



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Going Global: Creating Partnerships and Expanding Business Abroad

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
28 May 2025, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Going Global: Creating Partnerships and Expanding Business Abroad

To explore how clusters can enhance global engagement and support their SMEs' internationalisation, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organises the EU Clusters Talk "**Going Global: Creating Partnerships and Expanding Business Abroad**" on 28 May, 8:30 – 10:00 CET. The session will highlight successful models of international cooperation, discuss strategic approaches to global networking, and showcase initiatives that support clusters and SMEs in scaling their international presence.

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. Support for internationalisation
Flavia Ferrasson, Policy Officer, DG TRADE, European Commission
3. Panel debate
Ander González, Internationalisation Manager, Basque Energy Cluster (ELBE Eurocluster)
Ewa Rekosz, International Affairs Director, Mazovia Cluster ICT (INGENIOUS Eurocluster)
Gytis Mikalauskas, Internationalisation Manager, Applied Research Institute for Prospective Technologies (Participant Matchmaking Event)
Josep Casamada, Project Manager, Tèxtils.CAT (xBUILD-EU and EuroBoosTEX Euroclusters)
Sarra Boussaïdi, Project Manager, Anima Investment Network (Euromed Cluster Forward initiative)
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- SMEs are central to the EU trade policy, yet many are still unaware of the tools and trade agreements available to them.
- The Access2Markets portal is a practical and multilingual entry point for SMEs seeking global opportunities in over 140 markets.
- All recent EU trade agreements include SME-specific chapters that promote transparency and facilitate easier market entry.
- Clusters play a critical role as multipliers—bridging EU-level tools and local SME engagement.
- Tailored international missions, focused on sector needs, are more effective than generic trade promotion.
- Building trust and cultural understanding is essential for internationalisation to succeed when relationships come first.



- Time constraints and lack of clear return on investment often deter SMEs—clusters must simplify processes and offer concrete value.
- Showcasing SMEs' success stories and providing hands-on support motivates broader participation and long-term engagement.

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. Register now for the [Matchmaking in India](#), on 29-31 October 2025
2. Be prepared for the upcoming matchmaking events:
 - EU – United Arab Emirates, call to be opened in the forthcoming days, 1 – 3 Oct 2025
 - EU – Taiwan, in preparation, most likely 21 – 23 October 2025
 - EU – Vietnam, in preparation, most likely 4-6 November 2025
3. Register for the [EU INDUSTRY DAYS 2025](#), 5–6 June 2025 in Rzeszów, Poland.
4. Register for the [CmR Rzeszów, Poland](#), on 3-4 June 2025.
5. Apply for the [call for expressions of interest](#) to co-host future editions of the “Clusters Meet Regions”.
6. Save the date and register for the [next ECCP events](#).

2. Support for internationalisation

Flavia Ferrasson, Policy Officer, DG TRADE, European Commission

Flavia Ferrasson began by highlighting the central role that SMEs play in EU trade policy. Despite recent geopolitical challenges such as the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and tensions with the United States and China, trade continues to be vital for SMEs to scale up, diversify suppliers, reduce costs and strengthen their resilience. However, **many SMEs do not fully take advantage of existing trade agreements**, and the share of trade value generated by SMEs remains relatively low.

One of DG TRADE's main priorities is to create a **stable trading environment** through bilateral and multilateral agreements. In this respect, the EU is an active participant in the WTO, particularly in the working group on SMEs, which promotes the exchange of best practices and transparency in trade policy.

In order for SMEs to benefit from trade agreements, access to clear and practical information is essential. To address this, the Commission launched the [Access2Markets portal](#) in 2020. This multilingual, comprehensive tool allows businesses to consult tariffs, customs procedures, regulations, rules of origin, statistics and public procurement opportunities across more than 140 export markets. It also includes features for reporting trade barriers and a self-assessment module on rules of origin (ROSA).



All recent EU trade agreements now include SME-specific chapters, which require partner countries to establish “one-stop-shop” information platforms outlining how to access their markets. Countries with such commitments include Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and Chile, among others.

Flavia Ferrasson also underscored the Commission’s investment in awareness-raising efforts. DG TRADE organises regular, free training sessions on using the Access2Markets portal and actively participates in events held across Member States, such as the Market Access Days, where senior officials, including the Chief Trade Enforcement Officer, engage directly with SMEs to understand their needs and challenges.

She also highlighted the importance of “multipliers”, such as chambers of commerce, trade promotion organisations and networks like the Enterprise Europe Network. These actors receive training from DG TRADE to disseminate information and support SMEs at the local level.

3. Panel debate

The discussion started by identifying the main challenges faced by clusters in supporting internationalisation. Through a Slido poll, the audience highlighted a lack of funding and insufficient SME interest as the most pressing barriers. Additional obstacles mentioned included limited staff capacity and restricted access to international networks.

After that, each panellist introduced their respective clusters, outlining their scope, member profiles and international engagement strategies.

Ander González described the **Basque Energy Cluster’s** focus on sector-specific missions and participation in international trade fairs, particularly within strategic subfields of energy such as offshore renewables.

Ewa Rekosz presented the **Mazovia Cluster ICT**, emphasising its broad value chain and its extensive support to members, notably in the creative industries and through national and EU-funded programmes.

Gytis Mikalauskas shared insights from the **Lithuanian FitTech cluster**, which primarily acts as a bridge between SMEs and international R&D opportunities. His work involves building networks that foster product co-development with foreign partners. Josep Casamada highlighted the importance of internationalisation for the survival and growth of technical textile SMEs, pointing to the significance of tailored services, focused events, and long-standing cooperation frameworks such as meta-clusters and Erasmus+ partnerships.

Sarra Boussaïdi, representing **Anima Investment Network**, focused on regional cooperation across the Mediterranean. She described initiatives to strengthen South-Med clusters, such as capacity-building academies, twinning programmes and matchmaking events. A key aspect of her work involves supporting trust-building and long-term partnerships between clusters from the EU and MENA regions.

There was strong alignment among panellists on the importance of **tailored, trust-based support for SMEs**. All agreed that small enterprises often lack the time and resources to explore international markets alone, making cluster mediation essential. While some clusters focused more on R&D (e.g.



FitTech), others emphasised business development or access to niche markets (e.g. Tèxtils.CAT and Mazovia).

Ewa Rekosz introduced a contrasting viewpoint by pointing out that in wealthier regions, such as Mazovia, SMEs can be more reluctant to engage internationally, expecting immediate returns. Josep Casamada echoed this concern but emphasised that clear value propositions and hands-on support can mitigate hesitancy. Gytis Mikalauskas and Sarra Boussaïdi both stressed the need for increased visibility and dissemination of success stories to motivate further participation.

The panellists agreed on the crucial role of clusters in simplifying access to international markets for SMEs. Trust-building, preparation, and cultural understanding were consistently highlighted as essential components of success. Recommendations included **offering a clear return on investment**, ensuring a focused approach to matchmaking, and actively involving SMEs in the design of missions.

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. [Cluster Business Connect](#); deadline end of June 2025.
2. [Interregional Innovation Investments Strand 1](#); deadline 13 November 2025.
3. [Interregional Innovation Investments Strand 2a](#); deadline 13 November 2025.
4. [Preparatory action for setting up joint programmes among innovation ecosystems actors](#); deadline 15 October 2025.