



EUROPEAN CLUSTER  
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

# European Cluster Conference: Results and visions for the future of clusters

## Summary

EU Clusters Talks  
5 October 2022, 8:30 – 9:30 CEST

An initiative of the European Union





## EU Clusters Talk “European Cluster Conference: Results and visions for the future of clusters”

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 5 October 2022, 8:30 – 9:30 CEST, to reflect on the key learning from the European Cluster Conference and discuss the vision for the future of clusters with the European Commission, the European Cluster Manager of the Year, the European Cluster Partnership of the Year, and representatives of cluster networks.

### Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Video: Highlights from the European Cluster Conference
3. Introduction to the topic of the day  
*Ulla Engelmann, Head of Unit – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission*
4. Takeaways and perspectives from the European Commission  
*Marek Przeor, Team Leader D.2 – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission*  
*Benoit Esmanne, Policy Officer – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission*
5. Panel debate: Key learning from the conference and outlook for the next 1-2 years  
*Kristina Sermuksnyte-Alesiuniene, General Manager, [Agri-Food Lithuania DIH](#), European Cluster Manager of the Year 2022*  
*Veerle De Graef, Programme Manager, Flanders' FOOD ([EF](#)), European Cluster Partnership of the Year 2022*  
*Antonio Novo, President, European Clusters Alliance ([ECA](#))*  
*Anais Le Corvec, Managing Director, Council of European BioRegions ([CEBR](#))*
6. Funding opportunities

### Key messages:

- The European Cluster Conference showed that participants from different countries are ready to engage in closer interregional and international collaboration. Clusters should promote the cross-collaboration for the most important European value chains.
- The established smart specialisation partnerships should be further used to shape the new initiatives launched by the European Commission.
- Clusters have advantages if they build stable structures on vertical and horizontal levels. These meta networks are organised structures of collaboration. The Euroclusters offer an excellent opportunity to build new trans-European networks.
- Clusters should extend the dialogue with external actors and other DGs from the European Commission to enlarge the scope and spread their voice.
- Clusters should translate policies into innovation steps for their companies.



## 1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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

After the introduction by moderator Jennifer Baker, the following news items were presented:

1. Application to the [Cluster Booster Academy](#) is open until 31 October 2022.
2. Meet the [2020 Partnerships](#): a New Video Series on ClusterXChange partnerships is available.
3. [Input Paper](#) “Clusters and Important Value Chains with Singapore” is published on European Cluster Collaboration Platform.
4. EEN Info Day on Invest EU opportunities takes place on 13 October

## 2. Introduction to the topic of the day

### Ulla Engelmann, Head of Unit – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission

Ulla Engelmann thanked all involved parties for the successful organisation of this year’s European Cluster Conference. She highlighted the **positive atmosphere** at the conference and the need to meet and exchange. The conference provided opportunities for new contacts and potential collaborations, which is reflected by the **high participant rate** with more than 500 persons onsite. In total, more than 900 participants from over 40 countries joined the European Cluster Conference. In addition, before the start of the conference, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised a matchmaking event with more than 200 participants and 550 on-site bilateral meetings. An exhibition hall provided the opportunity to have bilateral meetings.

The objective of the European Cluster Conference was to **discuss the role of clusters in the implementation of the updated EU Industrial Strategy**. A strong focus was placed on resilience as well as reactions to the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine. International partners attended the conference; the European Commission welcomed a Canadian delegation.

One of the highlights was the award ceremony for the European Cluster Manager of the Year and European Cluster Partnership of the Year. The awards showed the importance of **food security** and the work done by the clusters and policymakers.

Ulla Engelmann shared that the European Commission received valuable input for the Transition Pathways **to feed the work of the Industrial Forum**. The discussions helped to make the case for clusters’ involvement in the implementation of the updated EU Industrial Strategy.

## 3. Takeaways and perspectives from the European Commission

### Marek Przeor, Team Leader D.2 – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission

### Benoit Esmanne, Policy Officer – Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters, DG GROW, European Commission

Benoit Esmanne highlighted the success of the European Cluster Conference in terms of participation and meeting opportunities. In total, 22 EU Member States were represented, with Spain, France, Czechia, Poland, Italy, and Belgium as the countries with the most participants. In the two days, there were **many bilateral and multilateral meetings** on the spot in addition to the planned meetings.



Marek Przeor summarised the opening sessions, which included the presentation of the policy priorities of the Czech presidency (energy, cyberspace security, defence) and the needs of emerging clusters and mature clusters to cope with the current challenges. The panellists concluded that **clusters are frontrunners**, not followers. In the first panel discussion, the speakers discussed how clusters need to catalyse change at speed and scale in times of crisis, and how they orchestrate multiple stakeholders for the green and digital transition. The panel focused on energy and discussed European dependence on the example of solar panel production, highlighting the need for investments and high-level capacities. Accelerated grant instrument, state/credit guarantees, and tax credit system were mentioned.

