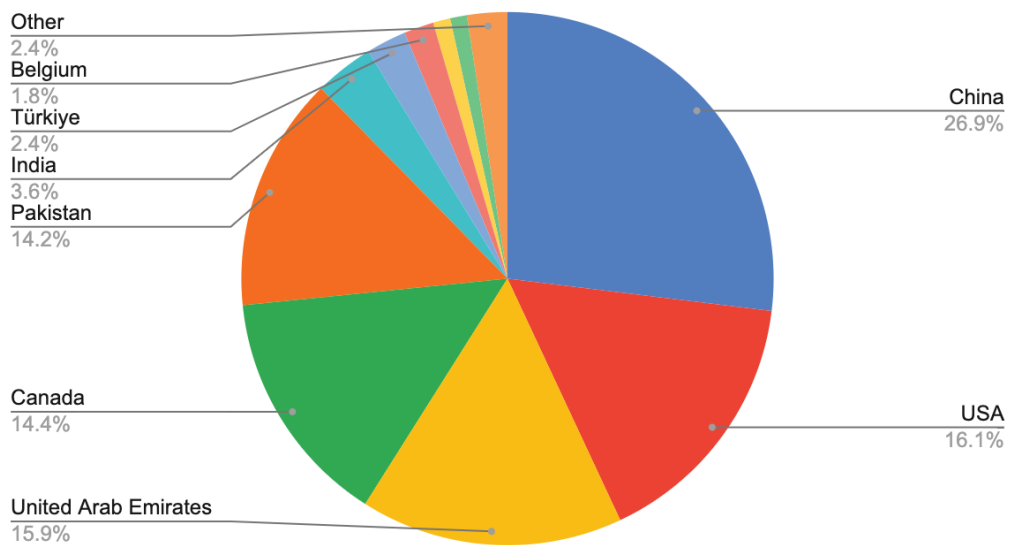


Figure 10. Percentage breakdown of Congo major source countries (2022)

In 2017, the Democratic Republic of Congo imported 103,825 tonnes of second-hand clothing and textiles, ranking 6th globally. By 2022, this volume increased to 125,229 tonnes, placing the Congo 7th. During this period, the amount of materials coming from China increased by 10% compared to 2017 volumes, as did the volume of materials from the UAE. Notably, six out of the top ten source countries in 2017 were import-export hubs.

Benin

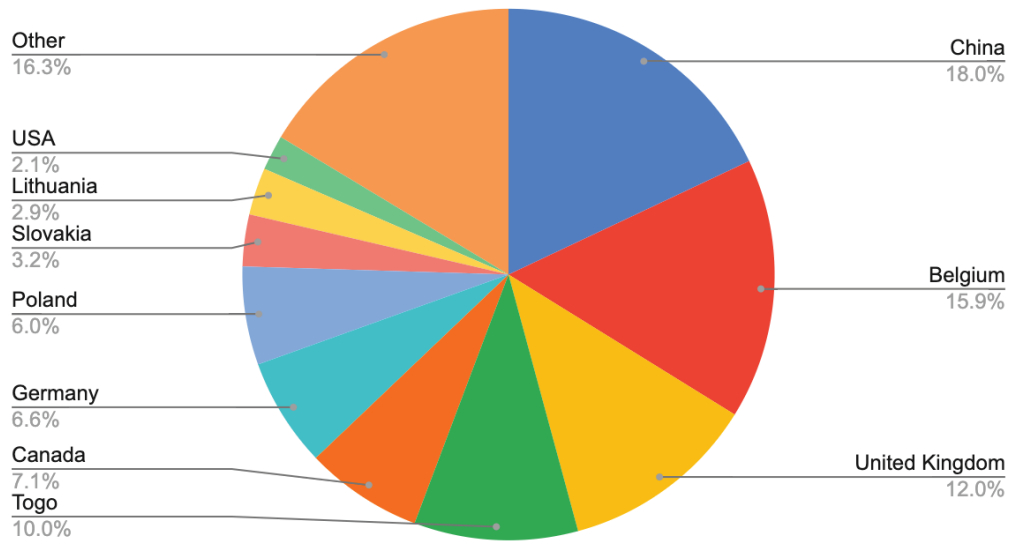


Figure 11. Percentage breakdown of Benin major source countries (2017)

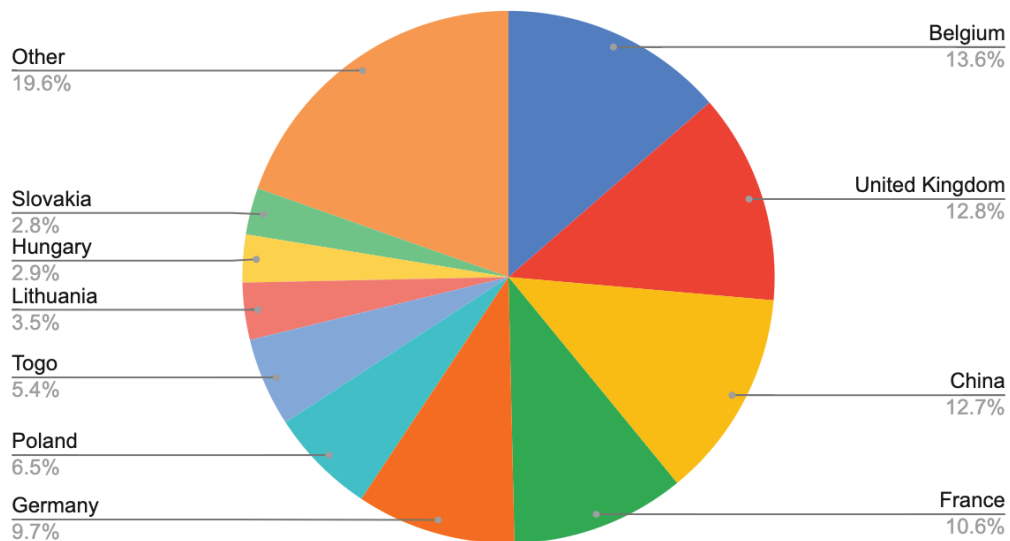


Figure 12. Percentage breakdown of Benin major source countries (2022)

Benin entered the top 10 list of largest importers of second-hand clothing and textiles in 2022, ranking 8th globally. Its import volume increased significantly from 42,674 tonnes in 2017 to 112,312 tonnes in 2022.

Ghana

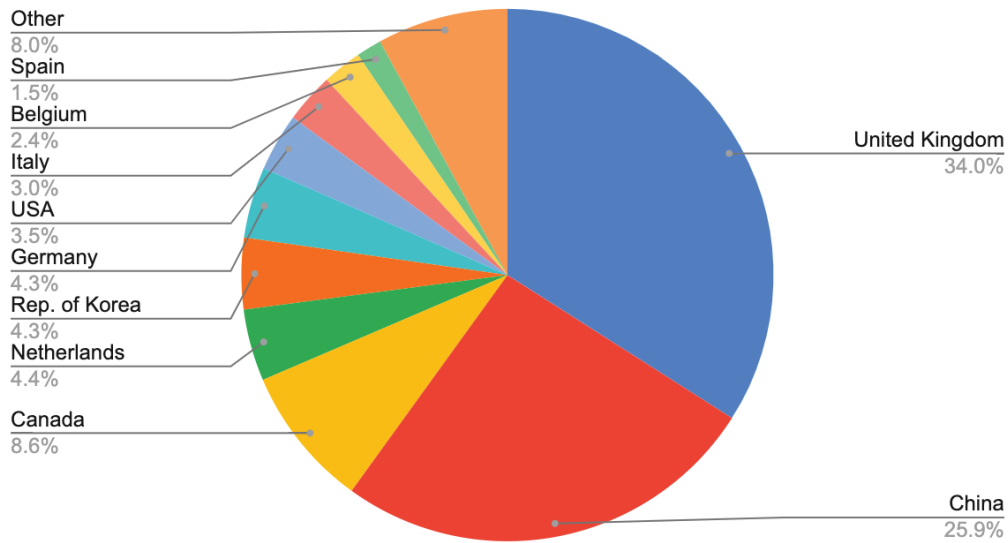


Figure 13. Percentage breakdown of Ghana major source countries (2017)

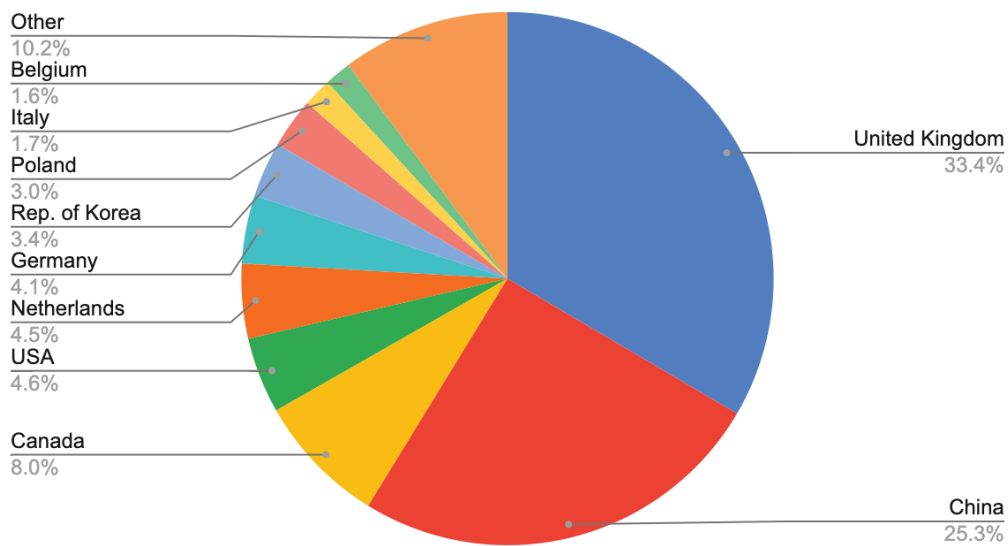


Figure 14. Percentage breakdown of Ghana's major source countries (2022)

Ghana ranked 4th in 2017 with 126,236 tonnes of imported second-hand clothing and textiles, while in 2022 it ranked 9th with 109,579 tonnes. The major exporting countries to Ghana remained relatively consistent between 2017 and 2022. Notably, the top two source countries for Ghana's imports were not import-export hubs.

