The total carrying capacity of all the merchant ships in the world is 470 million tonnes. This is 57% of the carrying capacity of the world shipping fleet. The remainder of the ships in the world carry mainly oil (not counted as cargo); a small percentage of the world shipping by weight is passenger and military vessels.

As with oil tankers, this map shows tonnage by the territory of registration. This map is very similar to that of oil tankers. The most ship registration by weight is in Panama and Liberia, followed by Malta and Cyprus. Panama registers 85% of all cargo ships by weight in South America, and is responsible for 26% of worldwide registration.

“Big cargo ships can be surprisingly vulnerable. They tend to have just a few crew members to transport and protect goods worth millions of dollars.”

Alison Gee, 2002