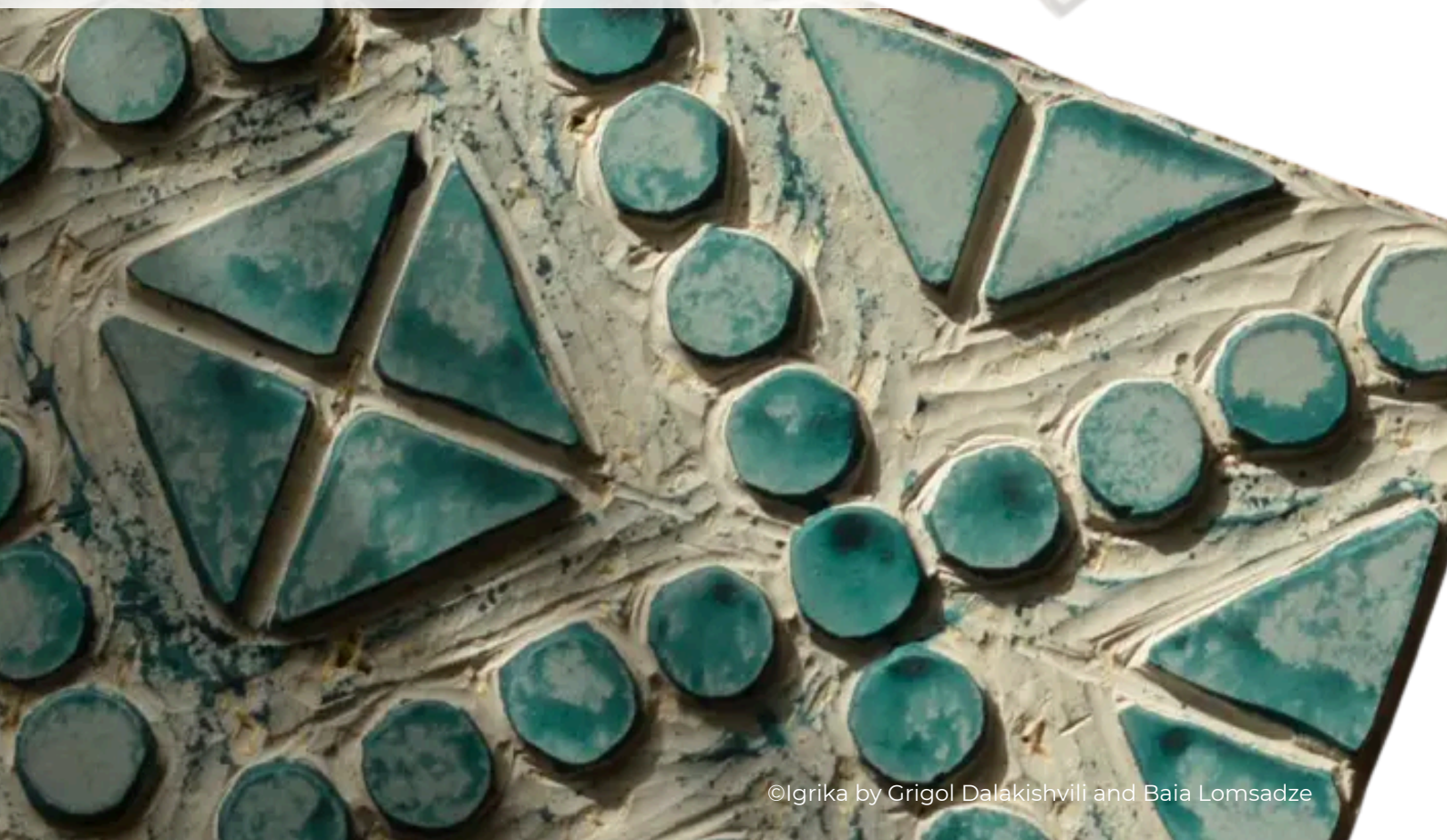




BUILDING BRIDGES, BUILDING SKILLS

BRICKS - Building Bridges, Building Skills: Enhancing Non-Formal Craft Education for Sustainable Cultural Transmission

NATIONAL REPORT, COUNTRY: BELGIUM



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Introduction

This document presents the national findings collected within the framework of the BRICKS : Building Bridges, Building Skills: Enhancing Adults' Non-formal Craft Education for Sustainable Cultural Transmission project. BRICKS is funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ 2024 programme (KA220-ADU – Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education). Its aim is to strengthen the visibility, quality, and recognition of non-formal adult education within the craft and heritage craft sectors across Europe.

Non-formal craft education plays a crucial role in safeguarding traditional knowledge, supporting professional development, and ensuring the transmission of skills to future generations. Yet, this field remains insufficiently structured and often poorly understood within national education frameworks. Through coordinated research and multi-country analysis, BRICKS seeks to bridge this gap and lay the foundations for a more coherent and accessible non-formal learning ecosystem for craftspeople, educators, and organisations.

This national report forms part of a wider comparative study conducted in Belgium, Poland, Georgia, and Italy. It outlines the key characteristics of non-formal craft education at national level, examines existing training and certification models, identifies challenges encountered by practitioners, and gathers insights directly from craft professionals through a dedicated survey.

The BRICKS Project and its European approach

Rationale & needs

The goal of this national report is to document the current state of non-formal adult education in the traditional and heritage craft sector in Belgium. It aims to provide a coherent overview of existing training pathways, legal and policy frameworks, validation mechanisms, challenges, and good practices, complemented by direct insights gathered from craft educators and learners.

The report contributes to the wider comparative study carried out in Belgium, Poland, Georgia, and Italy, forming part of the evidence base that will present the mapping of non-formal education in the partner countries.

Objectives

- Study the existing non-formal adult education models and challenges in the crafts sector of partner countries.
- Support partner organisations, craft educators, and master craftspeople to expand opportunities, quality, and accessibility of adult non-formal education in heritage craft (HC) and traditional craft (TC).
- Increase the outreach of BRICKS and ensure spill-over effects at national and European levels.

Through this research, BRICKS has produced:

- A consolidated state of the art on non-formal adult craft education in the four partner countries;
- Improved understanding among partners and educators of existing models and potential areas for development;
- Increased awareness of the role and value of non-formal craft education at national and European level.

For the report, the terms *craftsmanship*, *handicraft*, *traditional craftsmanship* (including artistic crafts, fine and applied arts, folk art, and related domains) and *traditional knowledge* are used in line with the project's glossary.

