



# EUROPEAN CONTAINER HANDBOOK

PRACTICAL INFORMATION SHEETS 2021



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ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

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# A SOLIDARITY PROGRAMME

**The European container programme is a solidarity programme run by the Emmaus groups in Europe.** Second-hand goods collected by the sending group are sent to a group unable to collect enough goods locally to run their activities. The programme is the European equivalent of the container programme run by Emmaus International for Emmaus groups across the world.

**Every year, over 100 container loads criss-cross Europe,** making for close to 10,000m<sup>3</sup> of goods, and over €500K of solidarity, with around 40 groups involved in the programme. The programme is one of the main examples of inter-group solidarity in the movement in Europe, as well as enabling links and exchanges between the Emmaus groups.

**Container loads are frequently discussed to ensure constant improvement because of their importance for the movement.** The topic has been discussed in the European geographical collectives<sup>1</sup>, at the Emmaus Europe Regional Assembly<sup>2</sup> and at the international container-transport meeting<sup>3</sup>, to quote just a few of the most recent meetings.

<sup>1</sup>Report of the meeting of the March 2019 European Poland / Ukraine Collective: [emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/solidarity](http://emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/solidarity)

<sup>2</sup>Emmaus Europe's 2020-2024 policy report: [emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/general-information](http://emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/general-information)

<sup>3</sup>Feedback from the international container and transport meeting: [emmaus-international.org/en/news/2197-feedback-from-the-international-container-and-transport-meeting.html](http://emmaus-international.org/en/news/2197-feedback-from-the-international-container-and-transport-meeting.html)

# WHY SEND A CONTAINER LOAD ?



Working together to prepare the next container load is important for community cohesion at Emmaus Annemasse in France.

## CONTAINER LOADS GENERATE INCOME AND ACTIVITY FOR RECIPIENT GROUPS

The vast majority (60-90%) of the shipped donations are sold in their charity shops by the receiving groups<sup>1</sup>. The groups also say that a significant amount (up to one-third of a load) is used for **local solidarity initiatives** and for kitting out people in difficulty in the group's local area. Some of the goods may also be used to **equip the community** itself, its shops or living spaces, but the amount used for this purpose is generally negligible.

**A container load tends to generate a profit of €5-10K for the receiving group.** Most of the profits are used to fund the community's day-to-day work (when the receiving group is a community), and its investment, albeit to a lesser extent. The container loads therefore help to ensure that the group is economically stable and can take in more companions in better conditions. Moreover, some groups also use a significant swathe of their income to fund their local solidarity work (40-60% for organisations that do not have residential communities).

**The container loads account for 85-95% of goods collected for most of the recipient groups.**

### ■ Supporting investment

The container loads may also enable the recipient group to make bigger investments. They may make possible the purchase or construction of a warehouse or shop, or increase the income-generating activity, and therefore make the group more self-sufficient. They may also help improve the living conditions of the companions, by building new bedrooms or renovating existing living accommodation.

### ■ Support for local solidarity

Some groups use a lot of the goods for solidarity work. In some cases, the income generated may be used to fund an orphanage, or the cost of medical procedures, for instance. Very often, the actual goods are used to support families in difficulty, or for an outreach programme.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the information in this guide is taken from a survey conducted in 2020 of 15 groups involved in the programme.

## ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS FOR THE SENDING GROUPS

For some sending groups, the container loads scheme enables them to handle more goods, and therefore reduce the surplus that they send to the tip, which can also constitute an expense. For others groups paid for waste recycling, the container loads are part of the group's reuse, meaning that the goods are more effectively reused. For furniture, for instance, taste differs from one country to the next, meaning that it is easy to reuse furniture that is unpopular in one country in another country.



## WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

■ **One of the main discussion topics** is the environmental impact of container loads. On the one hand, they help increase the amount of goods collected by the groups being reused, and are an alternative to disposal for quality items for which no buyers can be found by the sending group, and for the surplus that the sending group is unable to sell. On the other hand, container loads account for a significant number of long-distance lorry journeys across Europe, and consequently use a lot of fuel. While it is difficult to compare these positives and negatives, because they vary significantly from one load to the next, particularly due to the nature and quality of the load, it would seem that export of second-hand goods tends to be eco-friendlier than manufacturing new goods\*. Nevertheless, we need to remain

mindful about this balance when organising all our container loads, so that they remain assets and not barriers to the movement's struggles.

