



EUROPEAN CLUSTER  
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

# European Year of Skills: Talent for the twin transition

## Summary



EU Clusters Talks  
14 June 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union





## European Year of Skills: Talent for the twin transition

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 14 June 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET, to discuss programmes and initiatives for re- and upskilling, the needed skills set for the twin transition, and cluster manager competences.

### Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform  
*Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform*
2. Pact for Skills  
*Daniela Santopolo, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission*
3. ERASMUS+ traineeship: Clusters as hosts  
*Vito Borrelli, Team Leader, DG EAC, European Commission*
4. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs  
*Katerina Nejdlova, Team Leader, DG GROW, European Commission*
5. Panel debate  
*Carolina Garcés, Project Manager, Mobile Heights*  
*Delphine Descorne-Jeanny, President, Cluster NOGENTECH*  
*Elin McCallum, Director, Bantani Education*  
*Jakub Grodecki, Policy & Project Manager, EURASHE*  
*Torsten Urban, Head of Education & Training, Lüdenscheid Plastics Institute*
6. Funding opportunities  
*Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform*

### Key messages

- Clusters can help companies identify needs and gaps and, together with education stakeholders, design tailor-made trainings.
- Entrepreneurial skills are enabling skills to drive the green and digital transition across sectors and should be fostered.
- We should not only think about high-level trainings, but also about operational training, offered for example in the French école de production.
- Universities need to be part of the dialogue. They are already working to de-silo their programmes to offer skills in smaller learning components.
- Experimental learning offers a new approach, and it can adapt learning to the specific circumstances of the people.
- While there are specific skills gaps in the sectors, the overarching democratic culture and empowerment of women are important across ecosystems.



## 1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

**Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform**

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news item were presented:

1. Announcement of the [upcoming Clusters meet Regions events](#)
2. Save the date for the upcoming [Matchmaking event in Singapore](#) on 30 October
3. Call for expression of interest to join [Industry 5.0 Community of Practice](#)
4. Enterprise Europe Network is organising a [pitching session with SMEs](#) offering energy saving and energy efficient solutions on 22 June
5. [Consultation meeting](#) on Commission initiative to enhance European Administrative Space
6. [Trend Universe](#): A new feature for Pro Users to better understand future trends and build the cluster strategy

## 2. Pact for Skills and Net-Zero Industry Act

**Daniela Santopolo, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission**

Daniela Santopolo presented the Pact for Skills and the Net-Zero Industry Act, two initiatives that address the skills gaps in the Single Market. She explained that over 70% of European enterprises report a lack of skills hindering their investment, and one in four SMEs across the EU struggles to find skilled staff. The green transition is expected to impact 35% to 40% of all jobs, requiring extensive upskilling and reskilling efforts. To address these challenges, the European Commission launched the Pact for Skills to mobilise private and public stakeholders to take concrete actions to skill the European workforce. By today, 18 large-scale partnerships have been launched, bringing together diverse stakeholders to facilitate effective up- and reskilling actions, and over 1,500 signatories from all Member States and sectors have joined the Pact, with a third making concrete commitments. In addition, the Pact offers access to support from the EU, providing networking, knowledge, and guidance to support the different stakeholders.

Another initiative to address the skills gap is the Net-Zero Industry Act. It establishes framework conditions to develop the net-zero technology sectors and scale up manufacturing capacities. As net-zero technologies require many skilled workers, chapter V of the act focusses on enhancing skills for quality job creation. The aim is to create academies in form of projects to design learning content with input from industry, education, and training providers, offer learning content to interested education providers, and deploy learning credentials to facilitate the transparency of skills. The first example is the European Batteries Academy that has started operating. Academies are furthermore planned for solar, hydrogen, and raw materials. Moreover, there will be a Net-Zero Industry Platform to deal with specific tasks, including skills, and monitor the academies.



### 3. ERASMUS+ traineeship

**Vito Borrelli, Team Leader, DG EAC, European Commission**

Vito Borrelli explained the Erasmus+ traineeship, a valuable opportunity for companies, SMEs, and start-ups to engage in higher education. These traineeships are available for students at various academic levels, as well as young graduates, and can last between 2 to 12 months, with shorter stays possible through virtual cooperation. He emphasised that any type of employer, including SMEs, start-ups, or clusters, can host a trainee. This Erasmus+ programme funds over 100,000 grants annually, covering travel and subsistence costs.

Vito Borrelli pointed out the benefits to companies of having a trainee:

- Trainees can provide a fresh international perspective, innovative ideas, and active support.
- Their presence boosts enthusiasm and enhances competitiveness and innovation capacity.
- A trainee's understanding of their home culture can open doors to new market opportunities and expand business reach.
- The employer gains enhanced competences in other languages and up-to-date IT skills.

To find prospective trainees, an EU-co-funded [website](#) can assist in matching traineeship offers with suitable candidates.

### 4. Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs

**Katerina Nejdlova, Team Leader, DG GROW, European Commission**

Katerina Nejdlova introduced the programme Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, which supports aspiring entrepreneurs in Europe by providing them with valuable skills and knowledge to start and run small businesses. It is partly financed by the European Commission. Through the programme, new entrepreneurs, who are either planning to start their own business or are in the early stages, collaborate with entrepreneurs with at least 3 years of experience for a period of 1 to 6 months. That way, new entrepreneurs gain on-the-job training, develop entrepreneurial skills, expand their business knowledge, and build a network by collaborating directly with the host entrepreneur. Host entrepreneurs, in return, benefit from fresh perspectives, new ideas, and potentially discover foreign market opportunities. The programme also opens doors for networking and establishing long-term business partnerships.