Partners

The BRICKS project is built upon a consortium of partners that are deeply rooted in the craft and cultural heritage sector, bringing together complementary expertise in training, advocacy, cultural preservation, and innovation. The partnership between Belgium, Georgia, Poland, and Italy reflects both geographical diversity and a shared commitment to addressing the key challenges identified in the non-formal craft education path: skills transmission, lack of recognition, limited funding, and generational renewal.

The project is led by **Mad'in Europe (MIE – Belgium)**, which plays a central coordinating and strategic role. Founded in Brussels in 2013, MIE has developed a strong positioning at the European level, focusing on enhancing the visibility and recognition of heritage professions, including traditional crafts, fine crafts, building crafts, and conservation-restoration. Its mission is to highlight the contribution of these professions to employment creation and

sustainable development, positioning them as key assets in achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal. MIE also places strong emphasis on the transmission of skills to new generations, advocating for the recognition of crafts as professions of excellence rather than marginal activities. This positioning directly responds to several challenges identified in the survey, particularly those related to lack of visibility, limited institutional recognition, and the need to reframe crafts within contemporary socio-economic debates.

The project benefits from the expertise of the **Georgian Arts and Culture Center (GACC - Georgia)**, an organisation with more than 25 years of experience in the fields of cultural heritage, creative industries, and international cooperation. GACC operates within a context where traditional crafts are deeply embedded in cultural identity but are increasingly at risk due to economic pressures, migration, and limited institutional support. As an accredited NGO to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, a member of the European Crafts Alliance, and the official representative of Europa Nostra, GACC plays a key role in the preservation, promotion, and sustainable use of Georgian cultural heritage. Its activities include educational programmes, support for cultural entrepreneurship, and international networking, aiming to strengthen the economic viability and resilience of craft-based sectors. GACC's positioning reflects many of the structural issues highlighted in the BRICKS project, particularly the urgency of safeguarding endangered skills and creating sustainable pathways for new generations of artisans.

The **National Museum in Gdańsk (Poland)** contributes to connecting craft education with museum practice, heritage preservation, and public engagement. As one of the oldest museums in Poland and a national cultural institution under the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, it plays a central role in the collection, conservation, and dissemination of artistic and cultural knowledge. Its scope includes not only Polish and European art, but also ethnographic and intercultural heritage, making it a key actor in interpreting and transmitting material culture. Through its educational activities, exhibitions, and research, the museum contributes to the public understanding of crafts and heritage, reinforcing the link between non-formal education and broader cultural ecosystems. Its involvement in BRICKS ensures that the project integrates institutional knowledge and heritage-based perspectives, complementing more practice-oriented approaches.

Artex – Centre for Artistic and Traditional Craftsmanship in Tuscany (Italy) brings over 30 years of experience in supporting and developing the craft sector. Established on the

initiative of Confartigianato and CAN – the two main Italian crafts associations, Artex operates as a key reference point for artistic and traditional crafts at regional and international levels, working closely with public institutions such as the Tuscany Region and the Municipality of Florence. Its activities focus on promoting craftsmanship, enhancing its competitiveness, and fostering innovation, particularly through the integration of digital technologies and sustainable practices. Artex’s positioning is particularly significant in a context where craftsmanship is both economically relevant and culturally embedded, yet faces increasing challenges related to global competition and generational transition. By combining training, business support, and policy engagement, Artex plays a crucial role in bridging traditional knowledge and contemporary market dynamics.

Across all partner countries, a common element clearly emerges: partners are not external observers of the sector, but active actors within it, working directly with artisans, learners, institutions, and communities. This ensures a practice-based and experience-driven perspective, allowing the project to address real challenges and develop operationally relevant solutions.

The strength of the consortium lies in this combination of local embeddedness and transnational vision. Each partner contributes specific expertise—ranging from European advocacy (Belgium), to heritage preservation and international cooperation (Georgia), institutional and cultural transmission (Poland), and innovation and sector development (Italy)—while the project framework enables comparison, exchange, and mutual learning.

Ultimately, the partners act as bridges between knowledge and practice, connecting heritage and innovation, local realities and European strategies, individual learning experiences and systemic development needs.

Through this collaborative approach and their direct experience in the field, the consortium contributes to repositioning non-formal craft education as a strategic domain, capable of supporting skills development, sustainability transitions, and the preservation of cultural heritage in contemporary Europe.

Methodology

The national findings presented in this report are based on a two-step research process conducted by all BRICKS partners using a shared methodological framework to ensure comparability across Belgium, Poland, Georgia, and Italy.

1. Desk Research

Each partner conducted structured desk research using a common template developed within the consortium. The research examined:

- Legal and policy frameworks for non-formal adult education;
- Existing training pathways in traditional and heritage crafts;
- Validation and certification mechanisms;
- Roles of institutions and organisations active in non-formal craft education;
- Examples of good practices and the relationship between formal and non-formal learning.

Sources included national legislation, governmental and regional documents, sector reports, academic literature, and publicly available information from craft and heritage institutions.

2. Survey

A multi-country survey was jointly designed to gather direct insights from:

1. Organisations or individuals providing non-formal craft education, and
2. Learners participating in non-formal craft training.

The questionnaire was disseminated nationally by partners through professional networks, associations, training centres, and online platforms. All responses were collected centrally by Artex S.Cons.R.L. and shared with partners in accordance with GDPR and the project's data management plan. The survey explored training practices, motivations, barriers, skills needs, and expectations regarding certification.

Methodological Note for Belgium

The Belgian national survey was conducted within the framework of the BRICKS project in order to better understand the realities, practices, and challenges of non-formal craft education in Belgium.

The survey targeted both organisations involved in the transmission of craft-related skills and learners participating in non-formal training activities.

A total of 43 responses were collected through the dissemination channels of Mad'in Europe. Due to the European scope and international outreach of the organisation, the survey also generated responses from organisations located outside Belgium, including participants from other European countries. For this reason, particular attention was paid during the analysis process to distinguish Belgian responses from non-Belgian ones.

The dataset was therefore separated into two main groups:

- organisations involved in non-formal craft education and training;
- learners participating in craft-related training activities.

In order to ensure a more accurate national analysis, Belgian responses were prioritised for the quantitative interpretation of the results. However, the non-Belgian responses were retained within the qualitative analysis because they provided relevant comparative insights into broader European dynamics and challenges related to non-formal craft education. This approach was considered particularly relevant given the transnational dimension of the BRICKS project and the shared issues identified across different European contexts.

Because many survey questions allowed multiple answers and included open-ended qualitative responses, an additional data cleaning and categorisation process was carried out. Responses were grouped into thematic categories in order to facilitate comparative analysis and visualisation. This process made it possible to identify recurring patterns concerning:

- the types of craft skills taught and learned;
- learner profiles and motivations;
- training formats and accessibility;
- evaluation and certification practices;
- pedagogical diversification;
- and the main structural challenges faced by organisations.