■ **During the 2019 Regional Assembly** of Emmaus Europe in San Sebastian in Spain, participants at the transport workshop raised the idea of using rail to reduce this negative environmental impact. Rail could be an interesting option for groups wishing to explore it. The option needs to be explored by contacting rail freight companies in each country.

\*CO2logic, 2012, Climate impact of the export of unsold second-hand goods

## A HISTORIC AND FUNDAMENTAL VISION OF SHARING RESOURCES

**The European container programme is based on the ethos that the Emmaus movement's resources are shared and do not belong to any one group more than another.** While some groups are fortunate enough to be located in areas where the economic context is more favourable, where more donations are made, and where customers and donors are more comfortably off, the donations that they collect are for the whole movement and not just this group.

The European container programme enables **goods collected by the movement's groups to be partially redistributed** to offset the different settings in which our groups are located.

**The container loads also enable us to work with the most socially-excluded people wherever they are,** including at the other end of Europe (and even the other side of the world, with the Emmaus International container programme).

While it is very important to work with needy people in our local areas, there is no justification for leaving other people in vulnerable situations simply because they are further away geographically. The Emmaus Movement's only priority criterion, enshrined in its Universal Manifesto<sup>1</sup>, is to help those who suffer most.

**The intention is to work with, and not for, the Emmaus groups located in the most challenging contexts, in order to achieve our shared goals.**

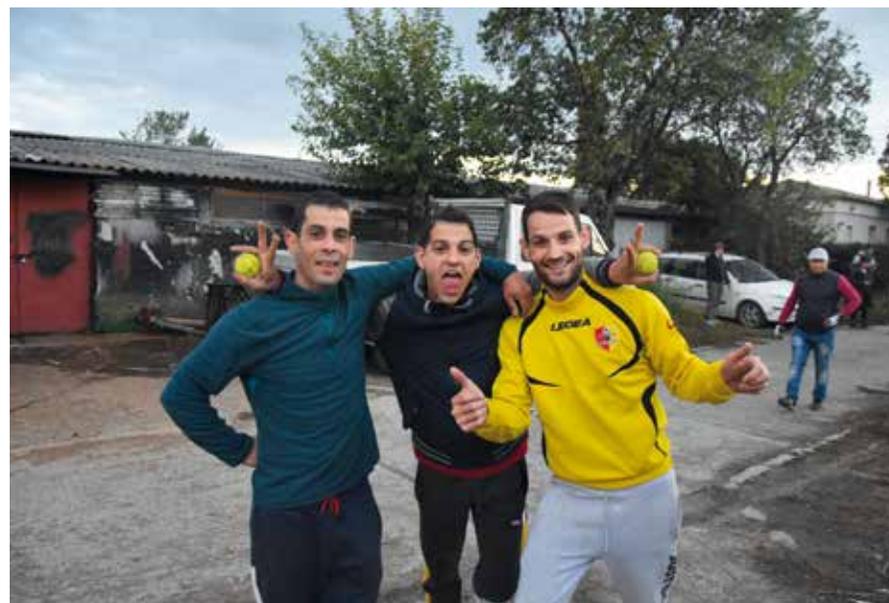
<sup>1</sup> The Universal Manifesto of the Emmaus Movement: [emmaus-international.org/en/articles/universal-manifesto.html](https://emmaus-international.org/en/articles/universal-manifesto.html)

## OPPORTUNITIES TO EXCHANGE, MEET AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Roughly 40 groups are involved in the container programme every year, and most have been involved on a regular basis for several years. Several longstanding partnerships exist through the programme, and **regular shipments are the foundation for exchanges which go beyond practical solidarity.** Containers are the opportunity for numerous visits to each other. These visits enable the groups to discuss their practices and know-how, get to know each other better, and bolster the interest of their members in the partnership. In some instances, community members also undertake exchanges, spending internships that can last up to a few months at the other group, so that they can find out about life in their partner group and help improve the partnership.

**Groups, and individuals in particular, getting to know each other is a real source of motivation, makes our initiatives more meaningful, and helps foster the spirit of the movement.**

The container loads play a big part in fostering cohesion in the groups involved in the scheme (here in Iasi in Romania).



# HOW TO SEND A CONTAINER LOAD ?



Solid experience and a lot of time were needed for the members of Emmaus Annemasse in France to perfectly fill this lorry.

