



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Clusters & SMEs in the EU's Simplification Agenda: Understanding the Omnibus Packages

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
7 May 2025, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Clusters & SMEs in the EU's Simplification Agenda: Understanding the Omnibus Packages

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk "**Clusters & SMEs in the EU's Simplification Agenda: Understanding the Omnibus Packages**" on 26 March, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to present the simplified rules on sustainability and EU investments, understand the benefits for SMEs, and discuss how clusters can support their members in navigating the changes.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderator: Andrew Lansley

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Omnibus packages
Adrian Schertz, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Panel debate
Raffaella Bruzzone, Chair "Access2Finance" Thematic Group, Enterprise Europe Network, Chamber of Commerce of Genoa
Sophia Zakari, Director Enterprise and Legal Affairs, SMEUnited
Werner Pamminer, CEO, Business Upper Austria
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- Clusters are vital enablers of the EU's simplification agenda, translating complex regulations into practical support for SMEs and ensuring that reforms reach businesses on the ground.
- The Omnibus Package marks a turning point for SME competitiveness, with proposed reductions in the administrative burden of 35% and simplified access to finance through InvestEU reforms.
- Simplification must go hand-in-hand with clarity and proportionality, ensuring that sustainability goals are met without overwhelming SMEs with obligations they lack the capacity to fulfil.
- Clusters act as antennas for real-world challenges, gathering feedback from SMEs and funnelling it to EU institutions to shape more effective and responsive policymaking.
- Co-design and continuous dialogue are essential, and clusters are uniquely placed to convene SMEs, financial intermediaries and public authorities to build trust, capacity, and usable pathways through the green and digital transitions.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Andrew Lansley, the following news items were presented:

1. Register for the [EU INDUSTRY DAYS 2025](#), 5–6 June 2025 in Rzeszów, Poland.
2. Register for the [CmR Rzeszów, Poland](#), on 3-4 June 2025.
3. Register for the [CmR Palma, Spain](#), on 14-15 May 2025.
4. Apply for the [call for expressions of interest](#) to co-host future editions of the “Clusters Meet Regions”.
5. Save the date and register for the [next ECCP events](#).
6. Discover [Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs \(EYE\)](#) and its new destinations.

2. Omnibus package

Adrian Schertz, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Schertz explained that the [Omnibus Package](#), adopted on 26 February 2025, forms part of the Commission’s efforts to enhance EU competitiveness and create a more supportive business environment. The package includes legislative proposals covering several key areas:

- **Simplification of sustainability reporting:** the package proposes to reduce reporting obligations for sustainability, alleviating burdens for smaller companies and focusing instead on large firms with greater environmental impact. This includes amendments to the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD).
- **Reduction of administrative burdens:** the objective is to cut administrative requirements by 25% for all businesses and by 35% for SMEs, thereby enabling them to innovate and grow more freely.
- **Improved access to finance:** changes to the InvestEU Regulation are proposed to simplify access to funding, increase guarantees, and streamline procedures, making it easier for SMEs to secure financing.
- **Support for the sustainable transition:** the proposals aim to help businesses adopt the green transition more pragmatically, contributing to the EU’s climate and sustainability goals.

The speaker concluded by highlighting that the Omnibus Package represents a major step towards a **more business-friendly regulatory environment** in the EU. By simplifying rules and reducing red tape, the initiative is expected to empower companies (particularly SMEs and mid-caps) to innovate, scale up and contribute meaningfully to Europe’s sustainable transformation.

3. Panel debate

Raffaella Bruzzone emphasised that **the Omnibus Package represents a direct response from the European Commission** to the administrative burdens faced by SMEs, particularly in accessing sustainable finance. She explained that many SMEs feel overwhelmed by sustainability reporting



requirements and welcomed the proposal for exemptions and voluntary templates as a necessary step to prevent exclusion from the market. She underlined the need for clear, tailored guidelines for financial intermediaries such as banks and funds to ensure that SMEs can truly benefit from these measures.

Sophia Zakari stressed that **reducing administrative burden must not equate to lowering the level of ambition in sustainability**, but rather to ensuring proportionality with SMEs' capacities. She supported the Commission's proposed simplification measures, particularly in relation to obligations stemming from the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). She also highlighted that many SMEs face indirect pressure from large companies to comply with obligations they are not legally subject to, which causes unnecessary tension. She argued that any measures must be accompanied by practical training and support.

Werner Pamminger offered insights from the perspective of **regional cluster management**. He reinforced the importance of clusters as facilitators of dialogue between SMEs, public authorities, and other actors, particularly in interpreting and applying regulations. He pointed out that clusters can act as antennas to detect real implementation difficulties and channel this feedback to Brussels. He also stressed that financial instruments must become more accessible and less bureaucratic, as many SMEs currently lack the capacity to apply without external support.

All speakers agreed that regulatory simplification is essential to enable SMEs to remain competitive amid the green and digital transitions. They shared the view that SMEs require tools proportionate to their size and resources, and that without tailored support, many risk being excluded from sustainable value chains. They also concurred that clusters play a key role in ensuring that reforms are effectively communicated and implemented on the ground.

While no explicit disagreements were voiced, differences in focus were noted. Raffaella placed particular emphasis on the need to **align the expectations of financial intermediaries** with SMEs' actual capabilities. Sophia underscored that **simplification must not mean sacrificing ambition**, while Werner concentrated on the **practical implementation of reforms**, highlighting the importance of translating legislative proposals into usable mechanisms for SMEs.

Throughout the debate, all panellists agreed that regulatory simplification is essential for SMEs to thrive amid green and digital transitions. They stressed the need for proportionate tools, accessible funding, and effective communication of reforms. Clusters were seen not just as intermediaries but as enablers of systemic change, uniquely positioned to translate legislation into actionable support and to channel grassroots feedback into EU policymaking. The discussion closed with a call for **simplification measures to be co-designed with SMEs** and supported through continuous, local-level dialogue between institutions, intermediaries and business communities.



4. 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. [STAGE Sustainability Transition Programme](#); deadline 31 May 2025.
2. [Teaming for Excellence](#); deadline 20 January 2026.
3. [Transforming Food Systems - reshaping food system interactions, fostering food innovations and empowering sustainable food choices](#); deadline 9 July 2025.
4. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).