The analysis therefore combines both quantitative tendencies and qualitative insights in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the current landscape of non-formal craft education in Belgium. To find more and see the database, click [here](#).

State of the art : BELGIUM

1. Legal and Policy Frameworks for Non-Formal Education

In Belgium, non-formal education is recognised in practice but not formally defined through a unified legal framework at national level. Its understanding is shaped by statistical definitions, European policy influence, and regionally embedded approaches.

At the federal level, there is no binding legal definition. However, the Belgian statistical office (Statbel) provides a widely used operational distinction: formal education leads to recognised diplomas, while non-formal education includes “all other courses, private courses and workplace training, including short training courses.” Although not regulatory, this definition plays a key role in structuring data collection and informing policy discussions (Statbel, 2023)¹.

Belgium’s approach is also aligned with the European framework, which considers non-formal education as complementary to formal systems and highlights the importance of recognising skills acquired outside traditional education pathways². This perspective is reflected in national and regional policies promoting lifelong learning and skills development.

At regional level, non-formal education is more concretely embedded in policy frameworks:

In the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, non-formal education is integrated into youth and cultural policies. The Government Policy Statement (2014–2019) emphasises its role in fostering citizenship, participation, and emancipation, notably through support for youth organisations³. Key stakeholders such as the International Youth Bureau (BIJ)⁴ and recognised youth organisations play an important role in implementing non-formal learning activities, particularly in mobility, training, and intercultural exchange. Research from the Observatory of Childhood, Youth and Youth Assistance (OEJAJ) further highlights these actors as central to the non-formal education ecosystem⁵.

In Flanders, policies are more structured and linked to lifelong learning and employability. The integration of SDG 4 (quality education) includes targets to increase participation in both formal and non-formal education⁶. In addition, the Validation of Acquired Competencies (VAC) framework

¹ [Education des adultes | Statbel](#)

² [Eur-lex.europa.eu](http://eur-lex.europa.eu)

³ [Politique Jeunesse - Portail de la culture en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles](#)

⁴ [BIJ](#)

⁵ [Oejai.cfwb.be](http://oejai.cfwb.be)

⁶ [SDG 4: Verzeker gelijke toegang tot kwaliteitsvol onderwijs en bevorder levenslang leren voor iedereen](#)

enables the identification, assessment, and certification of skills acquired outside formal education, in connection with the Flemish Qualification Framework (FQF) (Vlaamse Codex, 2019)⁷.

Across these different levels, non-formal education in Belgium shares common characteristics: it is structured but flexible, does not necessarily lead to formal certification, and relies on participatory, practice-based learning approaches.

Overall, the Belgian framework is characterised by implicit recognition, strong regional differentiation, and the active role of intermediary stakeholders, but also by the absence of a unified national definition or strategy, which limits coherence and visibility across sectors, including traditional and heritage crafts.

2. Non-Formal Learning Pathways and Support Instruments in Heritage Crafts

Belgium has a well-developed but regionally diverse ecosystem of non-formal learning pathways in the traditional and heritage craft sector. These pathways are primarily practice-based and often closely linked to heritage preservation, vocational training, and adult education systems.

In **Wallonia**, non-formal training in heritage crafts is strongly structured through public institutions. The **Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine (AWAP)** plays a central coordinating role by offering specialised training programmes in areas such as masonry, carpentry, and restoration of historic buildings⁸. These programmes are typically modular, practice-oriented, and adapted to different skill levels, with financial accessibility depending on participants' status (e.g. reduced fees for jobseekers or full coverage through European-funded projects).

Under the umbrella of AWAP, key training centres such as the **Centre de la Paix-Dieu**⁹ and the **Pôle de la Pierre**¹⁰ deliver high-level, hands-on training in architectural heritage crafts. They combine technical instruction with real-life restoration contexts and contribute to professional upskilling as well as international training exchanges, reinforcing the structured nature of non-formal learning in this sector.

Complementary pathways are offered through organisations such as **SIEP (Service d'Information sur les Études et les Professions)**¹¹, which connects learners to a wide range of craft training

⁷ [Codex.vlaanderen.be](https://codex.vlaanderen.be/);

⁸ [AWAP Patrimoine](https://awap.be/)

⁹ [Centre-de-la-paix-dieu](https://centre-de-la-paix-dieu.be/)

¹⁰ [Pole-de-la-pierre/](https://pole-de-la-pierre.be/)

¹¹ [Siep.be](https://siep.be)

opportunities (textiles, ceramics, leather, metalwork, etc.) in collaboration with providers like **IFAPME**¹², **CEFA**¹³, and social promotion education (EPS)¹⁴. These pathways may lead to recognised certificates, although they remain outside traditional formal education systems.

In **Flanders**, non-formal learning is often embedded within cultural and heritage institutions, with a strong emphasis on hands-on and experiential learning. The **Museum of Old Techniques (MOT)** in Grimbergen is a key example¹⁵, offering short workshops and multi-day training courses in traditional crafts such as woodworking, blacksmithing, stone engraving, and traditional construction techniques. These initiatives are supported by regional authorities, including **Brabant Flamand**¹⁶, which contributes to funding and accessibility.

Across regions, support instruments exist but remain fragmented and not systematically embedded in law. They include:

- Regional public funding supporting institutions and training centres;
- Reduced participation fees for specific target groups (e.g. jobseekers);
- European project-based funding, which can fully cover training costs in some cases;
- Links with vocational training systems in certain cases (e.g. IFAPME in Wallonia).

Overall, Belgium offers a rich and practice-oriented landscape of non-formal craft learning opportunities, supported by a network of specialised institutions. However, the system remains uneven across regions and craft sectors, with stronger provision in architectural and construction-related heritage crafts than in fields such as textiles or decorative arts.

3. Good Practices in Craft-Based Non-Formal Learning

Several examples in Belgium illustrate how non-formal learning is implemented in the traditional and heritage craft sector, particularly through practice-based and context-driven training approaches.

In **Flanders**, the **Museum of Old Techniques (MOT)** in Grimbergen offers a structured programme of non-formal learning activities¹⁷. Through its “Does” (How-To) workshops and multi-day courses, participants can engage in hands-on training in crafts such as blacksmithing, woodworking, wattle and daub timber framing, stone engraving, and traditional construction techniques. These activities

¹² [IFAPME](#)

¹³ Enseignement.cfwb.be

¹⁴ Enseignement.be

¹⁵ [het MOT](#)

¹⁶ [Provincie Vlaams-Brabant](#)

¹⁷ [het MOT](#)

are typically short-term and accessible to adult learners, with a focus on practical skill acquisition under the guidance of experienced practitioners.

