



# European Crafts Conference

2025

12-13  
MARCH  
2025

MUNICH  
GERMANY



Supported by:



## EUROPEAN CRAFTS CONFERENCE 2025

### Concept

The European Crafts Conference is organised jointly with the European crafts organisations from various EU Member States (Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, Poland, Greece, Austria, Luxembourg, with the support of SMEunited and the EEN). The conference is supposed to become a reoccurring event, taking place every 2-3 years in different EU Member States.

Together with entrepreneurs from all over Europe, we will discuss a vision for the future of the skilled crafts sector with politicians and EU officials from Brussels, put forward political demands to better support businesses and highlight the importance of the skilled crafts sector for the transition to a sustainable and competitive economy. We intend to strengthen the visibility of skilled crafts across Europe.

### The event 2025

The European Crafts Conference will take place on 12-13 March 2025 in the framework of the International Crafts Fair (IHM) in Munich. The conference will be held in English and moderated by German journalist and author Detlef Fechtner.

The Opening Ceremony will take stock of the challenges the skilled crafts companies face in the context of the transformation of the EU economy and discuss the specific role that these companies are playing when it comes to implementation. It will highlight what the companies within the skilled crafts sector bring to Europe, how they help achieve policy targets defined at EU level and why they are crucial for the European economy and society as such.

Three consecutive moderated panels will enable a focused discussion between EU decision makers, legislators, craft organizations and entrepreneurs on current trends in the skilled crafts sector. The panel discussions should allow for interactive audience participation and will cover relevant policy topics. A closing event will tie the different aspects together and give an outlook of the way forward.

# Programme

## Wednesday, 12 March 2025

14:00

### Opening Ceremony

Introduction by [Jörg Dittrich](#), President of ZDH

Keynote Speech: [Enrico Letta](#), former Prime Minister of Italy

#### Panel discussion between:

[Hubert Gumbs](#), Deputy Director-General at European Commission (DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs)

[Marco Granelli](#), President of Confartigianato Imprese

[Véronique Willems](#), Secretary-General of SMEunited

15:00

### Panel: Shortage of skilled workers

Video message featuring [Josef Herk](#), CEO of Herk GmbH (automotive retail business)

#### Panel discussion between:

[Prof. Dr. Detlef Buschfeld](#), University of Cologne, Germany

[Joël Fourny](#), President of CMA France

[Manuela Geleng](#), Director Jobs and Skills at European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion), tbc

[Alexander Rauner](#), Expert for education, WKÖ

16:00

### Panel: Competitiveness and innovation

Speech by [Lex Delles](#), Minister for the economy, SMEs, energy and tourism, Luxembourg

Video message featuring [Paul Bisenius](#), CEO of Menuiserie Fellens

#### Panel discussion between:

[Marie-Hélène Pradines](#), Head of Unit at European Commission (DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs)

[Andreas Rahlf Hauptmann](#), Deputy Director-General at Danish Business Authority

[Paul Bisenius](#), CEO of Menuiserie Fellens

17:00

### Panel: Sustainability

Video message featuring [Luca Crosetto](#), CEO in the production, trade and repair of agricultural machinery and [Marianna Panebarco](#), animation producer

#### Panel discussion between:

[Miriam Koreen](#), Senior Counsellor, OECD

[Andreas Brieger](#), Director at SMEunited

[Chiara di Mambro](#), ECCO (think tank)

## Thursday, 13 March 2025

09:00

### Closing Session

Discussing the future of crafts with [Petri Salminen](#), President of SMEunited, and [Dario Costantini](#), President of CNA

Views from the audience with [Jesper Beinov](#) (Director at SMVdanmark),

[Susanne Haus](#) (President of Handwerkskammer Frankfurt-Rhein-Main) and

[Tom Oberweis](#) (President of CDM)

Closing speech by [Georgios Kavvathas](#), President of GSEVEE

10:30

### Press Session



- CMA France, CNA, Confartigianato Imprese, GSEVEE, Chambre des Métiers du Luxembourg, SMVdanmark, WKÖ, ZDH and ZRP represent skilled crafts in eight European countries.
- Although their definitions of skilled
- crafts are different, the enterprises share the same values: they take personal and financial responsibility, are often multi-generational family businesses and maintain long-term relationships with their employees, customers, suppliers and society. At European level, they are given a strong voice by SMEunited. Here you can find an overview with facts and figures:



As of 2024; rounded figures

**9,000** active companies

**107,000** employees

(this accounts for 20 percent of all companies active in Luxembourg)

**1,700** apprentices

across all areas of the Crafts and Trades sector

**500** candidates for the Master Craftsman Certificate (Brevet de Maîtrise)

The Crafts and Trades sector is the first employer in Luxembourg. It distinguishes itself also as a real integration vector, insofar as 57 percent of all employees in the sector commute every day to Luxembourg from the Greater Region. The sector is highly diversified in terms of nationalities with 29 percent Portuguese nationals, 23 percent French nationals, 14 percent Luxembourg nationals, 13 percent of German origin as well as 9 percent of Belgian origin. The remaining 12 percent hail from all over the world to bring about one of the most diversified working sectors in Luxembourg.