Guatemala

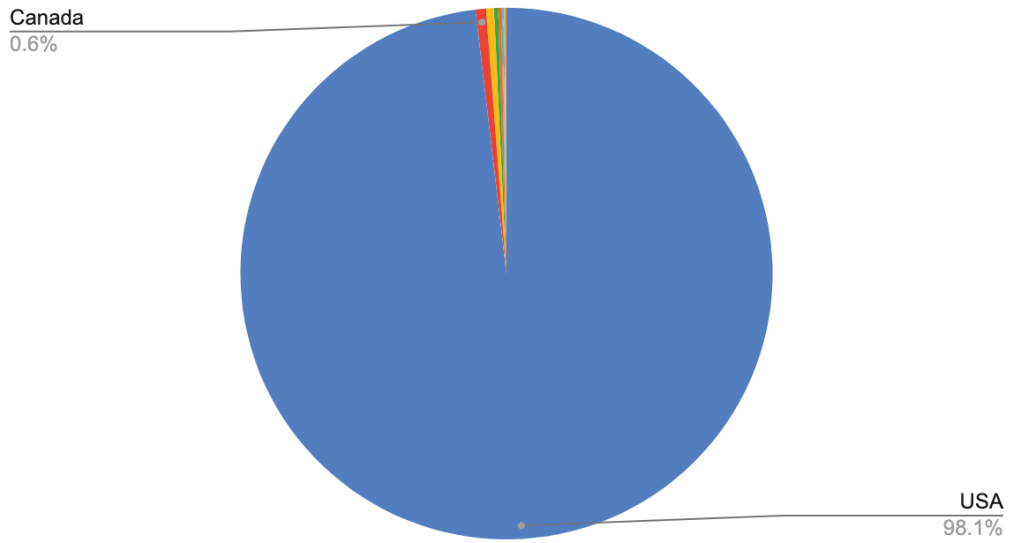


Figure 15. Percentage breakdown of Guatemala's major source countries (2017)

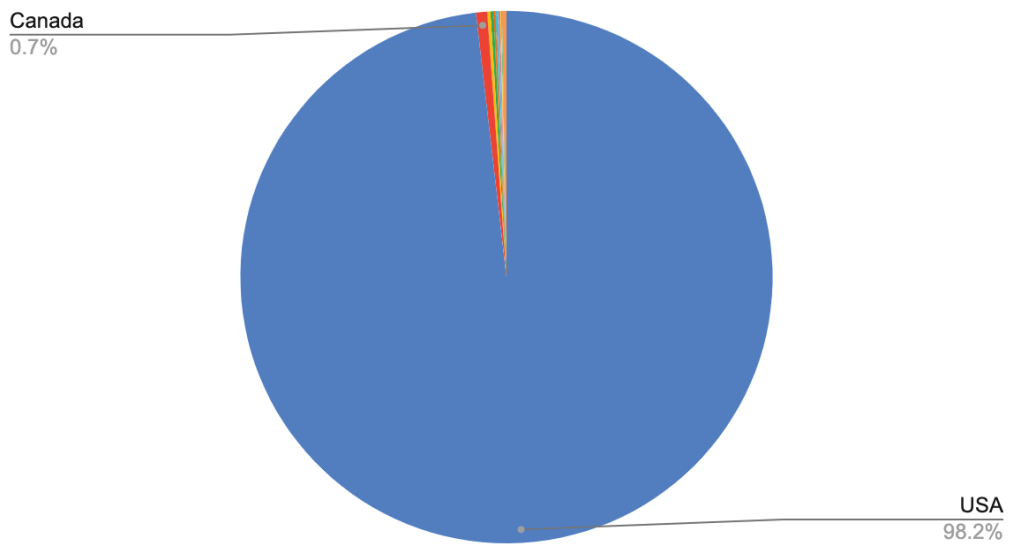


Figure 16. Percentage breakdown of Guatemala's major source countries (2022)

Guatemala ranked 8th globally in 2017 with 81,263 tonnes of imported used clothing and textiles, while in 2022 it ranked 5th with 137,186 tonnes. The United States was the dominant exporter of used clothing and textiles to Guatemala for both 2017 and 2022.

Honduras

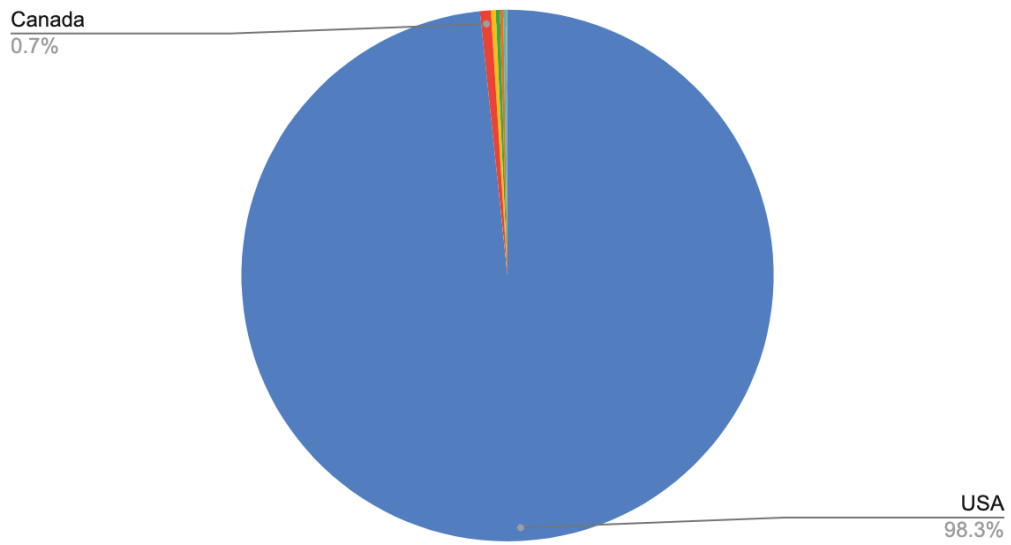


Figure 17. Percentage breakdown of Honduras's major source countries (2017)

Honduras ranked 10th in 2017 with 79,397 tonnes of imported used clothing and textiles. However, there is no data available for Honduras in 2022.

Hungary

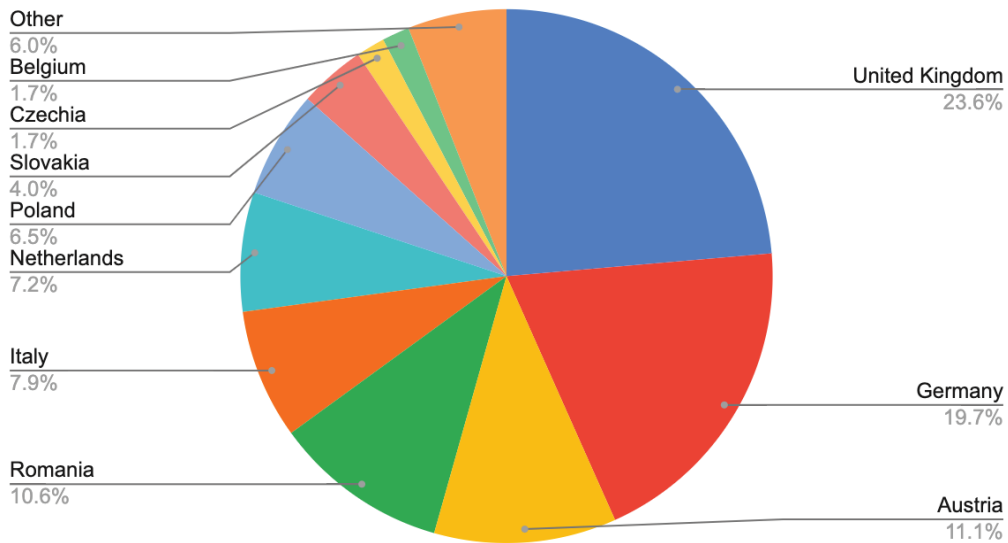


Figure 18. Percentage breakdown of Hungary's major source countries (2017)

