EUROPEAN CLUSTER COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 1

Summary

EU Clusters Talks
26 November 2025, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union

Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 1

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, hosted the EU Clusters Talk "**Joint Cluster Initiatives: Presenting the new Euroclusters in Strand 1**" on 26 November, from 8:30 – 10:00 CET. The session outlined outline the Euroclusters' objectives and scope and discussed how clusters and their members can actively engage in and benefit from these ambitious European initiatives.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Chris Burns

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
   Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Net-Zero Industry Act
   Daniel Gerber, Team-Leader Net-Zero Industry Act, DG GROW, European Commission
3. Critical Raw Materials Act
   Salvatore Berger, Policy Officer – Raw Materials, DG GROW, European Commission
4. Presentation of Euroclusters
   1. MANUFACTergy: Andreea Toma, Project Manager, HYGIA Consult
   2. GREEN MANTIS: Xavier Alberola, European Project Manager, Association ALPHA-RLH
   3. RENEW-BOOSTER: Elisa Sedat, International Project Manager, Capenergies
   4. PowerUp NetZero: Silvana Sanfeliu, Responsible of Internationalisation and European Project Development, Fondazione Piemonte Innova
   5. RESIST II: Patricia Solá, European Project Manager, CEAGA
   6. JEWEL: Sophie Schmitz, International Project Manager, Pôle MecaTech
   7. Green Grid: Evelina Šalavėjienė, Project Coordinator, Sunrise Tech Park, Cleantech Lithuania
   8. BIONetZero: Mária Šášiková, Project and Communication Manager, Bioeconomy Cluster
5. Q&A
6. Funding opportunities
   Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- The Euroclusters in Strand 1 support the implementation of the Net-Zero Industry Act and Critical Raw Materials Act.
- Central instruments are funding opportunities for SMEs; all Euroclusters will launch calls to fund innovative projects.
- Further support will be provided in form of networking, matchmaking, business advice and internationalisation.

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

The following news items were presented:

1. ECCP Investment Survey launched to collect information on major investments attracted by European clusters for the Summary Report 2025.
2. EU consultation on public procurement; deadline 26 January 2026
3. Call for evidence and public consultation for the Advanced Materials Act; deadline 12 January 2026
4. Invitation to join the Clusters meet Regions in Copenhagen on 3-4 December 2025

2. Net-Zero Industry Act

Daniel Gerber, Team-Leader Net-Zero Industry Act, DG GROW, European Commission

Daniel Gerber recapped the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA), a regulation in force since June last year that aims to strengthen Europe's competitiveness in clean energy technologies by expanding manufacturing capacity in the EU and reducing strategic dependence on China. Europe currently imports many clean-tech products and key components from China, and the battery value chain was highlighted as a critical weakness. The NZIA, alongside the forthcoming Clean Industrial Deal, is intended to turn EU industrial ambitions into real investment conditions for companies, regions and clusters. A central chapter is permitting: for the first time the EU has binding time limits for authorising new factories, designed to harmonise rules across Member States and make Europe more attractive for investment. Other elements include a "strategic projects" label that firms can apply for to gain priority treatment, and new non-price criteria entering public procurement and renewables auctions from 1 January, requiring authorities to value sustainability and supply-chain resilience rather than selecting purely on lowest price. Overall, the regulation applies to new or expanded manufacturing projects across 19 broadly defined net-zero technologies.

An interesting initiative for clusters is the "net-zero acceleration valley". These are regional hubs meant to foster industrial clustering. They can act as a one-stop shop to attract projects and investors. To become a valley, a region must define its geographic and technology scope, carry out an environmental assessment in advance to ease future approvals, and submit a plan to its Member State. Around 11 regions are currently exploring valley status, with the most advanced examples in Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia (all Germany), and Navarre (Spain). Daniel Gerber noted that valleys are built through structured local co-creation between industry, municipalities and governments, including mapping suitable land and building a credible project pipeline. He closed by saying the Commission is stepping up work on valleys with more guidance expected in January.