In Wallonia, the **Centre de la Paix-Dieu**¹⁸ and the **Pôle de la Pierre**¹⁹, under the coordination of **AWAP**²⁰, provide training in architectural heritage crafts. Their programmes are based on technical instruction combined with practical application, often linked to real or simulated restoration contexts. These initiatives are primarily oriented towards the transmission of skills in sectors such as stone masonry, carpentry, and conservation.

Another example is the **Table Ronde de l'Architecture (TRA)** (<https://www.latra.be/>), which operates outside formal education systems and proposes alternative learning formats such as summer schools. Its participants are often architects or architecture students, while the training is delivered by highly skilled craftspeople. This creates a learning dynamic in which participants are introduced to traditional techniques that are often underrepresented in architectural education, thereby strengthening connections between architectural practice and craft knowledge.

These examples highlight non-formal learning formats that are hands-on, practice-oriented, and led by experienced professionals, and that can be accessed by a variety of adult learners through flexible training formats.

4. Articulation Between Non-Formal and Formal Education

In Belgium, the articulation between non-formal and formal education in the heritage craft sector relies on cooperation between training providers, public institutions, and certification bodies, as well as on structured validation frameworks.

In Wallonia, the training programmes of the **Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine (AWAP)**²¹ illustrate this approach. While AWAP provides technical and sector-specific training, it does not directly deliver formal certifications. For certain programmes, such as *Heritage Site Management (Gestion de chantiers du patrimoine)*²² certification is ensured through partnerships with recognised institutions including **IFAPME**²³, **FOREM**²⁴, and **EFp**²⁵. These actors are responsible for evaluation, administrative management, complementary training including transversal (soft) skills, and the delivery of

¹⁸ [Centre de la Paix Dieu](#)

¹⁹ [Le Pôle de la pierre](#)

²⁰ [Former - AWAP Patrimoine](#)

²¹ [Former - AWAP Patrimoine](#)

²² [Gestionnaires de chantiers de patrimoine](#)

²³ [IFAPME](#)

²⁴ [Le Forem](#)

²⁵ [Efp](#)

certification. This cooperation is framed by the **Cooperation Agreement of 24 October 2008**, which organises alternating training as a shared responsibility between public authorities, training providers, and companies.

A second example is the advanced Master's programme in heritage conservation and restoration²⁶, where universities such as **UCLouvain**²⁷ collaborate with AWAP. Academic staff and craft professionals jointly deliver the programme, combining academic knowledge with practical expertise.

In **Flanders**, articulation follows a different logic, based on the **Flemish Qualification Framework (FQF)** and the **Validation of Acquired Competences (VAC)**²⁸. These mechanisms allow skills acquired through non-formal learning to be assessed and formally recognised, independently of the training pathway.

Alongside these structured pathways, a significant part of the training offer remains non-certifying. As shown in the AWAP catalogue²⁹, training modules are organised according to progressive levels within specific crafts, for example in stonework from *Stone 1 – foundational knowledge (Pierre 1)* to *Stone 4 – conservation and restoration (Pierre 4)*, as well as levels such as initiation and advanced training.

Overall, non-formal education in Belgium both complements formal education pathways and, in some cases, is integrated into certification processes, reflecting a system where training provision and certification are carried out by different actors.

5. Governance of Craft Education Policies

In Belgium, education and training policies are highly **decentralised**, and there are no specific federal policies dedicated to traditional and heritage craft education, as these competences fall under the responsibility of the regions and language communities.

In **Flanders**, heritage craft education is integrated into broader policy frameworks related to **vocational training, adult education, and cultural heritage**.

The **Flemish Qualification Framework (FQF)** and the system for **Validation of Acquired Competences (VAC)** structure the recognition of skills, including those acquired through non-formal learning. In parallel, the *Decree supporting cultural heritage operations* promotes the safeguarding and social

²⁶ [Master de spécialisation inter-universitaire en conservation et restauration du patrimoine culturel immobilier](#)

²⁷ [Université catholique de Louvain](#)

²⁸ [De Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur \(VKS\) | Vlaanderen.be](#)

²⁹ [Formations pour adultes - AWAP Patrimoine](#)

valorisation of cultural heritage³⁰. However, these frameworks do not specifically target education in traditional and heritage crafts, which remains addressed indirectly.

In **Wallonia**, governance is more directly linked to heritage institutions. The **Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine (AWAP)** plays a central role in developing and delivering training programmes in architectural heritage crafts, notably through the **Centre de la Paix-Dieu** and the **Pôle de la Pierre**³¹. These initiatives are supported by public funding and structured within non-formal education frameworks.

Beyond regional policies, governance also relies on **intermediary coordination mechanisms**. The **Office francophone de la formation en alternance (OFFA)** oversees and coordinates alternating training systems, while the **Service francophone des Métiers et des Qualifications (SFMQ)** defines professional competence profiles that inform training programmes and certification pathways. These bodies contribute to aligning training provision with labour market needs.

In the **Brussels-Capital Region**, governance is more complex due to the coexistence of different language communities. Education policies are largely determined by either Flemish or Walloon systems, while regional heritage policies support craft-related activities, particularly in the fields of restoration and urban conservation³².

Overall, governance of craft education in Belgium is characterised by a **multi-level and fragmented structure**, with strong regional autonomy, the involvement of specialised institutions, and coordination mechanisms across education, training, and employment sectors. However, there is **no dedicated, integrated policy specifically addressing non-formal education in traditional and heritage crafts**.

6. Research and Monitoring of Skills Transmission in the Craft Sector

In Belgium, research and monitoring of non-formal learning in the craft sector are **not centralised**, but developed through a combination of **heritage policies, qualification systems, institutional reporting, and research projects**, reflecting the decentralised organisation of competences.

In **Flanders**, monitoring is most structured within **intangible cultural heritage policy**, where craft techniques are documented through the Inventory Flanders for Intangible Cultural Heritage³³. This

³⁰ [Flemish Qualification Framework \(FQF\)](#)

³¹ [Former - AWAP Patrimoine](#)

³² [Cultural heritage | Brussels-Capital Region](#)

³³ [Inventory Flanders for Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)

system is supported by periodic reporting, including contributions to UNESCO³⁴, and includes attention to safeguarding measures such as the **transmission of knowledge and skills**. In parallel, the **Validation of Acquired Competences (VAC)** and the **Flemish Qualification Framework (FQF)** provide tools to identify, assess, and certify competences, including those acquired through non-formal learning³⁵.