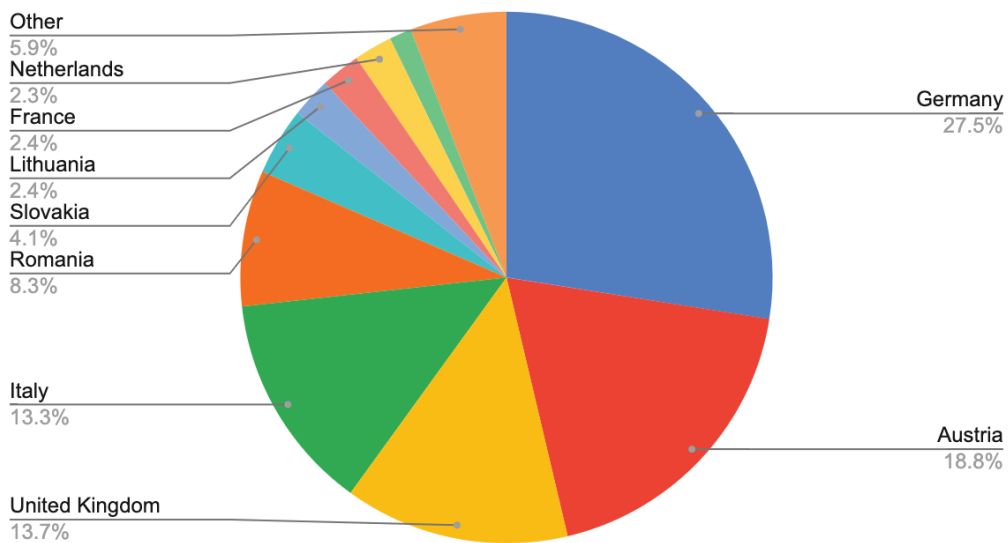


Figure 19. Percentage breakdown of Hungary's major source countries (2022)

Hungary ranked 12th globally in 2017 with 74,022 tonnes of imported used clothing and textiles, while in 2022 it ranked 10th with 97,647 tonnes, representing a significant increase between 2017 and 2022. The predominant exporting countries supplying Hungary with used clothing and textiles are located in Europe.

Thailand

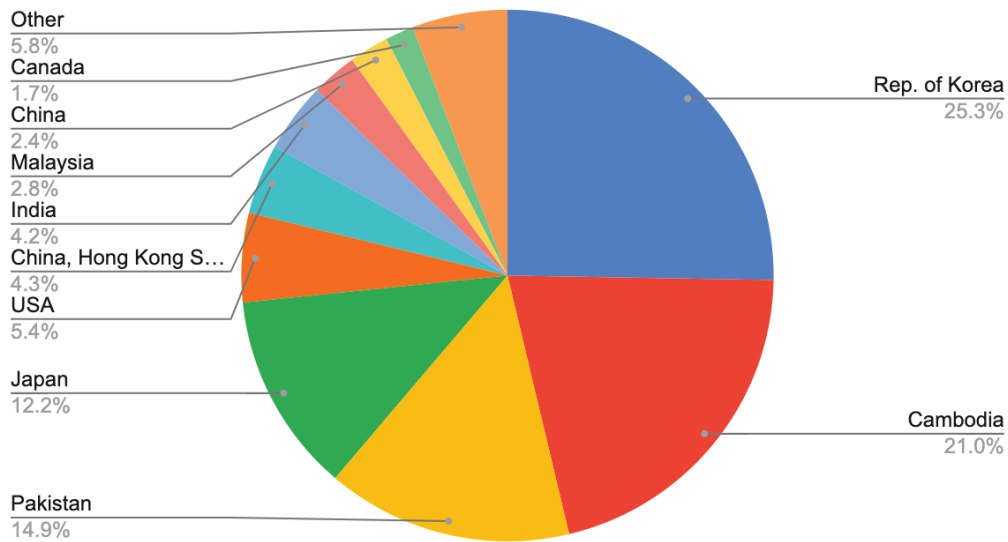


Figure 20. Percentage breakdown of Thailand's major source countries (2017)

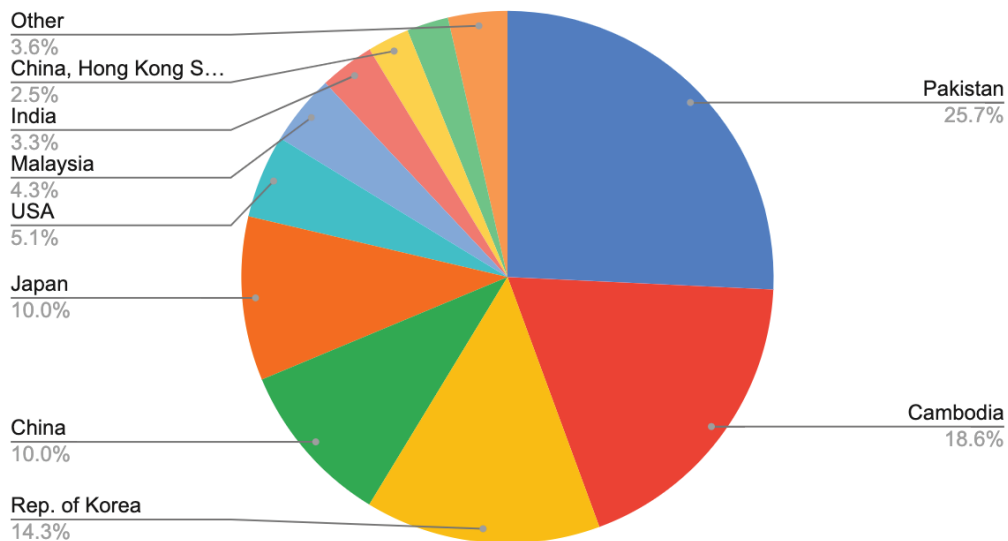


Figure 21. Percentage breakdown of Thailand's major source countries (2022)

Thailand was the 18th largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 55,891 tonnes. However, in 2022, Thailand became the 6th largest importer, with an import volume of 127,585 tonnes, representing a 128% increase. Pakistan, Cambodia and Korea remained as the largest source countries.

Ukraine

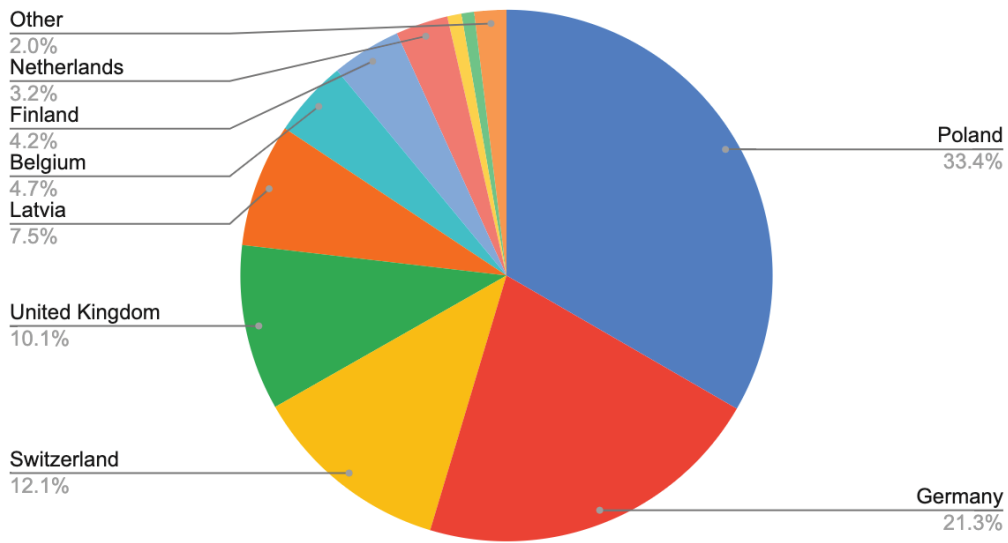


Figure 22. Percentage breakdown of Ukraine's major source countries (2017)

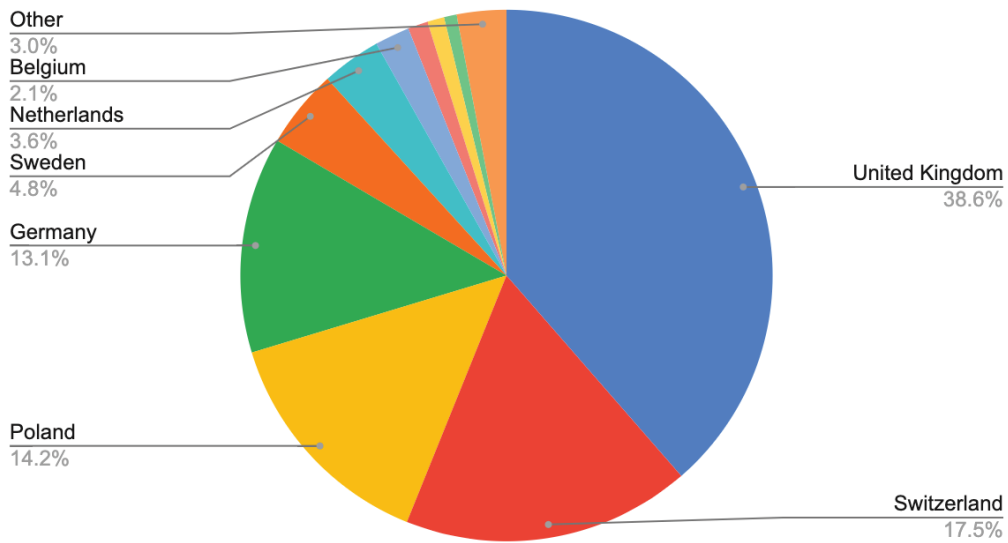


Figure 23. Percentage breakdown of Ukraine's major source countries (2022)

Ukraine ranked as the fifth largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 121,619 tonnes but decreased to the 12th largest importer in 2022 with 88,793 tonnes, a notable reduction potentially related to the political landscape in the country. The predominant source countries for Ukraine's imports of used textiles are located within the European Union.

