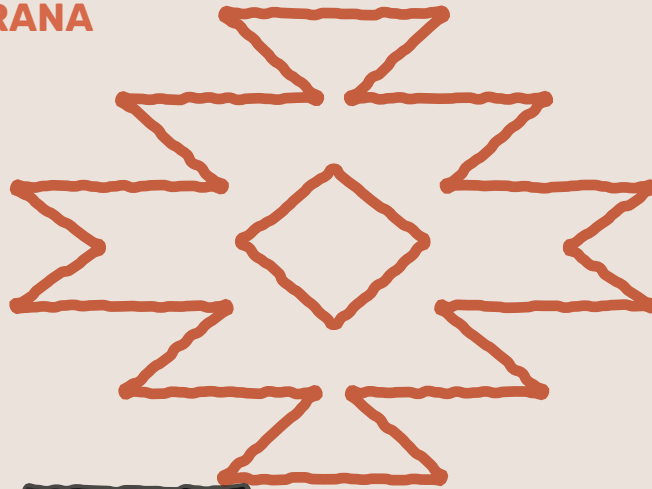


Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Analysis

SUB-SECTOR OF HANDICRAFTS

► MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA





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MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA



U.S. EMBASSY
Tirana, Albania

*With the support of the Gender Equity and Equality Action
(GEEA) Fund of the Department of State*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDA	Albanian Investment Development Agency
AECA	Albanian E-commerce Association
A2F	Access to Finance
BKT	National Commercial Bank
CCIT	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tirana
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
GBCs	Gender-based constraints
GSVC	Gender-Sensitive Value Chain
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
MSPE	Ministry for the Protection of the Entrepreneurship
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
MoT	Municipality of Tirana
MoC	Ministry of Culture
NAVETQ	National Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Qualifications
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NBS Albania	Nxitja e Biznesit Social Shqipëri / Social Business Promotion Albania
NoA	Albanian Microfinance Institution
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SHGPAZ	National Association of Professional Women, Craftswomen and Businesswomen
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VC	Value Chain

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SUMMARY

The handicraft sub-sector in Albania holds significant cultural and economic value. It is deeply rooted in the country's rich cultural heritage and serves as a means of preserving traditional craftsmanship and skills passed down through generations. The handicraft sub-sector, although not explicitly mentioned in the economic breakdown, significantly contributes to the overall economic landscape of Albania, and its growth and promotion can further enhance the diversity and richness of the country's economic activities. Handicrafts are part of indigenous cultural tourism and creative tourism, and give the community a source of income and employment opportunities. Moreover, handicrafts play an important role in the cultural tourism industry by preserving Albanian unique craftsmanship and cultural heritage.

In recent years, handicraft products have received increased interest from the public, particularly tourists. Albania is known for its tradition of crafts with precious values, developed since in the Illyrian period. These handicraft products inherited from generation to generation have enhanced great interest to visitors as they seek unique, handmade products that reflect the local culture. Tourists are a significant portion of the market, accounting for approximately 60% of the demand for Albanian artisan products. According to the Institute of Statistics, foreign visitors during the period of January-July 2023 exceeded 5.1 million, marking a 31% increase compared to the same period in 2022, which was previously considered a record year in terms of visitor numbers.

Based on the significant historical, cultural and economic importance that handicraft presents, this gender-sensitive value chain (VC) analysis aims to develop a research that attempts to acquire a better understanding of the development of the sub-sector of handicrafts in the Municipality of Tirana, as well as to evaluate the involvement of women in the processes and their opportunities for empowerment. During the research, a comprehensive examination of Tirana's handicrafts sector is presented, diving into the dynamics of product flow and the various actors involved. This report sheds light on the prevalent informality that characterizes this sub-sector, with a particular attention on home-based

workers, thereby illuminating the gendered division of labor within. The important roles played by micro and small businesses, particularly women artisans, who infuse their creativity and skills into this cultural tapestry, are stated out. The report reveals the map of these value chains, clarifying the stages, actors, and the important role of women in the core value chains.

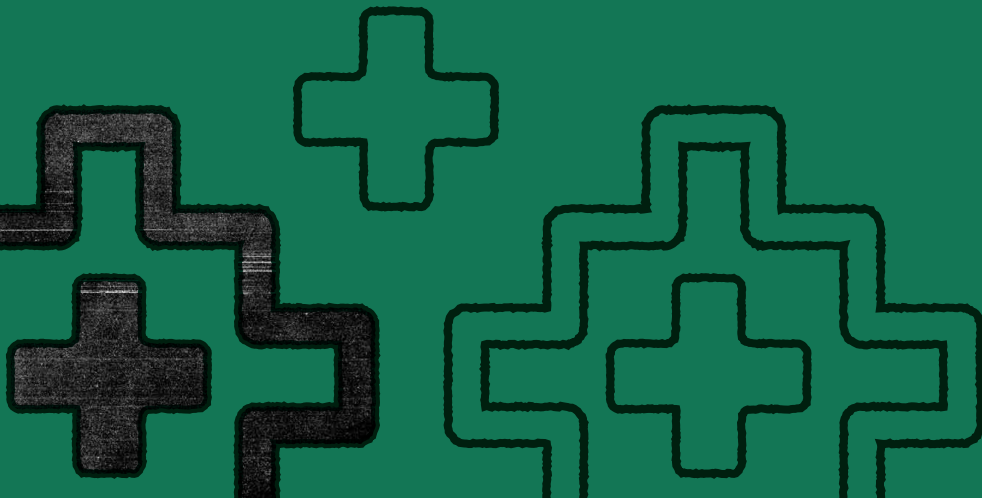
Despite the potential it offers in the economy and development of the country, this sub-sector faces some constraints which range from limited market access to challenges in accessing support functions and adhering to regulatory rules. There is an absence of access to specialized training and opportunities, limiting the artisans from innovating, diversifying their product offerings, and improving the overall quality of their crafts. The lack of accessible financial services, strict eligibility criteria, and collateral requirements pose challenges for artisans seeking loans or credit facilities. The handicraft sub-sector is affected by the seasonality and lack of work-life balance, causing instability and irregular jobs. Understanding these constraints is crucial for creating an enabling environment that fosters the growth and development of the handicraft sector, empowering artisans and entrepreneurs alike. Thus, several key opportunities have been presented in this report to contribute to the growth and development of artisans in Tirana. The possibility of long-term and sustained strategic interventions with a strong focus on gender empowerment and community engagement are explored and recommended accordingly among different stakeholders such as local and governmental institutions, as well as national and international organisations.

So far, several studies and projects on handcrafting have been focused on enhancing the competitiveness of artisans, promoting entrepreneurship, and strengthening the market position of Albanian handicrafts. Furthermore, the handicraft sub-sector has witnessed growing government support, as evidenced by the drafting and approval of the "Law on Crafts in the Republic of Albania."



CHAPTER 1

SUB-SECTOR & STUDY OVERVIEW





1.1 Description of sub-sector

1.1.1 Relevance in the Albanian economy

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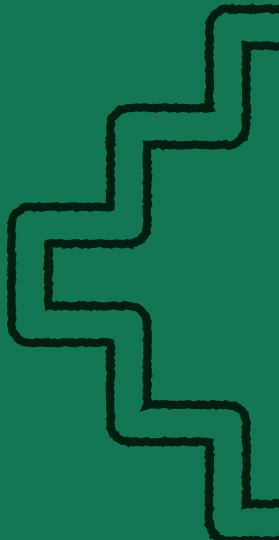
1.3 Description of methodology: study objectives, approach and delineation

1.3.1 Background

1.3.2 Approach

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1.1 Description of sub-sector

1.1.1 Relevance in the Albanian economy

Albania has a rich tradition of handicrafts created for centuries characterised by different geographical areas. The Albanian handicraft sub-sector refers to the industry involved in producing, promoting, and selling traditional handmade crafts and artisanal products in Albania. It encompasses a wide range of traditional crafts, including but not limited to textiles, embroidery, woodcarving, metalwork, pottery, ceramics, jewelry, and leatherwork. In 2018, the Ministry of Culture drafted and approved the Law "On Crafts in the Republic of Albania", where crafts were mentioned as "work, through which the necessary and decorative objects are completely worked with hand and simple tools".¹

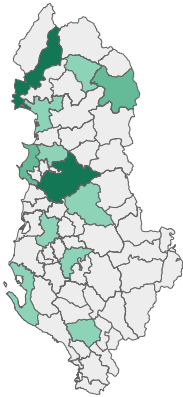
According to researcher Albana Stefa², in recent years it has been noticed that the interest of the public has increased³ in products produced by artisans, as opposed to products produced by factories. This is a result of several reasons, such as the increase of the number of foreign tourists in Albania in recent years, the increase in the awareness of locals towards the historical and traditional values of handmade products, and the economic development of the population.

Due to the increase in interest in traditional Albanian handicrafts, the number of new handicraft businesses has increased during the last few years, and several associations of artisans have been established, such as "The Association of Professional Business Women and Craftsmen"⁴ and "Association of Albanian Artisans"⁵, which organizes many promotional activities both inside and outside the country.

In addition, the Municipality of Tirana organized competitions for the creation of city souvenirs, various fairs, and supporting financially different initiatives regarding handicrafts. Two dedicated spaces for handicrafts products were created with the support of the Municipality of Tirana, such as Pazari i Ri and Kalaja e Tirana.⁶ The Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, has underlined that "Supporting small businesses and artisans through fairs and continuous events is one of the priorities of the Municipality of Tirana, aiming not only to give a boost to the local economy, but also to preserve and promote the identity of the capital and its recognition by foreign visitors."⁷

Although not all entrepreneurs in Albania's craft sector are registered as businesses, AIDA's ⁸ financing to this sector, found that Shkodra has the largest share of artisans in Albania with 34%, followed by Tirana with 31%. In Tirana, there are a large number of artisans considering that it is the largest city in Albania, and during the years of transition, there has been an internal migration from all other cities (from north to south), increasing Tirana's inhabitants to a total of 863.694 in 2021.⁹

Artisans in Albania



There is a strong link between the handicrafts and tourism sectors, because it creates a mutually beneficial relationship that enriches the overall travel experience and promotes sustainable tourism practices. The artisans play a crucial role in enhancing the tourism sector by showcasing their unique craftsmanship and cultural heritage. By promoting and supporting local artisans, the tourism sector contributes to the preservation of traditional skills and techniques while also boosting the local economy. Based on a study by Khan, T. A., handicrafts give communities a source of income and employment opportunities, and they play an important role in the cultural tourism industry in many nations¹⁰. Additionally, tourists have the opportunity to learn about the cultural significance behind these artisanal products, fostering a deeper appreciation for the destination they are visiting.

The tourism sector is traditionally a significant source of income for the country, especially during the summer months, but also recently during the winter months. Albania has been ranked among the most popular tourist destinations in Europe and one of the best tourist destinations in the world by the New York Times¹¹ and Lonely Planet.¹²

The handicraft sub-sector in Albania holds significant cultural and economic value. Handicrafts and crafts are a part of indigenous cultural tourism and creative tourism.¹³ With over 7,5 million tourists a year¹⁴, the expenditure by foreigners traveling in Albania reached a record of 2.84 billion euros in 2022, surpassing the record of 1.07 billion in 2007, according to data from the Bank of Albania¹⁵. Albania has seen an increase of tourists over the years. The statistical data in travel and tourism during the first 6 months of 2023 (January–June) show that there is an increase of 33.0% compared to 2022. Also, this year there is a significant increase of 58.9% compared to 2019.¹⁶

Based on this annual increase in the number of tourists in the National Program¹⁷ “Art, craft, sports” as a joint initiative intended to include art, crafts, technology, agriculture, and sports in pre-university education, encouraging the learning of arts and crafts, folk crafts and traditional to the youth of Albania.

1.1.2 Historical Overview of Handicrafts in Albania

The artisans’ sector is a vibrant and diverse industry that encompasses a wide range of skilled craftspeople and artists. From traditional trades such as blacksmithing and pottery to contemporary art forms like glassblowing and jewelry making, artisans works made by hand¹⁸ play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and pushing the boundaries of creativity.

During the communist era, craftsmen who had previously worked from their homes and had mostly created items for personal and family use were gathered and organized into craft cooperatives, which after a short period of time transitioned into state creative enterprise. The Reform Law, which took effect in 1962¹⁹, called for the

establishment of professional education, placing a strong emphasis on training new artisans in all trades. Cooperatives were transformed into artistic enterprises, which were established in the main cities of the country. One of the interviewed²⁰ women who worked from home had worked at the “Artistic Enterprises Migjeni” in Tirana during the communist period. She said that in the beginning of democracy, the closing of these enterprises left many of these artisans’ women unemployed, and in such cases, they were forced to work from home. However, the separation of the planned and centralized economy towards the market economy and the political and social transition that Albania experienced after the fall of communism brought about a paralysis of the economy and crafts in Albania. Most of the artisans abandoned the profession entirely. At that time, after the fall of communism, Albania was in a very poor state, with an unemployment rate of 26% at the end of the year 1992²¹. The indicator of unemployment has been higher for women compared to men, because it was especially difficult for women to adapt to the new labor markets. At the end of 1992, there were about 200.000 women unemployed and 190.000 men unemployed,²² while Albania’s foreign debt was high, today estimated at 688.94 million²³ USD. With that level of poverty, no one was interested in buying handicraft products, and there was no tourism development because Albania had been a country completely closed during communism.

Regardless of political and economic changes, Albania stands out for its ancient tradition in the practice of several craft professions,²⁴ such as wood, stone, metal work, textile production with looms, wicker, and straw products, etc. Many women continued to work in handicrafts at home to meet their family’s needs, by producing clothing or home furnishings, unable to buy imported items. For this reason, the tradition continued until today. Due to the increase in interest in these products, as well as the increase in the number of tourists, women started to see an opportunity for entrepreneurship. The use of bright colors in folkloric handicraft motifs such as in carpets and in clothing or furnishings, the use of unique and interesting materials, and the handmade production make Albanian handicrafts products stand out. These elements draw the attention of both local and foreign tourists to handicraft products. Also, education²⁵ in schools has been promoting the country’s tradition which has significantly stimulated the organization of folklore festivals and folk dances, directing children together with their parents to purchase or rent folk costumes.²⁶

1.1.3 Why does Albania need artisans?

Creates employment for vulnerable groups

Artisans can be based in every city of Albania, both urban and rural areas. From the research interviews,²⁷ it was found that many of the handicrafts’ entrepreneurs employ people in specific situations, such as women in difficult economic conditions, pregnant women, or women who take care of small children, elderly or a family person

with specific health problems or disability. Working in these jobs allows a certain group and category of people to have the flexibility to work at home and still acquire an income. They do not necessarily need a physical work environment or a workshop. The same example can be found in Korça region, where the “House of gold-hands” functions as a center for handicrafts of women with social problems but also as a tourist center for the marketing of their works.²⁸ Also, in another study “Crafts as a key factor in local development”, the result indicates that crafts are considered a source of income for local communities, particularly linked to tourism, job creation, and sustainability in the first place.”²⁹

Arts and artisans protect culture

Thousands of years of culture can be preserved in clothing and handicrafts. Despite political and economic difficulties, Albania has managed to survive the cultivation of this culture and its transmission between generations. For instance, the Arberesh in Calabria, Italy, who moved from Albania 600 years ago, have managed to preserve the language and traditional costumes of Albania. Clothing, which has been preserved and adapted until today from the South to the North, is a priceless treasure for the cultural tradition of our people.

Artisans offer an alternative to the mass consumption economy

Women artisans recycle many leftover pieces by embroidering them in accessories and clothes, which is different from factories that emit an endless carbon footprint into the air. Many designers make clothes by hand, and some of them embroider with Albanian folk motifs. In some cases, these motifs can be modernized, but a self-produced and embroidered garment is unique and adds value to the final product. In contrast to the standardization and mass manufacturing of “Fordist” capitalism, in the artisan’s economy, authenticity refers to a quality that can be realized by both workers and products in an authentic, creative, autonomous setting.³⁰

Offers creativity and innovation

In the new era that awaits the new generation in the future, many jobs, both in production and in service, will be replaced by artificial intelligence. Be it low-skill or high-skill jobs, none will escape this development. Handicrafts are among the jobs that a robot or an artificial intelligence cannot do. Craftspersons produce products with spindles, looms, embroidery, etc, which not only require creativity but also bring innovation and bring at the same time the past with the present and the future. A mix that only human beings can do. Handicraft is one of the largest subsectors of the creative industries.³¹

Low-entry, peaceful activity which can be carried out during lockdowns

During the period of the pandemic, people were locked in their homes, and statistically, many of them had a high level of anxiety and depression. The Covid-19 pandemic triggers a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide.³² For some people who have been thrown into unemployment by the pandemic, small artisan and craft enterprises have been considered a means of surviving and passing the time.³³

Handicrafts are jobs that can be done at home, and besides providing income, they avoid the morning traffic, the daily routine that many people experience with a standard job, bringing a kind of peace of mind to what they create by keeping them and the whole family engaged in producing a final product. From the conducted interviews³⁴ women had spouses who helped them finish the product and adult children who helped them promote the product on social networks and find a network of customers to buy these products.

Beauty enchants

Businesses today invest in distinctive interior designs. In many cases, the beautiful combination of traditional and modern makes people more attracted to one place than another. One of these cases in Tirana is "Bar Komiteti".³⁵ The coffee bar is furnished with museum objects and a series of handicrafts. The more an environment is restored with such artisanal details, the more new customers are attracted to those details, whether local or foreign. In a study by "Cultural tourism as an opportunity for a sustainable development of the region of Korça",³⁶ about 80% of respondents in the accommodation sector in Korça offered environments and crafts to attract tourists.

1.2 Three value chains to focus on

The trend and demand for handcrafted products consists mostly of traditional costumes, carpets, embroidery, stone and copper crafts.³⁷ As stated in the interview with the owner of a physical handicrafts, products such as folk costumes and personalised embroidered products are the most popular. Of the handcrafted products, artisans in Tirana are most successful in producing traditional Albanian costumes for adults and children, and woolen products such as rugs, bags and folk wool hats (Qeleshe). In this report the focus will be on analysing the value chains of traditional costumes, rugs and embroidery, as three most sold products.

1.2.1 Traditional Costumes

Traditional costumes are undoubtedly one of the most powerful manifestations of Albanian culture and traditions. They are inheritors of many elements that come from antiquity, including Byzantine and Oriental influences, as well as elements related to the Illyrian tradition. The beauty of Albanian clothing is also described in the verses of

Lord Byron, where he states that “Albanian clothes are the most beautiful in the world”. The traditional costumes were used every day by men and women until the 1950s, when they were replaced by western clothing styles.



Lord Byron in Albanian Dress³⁸

In this painting, Byron wears a magnificent Albanian dress, acquired during his journey of 1809-11 to the Ottoman world, which he so much admired: The Albanians in their dresses (the most magnificent in the world, consisting of a long white kilt, gold-worked cloak, crimson velvet gold-laced jacket & waistcoat, silver mounted pistols and daggers), ...³⁹

His enthusiasm for the extravagance of Albanian dress is clear in the letter he wrote to his mother about his purchases: “I have some very ‘magnifique’ Albanian dresses; they are the only expensive articles in this country; they cost 50 guineas each and have so much gold they would cost in England two hundred.”...⁴⁰la dhe kanë aq shumë ar sa do të kushtonin në Angli dyqind”...⁴¹

Nowadays, people only wear the traditional costumes at festivals, weddings, and other special occasions. It allows them to remember the past, gives them a sense of patriotism and a sense of connectivity and belonging to Albanian culture and history. For example, many Albanians still wear the xhubleta during celebrations and festivals, and it has even become a popular souvenir for tourists visiting Albania as well. Xhubleta holds a significant place in Albanian culture, history, identity, and it has become a symbolic item, representing the country’s history and traditions. The xhubleta is a traditional Albanian item of clothing that has been worn by both men and women in the country’s highlands, with a history dating back 4000 years. In November 2022, the xhubleta was declared part of the world’s intangible cultural heritage and thus protected by UNESCO.