In **Wallonia**, monitoring is less formalised. The **Agence Wallonne du Patrimoine (AWAP)** plays a key role in training and transmission through its centres³⁶, although it does not function as a dedicated monitoring body. Policy recognition exists, notably in the Walloon Government Declaration 2019–2024, which highlights the importance of supporting the transmission of artisanal knowledge³⁷.

Belgium also contributes through **academic and European research**, such as the Horizon Europe project Tracks4Crafts coordinated by the University of Antwerp, focusing on craft knowledge transmission and its socio-economic relevance³⁸.

Overall, monitoring remains **fragmented**, with more structured approaches in Flanders and a stronger focus on training provision in Wallonia. While skills transmission is actively supported, it is **only partially documented through systematic and comparable monitoring tools**.

Survey results

Results from Belgium

Overview of the Non-Formal Craft Education Landscape

The survey results reveal a highly diverse non-formal craft education landscape in Belgium, encompassing a broad range of craft disciplines, transmission methods, and educational formats. The organisations represented in the survey operate across both heritage-related and contemporary craft practices, illustrating the richness and plurality of the sector.

³⁴ [Safeguarding intangible heritage in Flanders](#)

³⁵ [De Vlaamse Kwalificatiestructuur \(VKS\) | Vlaanderen.be](#)

³⁶ [Former - AWAP Patrimoine](#)

³⁷ [Declaration politique regionale 2019-2024](#)

³⁸ [U Antwerpen research-groups, urban-studies-institute](#)

Indicator	Count	Share
Total organisations surveyed	32	100%
Belgian organisations	13	40.6%
Spanish organisations	6	18.8%
French organisations	4	12.5%
Other countries (6 countries)	9	28.1%

Among the craft domains represented, decorative and finishing techniques emerged as the most frequently taught category, reported by 40.6% of organisations. Ceramic and clay-related practices were also strongly represented (37.5%), followed by woodworking, metalwork, textile techniques, and construction-related crafts, each cited by 28.1% of organisations. These results highlight the strong presence of material-based and heritage-oriented practices within the Belgian non-formal craft education ecosystem.

Other disciplines, while less represented, still demonstrate the breadth of the sector. Paper-related practices and jewellery-related crafts were each taught by 18.8% of organisations, while leather and shoemaking techniques accounted for 12.5% of responses. Only a very limited number of organisations reported practices outside the predefined categories, suggesting that the survey framework broadly reflected the diversity of activities present within the sector.

Discipline	Organisations	Share
Decoration & finishing techniques	13	40.6%
Ceramics & clay-related practices	12	37.5%
Woodworking	9	28.1%

Metalwork	9	28.1%
Textile techniques	9	28.1%
Construction-related crafts	9	28.1%
Paper & printing techniques	6	18.8%
Jewellery & goldsmithing	6	18.8%
Leather & shoemaking	4	12.5%
Other (outside predefined categories)	1	3.1%

The analysis also shows that the majority of organisations remain relatively specialised in their educational offer. Nearly 69% of organisations were categorised as specialised structures, focusing on a limited number of craft domains. By contrast, 18.8% of organisations demonstrated a highly polyvalent profile, combining several disciplines and material practices within the same training structure. A smaller proportion (12.5%) occupied an intermediate position between these two models.

Organisation Type	Count	Share
Specialised (focused on ≤ 3 domains)	22	68.8%
Intermediate profile	4	12.5%
Polyvalent (highly diversified)	6	18.8%

This coexistence of specialised and polyvalent organisations reflects the heterogeneous nature of non-formal craft education. Some organisations focus on the in-depth transmission of highly specific techniques and know-how, while others adopt broader interdisciplinary approaches that combine multiple crafts, heritage practices, and complementary skills.

Beyond the diversity of disciplines taught, the survey responses also underline the central importance of hands-on learning and workshop-based pedagogy. Across most organisations, the transmission of knowledge relies heavily on practical experimentation, direct engagement with materials, and learning-by-doing approaches. This confirms the strongly experiential dimension of non-formal craft education, where technical knowledge is closely connected to embodied practice, repetition, observation, and interaction with experienced practitioners.

Learner Profiles and Motivations

The learner responses collected through the survey reveal a diverse range of motivations and engagement patterns within non-formal craft education in Belgium. Although the number of learner responses remained relatively limited (12 responses), the results nevertheless provide valuable insights into the different functions and expectations associated with non-formal craft learning.

The most common learner profile identified was participants seeking to deepen or specialise an existing technique, representing 50% of learner responses (6/12). This suggests that non-formal craft education plays an important role not only in initiation and discovery, but also in the further development of already acquired practical competences.

Professional reorientation also emerged as a significant motivation, accounting for 33.3% of responses (4 out of 12). This finding confirms the role of non-formal craft education as a pathway for career transition and professional repositioning, particularly for individuals seeking more meaningful, material-based, or autonomous forms of work.

A smaller proportion of learners participated primarily for hobby or leisure purposes (25%), while a limited number of responses reflected other individual situations or motivations. Overall, the results demonstrate that non-formal craft education simultaneously serves personal, professional, and exploratory purposes.

Primary Motivation / Profile	Learners	Share
Deepening or specialising an existing technique	6	50.0%
Professional reorientation	4	33.3%

Hobby or leisure purposes	3	25.0%
Other individual situations	1	8.3%

The qualitative responses provided by learners further enrich this picture and reveal several recurring motivational patterns. Professionalisation-related motivations were the most prominent, appearing in 58.3% of learner responses (7 out of 12). Many participants expressed a desire to acquire practical competences that could support professional activity, complement existing work, or contribute to greater professional independence.

At the same time, artistic motivations and heritage-related interests were both present in 16.7% of responses. Several learners referred to an interest in traditional know-how, historical techniques, restoration practices, or decorative arts. Others highlighted curiosity and the wish to discover new techniques or material practices.

The responses also point toward a broader search for manual and tangible forms of engagement. Some learners described craft learning as a way to reconnect with practical activity and material experimentation, often presented as a complement to more intellectual or office-based professional environments.

The techniques learned by participants strongly reflect this orientation toward heritage-related and manual practices. Learners frequently referred to restoration techniques, gilding, engraving, ceramics, pottery, decorative arts, and other highly material-based crafts requiring precision, patience, and direct engagement with tools and materials.

Taken together, these findings suggest that non-formal craft education in Belgium attracts a heterogeneous learner population situated at the intersection of professional development, personal fulfilment, heritage transmission, and creative exploration. This diversity constitutes one of the defining characteristics of the sector and highlights the importance of flexible and adaptable learning environments capable of accommodating varied learner trajectories and expectations.