Artigiani  
Imprenditori  
d'Italia



As of 2024; rounded figures

**1,250,582** craft business  
(21.3 percent of all businesses – data 2024)

**229** craft businesses founded  
every day (25.9 percent of all new businesses registered in the registers of the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agricultural – data 2024)

Average size of  
craft businesses:

**2.5** employed persons / enterprises

Value added in crafts: **€109 billion**  
(6.6 percent of the total – data 2021)

**€374 billion** turnover  
(8.9 percent of the total – data 2022)

Crafts are fundamental in the Italian productive system. Craftsmanship is usually associated with the uniqueness of some manufacturing productions whose quality is recognised throughout the world – thanks to the “Made in Italy” brand. However, craftsmanship, manufacturing and “Made in Italy” are more than this, since they cover other areas of economic activity, such as construction, transport, logistics, personal services and maintenance of durable goods. Crafts play an important proximity role through the customised added value delivered in the daily lives of many citizens and consumers at national, European and international level.

**ITALY**

& figures

& figures

**AUSTRIA**

As of 2024; rounded figures

**237,000** active enterprises  
(organized into 27 guilds or trade groups)

**€138 billion** turnover

**810,000** employees  
(out of a total of 2.8 million)

**47,000** apprentices  
(more than half of all apprentices)

Skilled crafts form the backbone of the Austrian economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises in trade and crafts drive regional economic power, guaranteeing local training and jobs. A key priority is the qualification of entrepreneurs and employees, as well-trained craftsmen ensure quality, safety, and innovation.





As of 2024; rounded figures

**2.4 million businesses**

(one craft business is created every 3 minutes)

**3.2 million employees**

**112,500 apprentices**

(receive qualified training in one of the 146 establishments of the „CMA Formation“ Network throughout France)

Together they represent

**12% of France`s GDP**

Through its economic and social dimension, the craft sector in France is a real asset. With 3.2 million active workers, it contributes significantly to the quality of life of our fellow citizens, trains future generations, promotes professional integration and the transmission of know-how, strengthens social cohesion, and boosts local employment.

**FRANCE**

& figures



**GREECE**

As of 2024; rounded figures

**56,386 enterprises**

**€16.4 billion turnover**

(9 percent of GDP)

**204,080 employees**

(5 percent of the total number of employment)

The craft sector in Greece is primarily dominated by family-owned and micro-enterprises, with 45,652 businesses employing up to four people. Key sectors in craft production include food processing, metallurgy, furniture manufacturing, clothing, printing, and jewelry. A significant advantage of the sector is its flexibility and easy access to raw materials. However, its main challenges include intense and unfair competition, particularly from imports originating in the Balkans and Turkey. Additionally, the rising costs of energy and energy poverty have emerged as significant threats to the sector's long-term viability in recent years.



Est. 1919

**GSEVEE**

Hellenic Confederation  
of Professionals Craftsmen  
and Merchants



As of 2024; rounded figures

**1 million** businesses

**5.6 million** employees  
(12.3 percent of the total labour force)

**350,000** apprentices  
(28.7 percent of all apprentices)

**€766 billion** turnover

Skilled crafts form the core and essential part of small and medium-sized businesses in Germany. As a large economic and social group, it exerts significant influence on public life. Whether for private consumers, industry, trade or the public authorities, the German skilled crafts sector offers a wide, differentiated and especially high-quality range of goods and services. Individual products and solutions are the focus and strength of the skilled crafts sector. A continual ability to adapt is ensured by highly qualified proprietors and employees. Qualified specialists are the driving force behind the ability of businesses to innovate and to cope with new economic and technical developments.

**GERMANY**

& figures

& figures

**DENMARK**

As of 2024; rounded figures

**36,400** enterprises  
in the crafts and construction sector

**€49.4 billion** turnover

**210,000** employees

**23%** of all apprentices  
with training agreements in Denmark are in the construction sector

These figures highlight the significant contribution of the crafts and construction sector to Denmark's economy, employment, and vocational training system. In Denmark, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in the crafts and construction sector.

