



Handwerkskammer  
Koblenz



# CRAFTS IN TEXTILE – ALBANIA

## Sector Overview & Development Priorities

**Based on the National Study on  
Textile Handicrafts**  
(114 artisans, 23 municipalities,  
46 institutional actors)

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# 1. WHY TEXTILE CRAFTS MATTER FOR ALBANIA

Textile handicrafts in Albania represent far more than a traditional activity. They sit at the intersection of women's economic empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, rural livelihoods, creative industries, tourism development, and the green transition.

Across many regions, textile crafts are among the few income-generating opportunities available to women, particularly those over 40 and living in rural and semi-rural areas. At the same time, these crafts embody a rich reservoir of intangible cultural heritage, reflected in embroidery, weaving, shajak production, natural dyeing, knitting, and region-specific motifs and techniques.

Despite this multi-dimensional potential, the sector remains largely invisible in public policy, weakly organised, and economically fragile. Activities are scattered, informal, and only marginally connected to scalable markets or structured development pathways.

This national study was undertaken to move beyond anecdotal perceptions and establish, for the first time, an evidence-based understanding of the textile handicraft sector – its profile, challenges, assets, and strategic development opportunities

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## 2. SECTOR SNAPSHOT: WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

The study is based on a nationwide survey of 114 textile artisans across 23 municipalities and consultations with 46 institutional and expert stakeholders. It reveals a sector with strong skills and heritage value, but limited economic performance.

### A women-led sector with an ageing profile

Around 95% of textile artisans are women. Most are over the age of 45 and have more than ten years of experience. This means the sector rests on a powerful base of craftsmanship and tacit knowledge – but also faces a serious generational risk.

This profile positions textile crafts as a strategic sector for gender-responsive economic policy and rural development, while simultaneously highlighting the urgency of youth engagement and skills transmission.

### Economically fragile, yet structurally promising

Income levels across the sector remain low. Approximately 65% of artisans earn less than €500 per month, and 85% earn below €1,000. For the majority, handicrafts function as a survival or supplementary activity rather than a stable enterprise.

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However, the study reveals a very clear performance pattern: all artisans earning above €1,000 per month are formally registered and operate as organised micro-enterprises. They work in teams, diversify sales channels, invest in branding, and engage more proactively with markets.

Higher income is not linked to superior craft skills – which are already strong across the sector – but to organisation, formalisation, business capacity, and market integration. This evidence demonstrates that the core constraint is not talent, but system infrastructure.

### **Rich production, weak market integration**

Textile artisans produce a wide range of goods: traditional garments, home textiles, carpets, accessories, and contemporary artisan fashion. Techniques are predominantly manual and heritage-based, with embroidery, weaving, and knitting forming the backbone of production.

Yet market access remains the primary challenge. Most sales occur through local fairs, social media, and small shops, with minimal export presence. Revenues are seasonal and heavily dependent on tourism flows, leaving artisans exposed to volatility and limiting growth.

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### 3. DIGITAL DIVIDE AND HERITAGE AT RISK

One of the most significant findings concerns generational and digital disparities.

All younger artisans are digitally active, while around 22% of women over 45 are not online at all. This creates a real exclusion gap, cutting a substantial part of the sector off from contemporary marketing, e-commerce, and visibility opportunities.

At the same time, the heritage base is narrowing. While embroidery and basic knitting remain widespread, practices such as shajak production, natural dyeing, and multi-technique craftsmanship are weakly represented and at risk of disappearing.

Without structured intergenerational transmission, documentation, and training pathways, valuable textile traditions could be lost within a single generation.

The sector is therefore at a strategic crossroads: either it becomes a bridge between heritage and innovation, or it continues to contract.

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## 4. A SECTOR THAT KNOWS WHAT IT NEEDS

A highly encouraging outcome of the study is the clarity with which artisans articulate their priorities. Across regions, they consistently call for:

- organisation and collective representation
- structured market platforms and promotion
- business, design, and digital skills development
- a clear legal status for textile artisans
- stronger international market linkages
- youth involvement and apprenticeship schemes
- documentation and certification of traditional techniques

Institutional actors and experts confirm the same challenges: informality, fragmentation, limited market access, digital skill gaps, and the absence of coordinated sector structures.

This convergence creates a strong foundation for collective action.

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## 5. CORE STRATEGIC MESSAGE

The study can be summarised in one statement:

**Skills are strong. Heritage is alive. Women are active.  
But systems are weak.**

Without coordinated intervention, the sector will remain trapped in low-income survival cycles. With structured investment, it can evolve into a heritage-based, green, and innovative creative micro-industry.

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## 6. VISION: FROM SURVIVAL ACTIVITY TO GREEN CREATIVE INDUSTRY

The proposed development vision is a textile handicraft sector that:

- generates sustainable incomes for women
- is organised, visible, and represented
- integrates youth and vocational education pathways
- develops environmentally responsible, innovation-driven products
- connects to tourism, design, and private markets
- strengthens Albania's cultural and creative economy identity

In essence, the sector can shift from fragmented survival activity to a green creative micro-industry rooted in heritage and aligned with contemporary market demand.