Motivational Theme	Learners	Share
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Professionalisation (acquiring practice-ready competences)	7	58.3%
Heritage interest (traditional know-how, restoration)	2	16.7%
Artistic motivation (creative exploration)	2	16.7%
Curiosity / discovery of a new technique	2	16.7%
Search for manual / tangible engagement	1	8.3%

Key Finding

Non-formal craft education in Belgium attracts a heterogeneous learner population situated at the intersection of professional development, personal fulfilment, heritage transmission, and creative exploration. This diversity constitutes one of the defining characteristics of the sector and underlines the importance of flexible, adaptable learning environments.

Accessibility and Learning Formats

The survey results highlight the strong accessibility and flexibility of non-formal craft education in Belgium. Across both organisational and learner responses, the sector appears characterised by diverse entry points, adaptable learning formats, and a broad variety of learner trajectories.

One of the clearest findings concerns the relatively open access conditions of many training programmes. Among the organisations surveyed, 12 indicated that no formal prerequisites were required to participate in at least part of their educational offer. Several respondents explicitly described their courses as accessible to beginners or open to anyone with an interest in the craft. At the same time, 7 organisations mentioned the importance of soft skills or personal predispositions, such as patience, concentration, manual dexterity, or artistic sensitivity. In parallel, 9 organisations reported requiring certain technical competences or previous practical experience for more advanced training pathways.

Entry Requirement	Organisations	Share
No formal prerequisites required	12	37.5%
Soft skills or personal predispositions recommended	7	21.9%
Technical competences or experience required	9	28.1%
Other specific conditions	3	9.4%

These results suggest that non-formal craft education operates through a layered structure combining introductory, exploratory, and specialised forms of learning. While many organisations seek to remain accessible to newcomers, others offer advanced training intended for learners already familiar with particular techniques or professional environments.

The duration of training formats also varies considerably across the sector. Short-term formats of less than six months were the most common, reported by 53.1% of organisations. However, many organisations simultaneously offer medium- and long-term pathways, with 28.1% proposing courses lasting between six months and one year, 18.8% offering programmes extending from one to two years, and 12.5% reporting training pathways lasting more than two years. Additionally, 28.1% of organisations described highly flexible formats adapted to learner needs, workshop realities, or modular structures.

This diversity of durations reflects the coexistence of very different educational objectives within non-formal craft education. Some organisations focus on short introductory workshops or intensive discovery sessions, while others support long-term skill acquisition, progressive mastery, or professional integration processes.

The survey also highlights the diversity of learner participation contexts. The most common participation pattern identified by organisations was hobby or personal development-oriented learning, mentioned by 68.8% of respondents. This confirms the important cultural and personal dimension of non-formal craft education, which frequently functions as a space for creativity, fulfilment, and engagement with manual practices.

At the same time, professional motivations remain highly significant. Upskilling and professional specialisation represented the most common learner profile identified by organisations, cited by 75% of respondents. In addition, 59.4% of organisations reported welcoming learners undergoing professional reorientation, while 43.8% indicated that many participants were already active in the craft sector and seeking to deepen or diversify existing competences. Apprenticeship-style or alternance-based participation models were also present in 28.1% of organisations.

These findings confirm the hybrid nature of non-formal craft education in Belgium. The sector simultaneously accommodates recreational learners, heritage enthusiasts, aspiring professionals, and experienced practitioners seeking additional competences. This capacity to address multiple learner profiles and educational objectives appears to constitute one of the sector's major strengths.

Overall, the results suggest that accessibility and pedagogical flexibility are defining characteristics of non-formal craft education. The coexistence of open-entry workshops, long-term specialised pathways, flexible formats, and practice-based learning environments allows organisations to respond to highly diverse learner needs while maintaining strong links to material practice, transmission, and heritage-related know-how.

Evaluation, Certification and Recognition

The survey results reveal that evaluation and certification practices within non-formal craft education remain highly diverse and often relatively informal. While certain organisations have developed structured approaches to skills validation, many training pathways continue to rely on flexible or non-formal forms of recognition.

Half of the organisations surveyed (50%) reported that they do not conduct formal evaluations of competences acquired during the training process. In many cases, learning is instead assessed informally through observation, workshop participation, technical progression, or direct interaction between learners and practitioners. This reflects the strongly experiential and practice-based character of non-formal craft education, where competences are often transmitted and recognised through embodied practice rather than through standardised assessment procedures.

At the same time, 28.1% of organisations indicated that learners engage in forms of self-assessment, often integrated into workshop-based pedagogical approaches. A smaller proportion of organisations reported more formalised systems, including technical skills assessments (18.8%) or structured frameworks for competence validation and certification (21.9%).

Evaluation Practice (organisations)	Organisations	Share
No formal evaluation conducted	16	50.0%
Learner self-assessment frameworks	9	28.1%
Technical skills assessment	6	18.8%
Structured validation / certification framework	7	21.9%

The most common form of recognition nevertheless remains the delivery of certificates or attestations of participation rather than officially recognised qualifications. This tendency is strongly confirmed by learner responses: 75% of learners indicated that they receive an attestation of participation, while only 8.3% referred to technical skills assessment processes. Very few learners reported the existence of formalised evaluation structures.

Learner responses generally confirmed the organisational findings regarding the predominantly informal nature of assessment practices. Most learners reported receiving simple participation certificates rather than formal qualifications, while only a limited number referred to structured technical evaluation processes. At the same time, learners still expressed interest in some form of recognition, suggesting that certification may play an important role in visibility, professional legitimacy, and personal validation even within non-formal learning contexts.

While only 25% of learners considered certification absolutely essential, half of respondents stated that certificates are useful “to a certain extent.” This suggests that learners recognise the potential value of formal recognition, even within highly practice-based and non-formal educational environments.

Form of Recognition	Learners	Share
Attestation of participation	9	75.0%
No evaluation at all	2	16.7%

Technical skills assessment	1	8.3%
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The survey also highlights broader structural challenges related to the recognition of non-formal craft learning. The lack of recognition of informal certifications emerged as one of the sector's major difficulties, identified by 50% of organisations. This issue appears closely connected to broader questions of professional legitimacy, visibility, and institutional integration of non-formal educational pathways.

Alongside recognition issues, financial fragility emerged as the most significant challenge reported by organisations. Nearly 60% of respondents identified lack of funding as a major obstacle affecting their activities and educational capacities. Difficulties in attracting learners were also frequently mentioned (31.3%), alongside more limited but still significant concerns regarding collaboration opportunities and outdated tools or infrastructures.