Tanzania

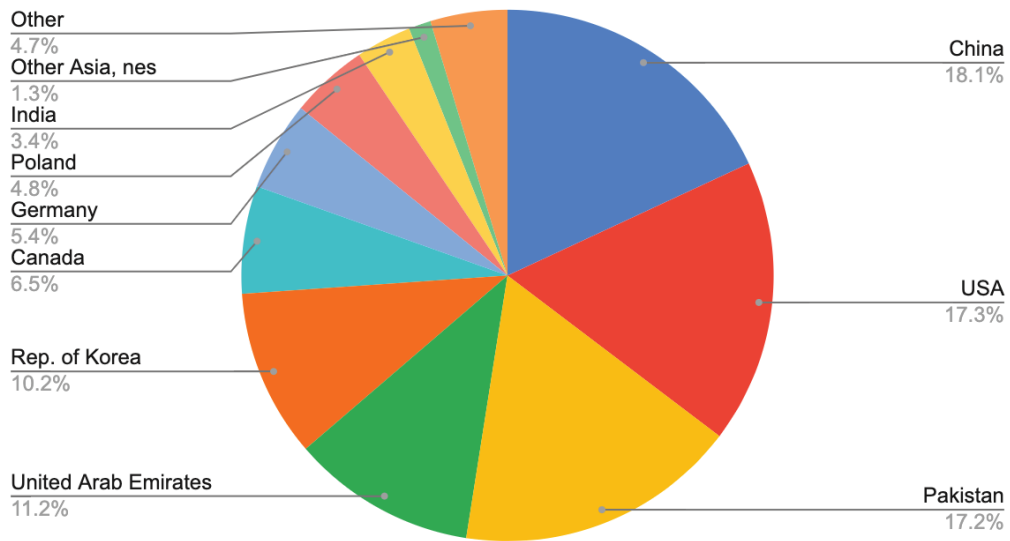


Figure 24. Percentage breakdown of Tanzania's major source countries (2017)

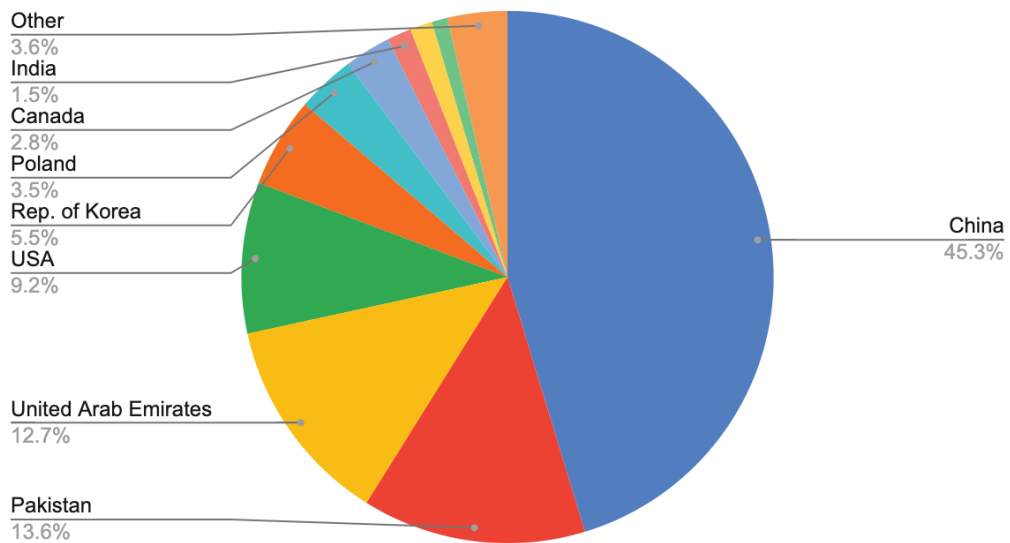


Figure 25. Percentage breakdown of Tanzania's major source countries (2022)

Tanzania ranked 8th in 2017 globally with 80,828 tonnes of imported used clothing and textiles, and 11th in 2022 with 95,380 tonnes. There was a notable increase in the volumes being imported from China into Tanzania between 2017 and 2022.

Import-Export Hubs: Source Country of Materials Breakdown

Belgium

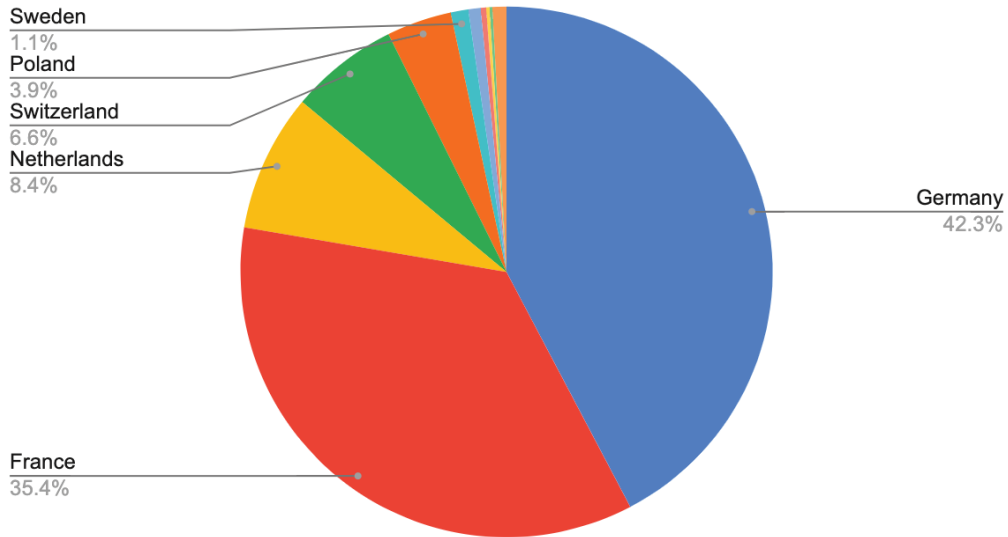


Figure 26. Percentage breakdown of Belgium's major source countries (2017)

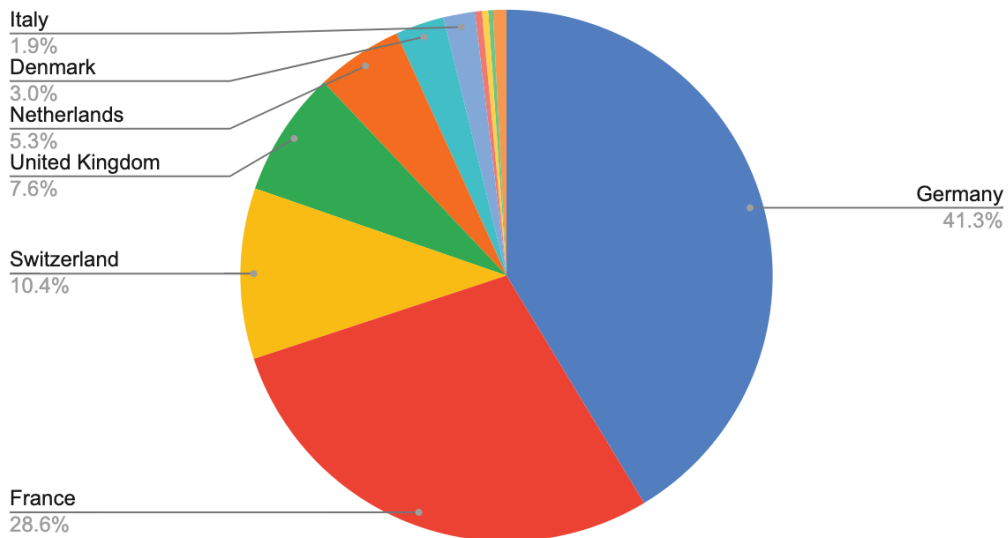


Figure 27. Percentage breakdown of Belgium's major source countries (2022)

Belgium's imports of used clothing and textiles experienced a decline, with the volume decreasing from 60,066 tonnes in 2017 to 47,533 tonnes in 2022. Despite this reduction, Germany and France maintained their positions as the dominant source countries supplying Belgium with these materials during both years.

