



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

EU Clusters Talks Special: Recap on key policies and takeaways

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
13 December 2023, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





EU Clusters Talks Special: Recap on key policies and takeaways

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 13 December, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to summarise important policy information, reflect on the main results of the morning exchanges, and discuss the takeaways that clusters can integrate into their work.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. EU Clusters Talks in numbers
Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Key policies for the twin transition and resilience building
Marek Przeor, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Enablers for the twin transition: the role of skills, technology, and funding
Valentino Izzo, EISMEA, European Commission
4. Panel debate
Dimitri Ionescu, Founder, Lightmirror
Giacomo Martinotti, Vice President, Distretto Aerospaziale Piemonte
Mike Richardson, Senior Project Manager, OpTecBB
Monika Antonowicz, Expert in Strategy and Analysis Department, Polish Agency for Enterprise Development
5. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The EU Clusters Talks discussed many aspects of the green and digital transition as well as building resilience.
- Key enablers are skills, technologies, and funding.
- The EU Clusters Talks help gaining insights into different sectors, keeping up with trends and policy developments, learning from other clusters, and initiating new collaboration opportunities.
- Upcoming topics will cover the areas of the Commission work programme and cluster needs.



1. EU Clusters Talks in numbers

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Jennifer Baker, Nina Hoppmann presented the statistics on the EU Clusters Talks:

1. 1,200 individuals connected to at least one EU Clusters Talk
2. More than 5,000 registrations
3. More than 3,000 unique attendees
4. More than 200 speakers
5. More than 17,000 views of recorded videos (380 on average)
6. Top countries represented: Belgium, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, Ukraine

2. Key policies for the twin transition and resilience building

Marek Przeor, DG GROW, European Commission

Marek Przeor gave an overview of the various topics and the underlying policies that were discussed in the EU Clusters Talks over the past two years. The basis is the EU industrial strategy focussing on the green transition, digital transition, and resilience. In addition to these building blocks, the need for skills, funding, and technology can be found across these priorities and are recurrent in the messages from the EU Clusters Talks.

The green transition was a central theme in the agenda. This transition is multifaceted, addressing various aspects of moving towards a more sustainable and environmentally friendly economy. Marek Przeor emphasised the importance of renewable energies and bio-based products, particularly in light of the impact of the Russian-Ukraine conflict on energy and food security. Renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power are key elements in reducing dependency on fossil fuels and mitigating climate change. Construction and mobility are two sectors that are key to the green transition. Similarly, it is necessary to secure supply chains for critical raw materials, such as rare earth elements used in renewable energy technologies. Furthermore, the green transition is linked to broader macroeconomic factors like human resources, capital investment, and productivity. The role of policy in guiding and accelerating the green transition both through European and national policies to provide direction, incentives, and support for businesses.

The digital transition is another significant area, covering topics like cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), industry 4.0 and 5.0, Internet of Things, blockchain, and quantum computing. Marek Przeor highlighted the shift towards a more interconnected, technologically advanced economy. With the increasing digitisation of industries and services, cybersecurity emerges as a critical concern. The focus is on safeguarding data, protecting networks, and ensuring the security of digital operations against cyber threats. AI is recognised as a transformative technology across various sectors. The European Commission's proposal for an AI Act is a significant step in regulating and encouraging the ethical and responsible use of AI. Furthermore, Industry 4.0 and 5.0 describe the integration of digital technologies into manufacturing and industrial practices, with Industry 4.0 focusing on automation, data exchange,



and the Internet of Things (IoT), and Industry 5.0 focussing on the collaboration between humans and smart systems.

Many EU Clusters Talks were closely linked to resilience building in the European Union. Marek Przeor spoke about the need to address challenges in food supply and logistics. The integration of Ukrainian companies into the EU value chains is highlighted as a priority. This involves reshaping trade and collaboration practices to include and support Ukrainian businesses more effectively. Additionally, we need to address the dependency on imports of critical raw materials from vulnerable countries and find alternatives through research and diversifying supply source. This is linked to strengthening the Single Market, especially in light of its 30th anniversary. Defence and the development of dual-use technologies are identified as other important areas. This involves technologies that can be used for both civilian and military applications. Lastly, healthcare remains a critical area of focus, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. All these topics reflect the EU's focus on resilience, innovation, and strategic autonomy across various sectors, emphasising the need for collaboration, research, and policy development to address these challenges.

Future topics include cluster-related issues such as business models, meta-clustering, support for start-ups and scale-up, and global outreach. Artificial Intelligence as a disruptive technology will remain an important topic. Policy topics are biotechnologies and the transition pathways of mobility and defence. Skills, funding, and technologies will be concurring cross-sectoral topics. Marek Przeor concludes by encouraging the study of the European Commission's work program for 2024.

