

CALL FOR PAPERS

Guild and Artisan Labour Working Group at the VI Congress ELHN

The Guild and Artisan Labour Working Group of the European Labour History Network (ELHN) brings together scholars engaged in a classic topic of economic and social history: craft guilds and artisan labour. We aim to expand upon and deepen the long-standing debates on the socio-economic dynamics that linked these institutions to labour and society from a historical perspective, especially spanning the 14th to the 19th centuries, in Europe and abroad.

Although excellent studies on the subject have not been lacking in recent decades, the main focus—rightly—has shifted toward invisible labour, prompting a reassessment of sources traditionally deemed secondary to guild records, as their predominant use in twentieth-century historiography gave rise to interpretative models that are now increasingly contested—for example, the notion of a stagnant pre-modern economy or the exclusion of women from labour.

We believe that this rich and fruitful season of research must now reconnect with the study of guilds—institutions that, especially in urban Europe, regulated professional training, ensured production quality standards, and controlled access to the market. These institutions exercised normative and identity-shaping power that extended far beyond mere economic regulation, profoundly shaping the social and cultural structures of their communities. However, even if the primary geographical focus of the Working Group is Eurasia, the scope of research also extends to the former colonies and beyond, promoting a global perspective through comparative analysis with other “guild-like institutions” worldwide.

The purpose of this Working Group is to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon and to lay the groundwork for a reconsideration of labour history studies, free from superficial generalizations. What we propose is to focus on these institutions—drawing on the extensive existing literature and brand-new archival research—to study them in their own right and in their fullness, on their own terms, rather than merely as a “phase” or “configuration” within a broader category of labour.

The Guild and Artisan Labour Working Group invites all interested scholars - at any stage of their academic career (and *especially* PhD students) - to submit a 250-word abstract for a communication to be presented at the VI Congress of the European Labour History Network to be held in-person at the Universitat de Barcelona between 16-19 June 2026. The Guild and Artisan Labour Working Group welcomes contributions that engage with, but are not restricted to, the following themes:

- 1. Guilds, Apprenticeship, and the Labor Market:**

- Ways of learning: apprenticeship, journeymanship, and tramping systems
- Closed shops, open markets, and “free” trades: limitations and opportunities for apprentices, women, and child labor
- Labor markets beyond the guilds

2. **Change, Conflict, and Institutions:**

- Intra-guild conflicts and liberal competition
- The role of institutions in the decline of the guilds
- Journeymen’s organizations in the Ancien Régime: guilds, combinations, or craft unions?
- Exclusion or integration? Women, foreigners, and minorities in the guild world

3. **The End of the Guilds: Between Abolition and Continuity**

- Guild abolition: abrupt ruptures, gradual breaks
- Resistance, reactions, and readjustments during abolition
- Guild continuities in labor markets and social movements

We strongly encourage everyone interested to submit a proposal, even if the topic lies outside the three above general topics. We also welcome studies concerning any place or time, so long as it deals with guild and artisan labour. In order to encourage the widest participation, *we will do our best to provide translation and/or session interpretation services for English, Castilian (Spanish), Catalan, Italian, or other languages as needed.* Do let us know if you might be interested in receiving or providing language services.

The deadline for abstract submissions is 1 September 2025. Please send your 250-word abstract to: guild.artisan.labour@gmail.com specifying which of the proposed sessions would be most appropriate for your paper. You are also welcome to indicate if your proposal might open up additional lines of inquiry or suggest new thematic directions for discussion. Kindly include your current affiliation (if any) when submitting your abstract, and indicate if you are a PhD student. *Keep in mind that PhD students and unaffiliated scholars are eligible for a reduced conference fee when registering.*

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, or if you wish to participate in the wider, ongoing activities of the Working Group, please feel free to reach out via email. Please let us know if you are interested in participating in the Working Group Meeting via video call to be held at the ELHN Conference. We look forward to hearing from you! *Please feel free to circulate this Call for Papers among colleagues who may find it relevant.*