3. Critical Raw Materials Act

Salvatore Berger, Policy Officer – Raw Materials, DG GROW, European Commission

Salvatore Berger explained how the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) closely complements the Net-Zero Industry Act, because net-zero technologies depend on a secure supply of critical materials—metals and minerals that sit at the very start of industrial value chains. Today those supplies are heavily concentrated, often in China, with some rare earths sourced at over 90% dependence. This creates a strategic vulnerability that can be, and has been, weaponised through export restrictions, affecting everything from EVs and wind turbines to semiconductors, drones and defence. The Commission decided to act after the Covid supply shock and the energy dependence exposed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The CRMA sets 2030 targets to build EU capacity in extraction, processing and recycling, and to diversify away from single-country reliance. Its tools mirror the NZIA: selecting "strategic projects" that get faster permitting and coordinated access to finance, whether located in the EU or in partner countries, as long as they strengthen the EU market. The speaker stressed improved supply-chain monitoring and awareness, noting that companies often think they are diversified because they buy via intermediaries, while upstream dependence remains the same. Circularity is central: recycling projects, battery black-mass recovery, and product design for easier recycling all reduce dependency and extraction needs, alongside stronger sustainability rules.

Salvatore Berger showed that implementation is already advancing, with 47 strategic projects chosen inside the EU and 13 outside, spanning the whole value chain and clustering in active regions such as parts of France, Spain, Belgium and northern Sweden. A new call for strategic projects is open. Finally, he warned that the geopolitical scramble for materials is intensifying, so the Commission is preparing an additional "Resource EU" package to accelerate and complement the CRMA delivery.

4. Euroclusters in Strand 1

The following Euroclusters will support the implementation of the NZIA and CRMA.

MANUFACTergy: Andreea Toma, Project Manager, HYGIA Consult

MANUFACTergy tackles the growing pressures on furnishing and construction SMEs—volatile energy costs, fragile supply chains, and the urgent digital-green transition—by helping them adopt advanced technologies and smart energy systems for real-time efficiency and optimisation, supporting NZIA and CRMA goals. The project is led by eight clusters from seven countries representing 1,000+ SMEs and coordinated through the Go Furniture Meta Clusters alliance. It offers two cascade-funding open calls: "Factory Check-in" (€10k per SME, ~37 firms) for audits and transition planning, and "Factory Transition" (€50k per SME, ~32 firms) for prototyping and implementing solutions. From a €2.7m budget, nearly €2m goes directly to SMEs to accelerate greener, more digital, resilient manufacturing.

GREEN MANTIS: Xavier Alberola, European Project Manager, Association ALPHA-RLH

GREEN MANTIS supports manufacturing SMEs to advance the green transition by improving energy efficiency and adopting net-zero technologies. It responds to the feedback that SMEs can't control energy supply conditions, so the quickest impact comes from optimising their own processes. The project targets three technology areas: energy-efficiency solutions, grid technologies, and industrial decarbonisation tech, aiming to scale EU net-zero production and boost SMEs' strategic autonomy. A six-partner consortium will deliver an integrated support package: up to €100,000 for collaborative innovation projects (minimum two EU SMEs), training sessions on green/digital transition, international missions to a shortlist of six countries, and networking via GREEN MANTIS Days in 2026 and 2027. Two call phases open in March 2026 and 2027, and a needs-analysis survey will let stakeholders shape training themes and target markets.

RENEW-BOOSTER: Elisa Sedat, International Project Manager, Capenergies

RENEW-BOOSTER focuses on three clean-energy ecosystems: photovoltaics, offshore wind, and energy grids. The consortium brings together six clusters and runs for 33 months. Support for SMEs comes as a combined package: financial grants linked to two types of challenges (open and thematic), plus training and business support. Funding targets innovation that reduces dependency on critical inputs and technologies, strengthens supply chains, and accelerates green and digital transition. Beyond the core sectors, SMEs outside photovoltaics, wind, or grids can still join training offers on digitalisation, sustainability, or introductory modules on the three ecosystems. Overall, the project's purpose is to accompany as many SMEs as possible with integrated support, contributing to EU critical raw materials goals, net-zero industry targets, and the Green Deal.

PowerUp NetZero: Silvana Sanfeliu, Responsible of Internationalisation and European Project Development, Fondazione Piemonte Innova

PowerUp NetZero brings together six digital and cleantech clusters from five countries to speed up net-zero applications in the EU single market. It targets five areas are solar, batteries/storage, hydrogen, sustainable biogas/biomethane, and carbon capture and storage. After mapping ecosystem needs, it will offer tailored training (including sector coupling) and nearly €2 million in cascade funding via two calls. About €20k will be available for SME business innovation/tech adoption, and up to €120k for collaborative projects between at least two SMEs (with 20% co-funding). Promising proposals not funded directly will be guided towards other EU funding opportunities.