**SME**denmark



Związek  
Rzemiosła  
Polskiego

As of 2024; rounded figures

**541,000** enterprises

**200,000** micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

**300,000** employees

The Polish Craft Association is the oldest and largest socio-professional economic self-government organisation, which has been operating since 1933. In 2001, it was granted the status of a representative employers' organisation. Together with regional, local and branch craft organisations – 25 craft chambers (including 1 branch chamber), 446 craft guilds and 54 cooperatives – it forms the largest and oldest structure of economic self-government in Poland, representing approximately 200,000 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

**POLAND**

& figures

European  
Crafts  
Conference  
2025



SMEUnited is the association of crafts and SMEs in Europe with around 65 member organisations from over 30 European countries. SMEUnited represents national cross-sectoral craft and SME federations from EU and non-EU countries as well as European SME branch organisations. SMEUnited speaks on behalf of the 25.8 million SMEs in Europe which employ almost 88.7 million people. SMEUnited is a recognised European cross-sectoral social partner and acts on behalf of crafts and SMEs in the European social dialogue and in discussions with the EU institutions.



# History

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EU CONFERENCES ON CRAFTS (1990–1997)

The purpose of this summary is to take advantage of some of the key moments that have helped to define the founding guidelines of the European policy for craft and small enterprises, a path that began some time ago and has been promoted by the most representative craft organisations, participated by our independent craft and small business leaders and interpreters, present in Europe for over 40 years and almost 80 years of peace within the European Continent. The importance of the cooperation with the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and the National and Regional authorities of the Member States, with the European Year of Crafts in 1983 (COM (84) 263) and ended with the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Conference on Crafts and Small Enterprises held in Milan in 1997. This last Conference led to a precise “awareness” of the common values of the craft sector, of the specific problems and constraints faced by crafts and small enterprises in the 1980s after a period of economic and social crisis, anticipating changes including those in cross-border areas and fostering the confidence in an alliance of existing democratic representative organizations from different European business cultures.

The subsequent stages have certainly contributed to making the craft sector today: a qualified interlocutor as the only **economic and social partner representative recognized at European level (UEAPME/EUROPME then SMEunited) in policies for technical standardization and on international markets**. The Conferences cycles, open to economic, scientific and multi-level political decision makers, contributed to a greater understanding of the potential expressed by craftsmanship and micro and small enterprises and in particular for the younger generations and apprentices, female and foreign self-entrepreneurship, in rural, mountainous and remote areas thanks also to the launch of the Internal Market in 1992 and later on with Euro adoption. A force for growth and resilience, proximity, innovation and the research and implementation of unique quality products and services, social cohesion and employment in Europe (definition of micro and SMEs, European Charter for Small Enterprises S.M. da Feira, Small Business Act for Europe, “Think small first” principle).

## 1990

### Avignon (France): Recognising the Role of Crafts and Small Businesses

The first major EU Conference on Crafts was held in Avignon, France, in 1990 (12-13 October). This event marked a turning point in the European recognition of the economic and social importance of craftsmanship and micro-small enterprises. At the time, European policies focused mainly on large industries and the liberalisation of world trade, with less attention to the specific needs of smaller companies. The Avignon Conference highlighted the need for a separate policy framework dedicated to the craft sector and small micro enterprises, addressing issues such as access to finance, training and innovation, sector based policies. This meeting laid the groundwork for greater collaboration between the EU institutions and SME representatives organizations, leading to more targeted support measures.

## 1994

### Berlin: Strengthening Policy Frameworks for Craft and SMEs

In 1994 (26 -27 September), the European economic landscape was evolving with the deepening of the Single Market (public markets and SME transnational cooperation). The Berlin conference reflected a more structured approach to supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), stressing the need for better integration of small enterprises into governments’ European economic policies within subsidiarity principle. During this period, more concrete financial instruments were adopted, such as EU-guaranteed loan schemes and financing programmes dedicated to craft businesses. The discussions in Berlin also highlighted the importance of vocational training, computerization and technological innovation, and cross-border cooperation between SMEs. The conference was instrumental in strengthening the EU’s commitment to promoting entrepreneurship, reducing bureaucratic barriers for small businesses and improving SMEs’ access to European markets.

## 1997

### Milan: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy for SMEs

The 1997 Milan Conference (20-21 November) built on previous discussions, moving towards a more comprehensive and coherent SME policy. At that time, the European Commission had started to implement specific action plans to improve the competitiveness of crafts and small businesses. Discussions in Milan focused on innovation, sustainability and the need to integrate SMEs into global value chains. In addition, the conference highlighted the digital transformation and the role of emerging technologies in fostering the growth of crafts and SMEs. The event contributed to the creation of the “European Charter for Small Enterprises” (adopted in 2000), which enshrined key principles such as improving access to markets, reducing administrative burdens, promoting entrepreneurship through education and training, and enhancing international trade opportunities for SME

## Legal notice

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Find the complete brochure  
and the conclusions of the European  
Crafts Conference 2025 online:



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