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## 7. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

### I. Capacity building and professionalisation

Develop tiered training and mentoring pathways covering formalisation, costing and pricing, branding, contemporary design, green product development, and digital market access.

### II. From production to market

Establish structured market platforms, collective promotion mechanisms, linkages with tourism and hospitality, and participation in national and international fairs.

### III. Sector organisation and representation

Support the creation of a National Textile Artisans' Association, regional clusters, shared workshops, and structured dialogue mechanisms with public institutions.

### IV. Heritage-based green innovation

Revitalise underused techniques such as shajak production, natural dyeing, and plant-fibre applications. Establish co-creation and innovation labs linking artisans, designers, and green economy actors.

### V. Youth engagement and skills transmission

Develop apprenticeship schemes, integrate textile crafts into vocational and higher education, and recognise master artisans as certified trainers and heritage custodians.

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## 8. SECTOR MOMENTUM: PUBLIC VALIDATION AND CONSENSUS

The study's findings were publicly presented and discussed on 19 January 2026 during a national event bringing together textile artisans, representatives of the Koblenz Chamber of Crafts, the National Chamber of Crafts, donors, civil society actors, and representatives of academia and vocational education.

Universities and training institutions emphasised the need for systematic documentation and certification of traditional techniques, strengthened design and product development capacities, revitalisation of fabric and organic fibre industries, and closer integration with private sector value chains.

Artisans strongly confirmed the need for a dedicated textile artisans' organisation, distinct from artists and general SMEs, to represent their specific interests and advocate for tailored support mechanisms. Willingness to host apprentices and engage young people was widely expressed.

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Public employment representatives highlighted the potential of Youth Guarantee schemes to support structured youth entry into textile crafts. The President of the National Chamber of Crafts commended the seriousness of the analysis and underlined that the sector has reached a new level of self-articulation and readiness for development. Kozeta Halili particularly stressed the importance of establishing a distinct legal status for textile artisans, enabling access to state support schemes and targeted financial instruments.

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## 9. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY AND CONCLUSION

The study clearly demonstrates a significant performance gap between women working individually and informally, and those organised in teams and formally registered enterprises. Organised and formalised artisans show higher incomes, greater production capacity, improved market access, and stronger engagement with private sector partners.

This difference confirms that organisation and formalisation are not administrative issues alone, but central development levers.

Albania's textile handicraft sector does not lack talent. It lacks structures.

With coordinated action, it can become a high-impact entry point for inclusive economic development, women's empowerment, green innovation, youth employment, and cultural heritage safeguarding.

Textile crafts are not a marginal activity.  
They are a strategic development opportunity.

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## Public Validation of Findings – Event of 19 January 2026

The study findings were publicly presented and discussed on 19 January 2026, during a dedicated event focused on the textile crafts sector, with broad and representative participation. The event brought together textile artisans from different regions of Albania, representatives of the Chamber of Crafts Koblenz, the National Chamber of Crafts, donors, civil society actors, as well as representatives of academia and the vocational education and training system. The presentation of the findings was followed by open discussions, which largely confirmed the challenges and strategic directions identified by the study.

Representatives from universities and vocational education institutions particularly emphasized the need for documentation and certification of artisanal techniques, the development of capacities in design and product development, and the revitalization and strengthening of the fabric and organic fibre industry in Albania. They stressed the importance of more strongly linking the crafts sector with textile value chains and the private sector. The need to build concrete bridges between artisans, educational institutions, and businesses was underlined as a prerequisite for innovation, youth employment, and the long-term sustainability of the sector.

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Artisans strongly confirmed the need for a specific organizational structure for textile crafts, as a distinct voice differentiating them from artists and from other SMEs, and directly representing the specific interests of textile artisans. The need for cooperation, exchange of experience, and dedicated financing mechanisms was emphasized, along with their willingness to host young people for professional practice and apprenticeships. Representatives of the National Employment Service raised the possibility of using the Youth Guarantee scheme to systematically address the inclusion of young people in textile crafts. The President of the National Chamber of Crafts, Mr. Luan Bregasi, highly appreciated the findings and the seriousness of the analytical work, emphasizing that the study provides a realistic picture of the sector and that artisans are already one step ahead in articulating their needs. In this context, Kozeta Halili specifically raised the issue of the legal status of textile artisans, distinct from that of artists, stressing that a clear legal status would create concrete opportunities to benefit from state support schemes and other development instruments.

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In conclusion, the study clearly shows that the textile crafts sector does not suffer from a lack of skills, but from a lack of structure. One of the most significant pieces of evidence is the visible difference in performance between women working alone and informally, and women who are organized in teams or formalized businesses with a registered NIPT. Women working alone and informally often remain at subsistence-income levels, with limited access to markets, finance, and product development. Meanwhile, cases of women organized in work structures and formalized businesses show sustainable income growth, higher production capacity, better market access, and greater readiness to cooperate with the private sector. This difference is not accidental—it demonstrates that organization and formalization are key levers for development, and that with targeted interventions, the sector can realistically move from survival to economic growth.

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