RESIST II: Patricia Solá, European Project Manager, CEAGA

The RESIST Eurocluster brings together five clusters and a research centre from five European countries in the mobility, transport and automotive ecosystem. It aims to help SMEs green and digitalise their operations while boosting resilience against future shocks. The project offers €1.6m in cascade funding for process and product/service innovation: up to €20k for individual SME projects and up to €30k for consortium projects, with the first open call due in May 2026. Ahead of that, an expression-of-interest call in December will give SMEs early assessments and roadmap support, plus networking via webinars and matchmaking. Funded SMEs will then get technical help, access to external experts, training, and support to internationalise into third-country markets.

JEWEL: Sophie Schmitz, International Project Manager, Pôle MecaTech

JEWEL is the successor to the Gemstone Eurocluster, supporting Europe's manufacturing sector to achieve the twin transition and cut CO_2. With seven partners across seven countries, it aims to accelerate net-zero transition in manufacturing, help innovative SMEs adopt clean and digital tech, and build a European meta-cluster for stronger cooperation and influence. Clusters can join the Meta-Cluster Alliance for green manufacturing, take part in an ambassadors' network, and contribute expertise and business cases to workshops and a knowledge hub. Companies and experts will be engaged through Europe-wide focus groups to build knowledge and co-develop net-zero solutions, linked to funding opportunities. Funding starts from April 2026 with two open calls for collaborative projects between at least two SMEs, and a larger flagship call targeting high value-chain impact based on focus-group results.

Green Grid: Evelina Šalavėjienė, Project Coordinator, Sunrise Tech Park, Cleantech Lithuania

Green Grid, delivered by six partners across Europe, focuses on renewable and smart energy grids, with €2 million in cascade funding for SMEs. It targets areas such as clean energy technologies, grid flexibility and storage, energy efficiency, digitalisation, sustainability, and green manufacturing. Funding is split into four streams and supports two main SME groups: industrial SMEs that first identify their energy-transition challenges and then adopt solutions, and cleantech/digital SMEs that provide innovative technologies to solve those challenges for energy-intensive companies, grid and distribution operators, and then scale successful pilots. The first open call is expected around December or early January.

BIONetZero: Mária Šášiková, Project and Communication Manager, Bioeconomy Cluster

BIONetZero's main aim is to cut European companies' dependence on critical inputs and technologies by helping innovative SMEs and start-ups develop, test, scale and commercialise bio solutions, combining "soft" support with direct grants. The project's core is cascade funding across several grant types: early networking/travel grants of €3,500 for about 100 companies; testing and validation grants of €15,000 for 40 companies; scale-up/product-development grants of €40,000 for 25 companies; and internationalisation grants of €5,000 for four high-growth firms. Beyond funding, SMEs will get a key account manager as a strategic adviser, support to connect with investors, plus networking, pitching, international visits, workshops and training.

5. Q&A

Addressing the questions form the audience, the European Commission clarified why it is funding many Eurocluster projects. This is a second Eurocluster generation building on a successful first round that reached hundreds of SMEs. The aim is to make EU support more accessible and practical for SMEs by working through clusters, which helps overcome paperwork burdens and language barriers and brings funding closer to firms that might otherwise be excluded. Speakers added that dispersing support across multiple smaller initiatives is an advantage: one huge project would be too heavy to manage, while several focused projects create more entry points for SMEs with different needs. Together, the eight projects form interconnected networks offering a full support package (advice, needs mapping, training, tech support, finance, market access, and matchmaking), which is particularly valuable for start-ups and smaller firms.

On internationalisation and accession countries, the panellists confirmed that collaboration with third countries is welcomed through project internationalisation activities, even if these partners are not directly funded via Eurocluster calls. Eligibility for funding depends on association with the Single Market Programme; several accession/associated countries are eligible, with the full list available online.

Finally, the session clarified funding limits: no single SME can receive more than €60k from one Eurocluster. However, SMEs can also apply to multiple Euroclusters for different, non-overlapping parts of a larger project, effectively assembling a bigger funding package without double-financing the same activity.

6. 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. Development of innovative solutions strengthening the security of renewable energy value chains; deadline 17 February 2026.
2. Expanding Investment Ecosystems; deadline 20 January 2026.
3. Scaling up deep tech ecosystems; deadline 20 January 2026.