## GENERAL PROCESS

### THE PHASES

There are several phases involved in shipping a container. They are explained over the next few pages:

01	> IDENTIFY A PARTNER GROUP
02	> CLARIFY NEEDS, CONTENT AND DATES
03	> GRADUALLY SELECT GOODS AND POTENTIALLY ASK FOR HELP FROM YOUR NEIGHBOURING GROUPS
04	> CONTACT THE HAULAGE COMPANY AND BOOK A CONTAINER
05	> IF NECESSARY, MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A DISINFECTION COMPANY
06	> PREPARE THE ADMINISTRATIVE PAPERWORK
07	> LOAD, DRAW UP THE PACKING LIST, AND PLACE THE SEALS
08	> SEND THE PAPERWORK TO THE RECEIVING GROUP AND EMMAUS EUROPE
09	> DISPATCH THE LOAD
10	> UNLOAD AND SORT THE GOODS
11	> SEND PHOTOS OF THE UNLOADING AND AN EVALUATION OF THE CONTENT
12	> SELL OR USE THE DONATED GOODS

### SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE EMMAUS EUROPE SECRETARIAT

Every year, the Emmaus Europe Secretariat draws up a schedule based on the needs and capacity expressed by the groups. This schedule informs each group about scheduled and delivered loads, and therefore helps them to work out which group should be the recipient of their next load. Moreover, the secretariat can help groups to find a sending or receiving group for a load, based on its date and content, link up or act as an intermediary between groups (helping overcome the language barrier, in particular).

The schedule is kept up-to-date and can be accessed by all on EE's website<sup>1</sup>.

### STARTING AN EXCHANGE WITH A PARTNER

Ideally, groups looking to forge a partnership would **meet each other**, for instance at the geographical collectives, arranged every year by EE. Otherwise, the contact details for the groups in Europe are listed in **Emmaus Europe's directory**<sup>2</sup>, or can be obtained from the secretariat.

### THE EMMAUS EUROPE GEOGRAPHICAL COLLECTIVES<sup>3</sup>



SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

POLAND-UKRAINE

ROMANIA

<sup>1</sup> See [emmaus-europe.org](https://emmaus-europe.org) in the member's area/Solidarity, or directly: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1D7r4wYly8Eef01ZmYwqJyPcglqZX-5sUYZtaGAA2yk>

<sup>2</sup> See [emmaus-europe.org](https://emmaus-europe.org/en/the-groups-in-europe) in About us/ The groups in Europe: [emmaus-europe.org/en/the-groups-in-europe](https://emmaus-europe.org/en/the-groups-in-europe)

<sup>3</sup> See the presentation of the geographical collectives and the schedule for future meetings: [emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/solidarity](https://emmaus-europe.org/en/members-area/solidarity)

## NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### ■ THE RECIPIENT GROUP'S NEEDS

Each recipient group expresses their needs directly, based on their local collection capacity, economic situation, and the goods that would be useful to it. These needs can be shared and discussed at **collectives** meetings (see previous page) in order to ensure an open and transparent discussion process and that container loads are fairly shared out.

### ■ LOAD CONTENT

Apart from the number of loads they wish to receive in a year and potentially their ideal delivery schedule, the recipient groups also set out the goods that they need to ensure that they receive items that they can most effectively sell or use.

**Here is an overview of the content of container loads in Europe.** Please note that this list is provided as a guide, and the actual content should be discussed by the two groups. For more information, refer to the list of detailed needs provided by the recipient groups.

#### ■ Furnitures

Generally at least half of the load, often 2/3, and even the whole container is loaded with furniture, which is the most useful item for the groups.

#### ■ Bric-a-brac

Crockery and bric-a-brac tend to account for 20-40% of the load.



#### ■ Textiles

Apart from Georgia, which receives almost exclusively textiles, groups always request that the amount of textiles is reduced as much as possible, because they are generally able to collect textiles in their local areas. Textiles should mainly be used to wedge in place the rest of the load, or to wrap the crockery, for instance.

#### ■ Other items

Domestic appliances, bikes, toys, sports equipment, medical equipment etc, can also be found in container loads, but it is worth checking with the receiving group that these more specialised items will be of use to them.

The crockery sold by Amis 3 (Latvia) is mainly supplied by the donation-sharing container loads.

## PREPARING THE LOAD

### ■ THE PARTNER GROUPS MEET



**Organising a container can be an opportunity for the members of the partner groups to meet up.** Moreover, paying a visit to the recipient group can enable the sending group to gain a better grasp of the local situation and send goods that better fit the local context. Likewise, visiting the sending group is a means of helping with loading and directly stating which goods are suitable or unsuitable, in order to tailor the content to the context.