Key Tension

The flexibility and informality of non-formal craft education constitute some of its greatest strengths. Yet the absence of widely recognised certification frameworks may limit the broader visibility and professional legitimacy of competences acquired through these pathways, an issue identified by 50% of organisations as a major challenge.

Overall, the results suggest that strengthening recognition mechanisms while preserving pedagogical flexibility constitutes one of the key future challenges for non-formal craft education in Belgium. The survey points toward a growing need for more coherent frameworks capable of supporting the validation and visibility of competences acquired through practice-based, workshop-oriented, and non-formal learning environments.

Educational Diversification and Emerging Needs

The survey results suggest that non-formal craft education in Belgium is currently situated at the intersection of tradition, transmission, and adaptation to evolving professional and societal contexts. While the core of most educational activities remains strongly centred on technical know-how, material practices, and heritage-related transmission, several organisations have also started integrating complementary competences extending beyond purely craft-specific skills.

Among the organisations surveyed, history, architecture, and art history emerged as the most frequently proposed complementary subjects, offered by 50% of organisations. This reflects the strong cultural and heritage dimension of many craft training environments, particularly within fields connected to restoration, traditional building techniques, decorative arts, and conservation-related practices. In many cases, technical learning appears closely connected to broader historical, architectural, and material knowledge.

Other transversal competences were less systematically represented but nevertheless present within part of the sector. Courses related to entrepreneurship were proposed by 28.1% of organisations, while 21.9% offered some form of digital training, including tools such as 3D modelling, digital fabrication, or graphic design. Communication and marketing-related courses appeared less frequently, representing 15.6% of organisations.

At the same time, more than one-third of organisations (37.5%) indicated that they did not provide any complementary courses beyond technical craft training. This confirms that many non-formal educational structures remain primarily centred on the direct transmission of practical know-how and workshop-based learning.

These findings reveal an ongoing tension within the sector between preserving highly specialised craft transmission models and adapting to broader contemporary professional realities. While technical mastery remains central, the growing presence of entrepreneurship, digital tools, and communication-related competences suggests an emerging awareness of the need to support learners not only as craftspeople, but also as independent professionals operating within increasingly complex economic and digital environments.

However, the survey also demonstrates that organisations continue to face important structural limitations that may constrain pedagogical diversification and long-term development. The lack of funding emerged as the most significant challenge identified by organisations, reported by 59.4% of respondents. In parallel, half of the organisations highlighted the lack of recognition of non-formal certifications as a major obstacle affecting the visibility and legitimacy of their educational activities.

Other difficulties included challenges in attracting learners (31.3%), limited collaboration opportunities (15.6%), and outdated tools or infrastructures (6.3%). These results suggest that many organisations operate within fragile conditions despite playing an important role in heritage transmission, lifelong learning, and professional reorientation.

At the same time, learner responses reveal evolving expectations that increasingly combine technical learning with broader aspirations related to professional autonomy, creativity, and meaningful work. Several learners expressed motivations linked not only to the acquisition of specific techniques, but

also to career transition, professional independence, and the integration of craft competences into wider professional activities.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the future development of non-formal craft education may depend on its ability to maintain the strengths of workshop-based and practice-oriented transmission while simultaneously strengthening transversal competences, visibility, recognition frameworks, and institutional support mechanisms.

In this respect, the survey highlights the importance of developing more integrated approaches capable of connecting technical know-how, heritage awareness, entrepreneurial competences, and contemporary professional realities. Strengthening recognition mechanisms, improving collaboration opportunities, and supporting pedagogical diversification could contribute significantly to reinforcing both the sustainability and attractiveness of non-formal craft education within the broader cultural, educational, and economic landscape.

Qualitative Signals and Individual Testimonies

Beyond quantitative findings, several individual responses add important nuance to the picture and deserve specific attention in the context of the BRICKS project.

Generational transmission crisis

Several practitioners described a deepening generational transmission crisis. Skilled practitioners are aging, younger people are difficult to attract, and the economic viability of operating a non-formal training structure remains precarious. One respondent specialised in the restoration of early keyboard instruments warned that the number of skilled restorers in Europe could drop to a quarter of its current level within five to ten years, simply because the activity does not pay enough to attract successors.

Financial barriers for learners

Learner comments pointed consistently to financial barriers as the single biggest practical obstacle for individuals undergoing professional reorientation. Several learners reported paying between €6,000 and €8,500 out of pocket, with no public support available when training runs in parallel with employment. One respondent noted that without the option to pay in monthly instalments, the training would simply have been inaccessible.

Administrative recognition gaps

One ceramics instructor highlighted a structural paradox: she cannot obtain the official “certified artisan” label because she works through a cooperative status (SMart) rather than holding her own VAT number. This illustrates how existing administrative frameworks can inadvertently exclude practitioners who have chosen flexible or alternative professional structures.

Taxonomy and Classification Gaps

One respondent working with recycled plastics for jewellery found no fitting category in the survey’s predefined discipline list. This points to a broader challenge: existing classification frameworks for crafts may not adequately capture emerging sustainable and innovative practices, which risk being rendered invisible within support and recognition mechanisms.

The role of personal motivation in transmission

Several educators described their decision to teach as driven by a dual motivation: the desire to transmit knowledge they received from their own masters, and the need to sustain their activity financially. One respondent noted that teaching also serves to break the isolation of the solitary craftsperson, an observation that points to the social and psychological dimensions of transmission that are rarely captured in formal assessments of the sector.

Conclusion

The Belgian national survey confirms the richness, diversity, and resilience of the non-formal craft education landscape. The sector plays a central role in heritage transmission, professional reorientation, and lifelong learning. Its principal strengths lie in pedagogical flexibility, open accessibility, and the depth of practice-oriented transmission models.

At the same time, the survey reveals a sector operating under significant structural fragility. The two dominant challenges, financial precarity and the absence of recognised certification frameworks, affect organisations across all countries and disciplines. These issues do not concern the quality or relevance of what is transmitted, but rather the conditions required to sustain and recognise it over time.

Survey results - general overview

The Belgian survey conducted as part of the BRICKS project paints a complex yet highly significant picture of non-formal education in the artistic crafts sector. The report highlights how this field, despite being legally recognized as an integral part of lifelong learning, remains poorly structured, fragmented, and heavily dependent on the individual initiative of artisans, workshops, and local organisations. Belgium boasts a rich ecosystem of experiences, traditions, and skills, yet lacks the systemic coordination that fully leverages its cultural, economic, and educational potential. The research highlights a sector experiencing constant tension between excellent know-how and structural fragility, between local roots and lack of institutional recognition, between the desire for transmission and the difficulty of engaging new generations.