1.2.2 Rugs



Rug weaving is an art in Albanian traditional culture made up of various decorative motifs. The most useful and ancient rugs are the ones with geometric, floral, or cosmic motifs. The colors and the method used for making rugs continue to be considered very special in the Albanian tradition, and are often described as cultural heritage.

Figure 2: The process of weaving rugs⁴²

The ancient art of weaving survived in Albania as a result of the preservation of tradition by a small number of families, passing it from generation to generation. In

Albania, the process of weaving rugs is exclusively a women's job. The regions with the greatest tradition in this craft are Shkodra and Kruja in the north of Albania, as well as Korça, in the southeast of the country. The biggest buyers of rugs are Albanian immigrants who want to bring back traditional motifs with patriotic symbols in their homes, as well as tourists.

1.2.3 Embroidery

Embroidery is a craft that Albanians have cultivated and mastered for centuries. Due to the fact that Albania was part of the Turkish Empire for over five hundred years, it is understandable that certain Turkish cultural and creative aspects are entwined with the craft skills and system of Albania. Most Albanian homes were embellished with traditional pieces of elegant embroidery. Traditionally both men and women were involved in the embroiderers craft, but mostly women were more involved.



Figure 3: Embroidery⁴³

Albanian embroidery came in a number of forms and styles and was often produced on linen, cotton and wool backgrounds. Some of the basic techniques or stitches of the earliest embroidery are chain stitch, buttonhole or blanket stitch, running stitch, satin stitch, and cross stitch⁴⁴. Those stitches remain the fundamental techniques of hand embroidery today. Unfortunately, Albanian embroidery work and craft skills in general have been greatly underappreciated. This is partly due to Albania's self-imposed isolationist attitude toward the rest of the world for over half a century, but another reason is the general lack of information and data concerning the traditional craft skills base of the country.

1.3 Description of methodology: study objectives, approach and definition

1.3.1 Background

But since the late 2010s, there has been an exponential growth in the popularity of embroidering by hand. As a result of visual media such as Facebook and Instagram, artisans are able to share their work more extensively, which has inspired younger generations to pick up needles and threads. Embroidery artists believe hand embroidery has grown in popularity as a result of an increasing need for relaxation and digitally disconnected practices.

This research and report have been prepared under the project "Women's Economic Empowerment through Gender Sensitive Value Chain Interventions", which is financed by the Gender Equity and Equality Action (GEEA) Fund of the Department of State and implemented by the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) in Albania. Carrying out gender-sensitive value chain analyses in relevant economic sectors was a sub activity of this project. The

objectives of this activity were twofold: 1. To analyze relevant value chains in Albania in a gender sensitive way to find obstacles and opportunities to improve women's positions. 2. Build the capacity of experts in Albania to carry out gender-sensitive value chain analyses. The latter is crucial to consolidate the knowledge within Albania ensuring lasting attention for gender dynamics in future value chain development efforts. Anna Lentink of FairShake was attracted to guide the experts to carry out the gender-sensitive value chain analysis.

Albanian experts with different profiles applied to be guided to do a gender-sensitive value chain analysis. The process started with a 2 day training in Albania to introduce value chain concepts combined with gender-sensitivity, as well as introducing several gender-sensitive VC analysis tools. After selection of value chains and fitting experts the research was carried out in a step-by-step manner, with guiding webinars and on-the job in-country coaching. This facilitated a 'learning by doing' approach. Both the value chain approach and finding gender-based constraints and sensitivities were new for the experts. This report is not meant to be a fully-fledged value chain analysis, with data on market potential. Instead, the report offers valuable insights on how different actors -specifically women- in the value chain function and how they are influenced by the enabling environment. The analyses conclude with recommendations that are both comprehensive and practical to immediately start improving the position of these entrepreneurs.

1.3.2 Approach

A value chain describes 'the full range of activities that are needed to bring a product or service from conception, through different phases of production to final consumers'⁴⁵. In this process the raw materials, intermediate products and final products are owned by different individuals or organizations, called value chain actors. The product goes through different stages where value is added: such as production, collection, processing and marketing.



Figure 4: Value Chain Stages

The value chain approach was embraced by development cooperation, because of the need to replace working with certain target groups in isolation, by seeing them as part of and influenced by a 'system'. An important element of the value chain approach is the right-end of the value chain: the consumers or market. The chain can only function if there is demand for a product. With this commercial interest the value chain can operate sustainably. The second key

element of the value chain approach is its interconnectedness. The way the different actors are linked and cooperate with each other determine the efficiency of the VC, as well as the extent to which the different actors benefit.

In addition, the production of these actors also depends on services available, such as input providers, transport services, financial service providers and skill development organizations. And, the enabling environment also influences production, and is composed of law and regulations, implementation of these, availability of technology, but also climate, macro-economic trends, such as inflation and socio-cultural norms and behavior. The value chains operates in and is influenced by a system (see figure 2).

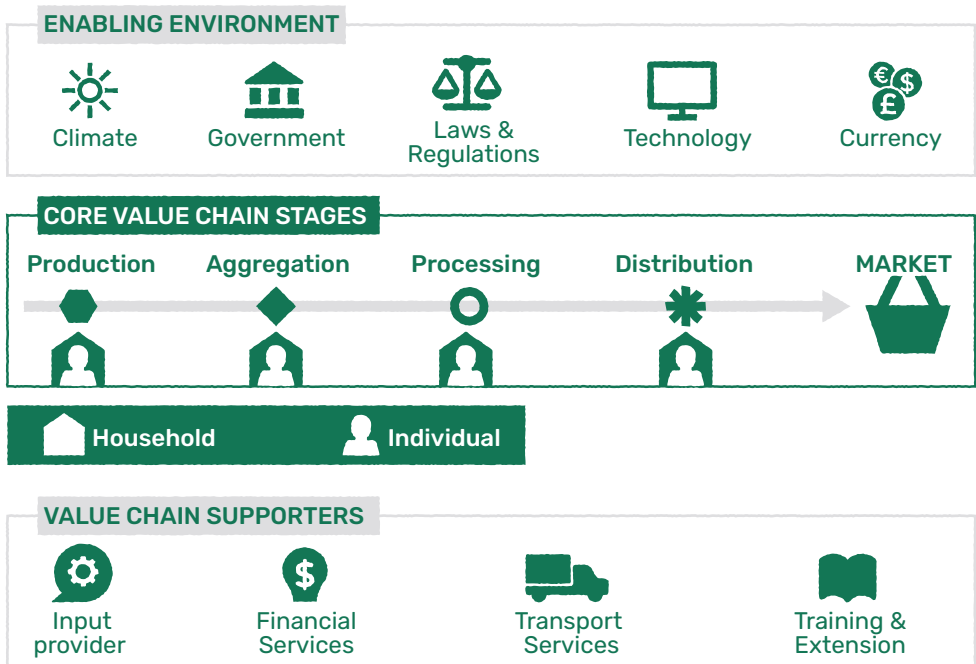


Figure 5: Lentink, A. based on earlier work for FAO, 2016

In the gender-sensitive value chain approach the dimension of the individual and the household is added to this value chain system. Instead of assuming that value chain actors act as the 'homo economicus'; doing what is economically the best choice, we acknowledge that in real life, people are influenced and driven by many other factors. Circumstances determine to which extent an individual person is able to make use of services & opportunities around her/him. This depends on a person's sex, age, place where you are born, wealth status of the family she/he is born into, etc. Additionally the actions of an individual are also influenced by the household dynamics it lives in, and gender dynamics in particular⁴⁶.

Value chain development projects generally aim to improve the position of certain target groups (e.g. the markets for the poor approach). Likewise, the Value Chain approach can be used to improve the position of women that operate in the value chain system. The value chain approach aims to understand the root causes of constraints in the value chain system, to address them in a sustainable way. To do a sound gender-sensitive value chain analysis the following tools are applied.

Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Mapping

Gender-sensitive value chain mapping was first introduced by Mayoux and Mackie, and more widely distributed as 'tool' by the AgriProfocus network⁴⁷, amongst others. Women contribute enormously to the economy, yet women's contributions are often invisible or not recognised. Women disproportionately work in the informal sector and carry out unpaid family labor. They are often not benefitting according to their effort and have limited access to necessary resources and inputs. Apart from being unfair, this leaves women's economic potential untapped. The mapping exercise aims to make visible where the women are in the value chain and the type of positions they hold.

Gender-based Constraint Identification

When the actors of the value chain and how they are linked are mapped, there is zoomed into bottlenecks or constraints that affect an efficient flow of products or certain target groups to benefit. In this study, apart from identifying and analyzing these general constraints, there has been particular attention for gender-based constraints. The Gender based constraint was introduced by USAID in 2009⁴⁸. A Gender-Based Constraint is a constraint that a woman or man faces because of what is expected from a man or woman in a certain society. To identify a constraint it is important to be clear in which stage of the value chain and by whom the constraint is experienced. Likewise, the consequence of this constraint should be clear to know why we should address it. A lack of market information is very different and has different consequences for a male-owned medium sized processor than for a remote female smallholder farmer. Preferably the constraint selected should have an effect on both the efficiency of the value chain as well as on the position of women.

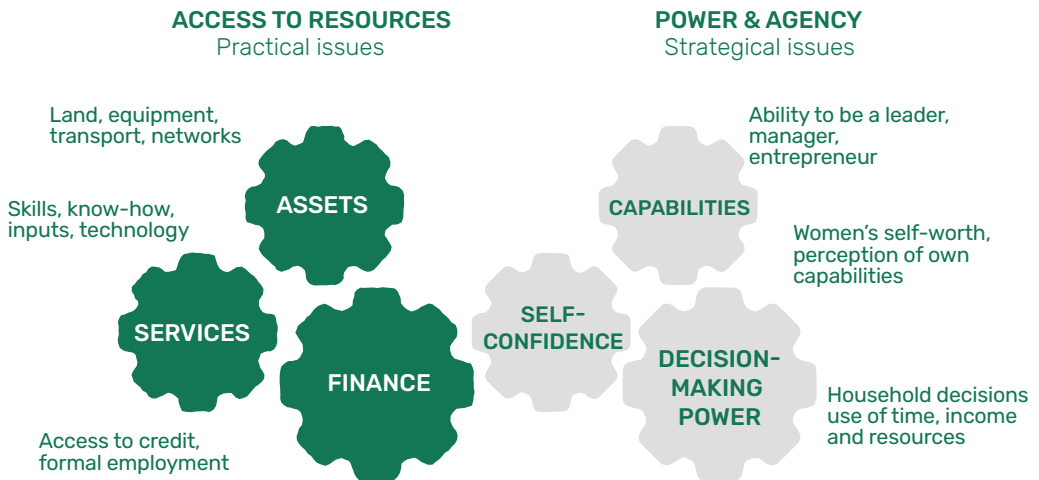


Figure 6: Two dimensions of Women's Economic Empowerment. Lentink, A & A. Senders for FAO, 2016

Gender-based Constraint Analysis & Intervention design

Next to the identification of a clear gender-based constraint and the consequence of the constraint, a tool developed by Terrillon, J. In Agriprofocus' Gender in Value Chains⁴⁹ continues to analyze the causes of each constraint. In this analysis it is crucial to probe and use the why-why-why method in interviewing. To address a constraint in a sustainable manner the root causes should be understood. When analyzing gender-dynamics a careful and thorough analysis is even more important. Often the causes are multiple and touch upon different dimensions of women empowerment. Constraints around 'Access to resources' are often taken into account when doing gender analysis. However, also including possible Power & Agency issues (see figure 3), the constraint could be addressed in a sustainable way. Decision-making power and self-confidence determine a large part of the opportunities of an entrepreneur. This way not only symptoms are addressed, but the root causes which could stimulate lasting systemic change.

The interventions proposed in the recommendations address the different causes and dimensions of the identified constraints and opportunities in the value chain. Moreover, the roles of stakeholders and organizations that have incentives or a mandate to address the constraints have been clarified to stimulate change that will be taken up by the value chain system.

1.3.3 Methodology and study objectives

The aim of this research is to contribute to women's economic empowerment within the value chains of the handicrafts sub-sector. Therefore, it is necessary to develop research that attempts

to acquire a better understanding of the sub-sector of handicrafts in Albania, as well as evaluate the involvement of women in the processes and their opportunities for empowerment.

The overall objective of carrying out this gender-sensitive value chain (VC) analysis is to collect data on how the different value chain actors are linked, the activities and value of each stage in the value chain, and how the wider system, including the enabling environment and service providers, affects the core value chain of the handicrafts sub-sector. In the end, through making practical recommendations, it aims to support and empower women, by accessing and benefiting from economic opportunities both in rural and urban areas of the Tirana municipality.

This gender-sensitive value chain analysis sets out to answer the following research questions:

- 1. What are the different activities of individuals and businesses involved in the three value chains in the handicrafts sub-sector?**
- 2. How are these actors linked together?**
- 3. Which service providers and factors from the enabling environment influence the value chains?**
- 4. What are the (gender-specific) constraints and opportunities faced by the artisans in the value chains of the handicrafts sub-sector?**
- 5. What are interventions that can be implemented to address the constraints and enhance the opportunities for women in the value chain of the handicrafts sub-sector?**

The methodology used for this analysis is mainly qualitative, combining both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources include the consideration of different reports and data that were mainly gathered from official publications and statistics of the Institute of Statistics in Albania, the Municipality of Tirana, the Ministry of Entrepreneurship, and the Ministry of Culture, as well as data and information obtained from previous studies and projects conducted by national and international organizations in the relevant field.

Due to the niche and diverse nature of the artisan field, quantitative data on the value chain is not readily available. To address this, in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviewed artisans were specialized in producing a range of products such as rugs, costumes, and embroidery. Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews with tailored questionnaires for different actors in the value chain, especially producers, marketers and donors. Questions were designed to (a) probe more information from the handicraft actors in different areas (center and periphery) of Tirana municipality, (b) identify the main constraints and opportunities for women artisans, and (c) understand how all the main stakeholders can work together to address these challenges/constraints.

1.3.4 Methodological limitations

The report strives to provide a comprehensive picture and offer a practical approach to acquire a better understanding of the sub-sector of handicrafts in Albania, as well as evaluate the involvement of women in the value chain and their opportunities for empowerment. It draws on the global literature on gender and value chains, women's entrepreneurship and handicrafts, background information on Tirana, and project documents, as well as material gathered in face-to-face interviews. There are still several limitations, which had an impact on the analysis and the quality of information provided in the deliverables of the report. The main limitations include:

- ◆ **Sample size limitations** - the sample size was 20, and the results may not be representative of the population in Tirana which has been studied in this analysis. This can lead to a lack of generalizability of the results.
- ◆ **Lack of available data** - There is limited information and data on the handicrafts sub-sector. The Institute of Statistics and Municipality of Tirana have no dedicated information and database on handicrafts. This analysis is based on the data received from the tourism sector in Albania over the years, other relevant stakeholders mentioned in this report as well as the artisans themselves.
- ◆ **Timing limitations** - This analysis has partly been conducted during the summer time, facing several limitations in contacting and meeting representatives of public institutions. Because of the limited data, sector-wide conclusions cannot be drawn.
- ◆ **Geographic coverage/scope** - The study was mainly located in the urban area of the municipality of Tirana. Artisans in Tirana may have different constraints from the artisans in rural areas or small cities outside the capital. However, we have a few references to them in the report, but not a clear and complete overview.

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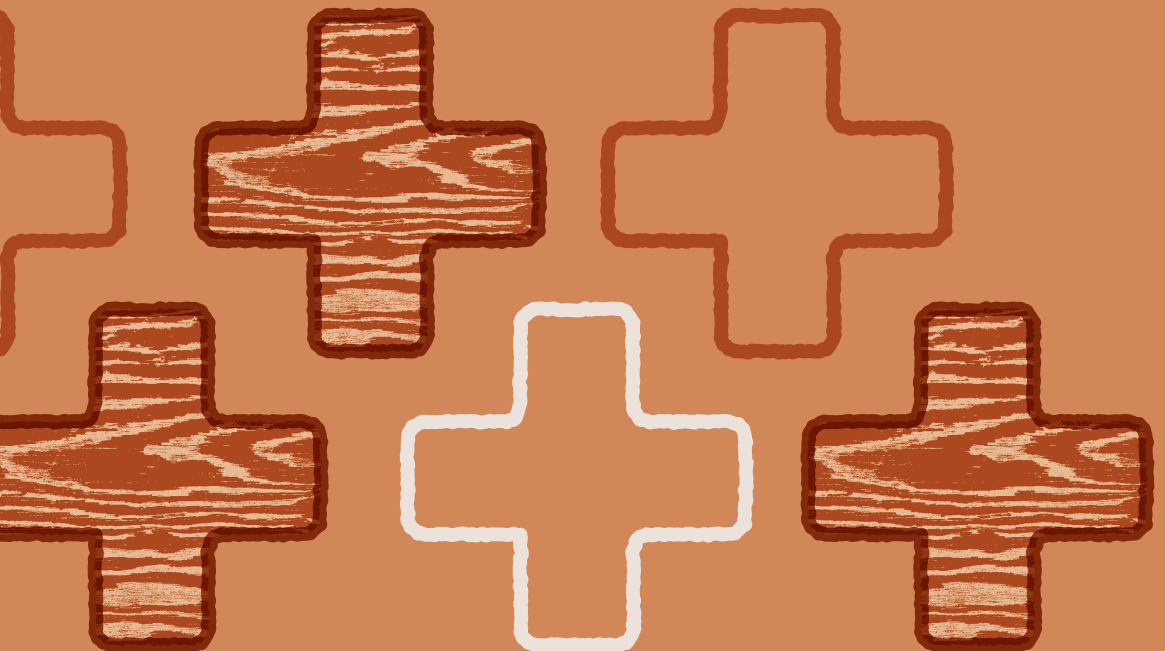
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CHAPTER 2

GENDER SENSITIVE VALUE CHAINS IN THE HANDICRAFTS SUB-SECTOR



- 2.1 Micro and small businesses, women's involvement and urban and rural artisans**
- 2.2 The map of the gender-sensitive value chains in the Handicrafts sub-sector**
- 2.3 The stages and actors in the core value chains**
- 2.4 Value chain supporters and enabling environment**



2.1 Micro and small businesses, women's involvement and urban and rural artisans

In Albania, most businesses are micro and small with just a few employees¹. They are defined as microenterprises and make up a large majority, about 85.6%, of all businesses in the country. They play a significant role in providing employment opportunities, with about 10.1% of the workforce working for these micro and small businesses. In total, there are 125,222 registered companies in Albania, with the capital city of Tirana being home to the largest number of businesses, around 62,239.

When it comes to women in entrepreneurship, they manage or own about 31.2% of all businesses in Albania. Women are particularly involved in "Trade" and "Other services" sectors, accounting for 34.2% and 40.2% of businesses in these areas, respectively. Women-led enterprises are often micro, employing just 1-4 people. In terms of employment, women make up 47% of the workforce.