**The groups decide how often to visit each other, but a visit is very important when two groups work together for the first time.** In some cases, members of the receiving group systematically travel to the sending group to help with loading, and in other cases, some companions spend several months on internships and help to prepare the load, among other tasks.

Generally, and even if it often proves complicated, **most of the groups are greatly in favour of these practices**, which have a positive impact on the container load, and always make for interesting exchanges.

Emmaus Cologne (Germany) and Brat Albert (Poland) unloading a container. The groups know each other by heart!

## ■ SELECTING THE GOODS



The goods selection process differs from one group to the next and needs to be tailored to the needs of both groups. It is important to always draw on the list of needs supplied by the receiving group and/or the experience of a member who knows what the recipient group needs. In any event, the presence of one or two “specialists” when selecting the goods is important if a coherent and suitable load is to be put together. However, this does not prevent a maximum number of members being involved in the preparations, and notably the managers of stands or departments who know their stock well.

### EXAMPLES OF HOW THE EUROPEAN GROUPS OPERATE

■ One interesting method is to truly share the donations received by the sending group, by fairly dividing up the goods to be sold in the local charity shops and those to be sent to a partner group as soon as the donations arrive.

■ Goods to be shipped can also be selected from the shop floor, or from among the unsold items. If unsold items are selected, the group needs to ensure that the item is of good quality, and has not remained unsold because of a major defect, and will be more likely to be sold by the recipient group (for instance, large items of furniture are more popular in some countries than in others).

Generally, groups start to set aside goods several months before the planned shipment date, and groups that regularly send containers may continuously put aside goods. Several groups store the goods in a container to gain a good idea of the volume.

**A container tends to be 80-120m<sup>3</sup>, while a weight of 12 tonnes can be transported.**

### WATCH OUT FOR WASTE!

■ Sending goods that cannot be sold by the recipient group is a big waste of energy, time and money, for members of both groups, and has a pointless environmental impact.

10-15% of container loads end up at waste reception centres because they do not meet the set needs or have been damaged during the journey. Furthermore, legislation is generally less favourable for the recipient groups. While most sending groups are paid for recycling or processing waste, the receiving groups often have to pay to dispose of poor-quality goods, making for a double loss.



## GROUP ADVICE ABOUT LOADING

Again, it is important to have a small number of container “specialists” to organise loading, because this is a **crucial stage in ensuring that the load is a success**, and notably that the goods arrive in good condition.

**The group also needs to consider how the container will be unloaded when they are loading it.** They need to be aware of the sometimes more limited unloading equipment available on arrival. A group of five to 10 people is adequate for loading, but taking it in turns can be worthwhile, as it means that more people will be involved. Ideally, one member notes down in real time what has been loaded in the container, so that the packing list can be drawn up.

It is absolutely vital that you carefully protect the goods, estrapping in the items as much as possible, wrapping them up with blankets and wedging in everything, using bags of clothing if necessary.



The heaviest items can be placed over the axles (front and rear). If using a curtainsider truck, remember to place rigid items along the sides in order to create a rigid protective envelope, and particularly bed bases, which can be used to hook up straps.



Remember to fill the container little by little up to the roof, so that no room at the top is wasted.

Loading is generally organised around the furniture. Furniture should be dismantled as much as possible, or filled, in order to make the most of the space and avoid any damage during the journey.



## ADMIN AND HAULIER INFORMATION

### PAPERWORK TO PREPARE

Administrative and regulatory requirements vary significantly, depending on the countries involved. If in doubt, contact the haulage company, as they should be well-informed about the legislation. The following information tends to be required. **In all circumstances and for security reasons, it is best to send all the documents to the recipient group and to Emmaus Europe**, and to give the driver a copy, to ensure that the information is available and those involved can respond swiftly in the event of a problem.

#### INFORMATION GENERALLY REQUIRED (PROVIDED AS A GUIDE)

DOCUMENTS	INFORMATION
Packing list (even if only a rough list of contents).	Loading and unloading addresses.
In some cases, a donation certificate or invoice (option 2 if the load will be cleared through customs).	Relatively precise date and time.
Disinfection certificate for textiles.	Contact people and their contact details.
If possible, quality certificate, notably for tested domestic appliances, for instance.	Type of goods.



Emmaus Annemasse (France) has been working with the same haulage company for a long time, and can contact the company at the last minute if necessary.