Netherlands

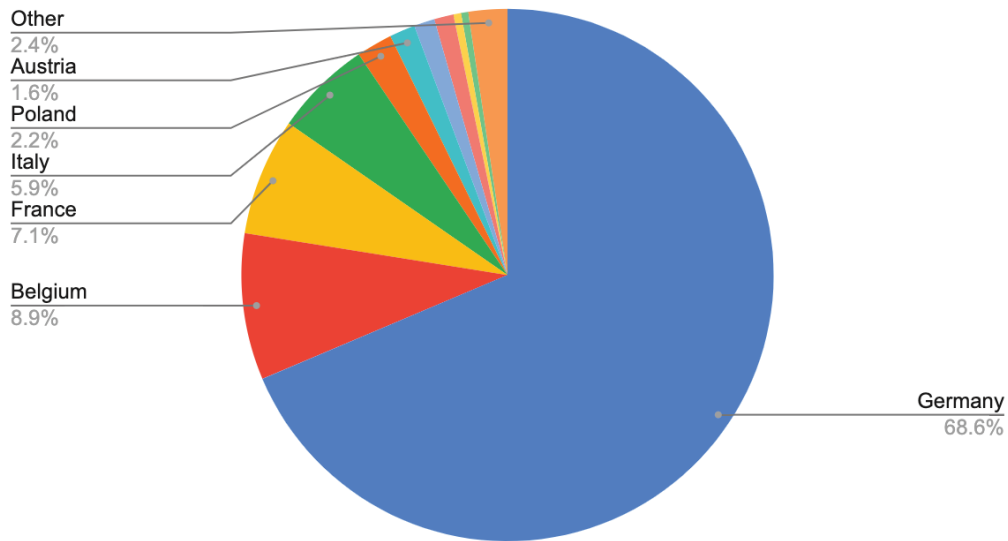


Figure 28. Percentage breakdown of Netherlands' major source countries (2017)

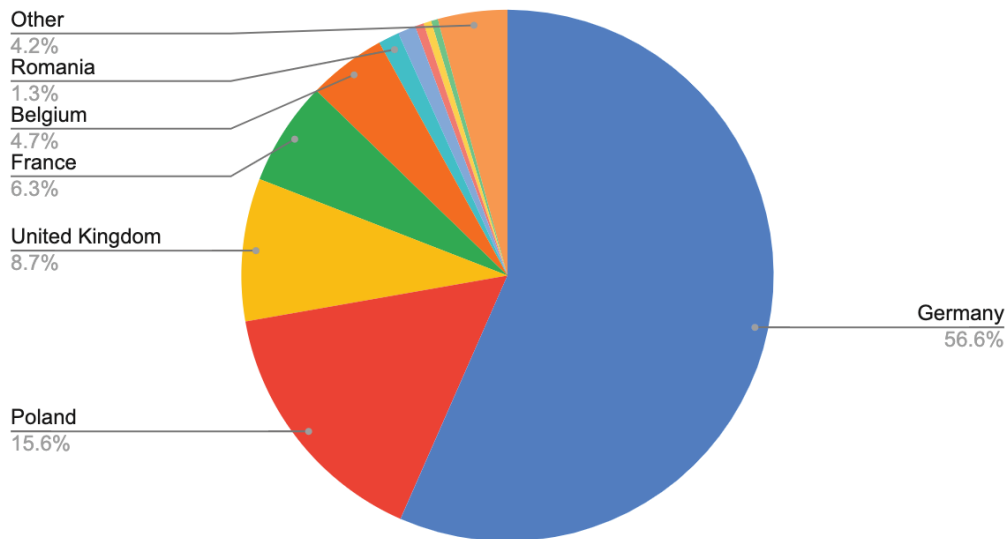


Figure 29. Percentage breakdown of Netherlands' major source countries (2022)

In 2017, the Netherlands was the ninth-largest exporter of used clothing and textiles, with 132,029 tonnes. By 2022, it had dropped to the 29th largest exporter, with 63,673 tonnes, marking a 51% decrease in export volume. Throughout this period, Germany remained the dominant source country for these materials.

Canada

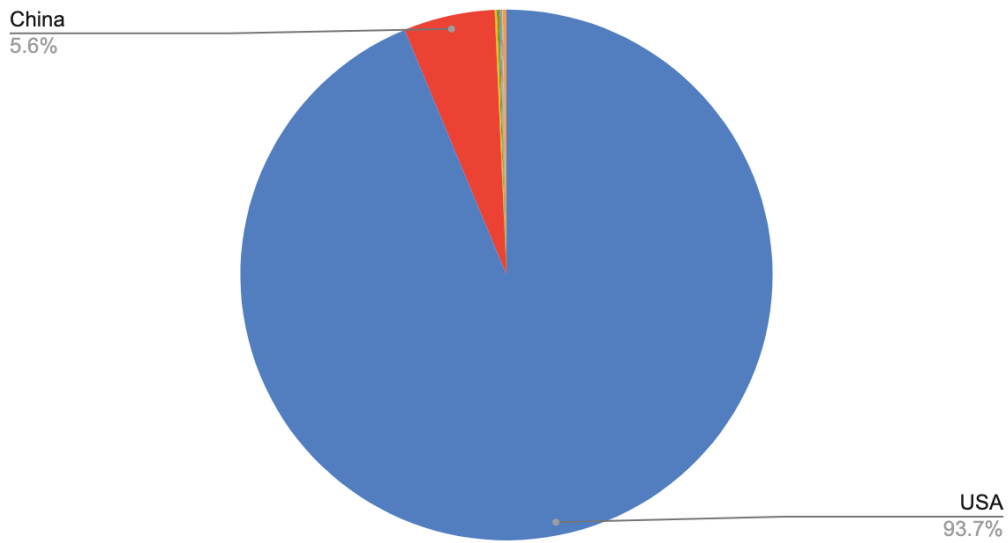


Figure 30. Percentage breakdown of Canada's major source countries (2017)

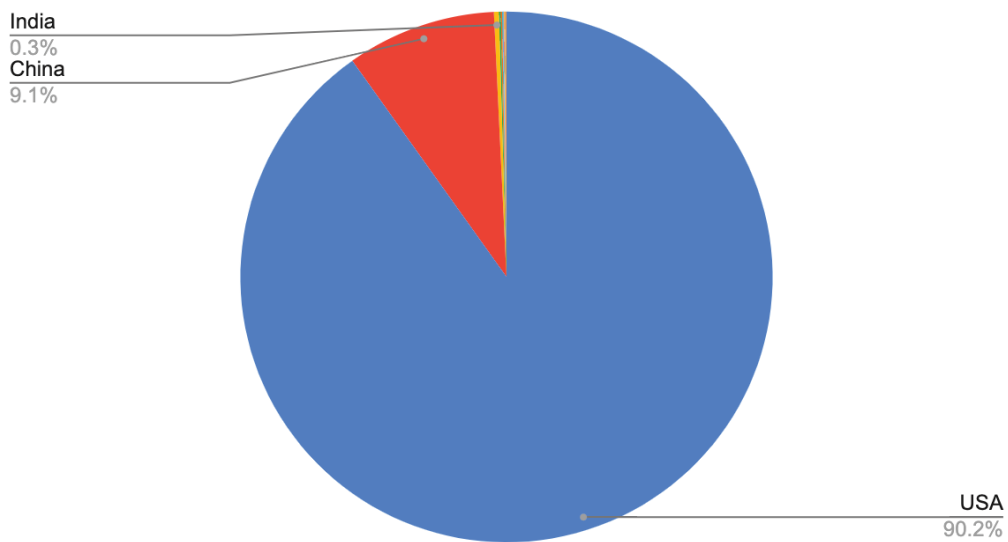


Figure 31. Percentage breakdown of Canada's major source countries (2022)

Canada ranked as the 6th largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 144,853 tonnes but dropped to the 14th largest importer in 2022 with 100,190 tonnes. More than 90% of the materials imported into Canada originated from the United States during both years.

Pakistan

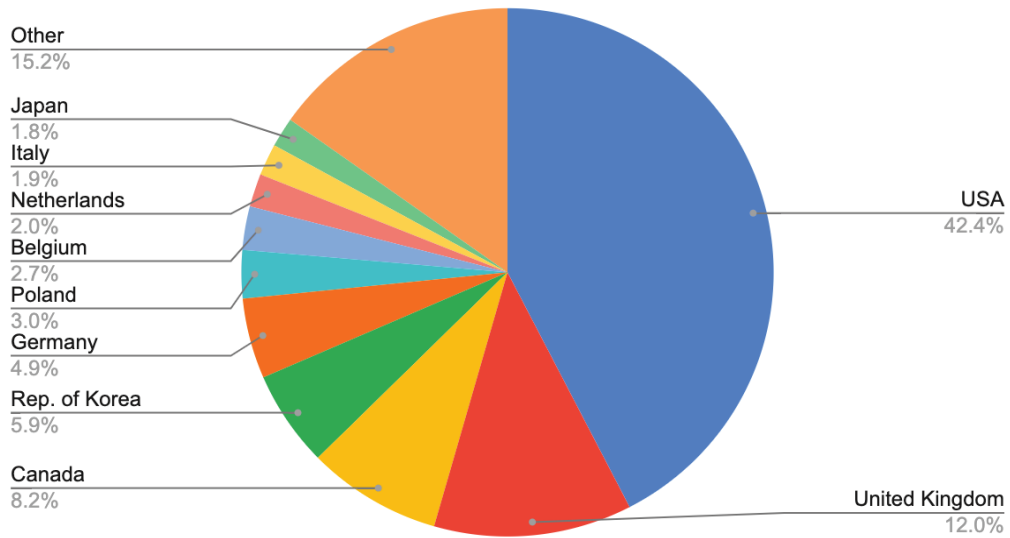


Figure 32. Percentage breakdown of Pakistan's major source countries (2017)

