



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Clusters in Policies: From National and Regional Agendas to Industrial Strategies

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
10 September 2025, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Clusters in Policies: From National and Regional Agendas to Industrial Strategies

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, hosted the EU Clusters Talk “**Clusters in Policies: From National and Regional Agendas to Industrial Strategies**” on 10 September, from 8:30 – 9:45 CET. The session showcased how different Member States integrate cluster support into their regional and industrial policy frameworks, discuss successful approaches, and reflect on what is needed to strengthen coherence and impact in the evolving policy landscape.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderator: Jennifer Baker

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Insights from ECCP Policy Factsheets
Fabian Schmidt, Consultant, Prognos and team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
3. Panel debate
Annie Renders, Head of Unit Cluster Policy & Strategic Relations, Government of Flanders, VLAIO
Robert Wenzel, Head of R&D Infrastructure Department, Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic
Lukas Nögel, Project Manager, German „go-cluster“ program of the BMW and Senior Consultant at VDI/VDE-IT
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- Clusters are essential instruments linking industrial policy, innovation, and regional development in Europe.
- Fifteen EU Member States run dedicated cluster policies, while others integrate them into wider innovation strategies.
- The twin transition (green and digital) has become a central driver of cluster policy.
- Base funding sustains cluster organisations, while project funding mobilises action on strategic priorities.
- Flexible monitoring and evaluation systems help clusters adapt to emerging challenges.
- Euroclusters and cascade funding will gain importance in the 2028–2034 EU budget period.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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

1. [Feedback on the 28th Regime](#): consultation launched for a harmonised EU-wide corporate legal framework for innovative companies, open until 30 September 2025.
2. [Public Consultation](#) on the European Innovation Act, open until 3 October 2025.
3. Commission seeks experts for the AI Scientific Panel to advise on the implementation of the AI Act; [applications](#) open until 14 September 2025.
4. [ECCP Investment Survey](#) launched to collect information on major investments attracted by European clusters for the Summary Report 2025.
5. Register for [Clusters meet Regions in Vaasa](#), Finland, on 24–25 September 2025.
6. Register for [C2Lab and Cluster Summit Finland in Kuopio](#), 28–30 October 2025.
7. Discover the [State of the Digital Decade 2025 report](#).
8. [Apply](#) for the AI Scientific Panel; deadline 14 September.
9. Register for the [Matchmaking in Taipei](#), Taiwan, 21–23 October 2025.
10. Register for the [Matchmaking in Bac Ninh](#), Vietnam, 4–6 November 2025.
11. Register for [Clusters meet Regions in Regensburg](#), Germany, on 26–27 November 2025, focusing on cross-innovation and sustainability

2. Insights from ECCP Policy Factsheets

Fabian Schmidt, Consultant, Prognos and team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Fabian Schmidt began by explaining the scope and validation of the 2024 fact sheets, which cover EU and Single Market Programme countries as well as selected third countries. The data, collected **between August and December 2024**, was validated by national authorities and reviewed by experts from the European Cluster Alliance.

He then addressed the geographical spread of cluster policies. Fifteen Member States have dedicated national or regional cluster policies, with a **clear distribution**: southern and central Europe tend to adopt specific cluster frameworks, while northern and south-eastern Europe often integrate clusters into broader innovation or smart specialisation strategies.

Turning to the historical context, Fabian Schmidt described three phases:

- **1990–2020 (Globalisation)**: Cluster policies emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional industrial and regional policies in globalised markets.
- **2000s (Place-based policy)**: Strategies such as smart specialisation shaped the competitiveness agenda.
- **2020 onwards (Goeconomic competition)**: A new industrial revolution, centred on clean energy, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology, requires active industrial policy to



determine where future value creation will occur. Globalisation has not ended but shifted towards diversification of supply chains, enhancing resilience.

The speaker detailed how cluster policies interact with broader industrial agendas. Some adopt **sectoral selectivity**, explicitly supporting defined industries and creating platforms to link clusters with national initiatives. For example, the Netherlands' Topsectoren policy targets ten sectors, while Spain's policy emphasises digitalisation and Industry 4.0. Many cluster policies also incorporate **twin transition objectives**, embedding green and digital priorities into their design.

Funding models were presented as a crucial element. **Base funding** supports the ecosystem by sustaining cluster organisations and networks, while **project funding** mobilises clusters to deliver on policy priorities. France, for instance, has reduced direct support for its competitiveness clusters, pushing them towards project-based funding under France 2030. Poland's multi-tiered approach differentiates funding access across national, regional, and super-regional clusters.

Fabian Schmidt also stressed the alignment of cluster policies with **Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)**. In Denmark, a dedicated cluster policy directly reflects the country's 14 national S3 priorities, whereas Slovenia embeds cluster support into broader innovation partnerships.

Looking ahead to the [EU budget period 2028–2034](#), Fabian Schmidt noted a potential shift in funding logic from cohesion and ERDF-driven support to a Competitiveness Fund with stronger industrial policy orientation. This could enhance the role of Euroclusters and cascade funding mechanisms in interfacing with sectoral EU programmes. Ultimately, while cluster policies must continue fostering innovation and ecosystem development, they are increasingly expected to take on strategic roles in Europe's industrial transformation.

3. Panel debate

All speakers outlined contrasting national frameworks that converge on similar objectives.