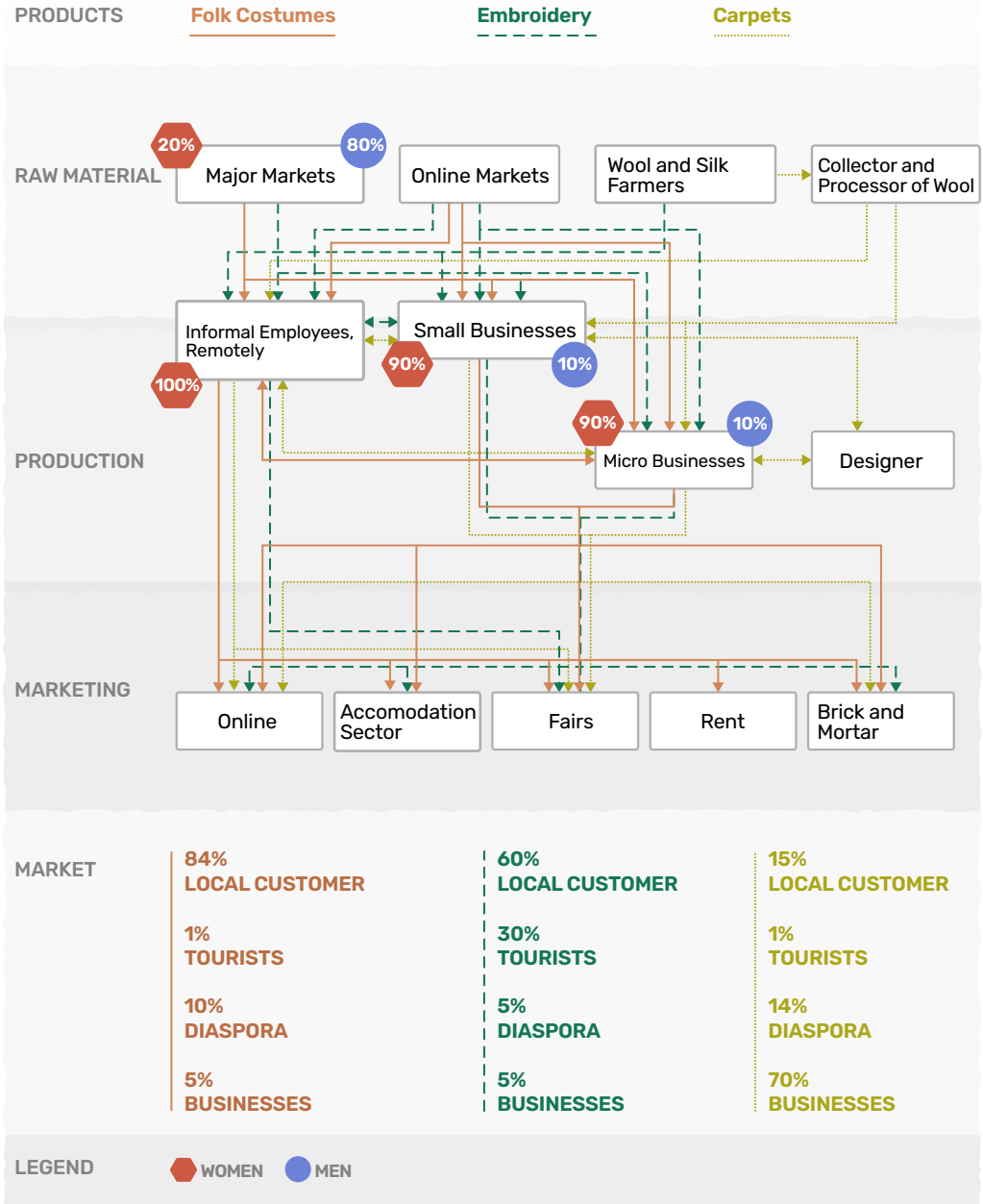
In the handicrafts sub-sector, which is largely dominated by women, there are noted mostly small businesses. This sub-sector doesn't require a high level of education to enter, making it accessible for women, mainly in rural areas, to earn an income.

The artisan sector in Albania consists of two main geographic segments, including rural and urban artisans. In the rural system, based on the data provided by AIDA and the National Chamber of Crafts Albania, artisans are often small-scale subsistence crafters who rely on traditional techniques and craftsmanship. They operate in rural communities and have limited access to formal markets. These artisans engage in craft production as a means of supplementing their agricultural livelihoods. They typically work from their homes or small workshops and utilize indigenous materials and traditional methods to create their crafts. However, it was seen that artisans in the rural artisan sector face challenges such as limited market access, a lack of resources, and limited exposure to modern business practices. They struggle to scale their businesses or reach wider markets due to factors such as geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited knowledge of market trends.

In contrast, the urban artisans in Albania operate in cities and towns. These artisans have better access to formal markets, tourism opportunities, and infrastructure. They mainly specialize in crafts that appeal to both domestic and international customers, and their products are sold through dedicated artisan markets, boutiques, or online platforms.

Urban artisans are able to engage in craft production as a full-fledged business. They can benefit from training programs, business support services, and exposure to market trends, allowing them to meet evolving customer demands and expand their market reach. Still they face some challenges regarding the increasing capacity of their company, innovating and increasing their skills to enter big markets.

2.2 The map of the gender-sensitive value chains in the Handicrafts sub-sector



2.3 The stages and actors in the core value chains

2.3.1 Input Stage

The input stage of the handicraft value chain is significantly influenced by Raw Material Suppliers who play an important role in providing essential resources for artisans. These suppliers are responsible for sourcing and providing various raw materials, such as textiles, fibers, wool, thread, silk, and natural dyes, which are the foundation of the artisans' craft production.

Raw Material Suppliers consist of farmers, gatherers, and dedicated suppliers. Their contributions directly impact the quality, authenticity, and uniqueness of the final handicraft products.

◆ **Large markets:** Elbasan and also Tirana are both cities in central Albania known for its vibrant marketplaces. They provide textiles, fibers, metals, and other materials needed for handicraft production. Artisans access these two markets easily to source a wide range of materials. The majority of sellers in these markets are men, approximately 80%. There is a noticeable underrepresentation of women engaged in selling raw materials within these markets.

This underrepresentation of women in selling raw materials within large markets is attributed to various factors, including traditional gender roles and societal norms that might have led to the perception that such roles are more suited for men. Additionally, limited access to resources, financial constraints, and lack of awareness about market opportunities contribute to this gender disparity. However, their presence becomes more prominent in the production stage, where they predominantly work from home and contribute significantly to the creation of traditional handmade products that embody the cultural heritage of Albania. For example, women artisans in regions like Kukës are actively involved in producing high-quality wool, which serves as a crucial raw material for various handicrafts. This active participation underscores their essential role in the production process and showcases their valuable contributions to the market. This gender disparity highlights the distinct roles occupied by men and women in the artisans' sector, with women playing a vital role in preserving and producing the rich artistic traditions of the country.

◆ **Online Suppliers/Markets:** The emergence of e-commerce has opened up new avenues for artisans to access a global marketplace when it comes to sourcing raw materials. Online platforms such as AliExpress have emerged as valuable resources, offering artisans a convenient and diverse range of materials that are easily ordered and delivered directly to their workshops. These virtual suppliers present artisans with an extensive selection of textiles, fibers, metals, and various other raw materials, giving them choices and flexibility in their craft production. It is worth noting that micro businesses in the Tirana region, in particular, have become regular buyers of certain

products such as packaging, chains, bids, etc. from these platforms, capitalizing on the convenience and accessibility offered by online channels. The reason why these businesses opt for online platforms to purchase accessories comes due to the more affordable prices offered by them.

Additionally, regions like Kukes in northern Albania are known for their mastery in traditional products and provide essential resources such as sheep wool to artisans across different areas, including Tirana.

These raw material suppliers encounter a variety of challenges that influence their effective engagement within the handicraft sector. Firstly, the raw materials are based on natural products and are therefore dependent on external factors such as weather conditions, pests, and diseases disrupt the quality and quantity of raw materials, leading to production setbacks. For example, adverse weather conditions like prolonged periods of rain negatively impact the growth of cotton or the quality of wool. Similarly, pests and diseases affect crops such as indigo plants used for natural dye production. These external factors not only affect the raw material suppliers but also have a cascading effect on artisans further along the value chain, as they rely on a stable supply of quality raw materials for their crafts. Secondly, limited market access is a concern for home-based suppliers, often due to their informal status and resource constraints that hinder their reach beyond local communities. Price fluctuations in raw materials influences their profitability and ability to maintain consistent pricing for artisans. These price fluctuations are often determined by factors such as the availability of their products, competition from other suppliers, and shifts in demand for specific raw materials within the handicraft sector. In addition, access to finance remains a challenge, making it difficult to invest in business growth, or upgrade equipment. Suppliers also struggle with aligning production with market demand, facing challenges of overproduction or underproduction. This was stated by the interviewers during the field research with various stakeholders in the handicraft sector. During these interactions, suppliers and artisans highlighted the difficulties they face in predicting market demand accurately. Factors such as seasonal variations, changing consumer preferences, and limited market information were mentioned as the main reasons for this challenge. Additionally, some suppliers mentioned that they often produce based on past experiences and assumptions rather than concrete market data, which can lead to mismatches between production and demand.

The informal status restricts access to support and protections, leaving suppliers vulnerable to exploitation.



Without formal contracts or agreements, buyers sometimes take advantage of our informal status and negotiate lower prices than our products deserve.

Artisan

- ◆ **Small Businesses:** Within the complex landscape of small businesses in the handicraft value chain, there is a crucial distinction between two distinct types of entities: those that engage in both raw material production and product manufacturing, and those that transcend traditional boundaries by participating not only in the cultivation or collection of raw materials but also in supplying essential inputs required by artisans for their creative endeavors. These multifaceted enterprises play a significant role, particularly in the context of materials such as wool and silk. By assuming the dual role of raw material production and product creation, they contribute directly to the crafting process, fostering a symbiotic relationship between their functions. This complex engagement ensures a consistent supply of raw materials and enhances the cohesion and effectiveness of the handicraft ecosystem.

These businesses engage in both production and input supply to create an efficient supply chain in the handicraft sector. By cultivating raw materials and providing necessary inputs to artisans, they optimize production, ensuring quality, consistency, and availability. Supplying prepared materials streamlines workflows, fostering a strong connection between material sourcing and crafting, benefiting the entire value chain. The reason why these businesses engage in raw material production is because it helps simplify the handicraft process and creates a more efficient connection between sourcing materials and crafting. Instead of buying ready-made wool or silk threads or fabrics, they cultivate and produce the raw materials themselves. This approach offers several advantages such as quality control, consistency, cost saving, craftsmanship Integration etc. There are certain issues that these small business suppliers face such as the availability of certain raw materials is seasonal or subject to external factors such as weather conditions or market fluctuations.

“

During the winter months, it becomes challenging to get high-quality wool as the damp weather affects the texture. This affects our ability to maintain a consistent supply of raw materials for our crafts.

Artisan

Wool & silk farmers and collectors: Wool and silk farmers and collectors, differently from small businesses, are primarily involved in the cultivation and production of these raw materials. For example, artisans specializing in wool production in Kukes and Korça rely on local farmers who deliver high-quality wool. The cultivation and production of wool and plant dyes predominantly involve male individuals, particularly in the northern region of Albania. Conversely, the cultivation of silk is primarily undertaken by women artisans who not only grow and produce silk but also use it in their handmade products. In the case of silk production, male family members often assist in the delivery and sale of a portion of the silk output.

Wool production

In the region of Kukes in northern Albania, a group of artisans specializes in the art of wool-based handicrafts.

At the heart of this process are the wool producers, who source high-quality wool fibers from local sheep farms, thereby supporting the local economy. Working hand-in-hand with these wool producers, the artisans of Kukes ensure a sustainable and reliable supply of wool for their craft production. They rely on traditional techniques and years of expertise to transform raw wool into a wide range of handmade products. With their expertise in spinning, dyeing, weaving, knitting, and felting, the artisans of Kukes bring the wool fibers to life, creating a diverse array of woollen products. This wool is used to craft blankets, scarves, hats, gloves, socks, and traditional garments, each item reflecting the unique qualities of locally sourced wool. The collaboration between wool producers and artisans in Kukes has a significant impact on the local economy. By promoting the region's sheep farming industry and harnessing the value of local resources, these artisans contribute to sustainable livelihoods and the preservation of traditional crafts.

Silk production: traditional artisan innovating and taking up more activities in the value chain

A highly skilled female artisan based in Tirana, is a true embodiment of the handicraft industry and plays a significant role in the input phase of the value chain. With a heritage rooted in her grandmother and mother, she has devoted her entire life to perfecting her craft. Starting at the young age of 16, she began sewing and creating various handicrafts, including tablecloths, carpets, traditional costumes, and exquisite embroidery.

In her quest for innovation, she ventured into silk production, displaying her entrepreneurial spirit and adaptability within the value chain. Transforming her creative space at home, she embarked on the journey of raising silkworms. She, as an artisan based in Tirana, aspires to become a prominent actor in the silk production industry, not only in Tirana but throughout Albania. Her journey into silk to realize her vision, she has set up a dedicated space within her own house, equipped with the necessary tools and machinery for silk production. She has undertaken the cultivation of silkworms, which takes a lot of time nourishing them 5 times a day using mulberry leaves as their primary food source.

Despite facing challenges such as limited resources and the absence of necessary machinery, she persevered. Without the proper equipment, such as an incubator or silk-spinning machines, her production capacity may be limited, hindering her ability to scale up her operations. Despite these challenges, she remains resilient and determined.

Her story demonstrates creativity and entrepreneurship mindset and plays a role in the input stage of the value chain for handicrafts in Tirana. Her craftsmanship, resilience, and dedication to preserving traditional techniques have an important impact on the input phase. Through her passion and expertise, she ensures the thriving of the handicraft sector, contributing value and diversity to the local market.

2.3.2 Production Stage
2.3.2.1 Production Stage Actors

The production stage of the handicraft value chain involves the collaboration of both micro and small companies as well as home-based workers, each playing a significant role in creating the different products. Micro and small companies focus on organized production processes, ensuring quality control, and scaling up their operations. On the other hand, home-based workers bring a distinct level of creativity and traditional craftsmanship to their products.

- ◆ **Micro and small businesses:** Micro and small companies are small-scale enterprises that specialize in handicraft production. They typically operate with a limited number of employees and focus on specific crafts or product categories. By law their structure is from minimum 1 to maximum 9 employees². These companies often employ artisans and provide them with a

structured working environment, tools, materials, and training to produce handicrafts on a larger scale.

Micro and small companies in Tirana's artisan sector are typically founded around the expertise of a core individual, often the artisan themselves. These artisans possess intricate knowledge and techniques required to produce handicrafts that reflect Tirana's cultural traditions. Family members often contribute to the production process, while a small number of non-permanent laborers are employed during peak periods or for specific tasks. It's noteworthy that many of these dedicated artisans tend to handle almost every aspect of their business on their own, which can make delegation and seeking outside help challenging. Family members often play an important role in the production process, while a few temporary laborers may be hired during peak periods or for specific tasks. This self-reliance and dedication to their craft underline the unique nature of these micro-companies within the sector.

These businesses face several significant challenges, including limited access to capital and financing options, which hinders their ability to invest in materials, equipment, and market expansion. They often rely on selling their products through local markets, craft fairs, and word-of-mouth referrals. Finding suitable markets is a struggle, as these businesses lack the resources and knowledge to tap into larger markets or online platforms. Moreover, intense competition, both from other artisans and imported mass-produced products, makes it difficult for micro and small businesses to stand out and secure consistent sales.

◆ **Home-based workers:** In the handicraft sector, home based workers refer to individuals, often women, who work from their homes on a part-time or flexible basis to create handicrafts. These individuals aren't formally employed by a specific company but instead engage in piecemeal/products or contract-based arrangements. 70% of the interviewees during the field research were home-based women workers.

Home based workers in Tirana Municipality, are a large community of mainly female artisans that serve as the backbone of the sector. These artisans specialize in certain aspects of the production of costumes, embroidery, rugs, and an array of other handicrafts. These ladies are very skilled, yet largely invisible by the larger public. In addition to the artisans based in Tirana, the value chain of the sector extends its reach to various regions across Albania. Notably, the artisans of Kukes, in northern Albania, are renowned for their mastery of traditional crafts and their provision of sheep wool to artisans in Tirana and other regions. Drawing upon their deep-rooted skills and knowledge, Kukes artisans create a wide range of handmade products, including textiles, woodwork, ceramics,

and more. Similarly, artisans from Korça contribute to the final products of the handicrafts products marketed in Tirana and wider. An interesting example of how these different artists cooperate to come to an innovative final product is described in box 4 below.

Case of an innovative business unlocking the urban market for traditional rugmakers

Thurrje Handmade is a business owned by two sisters in Tirana. The company specializes in the production of carpets and rugs according to the traditional loom method but with a more contemporary design. The business is seasonal, which means that the income is not the same every month of the year. In the period of low orders, the girls employ 4 women, and in the period of high orders, they employ a total of 16 women. The busiest periods are before the summer because, in addition to carpets, women also knit beach nets for beach bars. Other busy months are September, November, and December.

All the employees are from the areas of Elbasan and Korce, and all carpets and rugs are made at home. The raw material is wool from Korce taken from the animals, pulled, and dyed in the boiler according to the old method. The girls in their business do not own any machines or equipment; everything is produced with the old machines of the employees. In the near future, they want to open a workshop and buy machinery, but they still do not have the necessary funds to make this investment.

The design of the rugs and carpets is produced by one of the sisters; the other one takes care of the marketing, finding buyers, networking, etc. The final product comes to their warehouse in Tirana and is distributed from there. They do not have a shop for the exhibition of the rugs and carpets; everything is sold online, but in the near future they are thinking of buying one shop in Tirana. Their main clients are beach bars, restaurants, hotels, spaces, and orders from individuals with high incomes, which owns (Luxury villas / Residential villas).

The artisans, both the micro and small businesses and home-based workers, face challenges in their daily job that prevent them from developing further; the limited access to financial resources to be used for the raw materials or equipment required, marketing opportunities, and business training that hinder their growth. They struggle against competition from mass-produced imported products.

Several artisans mentioned that they struggle to compete with these cheap mass-produced products imported from other countries.

“It’s hard to compete with the low prices of imported products. Our handmade crafts require time and effort.”
Artisan

On the other hand, home-based work allows women with limited mobility or access to formal employment, to contribute to their household income and participate in economic activities from the comfort of their own homes. It offers flexibility and a means of livelihood that are tailored to their personal circumstances.

However, this “privilege” for home-based artisans, particularly those engaged in informal or self-employment, comes with various vulnerabilities and challenges. One significant challenge is the lack of social security, which leaves them financially exposed in times of emergencies, illness, or old age. Their income is often irregular, relying on sporadic orders or piece-rate payments, making it difficult to maintain a steady flow of work and plan for the future. Limited bargaining power further compounds their challenges, as they struggle to negotiate fair prices for their products or secure favorable payment terms from buyers.

Moreover, the absence of legal protections leaves home-based artisans vulnerable to exploitation, unfair treatment, and non-payment for their work.

“The lack of legal safeguards puts us in a vulnerable position. We have faced situations where buyers don’t pay us as promised, and there’s little we can do about it. We’re often at the mercy of their terms, which is quite unfair.”
Artisan

Limited access to resources poses obstacles to their professional growth and development. Home-based artisans face challenges in accessing training opportunities, skill development programs, market information, and financial support.

2.3.2.2 Production process

The production process of artisans' products in Tirana and Albania involves several integral processes that shape the final outcome of the folk costumes, embroideries and rugs. Each process, from material selection to pre-processing and preparation, requires attention to detail, quality assurance, and adherence to traditional techniques.

- 1. Material Selection:** Artisans carefully choose raw materials based on their specific characteristics, such as texture, color, durability, and sustainability. They secure these materials from the input stage actors such as large markets in Elbasan and Tirana as well as from farmers based mostly in the north of Albania. However, it is easier for the businesses to access the raw materials from the nearby markets and also online markets such as AliExpress. While the input from the northern farmers is mostly used by artisans based in those regions or micro and small businesses that have the possibility and the access to bring these raw materials in Tirana.
- 2. Pre-processing:** Pre-processing involves the initial treatment of raw materials to prepare them for further utilization in handicraft production. Depending on the specific material, pre-processing includes cleaning, washing, dehiscing, and sorting. For example, in the case of wool, pre-processing involves washing the fibers to remove impurities and excess oils. Similarly, silk cocoons undergo delicate processing to separate the silk threads for subsequent use. This stage is crucial in ensuring the raw materials are ready for the next steps of production and meet the desired standards of quality and cleanliness. Some artisans and micro businesses do this process by themselves and then use these raw materials to produce the final product that they sell. For example, the case of a micro business in Tirana which cultivates silkworms to produce firstly the silk material to later use it to produce the final products.
- 3. Production:** Production involves the preparation and actual production. The preparation phase involves transforming the pre-processed materials into forms suitable for the subsequent stages of production. This includes activities such as cutting, measuring, shaping, and assembling the materials as per the artisan's design specifications. For instance, in costume crafts, the preparation phase involves measuring and cutting fabrics or fibers to the required dimensions for weaving, sewing, or embroidery. For the production of the final products micro and small businesses either employ artisans' women to produce the products they sell, or they collaborate and engage the home-based workers by making them produce the products and then selling them as final products themselves. It is important to note that the collaboration between micro and small businesses and home-based workers happens in informal ways, because

rarely they sign a contract between each other for the work and products they provide.