Benoit Esmanne reflected on the 2<sup>nd</sup> panel session, which presented the **work of the Industrial Forum**. The speakers gave an update on the status of the Transition Pathways for the different ecosystems. Then, two practical examples from Sweden and the automotive sector showed how the green transition can be implemented.

Following, Marek Przeor and Benoit Esmanne presented the six breakout sessions that took place on the second day of the conference:

1. **Up-skilling and reskilling.** The participants learned from young cluster managers how clusters can attract talents and how young SMEs can find their place in the business market.
2. **Internationalisation.** The participants heard from two cluster partnerships – a Canadian “supercluster” and the Japan IP Help Desk – and spoke about learnings from internationalisation activities.
3. **Transition pathways.** In a world café session, there were active discussions for six industrial ecosystems of how clusters can contribute to rolling out the Transition Pathways.
4. **Supply chains.** The participants discussed lessons learned from the covid pandemic and the importance of creating trust, a map of resources, and diversifying linkages. The Ukrainian representative spoke about the war in Ukraine and called for orders and collaboration.
5. **Regional development.** In a world café session, the participants spoke about how to integrate clusters into regional economic development. They agreed that clusters need to active at policy level and co-create the implementation.
6. **Cross-border and cross-ecosystem collaboration.** The participants agreed that it is crucial to find common interests to collaborate. Different instruments can bring actors together.

Marek Przeor emphasised that we have the capacity, knowledge, and network in all the areas that were discussed.

## 4. Panel debate

The panellists shared their main takeaways from the European Cluster Conference and ideas for the next steps for clusters. Kristina Sermuksnyte-Alesiuniene highlighted that clusters play a crucial role in the twin transition and value chain resilience, as they can develop regions and support strategic sectors. Many EU Member States already have smart specialisation strategies, and clusters can help implementing these strategies in their regions. At the conference, she experienced that all the participants from the different countries want to cooperate to **enhance the interregional and international collaboration**. We should promote the “cross” collaboration for the most important European value chains and encourage other clusters to contribute to the Transition Pathways. She stressed **the need to develop new cluster initiatives** and create good examples for countries that do not have any cluster policies yet. With her colleagues, she also talked about EU programmes that had a real impact on helping clusters access funding.

Veerle De Graef added that clusters were put on the stage as agents of change. Many new initiatives are being launched, but in her view, the potential of clusters is not fully used yet. She said that it is not always immediately clear if new initiatives fit into the cluster reality. For example, **the established smart specialisation partnerships should be further used to shape the new initiatives**.



Antonio Novo spoke about the benefits of dedicating a full morning to cluster networks. He stated that clusters grow from organising themselves through networks. **It is an advantage to have a common voice and stable structures** to, for example, contribute to the Transition Pathways in the Industrial Forum. He announced that meetings will be organised to discuss the contributions to the Transition Pathways. Furthermore, Antonio Novo explained that clusters are working on their capacity to react in crisis times and are preparing for the coming months. Our organisations can help **align the capacities** for what is needed.

Anaïs Le Corvec affirmed the positive feedback about connecting in person. She identified **“cross”** as the conference’s “buzz word” to collaborate across the different ecosystems. For the next European Cluster Conference, Anaïs Le Corvec proposed to invite **more external actors** and other DGs from the European Commission, as the next step is to carry the voice of the clusters further towards external actors.

With regards to the crisis, Kristina Sermuksnyte-Alesiuniene stressed the challenges to continue building the EU single market and working on the most important value chains. We need to understand that we are building **strategic autonomy** for European ecosystems. To accomplish this, she said to think out of the box, adapt and regroup. Collaboration is the only way, e.g., in meta networks for the different ecosystems.

Veerle de Graef pointed out that we need a mentality shift in the companies to deal with the changes. **Clusters should translate policies into innovation steps.** Connecting knowledge is key. She suggested to build networks of clusters to learn from each other to take the extended knowledge back to the companies, thus helping companies to build resilience at home.

Antonio Novo emphasised that it is critical to go out of the comfort zone and **bring clusters to other environments.** Clusters need to explain their capacities. The **Euroclusters** are a good opportunity to do this. This new structure can help build trans-European networks. His personal recommendation for the Euroclusters is to look for synergies and actively promote linkages to other Euroclusters. Anaïs Le Corvec affirmed the opportunities for the Euroclusters and the real impact on the citizens that these collaborations can have. However, clusters also need the resources to bring the solutions to the people.

## 5. Funding opportunities to strengthen resilience

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

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann presented the following funding opportunities:

From the European Commission:

1. [Enhanced preparedness and management of High-Impact Low-Probability or unexpected events](#). Deadline to apply is 23 November 2022.
2. [Boosting awareness raising for mainstream enterprises to work with social enterprises](#). Deadline to apply is 7 December 2022.
3. [Specialised education programmes or modules in key capacity areas](#). Deadline to apply is 24 January 2023.

From Cluster Partnerships:

1. InnORBIT pilots a train-the-trainers programme for business support organisations and innovation intermediaries with interest in space. [Expression of interest on project website](#).