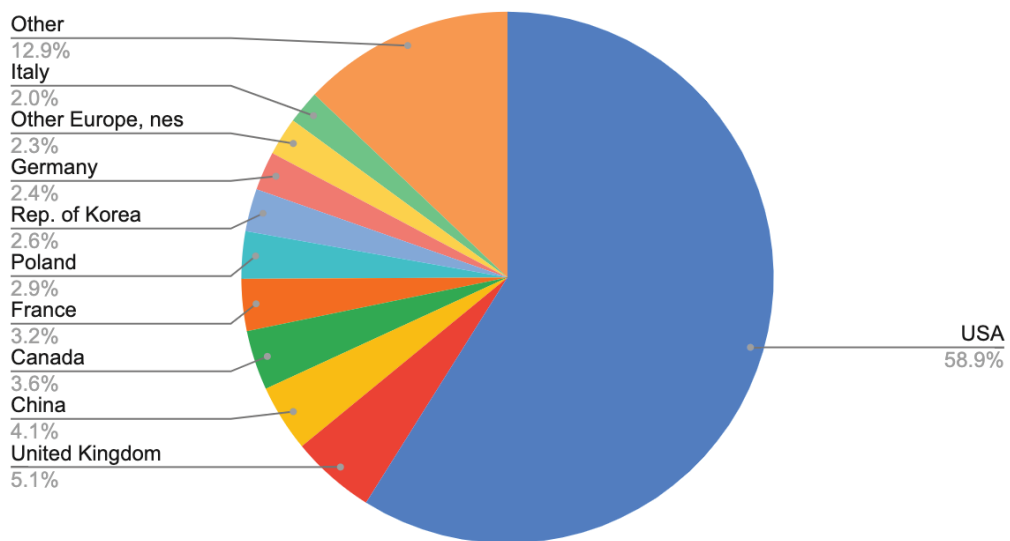


Figure 33. Percentage breakdown of Pakistan's major source countries (2022)

Pakistan was the largest importer of used clothing and textiles in both 2017 and 2022, with import volumes of 656,174 tonnes and 806,648 tonnes, respectively. A significant portion of these materials originated from the United States. Furthermore, there was a difference of more than 45% between Pakistan's import volume and that of the next largest importer for both years.

India

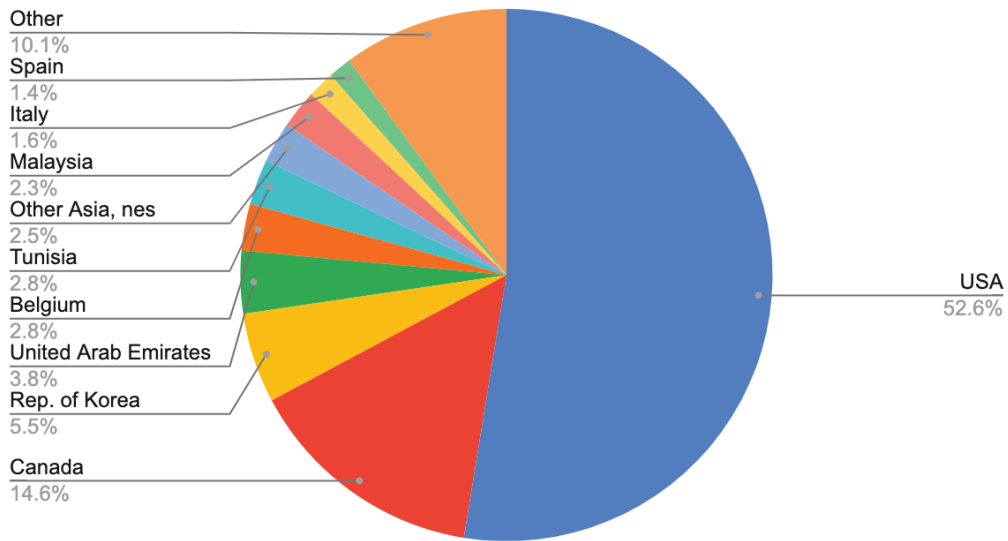


Figure 34. Percentage breakdown of India's major source countries (2017)

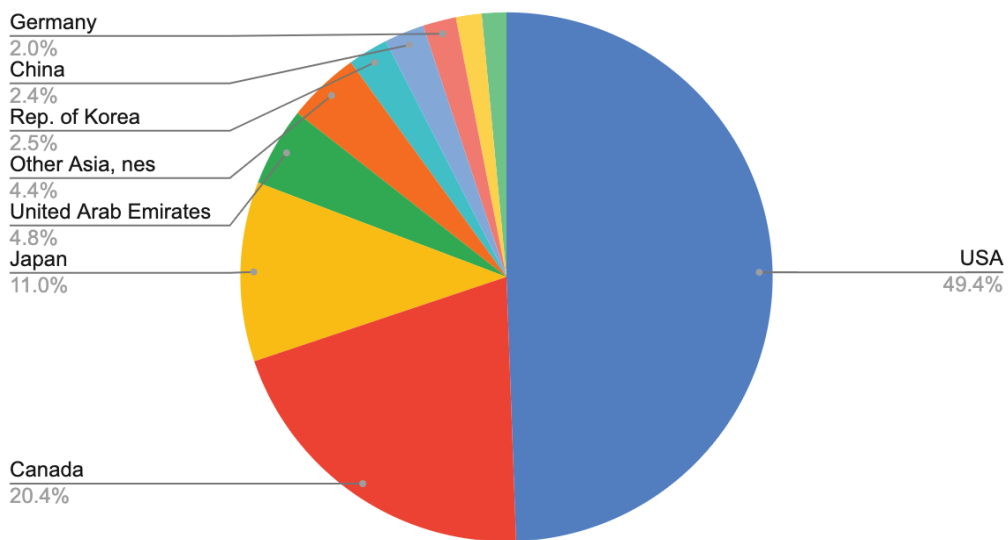


Figure 35. Percentage breakdown of India's major source countries (2022)

India was the second largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 355,563 tonnes, but dropped to the sixth largest importer in 2022 with 186,543 tonnes, representing a notable 47% decrease in import volume during that period. USA remained the dominant source country.

Malaysia

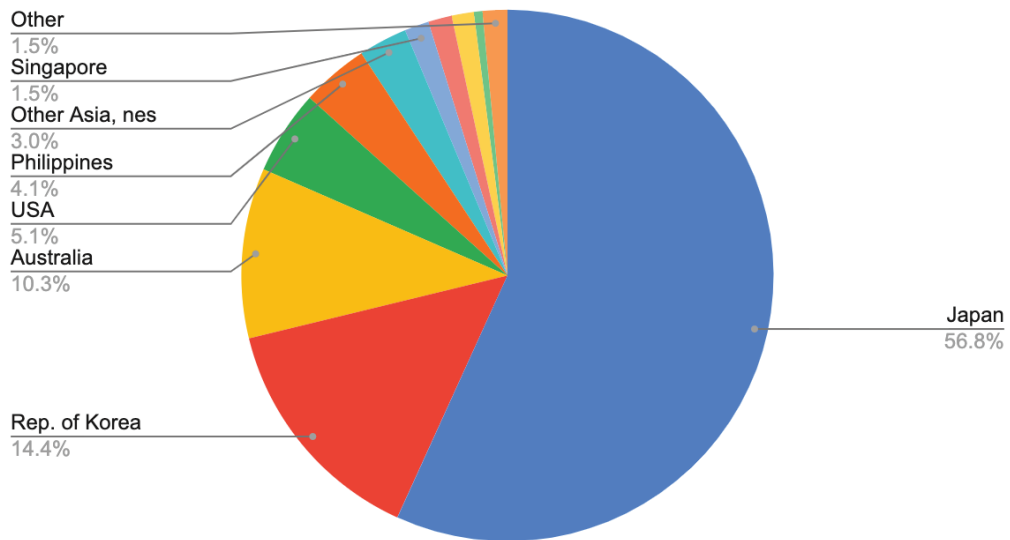


Figure 36. Percentage breakdown of Malaysia's major source countries (2017)

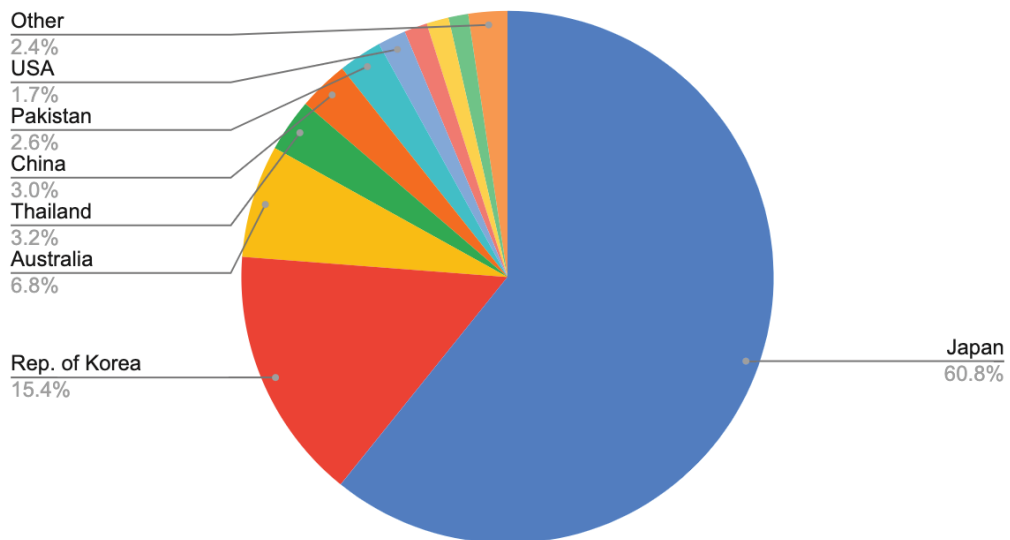


Figure 37. Percentage breakdown of Malaysia's major source countries (2022)