Katerina Nejdlova explained that Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs promotes peer-to-peer exchange rather than traditional internships. It provides a supportive and collaborative environment for aspiring entrepreneurs to gain hands-on experience and valuable insights from experienced entrepreneurs. Several alumni share their success stories online and serve as inspiration. Until now, more than 11,300 exchanges have taken place. She highlighted that there are no deadlines and no sector limitations for the application.



## 5. Panel debate

The panelists presented their different activities and approaches to re- and upskilling, the skills set needed for the green and digital transition, and opportunities that initiatives like the Pact for Skills offer to stakeholders involved in education and training.

Carolina Garcés, from an IT cluster in Sweden, explained that in the next year, Sweden will need many IT-skilled professionals. Together with the region, they developed a project called Co-Skill, where the **cluster helps companies identify needs and gaps**. They analysed the needs from the business perspective and strategy for the digital transformation, building **tailor-made trainings** with the university and vocational centres. That way, more than 2,000 persons from over 200 companies were trained, e.g., on AI, cybersecurity, data management, and leadership. Furthermore, she highlighted that services of digital companies were in high demand in the covid pandemic, which is why deep-tech enterprises have trained manufacturing companies in digital solutions. Carolina emphasised the importance of **strategic thinking**, encouraging the companies to explore how technologies can be utilised in their operations.

Delphine Descorne-Jeanny explained a new type of education option in France, the **école de production**, a private school for young people from 15-17 years. The focus of this school is on practical skills and promoting skill development among students. In 2021, the cluster decided to open this school since they were missing young talent interested in machines and production. They train with real machinery, which is subcontracted from companies. Delphine spoke about the necessity to think about this **operational training** also in initiatives like the Pact for Skills, in order to maintain production capabilities in Europe.

Elin McCallum explained how **entrepreneurial skills** are enabling skills to drive the green and digital transition across sectors. Their organisation has created the “EntreComp” community to develop synergies for education stakeholders interested in entrepreneurial skills. She highlights the diversity of the partners that are interested in incorporating these skills, e.g., creativity, initiative, planning and management, financial literacy, into their sectors and the significance of collaboration and networking, with clusters playing a vital role in facilitating these connections.

Jakub Grodecki, representing in this panel the policy of education, shared insights into the developments in higher education. Universities acknowledge the need to be included in the debate and try to **de-silo their programmes to offer skills in smaller learning components**. For example, he spoke about the project PACK Alliance, which focusses on the needs of the plastics industry. In this specific case, they worked on official certification across countries of the skills at the end of the training programmes. Another example is the digital school of the university of Amsterdam, that accepts students that are not enrolled for specific digital courses. Regarding the Pact for skills, he mentioned that **universities of applied science** play a big role to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application.

Torsten Urban represented both a cluster of the plastics industry in Germany and a VET centre offering education to operate machines. He presented the STEP2LAB project, where the target group is young prisoners between 17 and 20 years. They design the education systematically to fit the industry, putting together **market-driven education and the re-socialisation process**. Torsten Urban also emphasized the importance of strategic thinking, particularly for young individuals, highlighting that



technical jobs are becoming increasingly complex. Elin McCallum confirmed the need to upskill young people into roles and to deliver an understanding of how to be in a business. It is a great opportunity to **integrate more experimental learning** in programmes. She referred to a project where they work with SMEs and policymakers on how to integrate this experimental approach into their work to add value to sector-based learning.

Carolina emphasised that clusters play a fundamental role in this complex agenda, as they can connect and be the voice of SMEs. SMEs often state that they have problems to attract talent or to retain them for senior positions. They experience that young people prefer working in big companies. **Vocational training** can help shorten the time from junior to senior positions so that the workers can advance more quickly within the company.

Regarding opportunities through the Pact for Skills, Daniela Santopolo explained that the Pact has opened up to Ukrainian entities as a consequence of the war. The initiative is encouraging the participation of SMEs and umbrella organisation. Jakub Grodecki added that there is an extensive number of events for networking opportunities to get involved in the Pact for Skills. Furthermore, EURASHA has a community of skills that also offer cooperation opportunities.

Talking about the **needed skills**, Delphine Descorne-Jeanny named engineering, industry design, technicians and operators, electronics, additive manufacturing, automation as the main areas from the perspective of French manufacturing companies. Torsten Urban added understanding the technical processes and substitutions for greener materials for the plastics industry. Carolina Garcés spoke about three levels of skills for digital transformation. The first level is specialised skills to create products and services; the second level is software, e-commerce, and AI; and the third level is generic skills for daily use, e.g., access to digital information. Jakub Grodecki added the overarching **democratic culture** for the twin transition, looking at the question of how the changes link with society.

Addressing life-long learning, Katerina Nejdlova highlighted that programmes like Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs have very diverse participants. People join those programmes because they want to explore and change careers. Carolina Garcés and Torsten Urban confirmed that cluster managers continue to learn in their trajectory. They need to get in touch with the technical knowledge of their companies and for the projects.

Closing the panel, Carolina Garcés, Elin McCallum, and Katerina Nejdlova emphasised the needed **empowerment of women**, especially in the digital field. Katerina Nejdlova referred to the ESTEAM project to encourage females to pursue these careers.

## 6. Funding opportunities

**Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform**

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Assessing and strengthening the complementarity between new technologies and human skills](#); Opening on 4 October 2023



2. [Strengthen economic fairness and resilience of active labour market policies and address high unemployment](#); Opening on 4 October 2023
3. [Skills and Education Guarantee Pilot](#); Deadline on 30 June 2027
4. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)