2.3.3 Marketing stage: The marketing stage of the artisans' value chain is a crucial phase where various actors come into play to facilitate the distribution and sale of handmade products. These include physical shops, online platforms, renting services, and hospitality businesses.

Physical shops: Physical retail shops serve as tangible platforms where artisans exhibit and sell their creations. Currently, the availability of physical shops in Tirana, dedicated to selling handmade products from Tirana and across Albania, is limited. The research observed the existence of small-scale shops scattered around Pazari i ri, Castle of Tirana, Tirana International Airport, and small corners within shopping centers. However, the number of physical shops exclusively offering authentic Albanian handmade traditional products, as opposed to imported ones, remains restricted. These shops are typically registered as small businesses and operate with a staff of 1-3 individuals responsible for managing the store, promoting the products, and facilitating sales. These types of businesses are predominantly owned and operated by women.

Craft Fairs and Festivals: Local events that bring together artisans from Tirana and surrounding areas to display and sell their crafts. The difference with shops is that this outlet only sells products made in Albania. These events attract a diverse range of customers, including local residents and tourists. Artisans' fairs are organized periodically throughout the year, and the cost of participation is very low for the local and national fairs. Based on the interviews, the artisans express that the income accumulated in three days of participation in those fairs was equivalent to three months of selling products from their premises. This thus serves as a very important marketing channel for the artisans.

Many craft fairs are held on a continuous basis in Tirana such as "The Artisan Fair" organized every year on March 14 by the Municipality of Tirana in the area of Tirana Boulevard, in the center, or in the artificial lake on the official holiday of "Summer Day".³ Handicraft fair in the Castle of Tirana⁴. On September 29, National Cultural Heritage Day: Craft Fair⁵. The fair was organized in the space between the Clock Tower and the National Library in Tirana. "Craft Fairs" in the New Market in Tirana, which is held many times during the year, is organized by the association of TID Tirana and Social Business Enterprise (NBS).⁶ Promotion of Social Business organized the "Fair of Albanian Crafts and Creativity" in the New Market in cooperation with the Municipality of Tirana and UNDP Albania.⁷ Festive events for children and adults and annual craft fair organizations like "Peza nFest"⁸ ⁹ every year on September

16th. Festive events for children and adults and annual craft fairs “Farka nFest”¹⁰. Other fairs organized in other cities of Albania are also present throughout the year, such as the example of “Vjosa në Festë”, or summer fair in the traditional center of Gjirokastra.

While the artisans also participate in international fairs abroad and sell and ensure contracts for larger sales of their products in the future, attendance to these fairs is still low. Participation in international fairs is expensive for the artisans so they have to seek support from organizations, donors or government.

Online Platforms: E-commerce has become an essential channel for Tirana artisans, and not only, to sell their handicrafts globally, allowing them to reach customers beyond geographical boundaries.

The e-commerce and online marketplaces offer artisans’ an opportunity to reach a broader customer base beyond traditional geographical limitations. This enables them to tap into international markets and contribute to the growing demand for handmade items. In Albania, there are already a few functioning platforms like Easy Albania¹¹, Tirana Ekspres¹² or Artisans of Kruja¹³ that artisans join to sell their products. Still the artisans need support and skills to be present to these platforms. Stakeholders elaborated further in this report, offer capacity building services to help them get the skills to digitalisation.

While physical stores offer a tangible space for customers to see products and receive personalized assistance, e-commerce platforms extend this reach to a wider audience through the convenience of online shopping. In the context of retail, businesses like Artizanes in Tirana exemplify the importance of both physical and online presence. The physical shop draws a lot of attention from tourists displaying attractive products and offering coffee at the same time. Simultaneously, Artizanes’ e-commerce platform expands the artisans market reach beyond physical and geographical boundaries (see box 5).

In Tirana, the majority of artisans do not have direct access to online sales platforms. Instead, they often rely on intermediaries to facilitate the sale of their products. However, it’s important to note that a significant portion of these artisans are aware of the potential of online promotion and sales through social media. While they may not have dedicated e-commerce websites, many utilize social media pages to showcase and sell their products.

They easily and with no costs create a social media account and immediately start to showcase and sell their products. For example, the research showed that 90% of the artisans, either the micro and small businesses or home-based workers used an Instagram account to promote and sell their products directly.

They highlighted the importance of this social media to reach out a wider number of customers and sometimes even to increase the interest of them to visit their physical shops, in case artisans had it.

Example of a small business shop of artisan products in Tirana

“Artizanes Shop” is strategically located in a prime area of Tirana, renowned for its high visibility and significant foot traffic, particularly among tourists. Owned and managed by a dedicated female entrepreneur, the shop operates with a team of three other women who ensure its day-to-day operations. With a robust network of 60 artisans across Albania and Tirana, the shop sources its extensive inventory of approximately 1200 unique and authentic handmade products. These exceptional creations are predominantly crafted by artisans residing in rural areas and the northern regions of Albania.

Operating as a seasonal business because of unstable consumers throughout the year, “Artizanes Shop” acknowledges the inherent challenges and obstacles it faces. Nonetheless, the team exhibits remarkable resilience and continually seeks innovative strategies to sustain and expand the business while concurrently supporting artisans in their production and sales endeavors. They play a dual role, serving as a platform to showcase and sell artisans’ products while also buying certain items from artisans in the northern part of Albania. These artisans, facing geographical and financial constraints, cannot afford to wait for their products to be sold and benefit from the shop’s immediate purchase.

Tourist consumers constitute a significant portion, accounting for approximately 60% of the “Artizanes Shop” customer base. Additionally, there is a growing segment of local and domestic buyers who deeply appreciate the value of handmade craftsmanship and are art enthusiasts. While consistently securing consumers and achieving sales targets pose ongoing challenges, the team remains resolute in their determination. They are actively pursuing the establishment of an e-commerce website to expand their market reach, thus enabling artisans to access a broader consumer base and foster their growth within the industry.

Renting services: In the artisan sector of Tirana, a part of the small businesses that focus on the production of folk costumes, also make an income by providing rental services for their products. They offer costume rentals for various occasions, such as festivals, weddings, and other events. Typically, these micro and small businesses are owned and operated by women, with a small team of 1-3 employees ensuring smooth operations. Although they occupy a relatively modest segment of the market within this sector, these rental services play a significant role in contributing to the sustainability and development of their livelihoods. They face

challenges when it comes to the promotion of their service and to make it known wider, but their big opportunity is the collaboration with art stakeholders, entertainment business sector as well as government events that are the main customers of these services.

Hospitality Industry: The hospitality industry in Tirana and Albania, consisting of restaurants, beach bars, hotels, and other establishments, serves also as another market segment for artisans. Within the hospitality sector, businesses actively seek out unique and locally crafted items to enhance their ambiance and provide a distinctive experience for their customers. In our research it was discovered that the primary market of a group of young entrepreneurs engaged in carpet and rug manufacturing, consists of beach bars, restaurants, event spaces, and hotels. The blend of traditional and modern elements in these establishments attracts customers and distinguishes one place from another. It is worth noting that many restaurants incorporate these carpets into their spaces using innovative techniques.

During the research there were found many cases of artisans collaborating with the hospitality industry, supplying handmade products to restaurants, beach bars, and hotels. These artisans often initiated these connections through networking events, local fairs, and personal contacts, showcasing their crafts to potential buyers in the hospitality sector. Their ability to align their products with the ambiance and aesthetic of these establishments has been a key factor in establishing these market linkages.

On the side of the buyers, several establishments have appreciated the authenticity of handmade crafts, recognizing their potential to enhance the overall customer experience and create a distinct identity for their venues. Apart from the interior design function of the artisans' products, a part of the venue is also selling some of the artisans products directly to the tourists and clients of these hospitality businesses. This can be in the form of providing a corner with handicraft products, or organizing small marketplaces/fairs during the peak season. For example, big resorts like Green Coast in Dhërmi, organizes the artisans fair in August giving the opportunity to all the artisans to bring their products and to interact with the big number of tourists and clients not only of this resort but also for other facilities around this area.

2.3.4 Market stage:

The market segmentation for the artisanal products, including the folk costumes, embroideries, and rugs, is divided into four principal categories: the domestic market, the tourist market, the Albanian Diaspora market and corporate and business segment.

Domestic market is composed of individual buyers living in Tirana and all-around Albania. Customers asking for artisans' products

generally appreciate traditional crafts and seek unique, handmade products that reflect the local culture. The capital of Tirana serves as a hub for domestic buyers, where artisans reach customers beyond the local community. These markets represent larger retail outlets, department stores, and specialty boutiques that cater to a broader customer base.

Most of the domestic consumers are the ones that are passionate about art and handmade products or the ones that seek for unique gifts. About 30-70% of the people who buy embroideries and folk costumes in Albania are from the domestic market. But when it comes to rugs, only about 10% of the domestic market buys them¹⁴. Based on the observations this happens because handmade rugs are very special and take a long time and a lot of materials to make. They have higher costs, and not many people in Albania afford to buy them.

The Tourists market segment forms an important part of buyers, particularly in regions known for their rich cultural heritage. Tourists are drawn to the allure of locally made handicrafts as souvenirs, mementos, or as a way to support local artisans and communities. This distinct buyer category plays a significant role in driving demand and creating market opportunities for artisans, contributing to the sustainability and growth of the artisans' sector.

Tourists are a significant portion of the market, accounting for approximately 60% of the demand for Albanian artisan embroidery products. This makes them a crucial market segment not only in Tirana but also throughout Albania for embroidery artisans. In contrast, the rug market is primarily covered by a modest 10% of tourists¹⁵. Data on tourist purchases of Albanian folk costumes is unavailable and there are no cases known of that.

This distribution is attributed to certain factors. Embroideries, being compact handmade items, are easily transportable and serve as convenient souvenirs, making them popular among tourists. On the other hand, rugs necessitate specific handling and transportation conditions due to their larger size, leading to a smaller proportion of tourists purchasing them. Additionally, traditional folk costumes hold deep cultural and ancestral significance, appealing more to individuals of Albanian heritage who place high value on their origins, as opposed to tourists who do not see a practical use for them.

Tourists, both domestic and international, are drawn to Tirana for its rich cultural heritage and the opportunity to explore traditional crafts and artisanal products. They seek out unique and authentic handmade items as souvenirs or gifts, creating a demand for a wide range of handicrafts. These include textiles, ceramics, woodwork, jewelry, and other traditional crafts that showcase the country's cultural diversity and craftsmanship. Tirana's craft markets, the Castle of Tirana, Pazari

i Ri, Theatres, Mount of Dajt, etc., cultural fulfillment festivals, and artisan shops fulfill the needs and preferences of these tourists. These venues provide an immersive experience where visitors can directly engage with artisans, witness their creative processes, and purchase one-of-a-kind items.

The Albanian Diaspora is a significant buyer segment for handicrafts from Tirana and Albania. Based on the research and interviews, Albanian Diaspora has higher buyer power than local ones, buying and ordering original costumes. Physical shops and online platforms serve as important avenues for diaspora buyers to explore and purchase these crafts.

Their influence extends over a range of approximately 10% to 20% within the market segments of rugs, embroideries, and to a lesser extent for folk costumes. It is important to note that the domain of costumes demonstrates a distinctive trend, wherein the adoption of renting services outweighs outright purchases. This phenomenon prevails not only among the local populace but also holds sway within the Albanian Diaspora. The clients opt for the convenience and practicality offered by renting, particularly for a variety of occasions and entertainment engagements that call for the one time use of authentic Albanian folk costumes. This trend underscores the significance of such costumes as valued elements of cultural representation and festive expression, even beyond the immediate consumer market.

Business buyers' segment is an emerging segment in recent years. They make up a big part, like 70%, of the rug market and still a good amount, about 10%, of the embroideries market¹⁶.

Even though they're not as common in the area of folk costumes, there are some interesting cases where businesses in places like hotels and restaurants use real Albanian costumes to make their spaces special as is the example of Mrizi i Zanave Agritourism.

The significance of business buyers transcends mere market participation; their role is important in the advancement and augmentation of the artisanal sector. They procure larger quantities of these products, thereby instigating a tangible impact on the income and financial sustenance of artisans. Apart from business hospitality buyers, a growing market comes from corporate clients, which artisans see as a chance to increase their income. Artisans also sell to corporate clients by making custom products for events, gifts, or promotions. This often includes banks and telecommunication companies in Tirana. Beyond corporations, artisans collaborate with individuals and businesses for special pieces that fit specific needs. These collaborations extend to the entertainment sector too.

2.4 Value chain supporters and enabling environment

There are several relevant service providers in Tirana and Albania that together with rules and regulation and wider economic, social and environmental trends create an enabling environment in which the artisans' business sub-sector functions. From government to private and donor institutions, all play a role with their initiatives toward a development and sustainable economy.

The legal framework environment is the start for all business ideas. To register a business in Albania is quite simple nowadays and with inconsiderable cost of 100 ALL¹⁷. In Albania, micro and small businesses that have an annual turnover up to 8 million ALL have a zero-taxation policy¹⁸. On the other hand, government is implementing the initiative of fiscalization¹⁹ which is an online platform where businesses have to declare all costs and income made without the need of keeping hardcopy books of accountability, and also the online registration of the businesses through e-albania platform, that despite the advantage sometimes poses a challenge for artisans, as they have limited digital knowledge and skills and the economic declarations can be complicated with the knowledge they possess. Extra training on financial management and declarations required by law will help the artisans' businesses to run smoothly.

The SMEs law outlines measures and incentives aimed at supporting SMEs in various aspects, such as access to finance, business registration, taxation, intellectual property rights, and market access. Additionally, the law establishes business development services that provide training, mentoring, and advisory support to enhance entrepreneurial skills, product quality, and business management capabilities²⁰.

In Albania, and particularly based around Tirana, there are quite a lot of organizations or entities that offer capacity building programs for SMEs and start-ups. **The Chamber of Commerce of Tirana** offers trainings on fiscal package and latest updates, code of work, general legislations relevant to the MSMEs, digitalization, business management, etc²¹.

Association of Professional Business Women and Craftsmen of Albania, apart from different capacity building services provided through various project with focus on women, offer an e-learning platform on how to build and manage a business, a simple guide to business approach²².

On the other hand, **the National Chamber of Crafts Albania** has various capacity building activities dedicated to the handmade professions such as legal consultancy, workshops and seminars, economic consultancy and trainings²³.

Risi Albania offers training and capacity building for women artisans in Albania by supporting them in different fields with the main focus

on creating a business and marketing strategy, personalized training and workshops, individualized mentoring and counseling, market connection and online selling, and also networking.

UN Women has different training programs that support women's empowerment as well as financial support for buying any necessary machinery. Also, they have opened two artisanal centers that support women in the municipalities of Kruja and Kavaja.²⁴

Tirana Regional Development Agency experts assist and support companies in managing different matters such as: marketing, management, finance, export, investments/technology solutions, etc²⁵.

Financial Institutions that have convenient schemes to financially support the MSMEs in Albania are banks such as **National Commercial Bank (BKT)**²⁶ with its program on loans for micro and start-up companies, and micro financial institutions such as **NOA**²⁷. There are also donors offering financial support, such as **GIZ** with its program and scheme on supporting start-ups and SMEs with small grants; EBRD Advice for small business in Albania with their programs on empowering access to finance (A2F) with different financial products created in cooperation with partner banks; Partners Albania²⁸ NGO with its **Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation program** and the **UNDP** with its "In Motion program" dedicated to Micro and small business in Tirana, Durrës and other sites suffered the earthquake of 2019, offering financial support through small grants for their economic recovery²⁹.

Central Government Institutions provide support through policy initiatives, market development programs, capacity-building initiatives, and access to funding opportunities. Based on our research data, the **Albanian Investment Development Agency (AIDA)**, apart from capacity building activities, offers financial support for MSMEs through small public grants. For the period 2014 – 2019 AIDA has had a dedicated grant scheme for the artisans' sector, giving in total 60,000,000 allocated to more than 70 artisans around Albania. Artisans have received the grant for the development of new products; purchase of equipment and tools for work, developing marketing plan and digitalization channels, and capacity building services³⁰.

Based on the information provided by AIDA, the artisans sector was almost 100% informal until 2015. The government took the initiative from 2013 to beat the informality in the Albanian economy, through offering incentives to help businesses to formally register and declare their employees. Regarding the artisans' sector, through the creativity fund, and through AIDA the government helped artisans around Albania to benefit from the fund once they legally registered their business activity. This initiative running from 2014 – 2019 led to

more than 60% of the artisans identified, most of them women, and helped to register their business and formally and legally contribute in the Albanian economy³¹. Few artisan women producers interviewed in this study expressed that they benefited from this fund respectively to buy raw materials and to create prototypes of new products. They both expressed that at that time the fund helped them to increase the capacity of production and exploring new products, and at the same time to create a network of potential buyers.

Also, for the year 2022 AIDA launched a call for a grant scheme for the digitalization of MSMEs where artisans' sector was also included³².

On the other hand, **the Ministry of Culture** recently has turned its attention to the crafts sector acknowledging its importance regarding the preservation of Albanian traditions. It offered the grant scheme called "The future is in origins" ³³. More than 8 beneficiaries producing rugs, costumes and embroidery benefitted from this grant³⁴. In addition, **the Ministry for the Protection of the entrepreneurship (MSPE)** offered in 2022 a grant scheme for start-ups and their facilitators³⁵. Even though this grant scheme is dedicated for the most innovative business ideas in Albania, among the beneficiaries of the first call there is one small company in the artisans' sector who was the first to introduce the idea of cultivating silkworms to produce first made in Albania silk. She benefitted 2,145,280 ALL grant³⁶. She used the grant mainly to purchase equipment necessary to gather and process the silk.

NBS Albania, an agency that functions as a joint-stock company with state capital, implements ongoing projects with the aim to promote cultural heritage and support artisanal productions. They also support new innovative ideas into helping them become a business³⁷.

TID Tirana is an initiative of the **Albanian American Development Foundation** with the support of the Municipality of Tirana for the economic and social-cultural development of the New Bazaar area, where artisans are always present.

AADF: Albanian American Development Foundation's Culture Corps project will provide opportunities for the next-generation of cultural leaders to receive the skills, knowledge and networks they need to jump start cultural entrepreneurship.³⁸

On the other hand, **the Municipality of Tirana** plays a crucial role in creating a friendly enabling environment for artisans and businesses in this sector. Through different activities like providing incentives on local taxation³⁹ for the organization of events and offering space for their promotion, from zero costs to symbolic cost of renting exposition spaces during festivals or fairs organized by the MoT in the main squares of the city.

Trade Fair Participation Many organizations, including AIDA, the Chamber of Artisans, the Municipality of Tirana, the Chamber of Commerce of Tirana, etc., collaborate with artisans to ensure their participation in the national or international trade fairs where artisans have the opportunity to reach a wider audience, sell most of their products, and conclude trade contracts for the future. AIDA publishes annually the calendar of trade fairs where MSMEs register to participate and are financially supported by AIDA for their participation. Lately, AIDA has also published a guide that helps MSMEs gain knowledge about participation in the fairs.⁴⁰

Another example that helps artisans to participate in trade fairs is the **NGO Tirana Ekspres**⁴¹. This NGO organizes various fairs throughout the year, focused and dedicated for the artisans, mainly the network of 60 artisans that collaborate also with the Artizanes shop in Pazari i ri, in Tirana. Finally, the Chamber of Business of Albanian Diaspora⁴² plays a role as well in organizing such events that help artisans to connect with the Diaspora community to be open to a wider audience outside Albania.