Malaysia was the third largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 244,993 tonnes, while in 2022 it ranked as the fifth largest importer with 193,223 tonnes. Japan is the dominant source country supplying used clothing and textiles to Malaysia.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

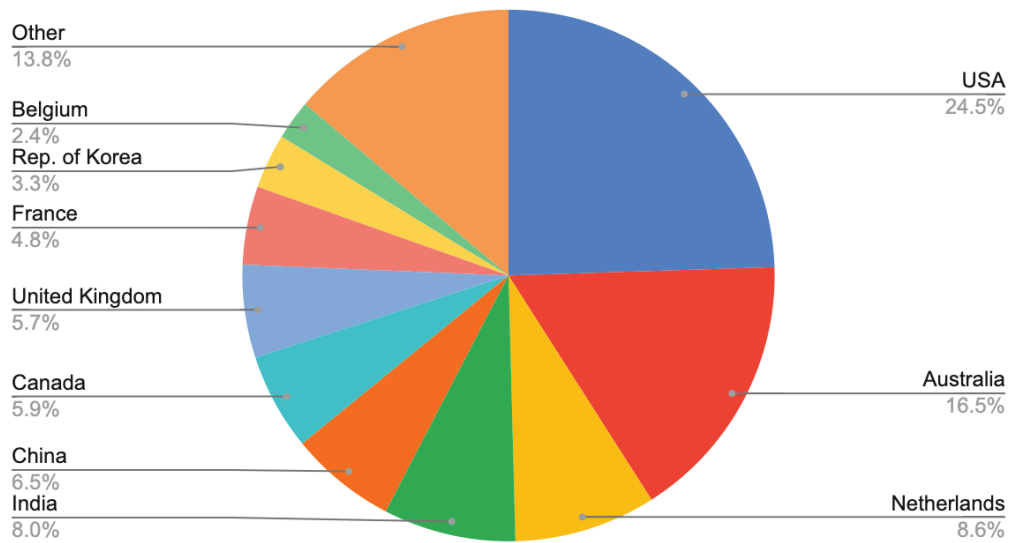


Figure 38. Percentage breakdown of United Arab Emirates major source countries (2017)

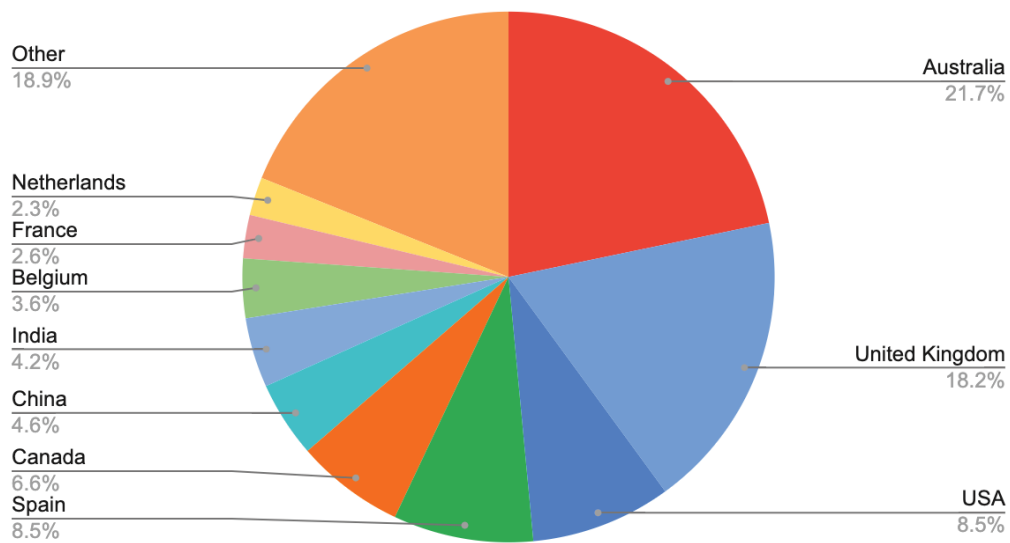


Figure 39. Percentage breakdown of United Arab Emirates major source countries (2022)

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was the eighth-largest importer of used clothing and textiles in 2017 with 133,245 tonnes. In 2022, the UAE became the second largest importer with 359,010 tonnes. The significant number of source countries supplying the UAE, including Australia, the USA, the Netherlands, and the UK, highlights its role as a major import-export hub for global trade.

Poland

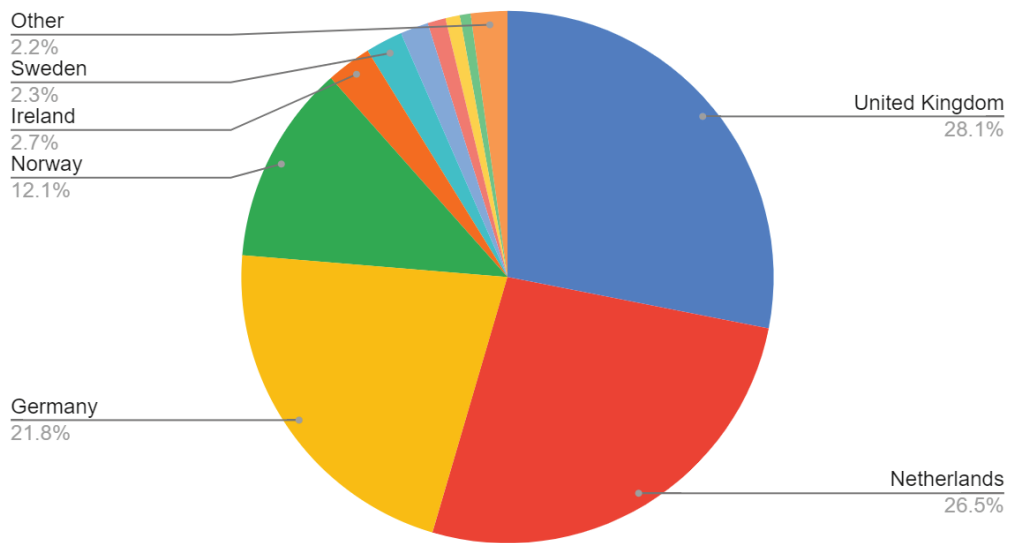


Figure 40. Percentage breakdown of Poland's major source countries (2017)

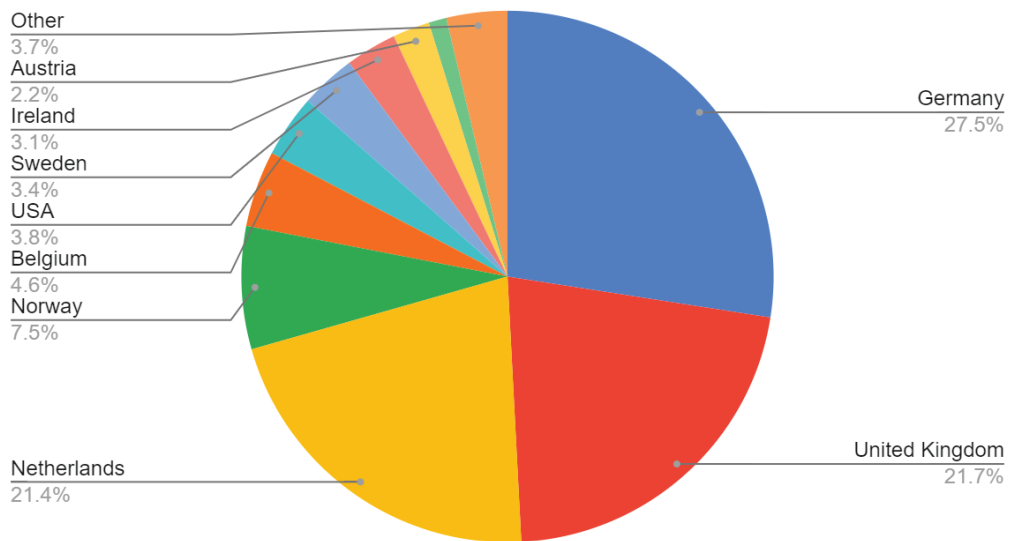


Figure 41. Percentage breakdown of Poland's major source countries (2022)

Poland was not among the top 20 largest importing countries for used clothing and textiles in 2017 or 2022, but it serves as an important import-export hub, importing 64,330 tonnes in 2017 and 67,874 tonnes in 2022.

