



EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

Skilled Crafts in Europe

The Skilled Crafts sector in Europe is highly diverse yet united by similar characteristics. This statement points towards the sector-specific policy needs for the next mandate of the European Parliament.



*All signing parties are member of [SMEUnited](#).

European Elections 2024: The Future of Crafts in Europe

Joint vision paper

Europe needs strong local economies to maintain its competitiveness and build a solid future. The micro, small and medium-sized enterprises of the skilled crafts sector are indispensable to ensure prosperity, services, jobs and local training in Europe's regions and local areas. They are the ones that implement the green and digital transformation.

At the same time, these businesses are often struggling the most with burdensome new legislation and red tape being introduced at an accelerated pace.

With this position paper, the European Crafts sector is asking EU policymakers to honour the important role of Crafts in Europe by providing them with better conditions to compete, innovate and grow their business in the future.

These sector-specific demands strongly support and add another layer to the political representation that SMEUnited, the European umbrella association for Crafts and SMEs, is successfully providing at EU level.

We ask for:

1. Stable regulatory framework for the green transition

The skilled crafts sector supports the climate transition and is a necessary partner to realise its success. Over the past five years, numerous laws have been passed in the framework of the "European Green Deal", which businesses must now implement.

For them to be able to keep their business running, they need a stable, reliable framework without constant changes in targets and measures. Clear priorities are crucial to make progress in transitioning towards a "green" economy where SMEs can thrive.

2. Reduction of reporting and documentation obligations

The constant increase in bureaucracy is a key factor that makes self-employment increasingly unattractive from the perspective of business owners in the skilled crafts sector. Young skilled workers are being disincentivised from setting up a new business or taking over an existing one. To counter this development, the bureaucratic burden on craftspeople must be significantly reduced. The interests of small and medium-sized enterprises should be taken into account from the outset, including through the strict application of the 'Think Small First'-principle, the SME test and the strengthening of the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. An SME Envoy must actively defend the applicability of EU initiatives by SMEs and skilled crafts enterprises in the legislative process at the highest level of the EU Commission.

3. Fair competition on digital markets

The digital transition presents great opportunities for the skilled crafts sector. However, such opportunities can only be seized if the framework conditions for fair competition, for example on digital sales platforms, are also ensured in the future. Access to the necessary data is a key element in this context as well. The EU has laid the foundations with the Data Act. Further implementation of its principles must now follow, e.g. with regard to hardware interfaces, standardized protocols, sector-specific regulations and access to customers. When using artificial intelligence, liability risks for companies must be appropriate.

4. Provision of skilled labour

Across Europe, there is a great need for skilled workers in the skilled crafts. Demographic changes are adding to this. At the same time, the tasks are becoming more complex and the skilled crafts more technologically demanding. It is therefore essential that skilled craftspeople throughout Europe are trained to a high standard and that the image, appreciation and equivalence of vocational training is improved. It is also important to strengthen the mobility of trainees and skilled workers in the EU and to simplify qualified immigration from third countries.

5. SMEs at the centre of EU competitiveness policy

The skilled crafts sector is a strong local partner. Businesses are therefore more dependent on local conditions than other sectors of the economy. A political rethink that places the competitiveness of SMEs at the centre of European policy. In order to strengthen these companies, well-developed infrastructure, affordable and secure energy supplies, efficient, digital administrative procedures in cross-border areas, e.g. for the posting of workers, are necessary. Support is also needed for effective participation in standardization processes and for innovation and transformation, e.g. through the establishment of easily accessible, suitable living labs and simplified access to relevant EU programs.

6. Stronger support for SMEs as cohesion factors in local areas

Crafts enterprises are not only part of the production system, but they are also a crucial development factor for local areas, as their know-how, human capital, and products are key tangible and intangible elements of Europe's cultural heritage.

Therefore, EU strategies and initiatives need to take into due account this important role of small businesses, promoting craftsmanship as “cohesion engine”, traditions’ repository and sustainable growth vector.

7. Promotion of a stable political environment

Small and medium-sized enterprises are at the core of Europe’s economic weight. Their success also depends on a stable political environment. Ultimately, the European elections must be an opportunity to strengthen the EU as a values-based political community. It is up to policymakers to ensure alignment between Member States and work towards more internal cohesion to strengthen the EU as a global player. In doing so, the specificities of the different Member States must be taken into account and the principle of subsidiarity has to be respected in order to ensure effective regulation.