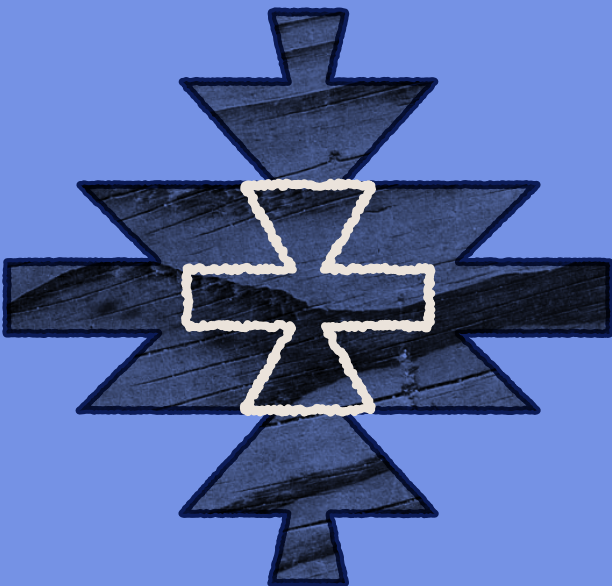
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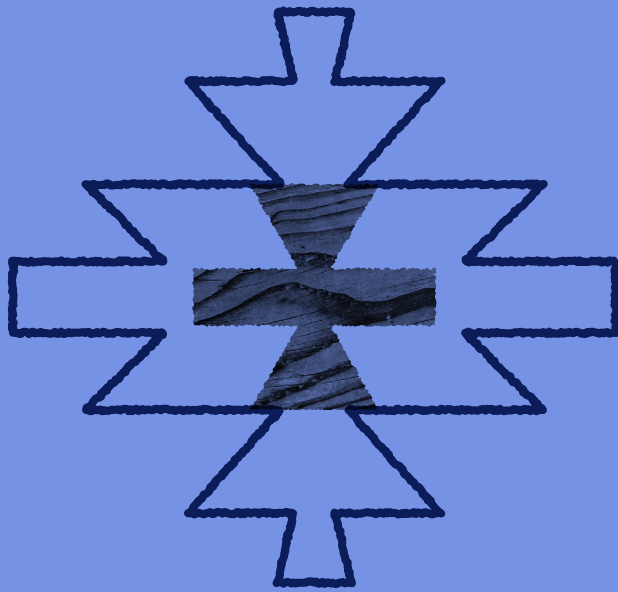
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CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF KEY CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES





3.1 Identification and analysis of key constraints

3.2 Identification of Key opportunities

3.3 Overview of constraints and opportunities in SWOT table



Limited capital to invest in business growth

Limited access to capital is a significant constraint faced by artisans in the handicraft sector in Tirana. Many artisans and small-scale handicraft businesses struggle to secure affordable and adequate financial resources to support their craftwork and business operations. The lack of accessible financial services, strict eligibility criteria, and collateral requirements often pose challenges for artisans seeking loans or credit facilities. As a result, artisans face difficulties in investing in new designs, purchasing quality raw materials, or expanding their production capacities. This constraint prevents their ability to innovate, compete in the market, and take advantage of growth opportunities.

Based on field research, most of the artisans interviewed find themselves constrained by a lack of financial resources to scale their operations and explore new market opportunities. One significant challenge is the risk-averse behavior and lack of entrepreneurial mindset exhibited by many women artisans. They hesitate to seek loans or credit due to fears of debt which is attributed to several factors, and pyramid schemes indeed contribute to their cautious approach. To address this, raising awareness about legitimate financial institutions, providing financial literacy education, and offering transparent and trustworthy financial services will help mitigate the negative impact of pyramid schemes.

The reasons for their hesitance are interconnected. Uncertainty about potential returns on investment and a lack of confidence in their business management skills are linked to their limited financial knowledge and skills. Based on the interviews many artisans do not have adequate training in managing finances, assessing business risks, and predicting the outcomes of investments. This cautious approach limits their ability to invest strategically in their businesses and seize growth opportunities.

Furthermore, the lack of proper information channels poses another obstacle for artisans in accessing financial support programs. Many artisans mentioned that they do not have access to relevant workshops, seminars, or community events where information about available opportunities is disseminated. The lack of access to relevant workshops, seminars, or community events is attributed to a combination of factors. Firstly, there seems to be a gap in communication channels between the service providers of these opportunities and the artisans. The service providers do not effectively reach these women artisans due to insufficient outreach efforts or the absence of platforms that the artisans frequently engage with. Their primary channel being official websites and not social media. This is also connected that there isn't any database that includes all the artisans, especially the home-based ones.

Moreover, time constraints and caregiving responsibilities also play a role in limiting their ability to access these opportunities. Artisans, especially women, have a double workload as they balance their craftwork with household and caregiving tasks. This limits their ability to actively seek out and participate in training and financial opportunities. As a result, they remain unaware of potential resources that could fuel their business expansion and enhance their economic prospects.

Through discussions with financial service providers, it has become evident that eligibility criteria for many of these programs are designed to accommodate a diverse range of businesses, including small-scale, informal, and home-based ventures. However, the lack of awareness among women artisans about their eligibility and the suitability of these programs for their businesses plays a significant role in perpetuating this perception.

Additionally, fear of complex procedures further inhibits women artisans from seeking financial support. They perceive the application processes for financial programs to be daunting and time-consuming, dissuading them from pursuing these opportunities. This fear of bureaucracy and paperwork becomes a barrier to accessing the resources that could potentially benefit their businesses.



I don't know where or how to search for financial support incentives. My daughter is the one who informs me about everything she finds out online (ex. open calls) but we just leave it there because we don't know how to proceed further. We don't have any information on how everything is done in order for us to apply
Artisan, Tirana

In the end, the income generated by women artisans is often directed towards supporting their families and children. Women tend to reinvest a much higher portion of their earnings in their families and communities compared to men. Although this contributes to wealth distribution and positive impacts on future development, it prevents them from investing in their business. Therefore, women, on average, tend to earn less and save less, leaving them with a smaller financial safety net to start a business or navigate through business failures or economic shocks, such as the case of Covid-19.

Training gaps and skills development

While the artisans possess inherent talent and traditional craftsmanship, many of them lack access to formal training and skill development programs that could enhance their techniques and keep them abreast of modern design trends and market demands. The absence of specialized training opportunities limits the artisans' ability to innovate, diversify their product offerings, and improve the overall quality of their crafts, preventing them from staying competitive and meeting evolving market demands.

Artisans are not aware of workshops, seminars, and training sessions that could potentially enrich their skills and knowledge. This constraint is further worsened by the absence of proper information channels that could disseminate details about training programs.

The focal training gaps the artisans had based on the field interviews were of different types, such as:

Traditional Artisans - Some artisans adhered to traditional crafting methods, using time-honored techniques¹ that have been passed down through generations.

Innovative/Modern Artisans - There are more innovative artisans who seek to incorporate contemporary designs and styles into their crafts.

The support needed for different types of businesses varies. Traditional artisans require support in preserving their cultural heritage and intergenerational knowledge transfer, while innovative artisans want to benefit from training in modern design trends, marketing strategies, and e-commerce skills to tap into wider markets.

On the other hand, based on the donors' interviews, it is seen that there are a lot of training opportunities offered through various stakeholders, such as chambers of commerce and other organizations/ NGOs. This "mismatch" resulting in the main problem limiting the growth and professionalization of women's businesses comes as the result of the lack of awareness and information about these training opportunities.

Additionally, as the younger generation of artisans gradually moves away from traditional crafts, the transfer of intergenerational knowledge is at risk. The lack of structured traineeship programs and mentorship opportunities further worsens the skills development gap, preventing the preservation of invaluable cultural heritage and the continuity of time-honored techniques.

Based on the field interviews, it became evident that many artisans in Tirana faced a significant lack of information regarding workshops

and training programs. They expressed uncertainty about how to participate in these valuable initiatives and had little to no knowledge about the organizations or entities implementing such training opportunities that would really help them on their economic empowerment.

Interestingly, among these constraints, some of the artisans themselves took the initiative to bridge the skills gap. They implemented training sessions on their crafts for home-based ladies who showed an interest in learning the art of crafting. These efforts demonstrated the willingness of artisans to share their knowledge and expertise within their community, despite facing their own challenges in accessing formal training opportunities.

This proximity highlights the untapped potential for collaboration and knowledge exchange within the artisan community in Tirana, while showcasing the missed awareness they have regarding these constraints that on the research terms comes as a result of most of the informal artisans not being registered in any database.

Inability to tap into formal market opportunities

This point poses significant constraints for artisans in the handicraft sector. Many artisans face difficulty in accessing formal retail outlets, galleries, or online platforms that can help them reach a broader customer base. Artisans often find themselves relying on informal networks or local markets, limiting their market exposure and potential for growth.



We mostly sell our products through word of mouth and local markets. It's hard to reach a wider audience because we don't have the resources for broader marketing, or neither the right connections/ network.
Artisan

This sentiment reflects the common challenge artisans face in relying on limited local networks and markets for their sales, which in turn restricts their market exposure and growth opportunities. This constraint on market linkages for artisans can be attributed to several reasons, including limited networks and connections within the market, especially for those operating on a small scale or in rural areas. Additionally, inadequate marketing and promotion efforts, market entry barriers at galleries or fairs with strict criteria, such as product quality, supply consistency, pricing, and packaging. Based

on the interviews many artisans expressed their struggles with competition and the difficulty of establishing a presence in market channels due to the competitive landscape and the barriers posed by established players and market requirements.

As a result, many talented artisans in Tirana remain hidden gems, with their crafts going unnoticed by individuals, tourists, businesses, and organizations both within Tirana and in markets beyond the immediate vicinity of the artisans' locations. This lack of visibility can lead to lower sales volumes and financial struggles for these artisans, affecting their livelihoods and discouraging them from pursuing their craft as a sustainable business.

Many artisans struggle to effectively reach their target markets and connect with potential buyers.

Several artisans expressed their difficulties in reaching their desired customer base during the interviews. One artisan shared,



“I create beautiful handcrafted pieces, but finding buyers is a constant struggle. I rely on local customers, but I know there’s a bigger market out there.

This sentiment highlights the challenges faced by artisans in connecting with potential buyers beyond their immediate vicinity. Many artisans rely heavily on local sales, which can limit their income and financial stability, making it a challenging endeavor for them to sustain their craft as a viable business. Some of these struggles come due to limited knowledge and skills where many artisans lack proper training and knowledge on how to effectively market their products. This includes understanding target markets, identifying potential buyers, creating appealing product displays, and developing marketing strategies.

The issue lies in the effectiveness of information dissemination channels, as not all artisans are reached by these channels, leaving them unaware of potential market platforms and market demands. The problem is primarily about accessing relevant market information rather than the availability of market information itself. There is market information available, such as trends, consumer preferences, and potential sales channels that could greatly benefit the artisans in expanding their reach and connecting with interested buyers. However, due to the lack of effective communication and information-sharing mechanisms, many artisans remain unaware of these opportunities, limiting their ability to tap into broader markets and grow their businesses.

While there are some service providers offering marketing training and market linkage support, artisans are not aware of these opportunities. The artisans' lack of awareness on this due to insufficient communication channels that effectively reach them due to them not being visible on any database. They also aren't well-informed due to limited outreach efforts by service providers, preventing the dissemination of information and preventing artisans from accessing these valuable resources. For instance, the artisans do not have direct access to information about available training programs and support initiatives, and service providers struggle to effectively reach and engage artisans due to inadequate outreach methods. Also, based on the field interviews a lot of artisans did not have proper access to online platforms and digital marketing tools leaving them to struggle on reaching wider audiences and potential buyers.



“I know that many businesses are using social media and websites to showcase their products, but I’m not very familiar with how to use those platforms. I don’t have a computer at home, and I struggle to navigate the internet on my phone. My daughter helps me with showcasing my products on social media when she has the time to. So, I feel like I’m missing out on potential customers who are online.”
Artisan

Most of the artisans had a younger family member taking care of their social media, which for most of them is the only place for marketing their crafts. These family members are not paid and do this on an irregular basis, having other preoccupations like studies or other jobs. This demonstrates that marketing of the products is not well integrated in the business. Based on our research, apart from relying solely on social media managed by younger family members, artisans could potentially explore other market channels such as local craft fairs, exhibitions, collaboration with boutique shops, and participation in artisan collectives. Regarding this, some artisans mentioned that they don't have information on these fairs and exhibitions, or there is a participatory fee that prevents them from participating.

Seasonality

Seasonality is another constraint with significant economic and social impacts in the handicrafts sub-sector. Artisans and businesses operating in the handicraft sub-sector experience higher sales and revenue during peak seasons, but they often struggle to maintain consistent earnings during off-peak times. When seasonal fluctuations occur, especially during the winter, small businesses, entrepreneurs and producers face decreasing revenues and demand for handicraft products, causing them irregular annual income and low return on capital. In this regard, many artisans mentioned the difficulties they face during the winter to pay the salaries of the workforce, as well as the rent and taxes.



“It’s very difficult to maintain a profitable business throughout the year. The winter period is difficult for my business as sales are less. I have to work hard to keep the workforce at work, pay the rent and all the taxes, as well as to be able to buy good quality raw materials.”

Market, Tirana

Furthermore, seasonality leads to an uncertain environment of doing business or producing, causing several limitations for artisans to undertake any initiative with the help of a loan. Based on field research, none of the interviewed women had undertaken an initiative to get a bank loan to help them in setting up, developing, or expanding their businesses. According to them, craft businesses are seasonal, and having a non-fixed monthly income there is a kind of uncertainty.

The effects of seasonality are substantial, impacting the sustainability of employment, as not surprisingly, one of the reasons for employees’ leaving is seasonality and the part-time nature of employment in this sector. Thus, it makes it difficult for a handicraft business to offer full-time employment, as the workforce gets involved mostly during the summer, temporary, seasonal or part-time. Many artisans mentioned that seasonality makes handicraft perceived as a temporary profession rather than a place for pursuing a long-term career, by reducing the interest in working in the handicraft sub-sector. Moreover, it decreases the attractiveness of employment in the handicraft sub-sector.

Moreover, particularly the issue of seasonality increases the instability of the business, impacts the quality of production, as well impacts the circle for innovation. Due to the instability of employment and doing business, hampers and limits employees' innovative initiatives or creativity, as people see their-self for a short time involved in this sector.

Other constraints caused by the seasonality are even the shortages in supply during the peak season as well as unused capacity off-season. Based on the field interviews, it became evident that many artisans in Tirana faced difficulties in finding good quality raw materials during the summer while they stock unused/unsold products off-season.

Several factors contribute to the seasonality constraint' need for addressing it:

- ◆ **Cultural and Festive Occasions:** Many handicrafts are in high demand during specific cultural or festive occasions, such as holidays, weddings, and traditional celebrations. Artisans experience a surge in orders and sales during these periods.
- ◆ **Tourism Peaks:** In regions with a strong tourism industry, artisans benefit from higher demand during tourist seasons when visitors seek locally crafted souvenirs.
- ◆ **Limited Product Diversity:** Some artisans specialize in specific crafts that are associated with particular events or seasons, limiting their ability to generate income year-round.
- ◆ **Weather-Dependent Crafts:** Artisans engaged in crafts influenced by weather conditions, such as outdoor markets or products made from natural materials, are particularly vulnerable to weather-related fluctuations in demand.
- ◆ **Market Trends:** Changing consumer preferences and trends also contribute to seasonality as certain products become popular during specific periods.
- ◆ **Infrastructure and Access:** Limited access to markets beyond local communities can amplify seasonality, as artisans might not be able to tap into demand from different regions or countries with varying seasonal patterns.

Lack of work-life balance prevents businesses to professionalize

As the handicraft sub-sector is affected by the seasonality, where sales and demands for handicraft products are higher during peak seasons, women artisans face the long working hours. This instability and unregular job leads to several impacts to women and their progress/development of their business or product. According to the World Economic Forum², humans need both physical and mental rest in order to recover between tasks, otherwise they can become stressed and fatigued.

Working these extensive hours and doing everything herself from the stage/phase of buying the raw material until the finalization of the hand-made product, not only limits time for leisure etc. but moreover limits them to take time and have energy for more strategic business practices and investments as training, understanding better the market, develop new products etc. Furthermore, it drains the energy of women preventing them to grow and get out of this just surviving business, where they work their assets off.

Many interviewees stated that they do not have enough time to develop their entrepreneurial and technical skills or to develop an existing business, as they have to take care of house and children. This means less time to access specific training, to promote their products, to meet potential supporters and investors, or seek for better customers or suppliers.

The lack of work-life balance poses significant challenges for artisans in the handicraft sector. As artisans are often self-employed and work from home, the boundaries between their work and personal lives can become blurred. This imbalance can lead to various negative consequences for their overall well-being, productivity, and the sustainability and professionalization of their craft businesses. The non-engagement of women in the labor market affects family income and the level of poverty. Thus, women are likely to experience higher income inequality throughout their lives and especially in old age.

Some of the factors that contribute to the lack of work-life balance among artisans are:

- ◆ **Flexible Working Hours:** While flexibility is a key advantage of being self-employed, it also leads to artisans working irregular and long hours without clear boundaries. The absence of fixed working hours makes it difficult to disconnect from work.
- ◆ **Passion and Dedication:** Artisans are often deeply passionate about their craft, leading them to invest significant time and effort. This dedication results in overworking and neglecting other aspects of life.
- ◆ **Home-Based Workspaces:** Many artisans work from home, blurring the line between their personal and work environments. The proximity of their workspace makes it challenging to separate work-related tasks from daily chores and relaxation.
- ◆ **Market Demands and Lack of Delegation:** Meeting deadlines and customer demands sometimes require artisans to work extended hours, especially during peak seasons or when fulfilling large orders. Small-scale artisans handle various aspects of their business themselves, from production to marketing. This lack of delegation leads to overwhelming workloads and limited time for personal activities.
- ◆ **Financial Pressures:** Economic uncertainties and the need to generate sufficient income leads artisans to prioritize work over leisure or family time.

- ◆ **Societal, cultural and gender norms:** Working women face various challenges regarding work/life balance due to societal, cultural, family, and gender norms. Even though the household dynamic seems to be changing in the last decade, there are many cases that still expect women to stay at home and take care of children and put all their attention on their household. This stereotype puts many women in a position where they struggle to achieve work-life balance, as Albanian society has a dominant mentality that burdens women with raising children and taking care of the home.

According to the last report of the World Bank, it underlined that Albanian women spend 25 years of their productive life raising children and doing unpaid family work.³ This figure shows how patriarchal societies suffer from women's exclusion from the labor market and the limitation of women to be more proactive and become actively engaged in economic life.

3.2 Identification of Key opportunities

The development of the artisans' sub- sector in Albania presents several key opportunities that contribute to its growth and development. These opportunities derive from various factors and market dynamics. The key identified opportunities consist of:

Tourism Market: Albania's growing tourism industry presents a significant opportunity for the artisans' sector. Collaborations with tourist destinations provide exposure and access to a large customer base. These collaborations take various forms, such as setting up dedicated artisanal shops within tourist areas or participating in craft markets and festivals that attract a significant number of visitors. Artisans can enter into this tourism market by creating and marketing products that resonate with tourists' interests and preferences. Collaborations with the tourism industry provide artisans with opportunities for product development and innovation. They can work closely with destination management organizations and tour operators to create customized products that align with the specific needs and themes of the tourist market. For example, artisans can develop specialized products for eco-tourism destinations, catering to the preferences and interests of different tourist segments. As it is already happening with the hospitality industry such as restaurants or hotels using the napkin or table clothes produced by Albanian artisans, or other decorations products to their spaces.