Lukas Nögel outlined the **German approach**, centred on the go-cluster programme, which has operated for more than a decade as a national excellence initiative. It professionalises cluster organisations and strengthens their management. He also described major initiatives such as the “transformation networks” of the automotive industry, backed by **more than €130 million in direct funding to support regional industrial transition**. He stressed that clusters and networks are increasingly used as instruments for developing regional strategies, particularly under pressures of structural economic change, the green and digital twin transition, and global competition. The pandemic highlighted clusters' role in resilience, especially in biotech and healthcare, while defence and security have recently emerged as new areas of engagement. On flexibility, he explained Germany's multi-level monitoring system, combining project-level and programme-level evaluations, with regular reporting to ministries and scope to adapt funding cycles. Although some schemes cover up to 90–100 per cent of costs, he underlined the continued importance of private co-financing. He also noted the creation of a “**Service Centre for Industrial Transformation**” to support emerging networks with non-financial services.

Robert Wenzel explained that the **Czech Republic** has maintained a **national cluster programme** for seventeen years, offering stability and predictability for the ecosystem, but without a dedicated



cluster strategy. Clusters are embedded in wider innovation policies and Cohesion Policy, supported primarily through ERDF funding, with about €40 million currently available. He emphasised that clusters are key to strengthening SMEs' innovation capacity. Drivers in the Czech case include industrial modernisation, uptake of advanced technologies, and integration into EU partnerships such as Euroclusters. He stressed that grants remain the main form of support, while warning of diminishing returns when funding repeatedly goes to the same applicants. The most impactful results have come from **joint innovation and research projects coordinated by clusters and taken up by SMEs**. The absence of a rigid national cluster policy allows flexibility in adjusting calls to EU trends and cluster maturity, though Wenzel cautioned against diluting objectives by chasing every new theme. He added that official recognition of clusters is unnecessary in the Czech Republic; eligibility depends instead on criteria such as critical mass, openness, and integration with research institutions.

Annie Renders traced the **Flemish cluster policy** to 2015, building on a legacy of networks and platforms. The region now supports six spearhead clusters with base funding and project finance, aligned with Smart Specialisation. She highlighted their increasing focus on societal and industrial priorities—digitalisation, sustainability, health and climate neutrality (delivering practical solutions through collaboration between firms and research institutions). She underlined that the Flemish government explicitly reaffirmed its commitment to clusters in the 2024 government declaration and in its **Productivity and Competitiveness Agenda**. Industry commitment, in her view, is essential for clusters' credibility: company co-financing guarantees relevance, while public base funding allows longer-term transitions to be addressed. Research facilities contribute significantly through project-based activities. She described a **KPI system operating on three levels**: project results, programme effects, and wider impacts on competitiveness; while acknowledging the limits of proving causality in the long run. Public funding, she noted, should not overlap with market consultancy services, but focus on areas with wider societal benefit.

Despite different national models, the speakers converged on several themes. Drivers of cluster policy include the twin transition, geoeconomic competition, resilience, and sovereignty. Lessons from the pandemic reinforced the importance of clusters in crisis response. **Defence and security** have become new fields for cluster activity. The panel contrasted base funding, which sustains cluster organisations, with project funding, which drives delivery on public priorities. **France and Poland** were cited as cases of shifts towards project-based or multi-tiered models. Industry commitment, alignment with Smart Specialisation, and research collaboration were considered essential pillars of success.

On flexibility, Germany and the Czech Republic emphasised project-based approaches, evaluation cycles and adaptive calls, while Flanders stressed that base funding provides stability for long-term societal transitions. **On recognition**, Belgium operates regionally and engages directly with the Commission, while the Czech Republic allows open eligibility without formal national recognition. Germany highlighted the dual role of excellence programmes like go-cluster and advisory schemes for emerging networks.

All panellists agreed that **clusters are vital instruments to link industrial and regional policies**, support competitiveness, and accelerate the green and digital transition. They shared the view that joint collaborative projects yield the most tangible impacts, especially for SMEs, and that evaluation systems must balance rigour with practicality. They also agreed that project funding promotes



adaptability. **Differences emerged in institutional design:** Flanders favours formal recognition and mixed funding, the Czech Republic prioritises open criteria within innovation frameworks without recognition, while Germany combines excellence programmes with flexible sectoral initiatives and a strong reliance on co-financing.

Some questions from the audience focused on **KPIs, flexibility, and representation**. Annie Renders emphasised the balance between company commitment and government partnership, with KPIs applied at three levels. Robert Wenzel underscored the value of joint projects for SMEs and warned against overfunding the same actors. Lukas Nögel detailed Germany's monitoring practices and explained how flexibility is maintained through cyclical project funding. On recognition and representation, Renders clarified that Belgian regions interact directly with the Commission, while Nögel stressed the usefulness of European-level platforms as two-way communication channels.

Each country has adapted its cluster policy model to its institutional context: Flanders relies on formalised clusters with base and project funding, the Czech Republic integrates clusters into broader innovation frameworks without official recognition, and Germany blends excellence-based programmes with sectoral transformation networks and flexible monitoring. Looking ahead, clusters are expected to play stronger roles in resilience, defence, and societal challenges, while continuing to foster innovation ecosystems.

4. Funding opportunities

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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

1. [Implementing co-funded action plans for connected regional innovation valleys](#); deadline 15 October 2025.
2. [Accelerating uptake through open proposals for advanced SME innovation](#), deadline 12 November 2025.
3. [Uptake Acceleration Services](#), deadline 12 November 2025.