Exports - A Global Snapshot

Figure 42 below presents a global snapshot of some key exporters and the weight shifts between 2005 and 2020. This chart uses UN Comtrade export volume data. It presents the export countries that had significant volume changes during this time. Note, it does not reflect all of the largest exporters and some countries did not have data for every year as seen in the chart. The USA, China, UAE and Pakistan were observed to experience the greatest change in weight of materials exported during the 2005-2020 period.

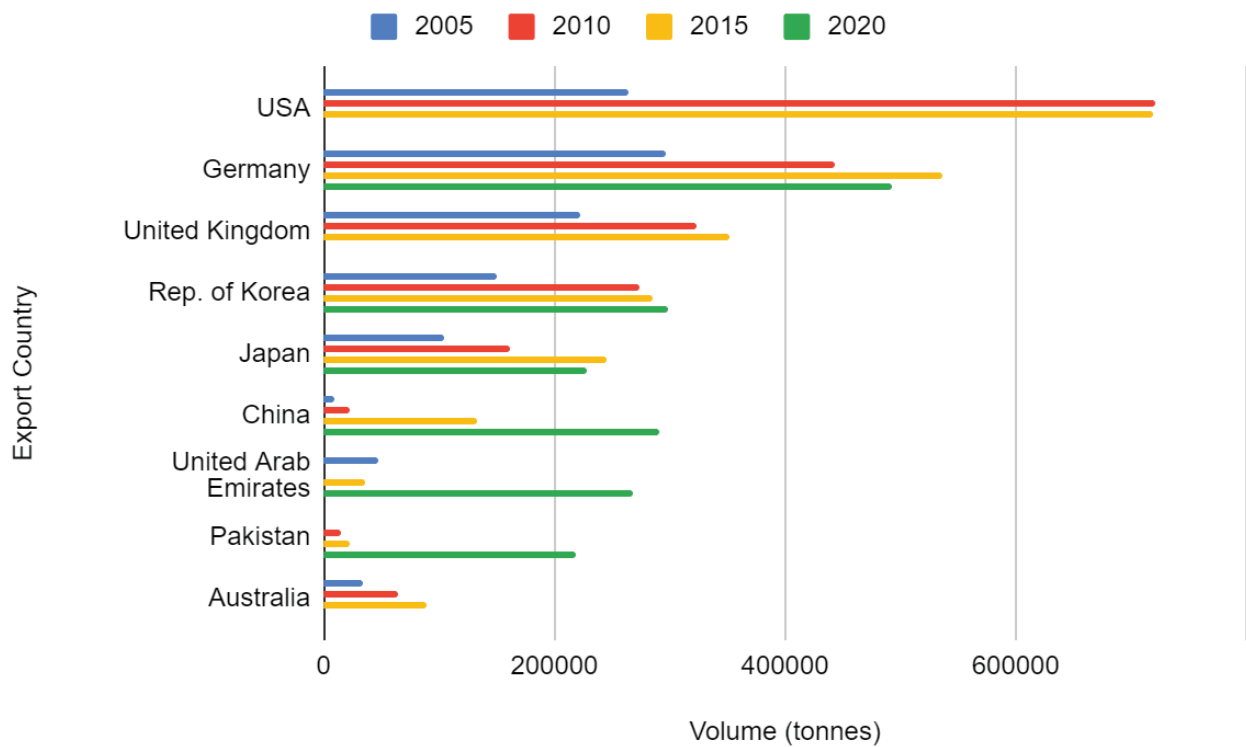


Figure 42. Key exporters and the weight shifts between 2005 and 2020

Exports - An Australian Snapshot

The chart below utilizes 2023 Australian Bureau of Statistics export data to present the breakdown of countries receiving worn clothing and textiles exports from Australia.

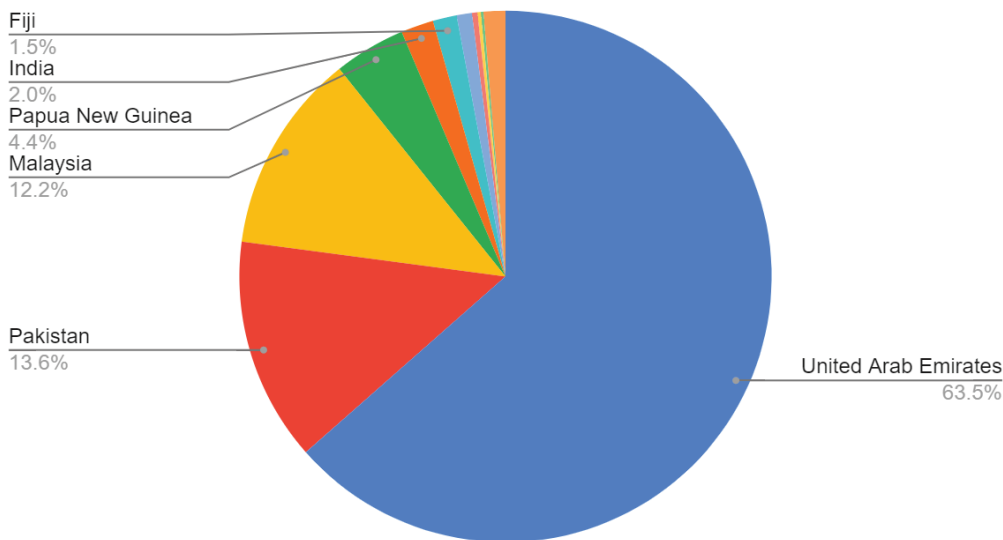


Figure 43: Source destinations for Australia's worn clothing and textiles (2023)

Figure 43 illustrates that the majority of Australia's exports of worn clothing and other worn textile articles in 2023 were destined for import-export hubs, which serve as major distribution centers for these commodities. However, Papua New Guinea and Fiji stand out as notable exceptions, receiving direct exports from Australia. This data aligns closely with the UN Comtrade trade statistics for 2023, exhibiting only slight variances in certain quantity figures.

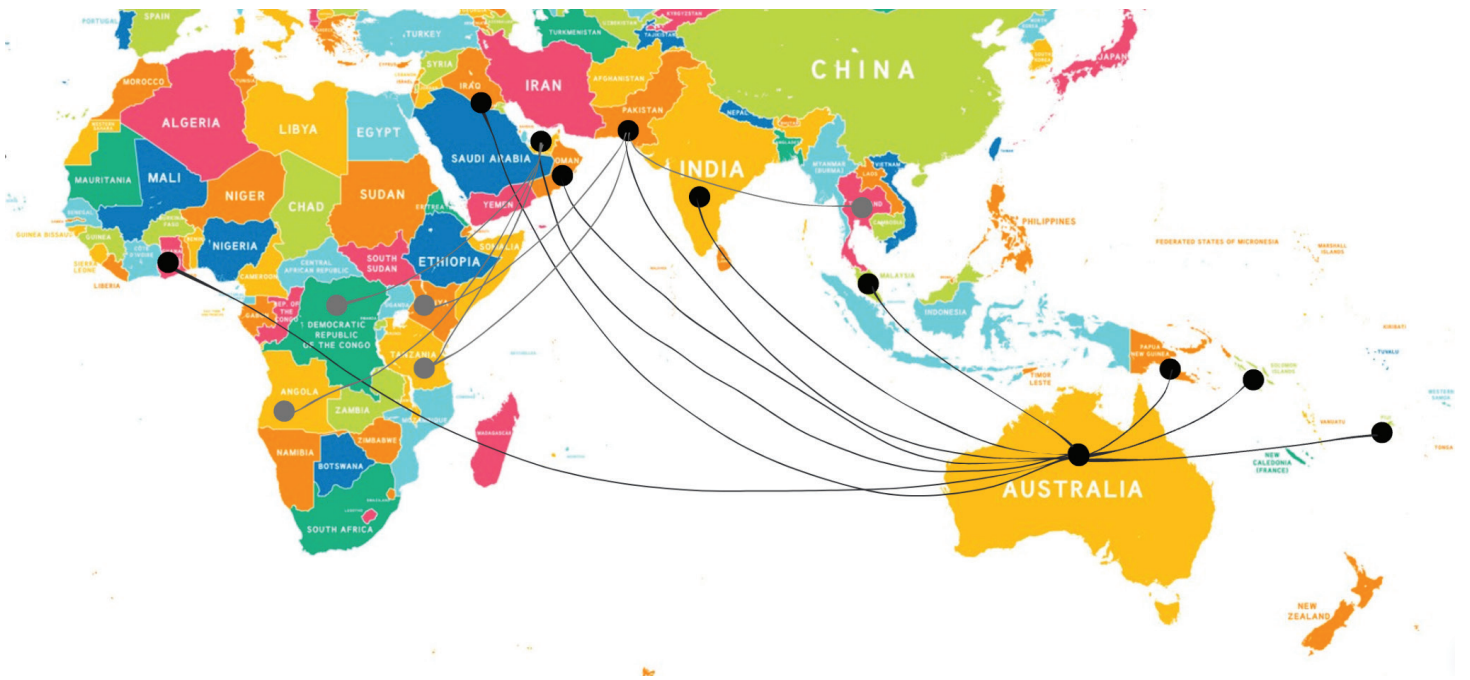


Figure 44: Flows of worn clothing and textiles from Australia



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