Cultural and Artisanal Tourism: Albania's rich cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship offer a unique opportunity to develop cultural and artisanal tourism in the country. Beyond the physical heritage of castles, archaeological ruins, and museums, Albania is home to several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Butrint, the Historic Centers of Berat and Gjirokastra, and the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region⁴. Apart from that, Albania has a

large list of monuments⁵ that are widely visited by the tourist either domestic or foreign ones, throughout the year.



Figure 8: Key opportunities of artisans' sector

To capitalize on this cultural wealth, artisans can actively promote and organize artisanal tours, workshops, and immersive experiences that allow tourists to engage with local crafts and participate in hands-on activities. Workshops organized provide tourists with the opportunity to learn and practice traditional crafting techniques under the guidance of skilled artisans. For example artisanal workshops or markets organized at the near cultural heritage zones in the peak periods of tourism, such as for example the artisanal fest organized in Vjosa River once the River was declared a world protected heritage. The service providers such as trade fair organizations or donors and public institutions are the ones that organize such kinds of events and invite the artisans to participate.

These artisanal experiences not only enhance the tourism offering but also provide additional revenue streams for artisans. By creating a market demand and appreciation for handmade products, artisans are encouraged to continue their craft traditions and pass on their knowledge to future generations. This helps to safeguard cultural practices and prevent the erosion of traditional craftsmanship.

Online Marketplaces: The rise of e-commerce and online marketplaces offers artisans' an opportunity to reach a broader customer base beyond traditional geographical limitations. Artisans in Albania have the opportunity to join international e-commerce websites like Etsy⁶ and Shopify⁷, which offer low-cost options for exposing their products. They can also consider platforms such as

Weebly⁸ and Woo⁹, which provide free or affordable ways to expose their products. The Albanian E-commerce Association (AECA)¹⁰ can also help artisans create their own online stores or support small companies in developing platforms specifically for artisans in Albania.

The artisan sector in Albania has a lot of potential in the e-commerce field, which is not fully explored yet.

Export Potential: Expanding exports of artisanal products is a significant opportunity for the sector's development. Participation in trade fairs and exhibitions, both domestically and internationally, is an effective way for artisans to promote their products and establish business relationships with buyers from around the world. These events provide a platform for artisans to demonstrate their craftsmanship, highlight the qualities of their products, and forge valuable connections with potential customers and business partners.

Moreover, the Albanian diaspora community plays a significant role in supporting the export of Albanian handicrafts. The diaspora community, living abroad and maintaining a strong connection to their Albanian heritage, is a valuable market for artisans. Collaborating with organizations such as the Chamber of Business of Albanian Diaspora¹¹ enables artisans to establish connections with diaspora buyers, tapping into their extensive networks and expertise in international markets. This collaboration involves organizing trade fairs both in Albania and in countries where the Albanian Diaspora resides. Workshops and joint events are also part of the initiative. The Chamber maintains a database of its members and companies in Albania, extending invitations to them whenever the organization arranges an activity. It actively promotes its services through online and offline channels within Albania and provides accessibility to interested individuals, both online and at its physical location in Tirana.

Collaboration with Hospitality Industry: The hospitality industry, including restaurants, hotels, and resorts, offers opportunities for artisans to promote and sell their products. Collaborations with these establishments allow artisans to create customized and unique pieces that enhance the ambiance and provide a distinctive experience for customers. Artisans can partner with the hospitality industry to supply products like handmade textiles, rugs, embroideries, artwork, and decorative items, expanding their market reach. Collaborating with luxury resorts, which have been rapidly increasing in numbers in Albania in recent years, opens up exciting possibilities for artisans. These resorts can engage artisans not only for selling of products but also for the interior design of their premises. They can create dedicated corners or boutiques within the resorts to showcase and sell traditional products,

providing a unique shopping experience for tourists and guests. This collaboration not only adds aesthetic value but also allows artisans to access a steady stream of customers who appreciate and seek out handmade products.

Product Innovation and Design: Continuous innovation in product design and development opens new opportunities for the artisans' sector. By blending modern design elements with traditional craftsmanship, artisans can create contemporary products that resonate with a broader audience. This enables artisans to adapt to changing consumer preferences and tap into new market segments.

Collaboration with designers play a crucial role in fostering innovation within the artisans' sector. Through partnering with skilled designers, artisans can strengthen their expertise in design thinking, aesthetics, and market trends.

An Albanian case that embrace the power of innovation and collaboration is Thurrje Handmade¹². Their approach to blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design has garnered recognition and success. Learning from their experience and adopting similar strategies can greatly benefit artisans in Albania.

Collaboration with brand producers: Collaboration with brand producers, presents an intriguing opportunity for the artisans' sector in Albania. A good example is the Hermes Birkin bag, renowned worldwide for its luxury status. The bag is meticulously handcrafted by skilled artisans using traditional techniques, making it a symbol of exceptional quality and artistry, and explaining its high value.

Also for Albanian artisans, collaborating with brand producers offers several advantages. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to showcase their craftsmanship and skills on a large scale. Working with renowned brands enhances the visibility and reputation of Albanian artisans. Secondly, artisans gain exposure to high-end markets and luxury clientele. Lastly, brand producers often apply fair and sustainable trade practices, which offer artisans fair wages and proper working conditions. This offers opportunities for the preservation of traditional techniques and cultural heritage. Such partnerships contribute to the empowerment and economic development of artisans, enabling them to sustain their craft and pass it down to future generations.

A promising example in Albania is the case of Amargi¹³, producing quality clothes Made in Albania and collaborating with artisans to provide unique designs of the clothes. Every collection presents a new aspect of Albania's ethnographic background, centering around a particular region, fabric, motif, or production process. Amargi

uses artisan hand-loomed fabric, to support the local economy, the empowerment of women and the principles of sustainability. The brand also uses celebrity ambassadors, who wear the brand and promote the product to a large audience.



Figure 9: Amargi designs¹⁴

Cooperatives foundation/creation: The foundation of artisans' cooperatives is another opportunity for Albanian artisans. Cooperatives provide a platform for artisans to come together, pool their resources, and collectively pursue their economic and social goals. Some key reasons why the establishment of artisans' cooperatives is beneficial are listed below:

Strengthened Collective Voice: artisans can intensify their collective voice and advocate for their rights and interests. Cooperatives enable artisans to have a stronger presence in the market, negotiate better terms with suppliers and buyers, and address common challenges they face as a group. Such is the case of artisans centers created¹⁵.
Shared Resources and Knowledge: Cooperatives allow artisans to share resources, such as tools, equipment, and workspace, which significantly reduce individual costs and improve efficiency. Additionally, cooperatives foster a culture of sharing knowledge and expertise among members, leading to skill development and innovation within the artisan community.

Access to Markets: Cooperatives provide a platform for artisans to access larger markets that may be difficult to penetrate individually. By pooling their products and resources, cooperatives offer a more diverse range of crafts, meet larger order quantities, and participate in trade fairs and exhibitions that target a wider customer base.

Economic Empowerment: by collectively managing their production, marketing, and sales activities, cooperatives can ensure fairer income distribution, improved bargaining power, and a more sustainable livelihood for their members.

Preserving Traditional Techniques and Culture: through cooperative initiatives, artisans can pass over their skills and traditions to future generations, ensuring the continuity of their craft and cultural identity.

Access to Support and Funding: Cooperatives often have better access to information and support services, training programs, and funding opportunities provided by government agencies, non-profit organizations, and development initiatives.

Collaboration and Networking: Cooperatives foster collaboration and networking among artisans, creating a supportive community where members learn from each other, share experiences, and collectively tackle common challenges. Collaboration leads to joint marketing efforts, shared resources, and even collaborative projects that enhance the visibility and impact of artisans in the market.

Capitalizing these key opportunities would give the artisans' sector in Albania an opportunity to expand its market reach, make greater economic contributions, and preserve the country's rich cultural heritage.

Overview of constraints and opportunities in SWOT table

In the context of the handicraft industry in Albania the below SWOT analysis provides an overview into the current state of affairs and the potential for growth and development. It is a summary and add on to the constraints and opportunities analysed in chapter 3.1 and 3.2. By examining these factors, stakeholders can make informed decisions and formulate strategies to foster the sustainable growth of the handicraft sector in Albania.

Strengths

- Large, diversified, and potential market in all over Albania and diaspora.
- There is a large product variety and is available because of diversified culture, costumes, embroidery, and rugs.
- Cheap labour that results in competitive prices, women in difficult economic conditions that work to gain some incomes. Women in economic difficulty who sell their products to survive because where they live do not find a market and do not know how to sell the product.
- Need low capital investment to start an enterprise such as handicrafts.
- Not necessary for this kind of business need a workshop; you can work from home, or a place to display the product as online markets enable its display.
- Low barriers of new entry.
- Products are high value added for cultural tourism.

Weaknesses

- Insufficient income to buy new technology.
- Inadequate information on current market trends.
- Less interest of young people in the craft industry. It's difficult to find the proper artisans. It is very hard to train the younger generation.
- Lack of skilled labour. In general, they work alone, and they do not have sufficient time to finish a product.
- Weak or non-existent Marketing. Most of these women do not have proper training on how to promote the product online or in other forms. From the interviews, in general they use Instagram accounts to promote their product as an online channel. Many of them, especially women working from home, are not aware of the existing market opportunities.
- The inability of these women to apply for grants, because they do not have the proper training to write a project proposal.
- Not risk takers. They do not take risks for the increase of the business, for example taking loans, working with other women etc.
- Security, they are not aware of their expensive product or expensive raw materials. They do not insure their product.

Opportunities

- Rising demand for handicraft products not only in Albania but also in diaspora.
- Developing fashion industry requires handicrafts products.
- Development of accommodation sectors like hotels and restaurants, that offer great requirements of handicrafts products.
- Development of the domestic and international tourism sector. Tourism is one of the most crucial sectors contributing to country development.
- e-Commerce and the Internet have emerged as promissory distribution channels to market and sell the craft products.
- Many fairs organised during the year, from Municipality of Tirana, Ministry of Culture, Artisans Market (Tirana Express), non-profit organisations, Cafeteria as "La Portena", etc.

Threats

- Competition in the domestic market.
- Products produced by competing countries like China and Turkey. (Imitation).
- Lack of coordination between government bodies and private players. There are no taxation facilities.
- Raw materials, for examples from the interviews, in the cases of "Thurrje Handmade", they have difficulties to find wool in the territory of Korca in the period of high demand and in the other cases of the interviews they buy with low-cost products from online market "AliExpress", because they are cheaper.
- Seasonal Business and handicrafts do not provide sufficient income every month.

Notes

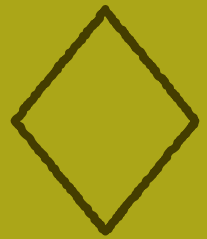
- 1 "Time-honored techniques" refer to traditional crafting methods that have been cherished and passed down over time, contributing to the cultural heritage of Tirana's handicrafts.
- 2 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/08/this-is-why-hard-work-might-not-pay-off-after-all>
- 3 Albania grapples with gender equality at home, work, politics – EURACTIV.com
- 4 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/al>
- 5 https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lista_e_Monumenteve_n%C3%AB_Shqip%C3%ABri
- 6 <https://www.etsy.com/>
- 7 <https://www.shopify.com>
- 8 <https://www.weebly.com/pricing>
- 9 <https://woocommerce.com/>
- 10 <https://aeca.al/>
- 11 <https://adbc.al/>
- 12 <https://euforinnovation.al/she-starts-up-thurje/>
- 13 <https://www.amargi.shop/>
- 14 <https://www.amargi.shop/anar-collection/>
- 15 Crafting a Brighter Future: How Handicraft Centers are Supporting Women Artisans in Albania



CHAPTER 4

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
ACTIONS AND INTERVENTION
STRATEGIES**





4.1 Intervention strategies to address key constraints and make use of key opportunities

- 4.1.1. Limited capital to invest in business growth
- 4.1.2 Training gaps and skills development
- 4.1.3 Inability to tap into formal market opportunities
- 4.1.4 Lack of regular income due to Seasonality
- 4.1.5 Lack of work-life balance prevents businesses to professionalise

4.2 Intervention Strategy



In the preceding chapters, we delved into the intricate landscape of handicrafts in the Municipality of Tirana, identifying key constraints and unearthing the untapped opportunities within this sector. As we continue our exploration, this chapter takes a proactive stance, shifting our focus toward actionable solutions that can directly address the challenges uncovered in Chapter 3. This chapter is dedicated to tangible actions that possess the potential to directly confront the challenges outlined earlier and unlock the pathways to bolster competitiveness and navigate new markets.

Within these pages, tangible steps and strategies are explored, firmly grounded in the insights gleaned from our research and analysis. From mitigating the identified constraints to capitalizing on promising openings, we outline a comprehensive array of actions that can catalyze growth and transformation within Tirana's handicraft sector.

Our journey culminates with an insightful overview of the proposed intervention strategies, which represent a roadmap toward change, igniting progress and prosperity for artisans, communities, and the sector as a whole. As we delve into the specific recommendations and strategies, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to nurturing this essential sector, fostering its resilience, and ensuring that the benefits of artisans are felt by all stakeholders.

The readers will find a collection of strategies and tactics, each carefully crafted to empower women along the value chain of this subsector. The goal is to provide a holistic view of the opportunities that exist beyond the challenges and to equip readers with actionable insights that can be immediately implemented in their own contexts.

4.1 Intervention strategies to address key constraints and make use of key opportunities

4.1.1. Limited capital to invest in business growth

Limited capital to invest in business growth is a significant constraint faced by many artisans in the handicraft sector. This challenge can be addressed through a multi-faceted approach that involves various stakeholders collaborating to provide tailored solutions:

- 1. Provide financial literacy and planning workshops :** Improving financial knowledge and planning skills is a crucial first step for artisans, especially those from marginalized communities, home-based artisans, or with limited education. Artisans need to have a strong understanding of financial concepts and how to manage their finances effectively before they can access loans. To implement this solution, cooperation with a suitable trainer from DHKKZ, CCIT or different NGOs such as SHGPAZ and GADC are needed. These organizations overall should have expertise in financial literacy training and should be able to tailor their programs to the specific needs and comprehension levels of artisans. The financial literacy workshops should use simple

language and visual aids to explain concepts, making them accessible and easy to understand for artisans. Additionally, securing additional funding for these financial literacy programs is essential. This funding can come from various sources, including government grants, in this case Ministry of Culture and Municipality of Tirana, private donors such as Risi Albania, or international organizations such as UN Women that support education initiatives. Once artisans have improved their financial knowledge and planning skills, they will be better prepared to access loans. Financial institutions, microfinance institutions, and banks such as NOA or BKT can then design microloan programs with flexible repayment terms and low-interest rates to meet the needs of these artisans. However, it's crucial to ensure that artisans fully understand the terms and conditions of these loan programs to prevent unintended financial difficulties or debt. Clear communication and user-friendly educational materials should continue to be emphasized even after artisans have improved their financial knowledge.

- 2. Government Initiatives:** The government can establish grants or subsidies targeting artisans, providing them with the initial capital required for expanding their businesses. By creating a streamlined application process and actively promoting these opportunities, more artisans could benefit from the financial support. The Ministry of Culture in accordance with the mission and policies for the promotion and creation of supporting and promotional spaces for artisans and craftsmen, announced this year the "Artisan Fund 2023."¹

The Municipality of Tirana in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture should target the artisans from a preliminary database. Their registration in the system of QKB² is done as small businesses but with the description "free professions" without a specified sub-sector. The IT of the National Registering Center and the IT of Municipality of Tirana (before the collection of the taxes) could open a new row in the system for this sub-sector to register these small businesses.. Also, the mini-municipalities, which have closer contacts with the businesses of the area and the unregistered entrepreneurs, should have a second database to keep relevant contacts of these artisans. After the construction of their own database, at the time of the calls for grants, all the involved entrepreneurs of a sub sector can easily be contacted.

The Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Tirana, continuously should do training to give the proper information regarding the grant proposals and the possibility of obtaining them. Many of the interviewed women artisans had a secondary education and did not have the proper education to apply for a grant. In many cases where they applied, they were disqualified for not fulfilling a condition that was not very clear to them. Also, they

are often not informed about a grant call, they do not constantly check the webpage of the Ministry or the Municipality. This is the main reason why the government needs to increase the use of awareness and promotional tools to reach this target group.

- 3. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):** NGOs such as Risi Albania or SHGPAZ or even DHKZ play a crucial role in facilitating access to capital and providing support to women artisans in Albania through collaboration with dedicated organizations like the Chamber of Crafts. They need to provide guidance on loan applications, help artisans prepare business plans, and offer mentorship to ensure responsible investment of funds. They can provide personalized guidance to artisans on the loan application process, by assisting them in preparing business plans, financial statements, and loan proposals. Also they should help artisans understand the terms and conditions of loans and ensure they make informed decisions. A challenge with this solution is that many NGOs might not have a comprehensive database of women artisans. To address this challenge, NGOs should work in partnership with local organizations, such as the Chamber of Crafts with the help of the Municipalities, to establish a comprehensive and up-to-date database of women artisans. Regularly collect data on artisans' businesses, financial needs, and aspirations. Also, they can use this database to tailor support services and financial products. Regular surveys, workshops, or information collection initiatives can be conducted by the Chamber of Crafts to gather relevant data from artisans, including their business details, financial needs, and aspirations. Strong cooperation with municipalities would help in contacting even those women who are not registered in a certain area and also promote artisan fairs, exhibitions, and events. They can create mentorship programs where experienced artisans mentor newcomers. Encourage peer support and knowledge sharing among artisans, fostering a sense of community and skill development and continuously assess the impact of these initiatives through regular monitoring and evaluation. Gather feedback from artisans to fine-tune support services and address emerging challenges.
- 4. Artisan Cooperatives:** Creating or strengthening artisan cooperatives can pool resources and collective savings among artisans. This cooperative structure can enable artisans to access larger loans, negotiate better terms with raw material suppliers, and collectively invest in initiatives that promote business growth. A challenge with this solution is the perception among some artisans that artisan cooperatives may not provide tangible benefits or might appear as more formal organizations without immediate advantages for their businesses. Based on the interviews, this perception created resistance among individual artisans to join or actively participate in cooperative

initiatives. The lack of understanding about the potential benefits, operational structure, and actual impact of cooperatives deterred artisans from taking advantage of this collaborative approach. To address this challenge, efforts should be focused on raising awareness and providing clear evidence of the benefits that artisan cooperatives can offer. Sharing success stories of existing cooperatives like "Artizanet e Vaut te Dejes"³ highlights concrete examples of improved access to resources, financial opportunities, and market penetration through collective action plan. Additionally, artisans who have benefited from cooperative initiatives can serve as advocates, sharing their positive experiences and outcomes to encourage others to participate. Even in difficult economic times, having strong relationships may assure a consistent flow of business and offer invaluable support and insights that can be used to spot new opportunities. For example, one of the interview women, a costume producer, expressed the desire to enter the diaspora market but she had no capacity to support the demand. Increased sales need an increased production and this sometimes can happen through collaboration with other artisans. Sometimes working in shared workshops spaces can help them in increasing the network, sharing the machinery, and sharing the same place of production. From the conducted interviews it became clear that "Thurrje Handmade" and "Artisans Market" have plans building a co-working spaces for artisans. Good examples of co-working places in world for arts and artisans are Arebyte⁴, CultureWorks⁵, Tradecrafts⁶, etc. that are co-working places and creative workspaces for animators, fashion designers, digital media artists, fine artists, etc. A co-working place could be created by the Municipality of Tirana, for example in a touristic place in Tirana, very frequented, where artisans at the same time can work and sell their products. Target region can be at the Lake of Tirana, a place between Mullet and Petrela village, Pazari i Ri, Kalaja e Tiranes, Fusha e Aviacionit, for example.