### THE HAULAGE COMPANY

**A list of hauliers used by the Emmaus groups in Europe is printed below** with the usual lead times, as well as their main plus points, according to the groups that work with them. More detailed contact information can be obtained from the Emmaus Europe Secretariat or the groups in question. It can be worthwhile joining forces to work with the same haulage company in order to obtain a better price.

**Generally, the recipient group tends to contact and book the haulier** for the agreed date, unless the sending group already works with a more attractive company. In the first instance, the precise loading address and the date must be supplied.

**Lead times are provided as a guide. The haulier should be contacted as soon as you know the loading date.** Most hauliers tend to be quite flexible (if you get in touch or make changes at the last minute), particularly those who have been working regularly with the groups for a long time.

**For rail transport**, see box on p.7.

	Haulage company	Plus points	Booking lead time
<b>Germany</b>	EMONS (German)	Longstanding working relationship Flexibility	3 weeks
<b>France</b>	JANUSZ MAZUR (Polish)	Attractive prices	2 weeks
	STRALOG-GPC LOGISTICS (French)	Attractive prices Service quality	6 weeks
<b>Lithuania</b>	BRETTA LITA (Lithuanian)		
<b>Poland</b>	LKW WALTER (Austrian) <a href="http://kw-walter.com">kw-walter.com</a>	Attractive prices Geographical area Mutual understanding	2 weeks
<b>Romania</b>	LOGITRANS SRL (Romanian) <a href="http://logitransromania.com">logitransromania.com</a>	Service quality Flexibility, guarantee Attractive prices	1-2 weeks
	RAC SRL (Romanian)	Attractive prices Longstanding cooperation	1 week

## ■ PRICES AND PAYING FOR SHIPMENTS

The groups share out the cost in different ways, but in all circumstances, it is very important to carefully determine who will be paying for what before the load is shipped. Some groups, whether they are sending or receiving groups, systematically pay all the costs, while in other cases, the cost is shared. Each group's payment capacity therefore needs to be established before the shipment takes place in order to reach an agreement. This factor can also have an impact on the number of containers that a group is able to send or receive in a year, and it is therefore preferable to discuss the issue in order to work out the best arrangement for both groups.

### Here are a few comments and possible adjustments for paying haulage costs:

- New groups can find it hard to pay the cost of a shipment, as their cash flow may not yet be very stable.
- A receiving group that is paying for the shipment must be assured that the quality of the goods will cover the cost.
- Sharing the costs, or taking it in turns to pay the costs, may help the cash flow of both groups.
- Some groups regularly arrange shared loads, which means that the supply of goods is shared, and costs are split between more partners, in addition to fostering opportunities for exchanges and working together.
- It may be worthwhile discussing the precise arrangements, in the event that some groups may find it advantageous to pay for customs clearance or VAT themselves, for instance.

## ROUGH PRICES FOR TYPICAL JOURNEYS

	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Georgia	Latvia	Poland	Romania
<b>Germany</b>	<b>2 500 €</b>			<b>1 900 €</b>	<b>2 500 €</b>
<b>France</b>		<b>4 600 €</b>	<b>2 200 € 2 500 €</b>	<b>1 750 € 2 300 €</b>	<b>1 900 € 3 000 €</b>
<b>Sweden</b>			<b>1 200 €</b>	<b>850 €</b>	
<b>Switzerland</b>					<b>2 100 € 2 800 €</b>

## ■ LOADING AND JOURNEY TIMES

**Allow a half-day (three to four hours) for loading.** If necessary, you can request extra time, but this may come at a cost (some groups take one or two days to load a container, for example).

It is recommended that you are strict with the haulier about the loading start/end times because time is often very limited and some hauliers may want to save time. If you load in the morning, the truck generally tends to leave at lunchtime, and arrive sooner at its destination.

### JOURNEY TIMES PROVIDED AS A GUIDE

(NOTE THAT MOST HGVS DO NOT OPERATE AT WEEKENDS)

	Bosnia-Herzegovina	Georgia	Latvia	Poland	Romania
<b>France</b>	<b>2 DAYS</b>	<b>25 DAYS</b>	<b>3 DAYS</b>	<b>2 DAYS</b>	<b>3 DAYS</b>
<b>Finland Sweden</b>			<b>1,5 DAYS</b>		
<b>Switzerland</b>					<b>3 DAYS</b>

The journey between Cologne in Germany and Krakow in Poland took roughly two days.



