

Press Release, 30 April 2026

Crafting Health and Wellbeing

Europe is under-utilising a powerful public health resource

A new ECA study shows that crafting is a highly effective tool that deserves a formal place in preventative healthcare.

[Download the report HERE>>](#)

The European Crafts Alliance (ECA) has published the **Crafting Health and Wellbeing** study, conducted by the research team from the *University of Eastern Finland*. It offers robust evidence for what makers have long known. Working with our hands is a highly effective, complementary tool for mental health. The report demonstrates that traditional craft acts as **a powerful form of preventative medicine**. However, it also highlights a critical structural flaw. We rely heavily on underfunded professional makers to deliver these community wellbeing programmes. By doing this, we push the very **people who keep these skills alive to the brink of burnout**.

"Crafting is an evidence-based complementary approach that engages the brain, reduces stress, and strengthens social connections. As an innovative recommendation, it **merits systematic integration** into a preventative, multidisciplinary healthcare model, with a recognised role in social prescribing pathways across Europe," says ECA President **Ana Cristina Mendes**.

Key findings from the study include:

- **Preventative healthcare and lifelong brain protection.**

Over 90% of people surveyed confirmed that crafting supports their mental health. The research shows that the hand-eye coordination required for activities like woodworking or throwing a clay pot actively protects cognitive function as we age. The report shares examples of this protective effect. One standout case is a 101-year-old blind knitter who still finds comfort and crucial brain stimulation in the familiar rhythm of working with yarn.

- **Social prescribing and community infrastructure.**

The study points to social prescribing as a gold standard for care. Ireland provides a compelling example through platforms like Arts+Health, showing exactly how craft can serve as preventative infrastructure. With healthcare professionals seeing the results firsthand, this approach proves that learning to print or weave is a highly cost-effective way to support people facing moderate mental health challenges before they require clinical intervention.

- **Tackling digital isolation and the gender gap.**

We live in an increasingly fragmented, screen-heavy world. The study highlights a concerning trend: as craft activities are replaced by mobile devices, there is a noticeable decline in hands-on making among younger generations. Furthermore, while community crafting spaces offer a crucial offline refuge, they remain largely female-dominated.

This presents a unique opportunity. Aligning directly with the EU's *Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030*, which actively calls for the integration of more boys and men into HEAL (Health, Education, Administration, and Literacy) and care-oriented sectors, crafting offers a highly effective, non-clinical pathway to achieve this. Bringing men into these tactile, community-focused environments provides a powerful antidote to digital isolation, naturally integrating them into broader spaces of empathy, community care, and wellbeing.

- **Crafting a sustainable future.**

The report highlights a strong link between craft skills and environmental care. When people learn to make or mend their own clothes and furniture, they are far less likely to rely on fast fashion and throwaway culture. Crafting offers a practical, hands-on way for citizens to engage with the green transition.

- **The Professional Paradox: Sustaining the infrastructure of community wellbeing.**

As craft programmes become more common in social prescribing, professional makers are increasingly central to their success. Yet these practitioners operate entirely outside the medical system. The survey reveals a harsh reality: for professional crafters, financial instability and severe imbalances between work, family, and leisure are the most common negative consequences of their profession. They are burning out because the legislation and financial backing from national governments are not there to protect them.

The public often undervalues this work, expecting cheap labour without considering the infrastructure required. If Europe intends to rely on craft to support public health, we must invest in the people who make it happen through structured funding models. Craft can support health, but it is the craft professionals who make that support possible.

- **Concrete policy recommendations.**

The report outlines clear recommendations for national and European policymakers. Healthcare would benefit by integrating craft into their systems. Furthermore,

professionals require better safety standards and legislative support to keep their micro-enterprises afloat.

*"Craftspeople are already delivering measurable public health value" explains ECA Secretary General **Laura Miguel Baumann**. "This community impact needs to be formally recognised and structurally supported across Europe."*

The study was conducted by Dr. Sirpa Kokko, Professor of Craft Science, Dr. Niina Väänänen, University Lecturer, and Dr. Riikka Hirvonen, University Lecturer from the University of Eastern Finland. They reviewed scientific literature from 2010 to 2025 and surveyed 458 people across Europe. They also conducted thematic interviews with craft practitioners, educators, and healthcare staff.

Download the full report [HERE](#)>>

This study was commissioned by the European Crafts Alliance as the sixth report in its ongoing [research series analysing the state of the European crafts sector](#). The research was co-funded by the European Union.



Additional Quotes

- **On the clinical benefits of crafting**

"There are the tactile and sensual benefits of crafting, and then there's a calming of the mind. I believe very strongly in the mental health benefits; it is almost meditative." — A nurse interviewed for the ECA study.

- **On building cognitive confidence**

"Because they have to concentrate, their mind is taken up with that activity instead of worrying about other things. I notice that when people make very small steps towards achieving something... an inner confidence is gained." — An artisan art-therapist interviewed for the ECA study.

- **On treating craft with the same respect as public sports**

"This illustrates what craft really is: not merely making something with your hands but achieving mastery through your hands. It is like sport: you must train to be skilled." — An artisan-teacher interviewed for the ECA study.

- **On the physical toll and safety risks for craft educators**

"Imagine teaching twenty students to sew on sewing machines, or to saw wood safely. After two lessons, the teacher is completely exhausted, it is physically very demanding... these are subjects involving tools and equipment." — A craft teacher interviewed for the ECA study.

About the European Crafts Alliance

The European Crafts Alliance (ECA) is an independent non-profit network organization of 43 members from 24 European countries, dedicated to empowering the European crafts sector. Our activities include advocacy, facilitation, collaboration and education. The ECA supports its members and partners to promote, grow and preserve crafts as a vital part of the European economy and culture as a driver for sustainability and innovation.

Press & Visual Materials

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More Info

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