- 5. Capacity Building through collaboration of Vocational Training Centers, NGOs and artisans:** NGOs and the 10 Public Vocational Training Centers in Albania⁷, can offer training programs on financial literacy, business management, and entrepreneurship. Equipping artisans with the skills to manage their finances and make informed decisions will empower them to utilize their limited capital effectively. Based on the demands of the labor market and in accordance with the Albanian Qualifications Framework, NAVETQ is responsible for developing the system of vocational qualifications, assessing the market's needs for qualifications, creating occupational and qualification standards, creating national curricula (for long and short-term training courses, teaching materials, assessment instruments, etc.)⁸ Based on the SWOT analysis, it has been identified that the younger generation is showing decreasing interest in the

craft industry, while women entrepreneurs are encountering challenges in sourcing suitable human resources. Introducing a new curriculum focused on handicrafts, such as weaving, embroidery, loom work, and sewing of folk costumes, into Vocational Education and Training (VET) schools could address this issue. However, to effectively encourage more women from these areas to engage in these profiles, a robust marketing campaign by the government is essential to stimulate interest. While government involvement is essential, collaboration between multiple stakeholders, including chambers, cooperatives, and the Ministry of Culture, can make such a campaign more impactful. Identifying successful artisans, like Thurje Handmade, and capturing their stories through short films or documentaries. Highlight their journey, achievements, and the impact of their work on their lives and communities. Showcase how their skills have transformed into sustainable businesses. Utilizing social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to disseminate these success stories. Short video clips, interviews, or photo series can be shared to inspire and inform a wide audience. Additionally, create engaging and shareable content like posts, infographics, and blogs to reach a broader online community. Also, partnering with local media outlets or TV channels to broadcast success story features. This can reach a broader audience and inspire women from various regions.

Presently, only the "Hamdi Bushati" school in Shkodra, which offers programs in textiles and confectionery, has integrated loom work into its curriculum. Nevertheless, enrollment in these directions remains limited. To enhance this effort and address the gap in entrepreneurship, financial, and business management training, collaboration with various service providers like the Chamber of Crafts or NBS and trainers is essential. Moreover, experienced craftsmen and artisans within the community can be excellent trainers. They possess firsthand knowledge of traditional techniques and can provide practical insights into the crafts. Additionally, they can share their experiences in managing small businesses. Many NGOs in Albania focus on entrepreneurship development and financial literacy. Organizations like Junior Achievement Albania or Partners Albania have experience in providing training to young entrepreneurs. Partnering with such NGOs can bring specialized training to vocational schools.

- 6. Artisan-focused business incubator:** Another recommendation would be creating artisan-focused business incubators similar to the ICT hubs and incubators in collaboration with Chambers of Crafts, NGOs, and other relevant projects presents a valuable opportunity to empower the handicraft sector. These incubators would serve as dynamic hubs where artisans can receive essential support to enhance their craftsmanship and business acumen. The key components of this initiative would

involve identifying strategic partnerships with organizations experienced in artisan empowerment, assessing artisans' specific needs, securing suitable physical spaces equipped with necessary tools, offering a wide range of tailored training programs, providing mentorship from experienced artisans and industry experts, facilitating access to markets through partnerships and events, offering financial literacy programs and access to funding, fostering collaboration and networking among artisans, implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and promoting artisans' products and stories through effective marketing. The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable ecosystem that nurtures artisan talent, preserves traditional craftsmanship, and drives economic growth in the handicraft sector. For example, from the interviews the girls that were entrepreneurs at "Thurrje handmade" were part of Destil Hub Tirana⁹, increasing the possibility of meeting other entrepreneurs and being part of different training sessions. One challenge with establishing artisan-focused business incubators is ensuring their accessibility and inclusivity for artisans from diverse backgrounds. Artisans in remote or marginalized areas may face difficulties in physically accessing these incubators, limiting their participation. Moreover, artisans with varying levels of technological literacy may struggle to engage with online platforms or resources provided by the incubators. Business incubators like Destil Hub Tirana, Coolab, and Pyramid of Tirana which have recently opened can tackle accessibility challenges by providing physical and virtual spaces for artisans from diverse locations, offering digital skills training, collaborating with the Ministry of Culture, Municipality of Tirana local community organizations or NGOs, and offering translation supportive materials to ensure inclusivity and engagement for those with limited English proficiency. This approach ensures no one is left out and promotes a more inclusive representation of artisans.

4.1.2 Training gaps and skills development

Addressing the training gaps and skills development constraint among artisans in the handicraft sector, with a specific focus on product design, innovation, and business management, requires a multi-pronged approach involving various stakeholders working collaboratively to provide comprehensive solutions. This approach aims to empower artisans not only with traditional craftsmanship skills but also with the modern expertise needed to excel in their craft, innovate their products, and navigate the challenges of the contemporary market effectively.

1. Government

Collaboration with educational institutions is essential to align training with industry demands in the handicraft sector. For instance, the government could allocate funds to develop a curriculum for specialized training programs in collaboration with renowned art and

design schools. However, bureaucratic hurdles and issues related to program implementation can pose challenges. For example, securing budget allocations and ensuring efficient disbursement of funds can be time-consuming and bureaucratic. Additionally, there might be delays in curriculum development and training program rollout, impacting artisans' timely access to skill-building opportunities. Therefore, close monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are crucial to track the progress of these programs and ensure that they effectively address the needs of artisans while being executed efficiently.

2. Online Learning Platforms

Creating digital training resources, webinars, and online courses can offer flexibility for artisans to access training at their convenience. These platforms can cover a wide range of topics, from technical skills to entrepreneurship and marketing. For example, an artisan interviewed who was interested in improving her sewing and crafting techniques found tutorials on online platforms that offer step-by-step guidance and demonstrations. These tutorials can help artisans learn new ways of working with textiles, experimenting with different stitches, or incorporating innovative design concepts into their creations. By utilizing these online learning platforms, artisans can gain valuable skills, enhance their craftsmanship, and acquire the business acumen needed to succeed in the modern market. These resources offer the flexibility to learn at their own pace and on their own schedule, making skill development more accessible than ever before.

3. Partnerships with Designers and Entrepreneurs

Collaboration with designers and entrepreneurs can provide artisans with exposure to new design concepts and market trends. Joint projects can encourage innovation and offer real-world experience in meeting market demands. Designers in collaboration with artisans, can introduce new elements such as: packaging, new products, catalog, branding identity, etc. On one side artisans can share knowledge regarding various aspects of handicrafts, costumes, embroidery, crochet etc., and designers can help them to improve their products and to make them more marketable.

4. Local Chambers of Commerce:

Local Chambers of Commerce play a pivotal role in addressing the training gaps and skills development constraints among artisans in the handicraft sector. Their engagement can extend beyond identifying training needs to creating a bridge between artisans and valuable resources that enhance their innovation, business management, and market research skills. These chambers can take proactive steps to reach the target groups of artisans who require specialized training in these vital areas. They can conduct thorough needs assessments within their regions. This involves actively seeking out artisans and artisan groups and understanding their specific training requirements. They can engage in surveys, workshops, and direct

communication to gather insights. Based on the needs assessment, chambers can collaborate with educational institutions, business development centers, or training providers to design customized training programs. Chambers can initiate awareness campaigns to inform artisans about the training opportunities available. They can organize networking events that bring together artisans and potential clients or businesses requiring artisanal products.

Efforts to address training gaps should consider the diverse needs of artisans, taking into account their current skill levels, access to resources, and preferences for learning. Strategies should be adaptable, keeping in mind regional variations and the evolving nature of the handicraft sector. By fostering collaboration between service providers and industry experts, a comprehensive training ecosystem can be established to uplift artisans and equip them with the skills they need to thrive in the modern market.

4.1.3 Inability to tap into formal market opportunities

To overcome the challenge of artisans' inability to tap into formal market opportunities, a range of strategic interventions involving multiple stakeholders is essential:

1. Market Access Workshops

They serve as a crucial component in equipping artisans with not only technical skills but also an entrepreneurial mindset. Collaborative efforts involving local Chambers of Crafts, government agencies like the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism, as well as NGOs such as Risi Albania, NBS, or DHKZ can facilitate these workshops to empower artisans for success. These workshops go beyond the traditional approach and emphasize the importance of proactively seeking opportunities in the market. They can address both market access and foster an entrepreneurial mindset through market exploration where artisans learn how to expose themselves to a wide range of market channels that suit their products. One suggestion on how to better link the service providers with the artisans is the creation of a centralized information hub where the Chamber of Crafts can create a centralized online platform in cooperation with different NGOs where artisans can easily access information about upcoming workshops, training programs, and resources related to market access and entrepreneurship. This hub should be regularly updated and user-friendly. They can also develop a shared calendar of events or cooperate with AIDA or DHKZ, as they make a similar calendar, and conduct awareness campaigns targeting artisans to inform them about the availability and importance of these workshops by utilizing various communication channels, including social media, local media, and artisan networks, to reach a broader audience.

2. Market Linkage Platforms

Creating digital platforms or marketplaces that connect artisans directly with potential buyers can expand their market reach. These platforms can provide artisans with visibility, enabling them to promote and sell their products to a wider audience.

Web marketing is becoming a need. Enterprises can reach them by the workshops led by the Ministry of Finance, dedicated to the development of an action plan for online commerce. The coordination of both state and non-state entities, including the Ministry of Finance, the Directorate of Taxes, Municipality of Tirana, AIDA, AECA, etc., is necessary to reach artisans and to help them to tap into the online formal market.¹⁰

Support should be provided for product presentation, online store setup, and digital marketing techniques. Ensuring artisans understand the legal and financial aspects of online commerce is essential, along with continuous monitoring, feedback collection, and adaptation. Collaboration with government bodies and Municipalities to create a favorable regulatory environment and active promotion of the digital marketplace are key components of this strategy. With these measures, artisans can effectively leverage web marketing to expand their market reach and thrive online.

3. Craft Fairs and Exhibitions

Government institutions and industry associations like AIDA or DHKZ actually have a calendar of events where they also showcase ways to apply, and sometimes even sponsor the artisans to attend. Facilitating access to craft fairs and exhibitions for artisans should involve creating an enabling environment and providing support to ensure their participation. The most important action here is ensuring that artisans are aware of upcoming craft fairs and exhibitions. Establishing communication channels, such as newsletters, social media platforms, and artisan associations, to disseminate information about these events well in advance. Also, encouraging artisans to participate collectively, either through artisan associations or local Chambers of Crafts. Collective representation often attracts more attention and allows for shared resources and responsibilities. Another suggestion is to organize networking sessions and matchmaking events before or during the fairs and exhibitions. These events can connect artisans with potential buyers, distributors, and retailers, increasing their chances of securing business deals. With more interest in expanding their network, they can also participate in international fairs of artisans with the help of The Chamber of Crafts or the Municipalities. For example, in the International Handicrafts Trade Fair 2024¹¹ which will be organized next year between April 25, 2024 until May 01, 2024, in Florence.

4. Cooperation with the Hospitality Sector:

Collaboration with local businesses and restaurants can result in the

inclusion of artisan products as part of their offerings, expanding market visibility and demand. One suggestion here is networking and relationship building. Local Chambers of Crafts, artisan associations, and NGOs like Risi Albania or UN Women with their projects can play a crucial role in connecting artisans with potential local partners. They can organize networking events, business mixers, or matchmaking sessions where artisans can meet with restaurant owners, managers, and local business representatives. Artisans can prepare collaboration proposals that outline the benefits of including artisan products in local businesses or restaurants. These proposals can highlight how artisan products can enhance the uniqueness and appeal of their offerings, potentially attracting more customers.

Another cooperation venture is, for example, to be part of the respective hotel's website. In this way, customers will be intrigued from the moment they click on the website to see the hotel, facilities and handicraft products as an attraction.

A product packaging with their logo accompanied by the hotel logo would be interesting. A stand at the entrance of the hotel, perhaps in the area in front of the reception, so that customers can view and buy their products while waiting in the main lobby of the hotel. The cooperation of the industry with several artisan associations such as the "Association of Professional Business Women and Craftsmen" and the "Albanian Artisans Association" and AECA, can help artisans to be contacted by businesses in the accommodation sector for the exhibition of their product in their hotel space.

5. E-commerce Workshops:

Workshops on setting up and managing e-commerce platforms can enable artisans to tap into online sales channels and reach customers beyond geographical limitations. Referring to the fact that a large number of Albanians live outside the borders of Albania, such as Greece, Italy (a minority of Albanians called "Arberesh" and immigrants after 1991), USA, Turkey, etc.. If the artisans entrepreneurs in Albania were given the proper training on how to market their products online in order to enter the international market, they would have increased sales and increased profits. Most of them did not know and had no information on how to build a page on social networks with professional photos, no information to enter international markets. In the only case interviewed, the entrepreneurs of "Thurrje Handmade", had paid a photographer to take professional photos of their products so that they could be properly advertised on social networks. A successful approach to improve the presence of artisans in the global market was the training of the International Trade Center (ITC)'s partners in central Asia with covered topics such as strategy, market research, digital content creation and optimization, digital marketing, online platforms, payment solutions and logistics providers. They increase the presence of artisans in the global market achieving in total \$2.5 million in sales through online

channels.¹² Such a comprehensive initiative should also be done in Albania so that they can sell their products not only in the local market but also abroad.

4.1.4 Lack of regular income due to Seasonality

To address the challenge of seasonality faced by artisans, especially those whose production is affected by changing weather conditions or market demand fluctuations, a combination of strategies involving different stakeholders can be implemented:

1. Product Diversification

Encouraging artisans to diversify their product range can help mitigate the impact of seasonality. This involves creating products that are relevant and in demand across different seasons, allowing artisans to maintain a more consistent income throughout the year.

The artisans in collaboration with a NGO, can study the market and select their products based on seasonality by creating a marketing plan for each season. For example, “Thurrije Handmade” had divided the products into two seasons. In winter they mainly worked with carpets and in summer with woven umbrellas where their products were mainly sold in hotels and restaurants. Women who are embroiderers can do the same thing, if in winter, for example they can knit wool sweaters, in summer she can knit bathrobes or crocheted dresses. The undertaking of such concrete initiatives would make them clearer in the products they want to sell and the hotels more hospitable to cooperate with them.

2. Collaborative Production

Collaborative production among artisans with complementary seasonal products can be a mutually beneficial arrangement, especially when dealing with seasonality-related challenges. Artisans can identify products that complement each other and share a workspace or studio where they collaborate during their respective off-peak seasons. This shared location serves as a hub for designing new collections, experimenting with techniques, and planning joint marketing strategies. Resource sharing is a key aspect, where artisans can pool equipment, materials, and tools, reducing individual investment costs. During peak seasons, these artisans can cross-promote each other’s products, expanding their customer base and maintaining a steady flow of customers year-round. Pooling orders and deliveries can also lead to cost savings. Joint events, exhibitions, and pop-up shops create marketing opportunities and attract a broader audience. Collaborative problem-solving, flexible employment arrangements, and a supportive network further enhance the effectiveness of this approach. Local artisan associations, craft cooperatives, and online platforms can facilitate these collaborations, enabling artisans to overcome seasonality challenges, adapt to market trends, and collectively strengthen their market presence.

3. Seasonal Themes and Collections

Encouraging artisans to create themed collections for specific seasons or occasions can be an effective strategy to attract customer interest and boost sales during relevant times. To implement this approach, artisans can collaborate with designers or mentors who specialize in seasonal market trends, maybe in cooperation with Artizanes. These experts can provide insights into popular themes, color palettes, and product categories that are in demand for upcoming seasons or holidays. Additionally, local artisan associations, Chamber of Craft, or Ministry of Culture-supported programs can organize workshops or training sessions on seasonal product development. These sessions can educate artisans on market trends, customer preferences, and effective design strategies for different seasons. To further support artisans in creating seasonal collections, online platforms or marketplaces can offer dedicated sections or features that highlight seasonal products. This can help artisans showcase their themed collections to a broader audience. Furthermore, marketing campaigns, social media promotion, and participation in seasonal craft fairs and exhibitions can help artisans gain visibility and reach potential customers interested in seasonal products. Collaborations with local businesses and retailers can also facilitate the inclusion of artisanal seasonal items in their offerings.

4.1.5 Lack of work-life balance prevents businesses to professionalise

To tackle the issue of a lack of work-life balance hindering the professionalization of women's businesses in the handicraft sector, a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders can be adopted, circling around three main objectives:

1. Professionalize work organization

Time Management Workshops

To provide holistic support to women entrepreneurs in the artisan sector, it's advisable to expand the workshop offerings. In addition to time management, workshops covering essential skills like communication, self-confidence, leadership, work-life balance, and empowerment can be incredibly beneficial. These workshops can empower women artisans to interact effectively with customers, negotiate deals, and collaborate with partners. They also aim to build self-confidence, enabling them to assert themselves in business environments and pursue opportunities with confidence especially for home-based women. Leadership development workshops can foster their potential to lead their businesses to success and become role models in their communities. Moreover, sessions on work-life balance can provide strategies for maintaining a healthy equilibrium between business and personal life, contributing to their overall well-being. To implement these expanded workshops effectively, collaboration with organizations such as GADC specialized in gender empowerment, leadership development, and communication training is recommended. NGOs, business associations, and women-focused

support groups can work together to design and deliver these programs, ensuring that women artisans receive comprehensive training to thrive in both their personal and professional lives

Digital Tools

The effectiveness of introducing digital tools to women artisans largely depends on their specific needs, capabilities, and constraints. While digital tools can greatly streamline business operations, it's important to tailor such initiatives to the target group. For women with lower levels of education or limited access to technology, introducing complex digital tools may not be the most efficient approach. Instead, a more realistic and efficient strategy might involve starting with basic digital literacy training to ensure that women artisans are comfortable using smartphones, tablets, or computers. Focus on teaching those essential skills like using email, messaging apps, and conducting online research. Additionally, introduce user-friendly, simplified apps or tools that cater to the specific needs of artisans, such as inventory management, order tracking, or online marketing. The emphasis should be on simplicity and ease of use. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning where women artisans can share their knowledge and experiences with using digital tools, creating a supportive environment for those who may be less tech-savvy. Ensure that digital tools are accessible in terms of language, user interface, and affordability. Provide ongoing support and troubleshooting assistance, including access to helplines, local IT support, or online tutorials, as women artisans begin to use digital tools. Lastly, assess the specific needs and preferences of each artisan, as a personalized approach can be more effective.

Promoting Delegation

Promoting delegation among women artisans in the handicraft sector can be facilitated through several practical strategies and stakeholder involvement. Peer support groups or cooperatives can be formed, allowing artisans to collaborate on specific aspects of their businesses, such as marketing or logistics. Involving family members, particularly in household responsibilities, can significantly reduce their workload, and NGOs and community organizations can provide counseling and awareness programs to promote gender equality within households. Workshops focusing on delegation skills and time management can be organized to help artisans identify tasks that can be delegated and improve communication with family members or hired help. Experienced women entrepreneurs or artisans can mentor newcomers, sharing their experiences and advice on balancing business and household responsibilities. Local support groups and community leaders can advocate for the importance of delegation, while accessible resources like pamphlets or videos can provide practical tips. Engaging men in conversations about delegation is essential, and programs targeting men can emphasize the benefits of sharing household and childcare responsibilities. Financial incentives or support for women who delegate certain

tasks can further motivate exploration of delegation. For example, women artisans may pool resources to hire part-time assistants for tasks like packaging and bookkeeping, freeing up more time for their craft and business development.

2. Personal and Leadership Development

Recognition of Achievements

Recognizing and celebrating women's achievements as entrepreneurs and caregivers is crucial for fostering their motivation and self-esteem. To achieve this, various strategies can be employed. Initiatives such as local or regional business awards can tailor a new spot for women artisans to highlight their significant contributions to both the economy and their communities. Specialized training programs focusing on enhancing business skills, marketing strategies, and financial management can empower women to view their ventures as legitimate businesses, reinforcing the importance of their income. Sharing success stories of women artisans, which can be done by various projects that are implemented by Risi Albania, GADC or NBS, who have successfully balanced caregiving and entrepreneurship can serve as inspirational role models. Advocating for gender equality in caregiving responsibilities, establishing support groups, and promoting financial independence through successful entrepreneurship are all vital components of encouraging women artisans to embrace their roles as businesswomen while effectively managing their caregiving duties. Lastly, public awareness campaigns challenging stereotypes and acknowledging the multifaceted roles of women can further reinforce their contributions to both their families and the economy.