## RECEIPT OF CONTAINER LOADS

**Unloading may also take half-a-day or even a whole day if taken at a more leisurely pace.** The time taken depends on the type and organisation of the load, so it is important to load carefully to help the receiving group to unload the truck, often with less equipment to help (forklift trucks, etc) than was used for loading.

**Generally, most and even all the members of the receiving group take part in unloading the container.** The simplest method is to sort the goods as you go between their different destinations (different shops, warehouse, solidarity, specific initiative). Depending on the group, goods to be donated may be identified when unloading, using knowledge of the needs of those supported by the group, or they are taken at a later date from the goods put on sale.

**Some countries, particularly Latvia, require precise product traceability information to comply with local legislation.** In this case, it is helpful if the sending group has provided a relatively precise packing list. As for loading, the simplest method is for this list to be checked, completed or drawn up in real time as unloading takes place.



Containers are often unloaded with less equipment than used for loading. Thanks to Emmaus Cologne (Germany) for packing items into small boxes, which are easy for the members of the MPFSC in Lithuania to carry.



## PROVIDING THE SENDING GROUP WITH FEEDBACK

### ■ It is very important to provide the sending group with feedback.

The receiving group needs to confirm receipt of the load, and inform the sending group about whether the goods are suitable and of good quality, in order to improve future loads if necessary. Moreover, this feedback strengthens the bond between the partner groups and therefore the commitment of members from both groups to keep working together.

### ■ Feedback may contain various types of information, depending on the circumstances and the groups' wishes.

An evaluation of the content, any breakages, whether the load was fit for purpose, and even the takings generated by it, are all very important pieces of information for organising useful loads which do not end up doing more harm than good. A more formal thank-you letter can be worthwhile if external partners are involved. Photos also help the news to be shared more effectively in the group and for the group to communicate with the general public. Groups can draw inspiration from the container promotion template documents suggested by Emmaus International\*.

\* Container fact file can be accessed here:  
[emmaus-international.org/en/solidarity/shipping-containers.html](https://emmaus-international.org/en/solidarity/shipping-containers.html)

# PROSPECTS



**Container loads or donation-sharing loads<sup>1</sup> are very important in several ways for the movement's groups,** as they help groups to achieve an economic balance, and fund their work with the most socially-excluded people around the world. They also foster a dynamic in the movement by enabling exchanges between groups, mutual learning, and collective development. As a matter of fact, this guide is based on the contributions made by many groups involved in the programme, and recent discussions and meetings on the subject. The container programme therefore plays a full part in the life of the movement.

**The EE elected representatives are aware of the fact that container loads generate a number of costs.** They require major financial investment by the groups. And they take up a lot of time and energy in groups that are already very busy and engaged in numerous issues. Finally, the truck loads have a significant environmental impact, which we need to try to reduce as much as possible.

**Therefore, it is very important to constantly improve and arrange the loads as best as possible,** with quality goods and efficient loading, so that these costs are justified and remain lower than the human, environmental and economic benefits generated.

**It is also vital that we continuously question the relevance of our initiatives and their rollout,** as well as the way in which we organise our solidarity, so that it never becomes part of the problem that it is endeavouring to address.

Opportunities to meet and work together are very important as they enable us to discuss and collectively improve our practices.

<sup>1</sup> See A historic and fundamental vision of sharing resources (p. 8) and the report of the 2019 EE Regional Assembly workshops.

# EUROPEAN CONTAINER HANDBOOK

What is the European container programme? Why this brand of solidarity? What vision underpins our sharing of resources? How do the groups and participating members benefit? How do you get involved? And how do you send a container?

This guide aims to answer all these questions so as to facilitate and improve the organisation of donation-sharing container loads in Europe. The guide is aimed at interested groups, and describes the framework within which we organise the containers, and the aims that we want the programme to have. It also describes all the phases involved in organising a load, and lists best practice and ideas provided by the groups already involved.

- **For more information**, or support with organising a container load, please contact the Emmaus Europe Secretariat:  
[theo.robin@emmaus-europe.org](mailto:theo.robin@emmaus-europe.org)
- **If you wish to share donated goods with Emmaus groups outside of Europe**, please contact the Emmaus International Secretariat:  
[conteneurs@emmaus-international.org](mailto:conteneurs@emmaus-international.org)



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EUROPE

ACTIVISTS FOR CHANGE

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Find the other  
practical informa-  
tion sheets in the  
members' area of  
the Emmaus Europe  
website:  
[emmaus-europe.org](http://emmaus-europe.org)

Emmaus Europe is the decentralised organisation of Emmaus International in Europe