The main trends that emerged show a sector characterised by short, intensive, and highly practical training courses, based on direct workshop work and experiential learning. Most trainers have been working for many years, confirming the centrality of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Collaborations are predominantly local, with local public bodies and artisan associations, while connections with national or international networks are marginal. Sustainability emerges as a cross-cutting value, with widespread use of natural, recycled, or locally sourced materials. However, the fragmentation of the system, the inconsistency of regional funding, and the lack of clear and uniform certification pathways limit the sector's growth and visibility.

The students involved in the survey are adults, often undergoing career transitions or seeking more meaningful career paths. Their primary needs include affordable courses, the opportunity to learn concrete and immediately marketable skills, the need for guidance and support in the world of work, and the desire to obtain recognised certifications. Many emphasize the importance of free or subsidised courses, which often represent the only opportunity for accessing artisanal training. Practical experience in the workshop is perceived as transformative, capable of opening new professional and personal horizons.

Artisans, educators, and organisations express equally clear needs. They demand greater institutional recognition, financial and infrastructural support, stronger networks between schools, workshops, and institutions, and more effective educational guidance that restores dignity and visibility to the arts and crafts. Many highlight the difficulty of welcoming apprentices without adequate financial support, as training requires time, materials, and equipment. Others emphasise the need to overcome the sector's individualism and promote more structured forms of collaboration. There is also a strong demand for adequate space, especially in urban contexts where costs are high and workshops often cannot accommodate large groups.

The main obstacles identified include a lack of stable funding, the limited recognition of skills acquired in informal settings, the difficulty of engaging young people, tax pressure and bureaucracy, the generational gap, and the fragmentation of the education system. Despite this, positive expectations emerge: greater integration between schools and workshops, targeted funding for youth training, clearer certification systems, a cultural repositioning of craftsmanship as a contemporary language rather than a marginal activity, and greater openness to digital innovation and experimentation. Overall, the survey reveals a sector rich in potential but in need of more forward-thinking policies, stronger networks, and a new vision to make it attractive to new generations.

Policy recommendations

10 Priority actions to strengthen non-formal craft education in Belgium

A more accessible, flexible and transferable approach to recognising non-formal education in traditional and heritage crafts could significantly strengthen skills transmission, improve access to training, support career transitions, and enhance the attractiveness of craft professions.

1. **Develop a shared recognition framework.** Developing an **inter-regional framework** recognising non-formal craft learning across Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels would improve coherence, visibility and trust in existing practices.
2. **Introduce craft micro-certifications.** The introduction of a **micro-certification system for craft techniques**, inspired by EU micro-credentials but adapted to hands-on learning, could provide a more flexible and accessible alternative to existing certification pathways. Modular, outcome-based formats would better reflect how skills are acquired in practice.
3. **Ensure transferability and European alignment.** Designing these certifications to be **transferable across regions and aligned with European frameworks** would support mobility. This would enable learners and professionals to access training opportunities abroad and acquire techniques not available locally.
4. **Simplify access and recognition pathways.** Simplifying recognition pathways, through a combination of micro-certifications and recognition of prior learning, could encourage greater participation in upskilling and reskilling, particularly among experienced craftspeople.
5. **Recognise craftspeople as trainers.** Facilitating the recognition of experienced practitioners as **vocational trainers or mentors** would strengthen the transmission of skills and support intergenerational learning.

6. **Improve access to workshops and training environments.** Strengthening access to **workshops, heritage sites and craft centres as learning spaces** would support practice-based learning, which remains central to craft education.
7. **Strengthen financial support mechanisms.** Expanding **financial support and incentives** for non-formal craft learning, including for jobseekers, self-employed professionals and career changers, could improve accessibility and participation.
8. **Improve mapping and visibility of training opportunities.** Developing a **comprehensive mapping of non-formal learning opportunities**, including small-scale workshops and independent practitioners, would help address their current lack of visibility. This could be supported by accessible online platforms and coordination between regional actors.
9. **Enhance communication and attractiveness of craft careers.** Strengthening communication on the **value of non-formal education for employment, upskilling, reskilling and career development** would improve the attractiveness of the sector. Highlighting innovation, entrepreneurship and career opportunities linked to crafts could support recruitment and sector renewal.
10. **Enhance coordination and monitoring.** Improving **coordination and data collection** on craft skills and training provision would support more informed policy development and help address existing gaps.

Overall, such an approach would make non-formal craft education more visible, accessible and transferable, while supporting mobility, innovation and the long-term sustainability of craft skills in Belgium and across Europe.

Glossary

Craftsmanship / Handicraft

Manual production of objects or provision of craft-based services using specialised skills, tools, and techniques, often carried out in small workshops or by independent craftspeople. It may include both contemporary and traditional practices and typically involves a high degree of manual intervention and technical expertise.

Traditional Craftsmanship

A broad term encompassing practices rooted in tradition, including artistic, applied, and heritage-based crafts. It refers to techniques, materials, and forms of production transmitted over time, often linked to cultural identity, local knowledge, or historical continuity.

Heritage Craft (HC)

Craft activities and techniques that hold cultural, historical, or regional significance and contribute to the safeguarding and transmission of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. These practices are often associated with conservation, restoration, and the preservation of traditional know-how.

Traditional Craft (TC)

Craft practices based on long-standing techniques, materials, or regional identities. They may or may not be formally recognised as heritage crafts, but are typically transmitted through experience, practice, and intergenerational learning.

Non-formal Education (NFE)

According to the BRICKS project, non-formal education in heritage crafts refers to “community-based, hands-on learning outside formal systems, where adults gain skills through mentorship and intergenerational exchange.” It is structured but flexible, does not necessarily lead to formal certification, and plays a key role in preserving craft traditions, promoting inclusion, and supporting regional development.

Non-formal Learning Pathway

A structured or semi-structured sequence of non-formal learning activities that allows learners to progressively acquire skills and competences. These pathways are often modular and practice-based, taking place in workshops, training centres, or real-life professional contexts.

Certification

A process through which an authorised body formally validates and recognises that a person has achieved specific learning outcomes, competences, or qualifications, acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

Micro-certification / Micro-credential

A certification of a small, clearly defined set of learning outcomes, typically acquired through short learning experiences. In the context of crafts, micro-certifications refer to the recognition of specific technical skills or competences. They are modular, stackable, and can be designed to be transferable across regions or countries.

Validation of Acquired Competences (VAC)

A process that identifies, documents, assesses, and certifies skills and competences acquired outside formal education, including through work experience or non-formal learning.

Competence

A combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform specific tasks or professional activities effectively in a given context.

Learning Outcomes

Statements describing what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to do after completing a learning process. They are used to design, deliver, and assess training and certification.

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