Personal Development:

Encouraging women to prioritize self-care and personal development can empower them to manage their businesses more effectively and improve their overall well-being. These programs would emphasize the importance of self-care, mental and emotional well-being, and personal growth. By recognizing the significance of self-care, artisans can maintain a healthier work-life balance, reducing stress and burnout. Moreover, instilling an entrepreneurial mindset and fostering an environment of continuous learning can empower women to approach their businesses with confidence and resilience. Recognizing and celebrating their achievements not only boosts motivation but also reinforces their identity as businesswomen, contributing to gender equality in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Collaborative mentorship and support networks can provide practical guidance, advice, and a sense of community, further nurturing personal development. These multifaceted efforts aim to create a holistic approach to women's empowerment, helping them thrive both personally and professionally in the artisan sector in Tirana.

3. Recognition and Awareness of gendered division of labor/ triple role women

Childcare Support

Providing affordable and accessible childcare options can alleviate the burden of caregiving responsibilities and allow women to focus more on their businesses. Addressing childcare needs for women artisans in Tirana is crucial for enabling them to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively. Realistic solutions might involve collaborations between local organizations, NGOs, and businesses to establish community-based childcare centers or hubs. These centers could offer affordable and flexible childcare services tailored to the schedules of women artisans. Additionally, partnerships with existing childcare providers, such as preschools or daycare facilities, could be explored to make their services more accessible and cost-effective for women in the artisan sector. Existing childcare options in Tirana may include formal daycare centers, private babysitters, or reliance on extended family for support. However, challenges such as high costs, limited hours of operation, and lack of flexibility often hinder women from accessing these services effectively. Therefore, a collaborative effort involving government agencies, NGOs, and local businesses is essential to develop childcare solutions that are affordable, convenient, and responsive to the specific needs of women artisans. Such support can significantly reduce the caregiving burden, allowing these women to concentrate on growing their business.

Community Awareness

Raising awareness within communities about the importance of supporting women's work-life balance can foster understanding and cooperation from family members and society. Creating a successful promotional campaign that features role models of each product and targets the local community can be achieved through a series of strategic steps and collaborations. First, it's essential to identify local artisans who have found creative solutions to successfully balance their work and family life, ensuring they represent various crafts to resonate with a broad audience of artisans. Collaboration with local media outlets is crucial in this endeavor. Partnering with television channels, radio stations, and newspapers to showcase these role models' stories. Arranging interviews, documentaries, or articles that highlight their journeys, challenges, and achievements, ensuring that these stories reach a wide and diverse audience. Engaging with local organizations that focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. Women's organizations, artisan cooperatives, and NGOs can play a pivotal role in endorsing and promoting the campaign within the community. Organizing community events, exhibitions, or fairs that not only showcase the products but also spotlight the success stories of women artisans. These events should serve as opportunities to connect with the local community, answer their questions, and instill a sense of pride and recognition

for the artisans. Leveraging the power of social media and online channels to disseminate stories, videos, and content featuring the role models. Create visually appealing and shareable content that can spread across various social media networks, reaching a wider digital audience. Seeking support and recognition from local government authorities, as their endorsement can add credibility to the campaign and help secure resources for its promotion. Conducting workshops and awareness sessions within communities, utilizing the role models as speakers. These sessions should allow for open discussions and questions from community members, addressing their concerns and providing guidance on achieving work-life balance. Lastly, maintaining an open feedback loop with the community to understand their perceptions and receptiveness to the campaign. Be ready to adapt and tailor the campaign based on the community's evolving needs and responses.

4. Technology Investment / Future technological advancements

The women who worked with the loom to weave carpets had very old machines. According to the findings of the interviews with the 16 women with whom the girls of "Thurrje Handmade" worked, the machines belonging to them were much depreciated, slowing down the process. The modern equipment is available today, and artisans can find it in the USA and China, but the machines are expensive: between 25,000 USD - 50,000 USD. New equipment, reduces time and produces a high quality final product. A possibility discussed with the women during the interviews was to get a working space to build a large workshop for the production of the products. The women in the Artisan market had the same idea. Perhaps if a group of artisans join together to invest in such an initiative, they could use the machines by borrowing or by using the machines in shifts or depending on their demands. A technology upgrade could also be a solution for the production of folk costumes; it was noticed that the sides of the folk dresses were ironed hand one by one. Having a machine would simplify this process, make the final product finish faster and be able to receive other orders.

4.2 Intervention Strategy

This section provides an overview of intervention priorities and corresponding activities within the artisan sector. These priorities include critical areas such as capacity building, establishing connections with the hospitality and tourism industry, improving work-life balance, and facilitating access to grants and funding opportunities. The below intervention strategy outlines the strategic initiatives and expected outcomes designed to empower and foster growth

Identified barrier

Absence of specialized training opportunities limits the artisans' ability to innovate, diversify their product offerings, and improve the overall quality of their crafts, preventing them from staying competitive and meeting evolving market demands.

Capacity Building			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
NGOs and vocational training centers can offer training programs, workshops and capacity building activities on financial literacy, business management, innovation and entrepreneurship.	NGOs, Vocational Training Centers, Chamber of Commerce of Tirana, Chamber of Artisans of Albania, Donors and International Organizations, Business associations, NGOs	1. Enhanced business management, financial literacy, digitalisation skills and knowledge among artisans. 2. Improved business management and market strategies for artisans.	Medium term
Establishing business incubators can provide a structured environment for artisans to learn, experiment, and grow, by offering training modules, mentorship, and access to experts in various fields to address specific training gaps.	Municipality, Banks, Chambers, Business associations, Destil Hub Tirana, Coolab, Pyramid of Tirana	3. Creation of contemporary products that appeal to a wider audience. 4. Improved marketing and distribution of artisanal products.	Long term
Collaboration with educational institutions to align training with industry demands in the handicraft sector.	Ministry of Education, Professional Schools		Medium term
Creating digital training resources, webinars, and online courses can offer flexibility for artisans to access training from technical skills to entrepreneurship and marketing.	NGOs, Ministry of Education, Pyramid of Tirana		Long term
Chambers can initiate awareness campaigns to inform artisans about the training opportunities available.	Local Chambers of Commerce, Educational Institutions, Business Development Centers		Medium term

Identified barrier

Lack of information channels regarding workshops, training programs and skill development initiatives.

Capacity Building			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Establishing mentorship programs connecting experienced artisans with those seeking to develop their skills can create a supportive learning environment.	National and International Experts; International Organisations, Donors	1. Enhanced business management, financial literacy, digitalisation skills and knowledge among artisans.	Medium term
Partnerships and joint projects with designers and entrepreneurs can provide artisans with exposure to new design concepts and market trends.	Designers, Entrepreneurs, Ministry of Culture	2. Improved business management and market strategies for artisans. 3. Creation of contemporary products that appeal to a wider audience. 4. Improved marketing and distribution of artisanal products.	Medium term

Identified barrier

Limited access to information about existing markets, market trends, and opportunities to showcase their products.

Links to Tourism and Hospitality			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Foster collaborations between artisans and the hospitality industry including restaurants, hotels, and resorts.	Artisans' cooperatives Hospitality establishments, Luxury resorts and hotels Ministry of Tourism and Environment Tour Operators Travel Organizations	1. Expanded market reach and customer base. 2. Increased demand for artisanal products in the hospitality industry. 3. Increased competitiveness and recognition as trendsetters in the artisan sector.	Long term
Foster collaboration with luxury resorts, which have been rapidly increasing in numbers in Albania in recent years, in terms of interior design.	Artisans' cooperatives Luxury resorts and hotels Ministry of Tourism and Environment Tour Operators Travel Organization		Long term
Foster collaboration with luxury resorts to create dedicated corners or boutiques within the resorts to showcase and sell traditional products, providing a unique shopping experience for tourists and guests.	Artisans' cooperatives Luxury resorts and hotels Ministry of Tourism and Environment Tour Operators Travel Organizations		Long term

Identified barrier

Lack of visibility that leads to lower sales volumes and financial struggles for artisans.

Links to Tourism and Hospitality			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Support the organization of summer fairs within the resort, for the participation of artisans (e.g., of Green Coast resort with its artisans' fair organized during August)	Artisans' cooperatives Luxury resorts and hotels. Ministry of Tourism and Environment Tour Operators Travel Organizations Tourism Agencies	1. Attract tourists interested in authentic cultural experiences and unique handmade souvenirs. 2. Create new market and customer base.	Medium term
Ensure the presence of artisans' products in the physical heritage of castles, archaeological ruins, and museums, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Butrint, the Historic Centers of Berat and Gjirokastra, and the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid region.	Ministry of Culture Albanian Chamber of Handicrafts Trade fair organizations Municipality of Tirana Administration of cultural sites Tourism Agencies Travel Organizations	3. Create new service from artisans (engaging workshops for tourist).	Long term
Organization of workshops or markets organized at the near cultural heritage zones in the peak periods of tourism, to provide tourists with the opportunity to learn and practice traditional crafting techniques under the guidance of skilled artisans.	Ministry of Culture Albanian Chamber of Handicrafts Trade fair organizations Municipality of Tirana Administration of cultural sites Tourism Agencies Travel Organizations		Medium term

Identified barrier

Lack of dedicated financial schemes or services for artisans

Grants and Funding Opportunities			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Establish funding programs and grants for artisans to access financial resources for business development, training, and capacity building initiatives.	Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Economy and Finance, AIDA, NTA, Municipality of Tirana, Private Financial Institutions	1. Increased financial support and access to funding for artisans. 2. Strengthened capacity and competitiveness of the artisan sector. 3. Simplified criteria and bureaucratic procedures for financial schemes for artisans.	Medium term

Identified barrier

Lack of accessible financial services, stringent eligibility criteria, and collateral requirements

Grants and Funding Opportunities			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
The government can establish grants or subsidies targeting artisans, providing them with the initial capital required for expanding their businesses.	The Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Tirana, AIDA, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Ministry of State for the Protection of Entrepreneurship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased financial support and access to funding for artisans. 2. Strengthened capacity and competitiveness of the artisan sector. 3. Simplified criteria and bureaucratic procedures for financial schemes for artisans. 	Medium term

Identified barrier

Lack of skills and capacity to apply for financial services and support and fear of complex procedures

Grants and Funding Opportunities			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Facilitation of procedures and decreasing bureaucracy and paperwork	Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Economy and Finance, AIDA, NTA, Municipality of Tirana, Private Financial Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased financial support and access to funding for artisans. 2. Strengthened capacity and competitiveness of the artisan sector. 	Medium term
Design and providing training programs and info sessions on how to apply for financial services	Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Economy and Finance, AIDA, NTA, Municipality of Tirana, Private Financial Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Simplified criteria and bureaucratic procedures for financial schemes for artisans. 	Long term

Identified barrier

Lack of proper information channels poses an obstacle for artisans in accessing financial support programs.

Grants and Funding Opportunities			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Design and provide an information program activity in all Albania (info sessions and workshops in all cities of Albania)	Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Ministry of Economy and Finance, AIDA, NTA, Municipality of Tirana, Private Financial Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased financial support and access to funding for artisans. 2. Strengthened capacity and competitiveness of the artisan sector. 3. Simplified criteria and bureaucratic procedures for financial schemes for artisans. 	Long term

Identified barrier

Long working hours

Work-life balance			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Design of the programs about "Time Management", including workshops and sessions about time management, covering essential skills like communication, self-confidence, leadership, work-life balance, and empowerment of each other.	NGOs, such as GADC, Women – focused support groups, Associations of Women in Artisan sector	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased Work-Life Balance giving a significant reduction in the average working hours. 2. Enhanced Productivity 	Medium term

Identified barrier

Less time to access specific training, to promote their products, to meet potential supporters and investors, or seek for better customers or suppliers.

Work-life balance			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Design of the dedicated programs/apps introducing digital tools to women artisans, with basic digital literacy training to ensure that women artisans are comfortable using smartphones, tablets, or computers.	National Agency of Information Society, NGOs, IT support organizations, National and International donor institutions	1. Improved and increased opportunities to Access to Training and Development Programs. 2. Expanded Professional Network	Medium term

Identified barrier

Lack of boundaries and delegation between their work and personal lives because of working from home

Work-life balance			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
Forming of Peer support groups or cooperatives allowing artisans to collaborate on specific aspects of their businesses Counseling and awareness programs to promote gender equality within households. Provide accessible resources like pamphlets or videos with practical tips.	NGOs, community organizations, Cooperatives of artisans, Risi Albania, GADC, NBS	1. Well-Defined Clear Work-Life Boundaries 2. Effective Delegation strategies	Medium term

Identified barrier

Societal, cultural and gender norms

Work-life balance			
Activities to address barriers	Potential stakeholders	Expected Outcome	Term of impact (short term/ medium/ long)
<p>Organization of Local or regional business awards events to highlight and share success stories of women's significant contributions to the economy and their communities.</p> <p>Implementation of public awareness campaigns challenging stereotypes and acknowledging the multifaceted roles of women</p> <p>Providing affordable and accessible childcare options allowing women to focus more on their businesses.</p>	<p>Government Agencies, NGOs, local businesses, local organizations, NGOs</p>	<p>1. Cultural and Gender Equality, experiencing greater acceptance and inclusion, breaking down societal and cultural barriers.</p> <p>2. Diverse Artisan Community, reflecting a wide range of backgrounds, perspectives, and creative influences.</p>	<p>Long term</p>

Notes

- 1 <https://www.kultura.gov.al/thirrje-e-hapur-fondi-i-artizaneve/>
- 2 <https://qkb.gov.al/>
- 3 <https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/grupimi-i-grave-artizanet-e-vau-dej%C3%ABs-/6011065.html>
- 4 <https://www.arebyte.com/studios/>
- 5 <https://www.cultureworkshopsila.org/>
- 6 <https://tradecraft.industries/>
- 7 <https://www.puna.gov.al/organizimi>
- 8 <https://www.akafp.gov.al/>
- 9 <https://bio.site/5HvNDj>
- 10 <https://aeca.al/tregetia-ne-internet-ne-shqiperi-drejt-nje-plan-veprimi-per-zhvillim/>
- 11 <https://www.cantonfair.net/event/3478-international-handicrafts-trade-fair#registration>
- 12 <https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/achieving-25-million-in-sales-in-central-asia-through-e-commerce>

Annexes

Annex 1: Calendar and important events for artisans

Month	Event Name	Description
JANUARY	National Handicrafts Fair	Yearly fair showcasing traditional crafts and artisanal products.
FEBRUARY	Tirana Winter Handmade Market	Market event for artisans to sell handmade products in Tirana.
MARCH	National Artisans' Conference	Annual conference to discuss the development of the artisan sector.
APRIL	Albanian Crafts Week	Week-long celebration of traditional crafts and artisanal products.
MAY	International Day of Artisans	Global observance to celebrate artisans' skills and creativity.
JUNE	Gjirokastra Folk Festival	Cultural festival featuring traditional music, dance, and crafts.
JULY	Handmade Textiles Exhibition	Exhibition in Tirana showcasing diverse handmade textiles.
AUGUST	Craftsmanship Workshops	Workshops where artisans share their skills with visitors.
SEPTEMBER	National Handicrafts Competition	Competition honoring the best artisans and their creations.
OCTOBER	Artisanal Food and Craft Fair	Fair combining crafts with local food products.
NOVEMBER	Artisanal Christmas Market	Festive market for handmade gifts and decorations.
DECEMBER	Annual Artisanal Awards Ceremony	Event recognizing outstanding artisans.

Note: The specific dates for some events may vary each year, so it is advisable for artisans to keep track of local announcements and event calendars for up-to-date information.

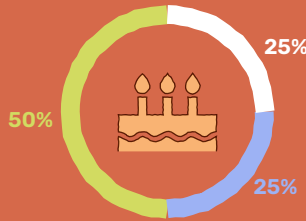
Annex 2: Data of Interviews

GENDER



100% Female

AGE



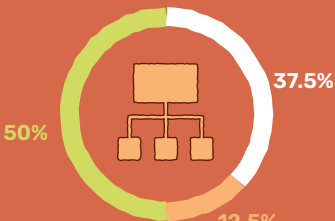
- <30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 50+

EDUCATION



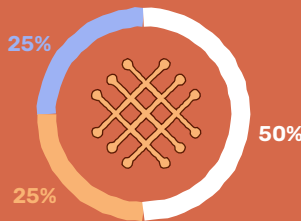
- Elementary
- High school
- University degree

THE COMPOSITION OF EMPLOYEES



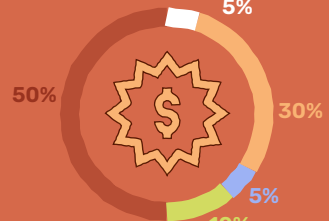
- None employees
- Non - Family
- Family with salary
- Unpaid family

PRODUCTS



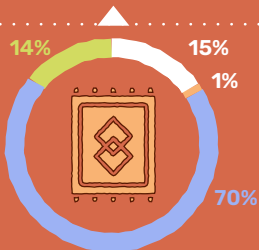
- Embroidery
- Rugs
- Folk Costumes

HIGH SEASON SALES



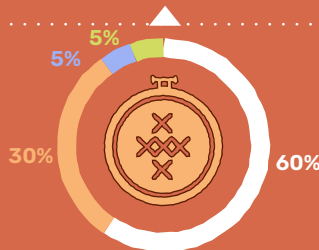
- Spring
- Summer
- Autumn
- Winter
- Celebrations

CUSTOMERS FOR RUGS



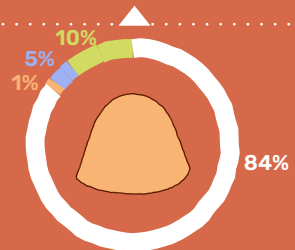
- Domestic buyers
- Tourist
- Business
- Albanian diaspora

CUSTOMERS FOR EMBROIDERY



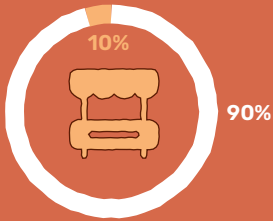
- Domestic buyers
- Tourist
- Business
- Albanian diaspora

CUSTOMERS FOR COSTUMES FOLKS



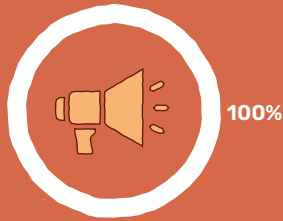
- Domestic buyers
- Tourist
- Business
- Albanian diaspora

FAIRS



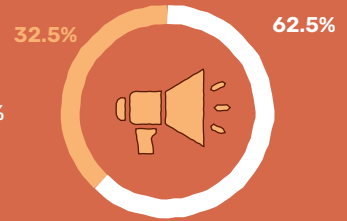
- No effect on handicraft industry
- Promotes handicraft industry

MARKETING NEED



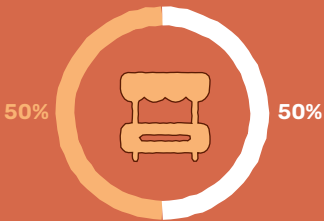
- Yes
- No

MARKETING IMPLEMENTATION



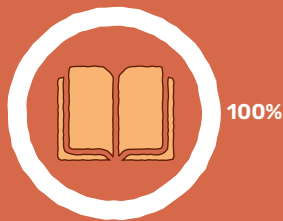
- Yes
- No

FAIRY PARTICIPATION



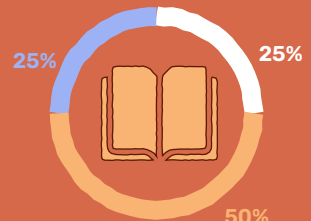
- Yes
- No

NEED FOR TRAININGS



- Yes
- No

CONDUCTED TRAININGS FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP, MARKETING ETC.



- Yes
- No
- Somehow

Source: Data collected and processed from the authors

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