3. Enablers for the twin transition: the role of skills, technology, and funding

Valentino Izzo, EISMEA, European Commission

Valentino Izzo reflected on the three main enablers for the twin transition and resilience building: skills, technology, and funding.

Regarding skills, Valentino Izzo described the significant focus on addressing the skills gap in Europe. Over 70% of European enterprises report a lack of skills hindering investments, with one in four struggling to find skilled staff. The green transition is expected to impact around 40% of jobs, necessitating extensive upskilling and reskilling. Clusters play a pivotal role in facilitating this. He gave the example of the “Co-Skill” project in Sweden and the French “*école de production*”, which are about practical skills and operational training. Collaboration with universities for adaptable learning and addressing gender skill gaps is also highlighted. Clusters should collaborate with regional partners, companies, universities, and vocational centres to develop tailor-made training programs. These programmes should be designed to address the specific requirements of industries and regions.

Looking at technology, Valentino Izzo highlighted that addressing technology gaps is crucial for maintaining technological leadership. Strategic technologies of interest are photonics, quantum technologies, and green tech. These technologies have a wide range of applications, from manufacturing to healthcare, and are essential for advancing Europe's technological capabilities. The



challenges include technology uptake, especially for SMEs, and ensuring market access for innovative solutions. Further, it is important to reduce dependencies from raw materials from 3rd countries to achieve tech sovereignty. For this, the Commission proposed the Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP).

Funding is another key enabler for the transition. In the EU Clusters Talks, we discussed different funding programmes for clusters, including shared and direct management EU funding, cascading grants, and private financing. The importance of having a mix of public and private funding was emphasised. Examples of clusters adapting their business models to facilitate this mix were provided, such as the Ireland Southeast Financial Services Cluster's creation of a fintech centre. Additionally, there are other forms of support that were addressed over the past two years. Valentino Izzo highlighted the discussions on patents, innovation procurement, business model changes, and tools to increase transparency and comparability.

3. Panel debate

The speakers reflected on the use of the EU Clusters Talks for their daily work. Dimitri Ionescu, representing an SME, highlighted the value of these talks in gaining knowledge about current topics and how it benefits his company, particularly in the construction sector. Monica Antonowicz gained insights into best practices in Polish clusters and clusters in other parts of Europe, aiding in her policy development work. Mike Richardson described how the EU Clusters Talks have been instrumental in his work with the photonics, quantum, and deep technology community in Berlin. He emphasised the role of these Talks in facilitating international collaborations, especially in Ukraine, and how they helped establish the first photonics cluster in Ukraine. Giacomo Martinotti focused the importance of understanding geopolitical and geo-economic factors and the role of SMEs in the industry. All speakers valued the spirit of networking, collaboration, and sharing ideas to address various challenges and opportunities, particularly in light of global shocks and changes. Overall, the EU Clusters Talks are valued as a platform for learning, sharing best practices, and fostering collaborations across different sectors and regions.

In short, the speakers highlighted the following benefits:

- Gaining insights and relevant knowledge in different sectors
- Keeping up with current trends and challenges in the fields
- Inspiring approaches of implementing cluster policies
- Facilitating information and contacts which can lead to new initiatives, e.g., in building partnerships in Ukraine
- Critical role of SMEs
- Continuous observation of geopolitical and geo-economic trends

Regarding the most relevant topics for them, the speakers highlighted sessions on the green and circular transition where they discovered how clusters and their member companies can contribute to these transitions. Furthermore, they put emphasis on building a resilient economy, especially in light of global challenges such as the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. Another topic was the difficulty



for SMEs to participate in public tenders and government projects. There was a call for more streamlined and SME-friendly processes in public procurement. The speakers also expressed a desire for more efficient and effective policy implementation strategies. Talking about the EU enlargement, they expressed their interest in starting to broaden the economic and technological networks in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

Looking ahead, there are many topics should be covered, or taken up again, in upcoming EU Clusters Talks. Among them are:

- Green and circular transition
- Resilience of the economy
- Policy implementation and acceleration
- Innovative cluster practices
- Public-Private Investments and Collaboration
- Euroclusters
- Mentoring for emerging and start-up clusters
- Industry Symbiosis
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities of clusters
- Societal challenges, e.g., demographic change

Additionally, the participants in this EU Clusters Talk expressed their interest in:

Which topics would you like to discuss in 2024?

Wordcloud Poll 35 responses 11 participants



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