European Cluster Collaboration Platform

AI Projects Powered by Clusters: Supporting Innovation and Strategic Transformation

Summary

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

An initiative of the European Union

AI Projects Powered by Clusters: Supporting Innovation and Strategic Transformation

To showcase how clusters are facilitating impactful AI projects, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk "**AI Projects Powered by Clusters: Supporting Innovation and Strategic Transformation**" on 9 April, 8:30 – 9:45 CET. The session will highlight concrete examples of cluster-supported AI initiatives, including examples of the C2Lab, share lessons learnt from implementation on the ground, and explore how clusters can strengthen their role as enablers of Europe's AI ecosystem.

Agenda of the meeting
Moderator: Chris Burns
1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
   Antonio Novo, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Panel debate
   Andrei Martiniuc, Manager of the European Projects Department, Transilvania IT Cluster
   Clara Plata Ríos, Project Director, Smart City Cluster
   Joan Puaté, Manager, Digital Cluster of Catalonia
   Elvis Bajric, Cluster Manager Robotics, High Tech NL
   Silvia Rossi, Manager, Clust-ER BUILD
3. Funding opportunities
   Antonio Novo, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages
- Clusters are essential catalysts for AI adoption across sectors, bridging SMEs, innovators and public stakeholders.
- Targeted training for both technical staff and decision-makers is key to sustainable AI integration.
- Working groups and peer matchmaking foster practical AI applications tailored to industry-specific needs.
- Starting with small-scale AI use cases builds trust and accelerates uptake in traditional industries.
- Cross-border cluster collaboration is vital to scale up AI pilots and drive digital resilience in Europe.

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Antonio Novo, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Chris Burns, the following news items were presented:

1. [Consultation](#) on the Clean Industrial Deal
2. Apply to the [call for applications](#) for the selection of members of the expert group on clusters policy.
3. Register for the [C2Lab in Denmark](#), 6-7 May 2025.
4. Register for [EU-South MED Matchmaking Event](#), 16-18 June 2025.
5. Save the date and register for the [next ECCP events](#).

2. Panel debate

Andrei Martiniuc explained how the **Transilvania IT Cluster** supports SMEs through working groups and matchmaking between solution providers and industrial users, particularly in digital health and manufacturing. Joan Puaté outlined how the **Catalan cluster** engages in collaborative AI projects to improve industrial processes, such as grain milling optimisation and fashion demand forecasting. Clara Plata emphasised **AI's transformative applications in smart city development**, from traffic and waste management to citizen engagement platforms. Silvia Rossi described how AI is being used in **construction and cultural heritage preservation**, including digital twins for urban resilience and energy-efficient building maintenance. Elvis Bajric illustrated the **robotics cluster's** hands-on approach to helping SMEs adopt AI by offering solutions and training directly in the field, with a focus on practical demonstrations that build trust and confidence.

One key point of alignment among the speakers was the necessity of **addressing cultural and organisational barriers to AI adoption**. Most agreed that resistance to change and lack of awareness often outweigh technological obstacles. The importance of upskilling and targeted training was highlighted throughout, especially for operational staff and decision-makers in traditional industries. Juan Puaté and Silvia Rossi both stressed the need to invest in capacity building not only for developers but also for managers and public officials, ensuring informed decision-making and smoother adoption.

There was general consensus on the importance of **starting with small-scale use cases to prove AI's value**, particularly in sectors like construction where innovation adoption can be slow. However, some nuances emerged regarding the AI Act and its implications. While some concern was raised about its potential to discourage investment in high-risk startups, panellists such as Joan and Clara emphasised that most industrial AI applications fall into low-risk categories. The act was broadly seen as necessary to create trust and safeguard ethical implementation without stifling innovation. Nevertheless, the need for clusters to offer training and guidance on **regulatory compliance** was acknowledged.

Audience questions prompted further insights. One key question **concerned how clusters promote AI at the SME level.** Joan Puaté emphasised the importance of identifying specific pain points through targeted surveys and noted that cultural resistance often outweighs technological barriers.

Andrei Martiniuc complemented this view by describing the practical role of sector-specific working groups, such as those focused on Industry 4.0 and digital health, which create spaces for SMEs and technology providers to connect and collaborate on AI applications. Another question addressed **how clusters themselves could enhance their own business models using AI**. Elvis Bajric shared how tools like ChatGPT assist in processing complex documentation and project material, stressing that effective use depends on skilled prompting and critical human oversight. His comments highlighted the need for dedicated training and a thoughtful approach to integrating AI into daily cluster operations.

The discussion also covered **future opportunities**. Andrei pointed to digital health and assistive technologies as rising fields, mentioning Romanian startup DotLumen as an example of impactful AI innovation. Clara saw potential in improving citizen well-being through cross-sectoral AI integration in urban services. Elvis proposed developing a European data centre for agricultural AI, advocating for open image sharing to accelerate precision farming innovation. He also envisioned dashboards for farmers to facilitate decision-making based on AI-driven insights.

To sum up, the panel underscored the **critical role of clusters as enablers of AI adoption across sectors.** They act as connectors between SMEs, researchers and public authorities, offering support in skills development, funding access and regulatory navigation. Key takeaways included the need for practical, demonstrable use cases; the centrality of training; the importance of collaborative ecosystems; and the opportunity for Europe to lead in ethical, human-centred AI innovation. The discussion closed with a collective call to translate pilot initiatives into scalable solutions and to deepen cross-border cooperation for a more digitally resilient and competitive Europe.

3. Funding opportunities

Antonio Novo, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Antonio Novo shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Sectoral digital skills academies: Digital Skills Academy in GenAI](#); deadline 15 April 2025.
2. [Sectoral digital skills academies: Virtual Worlds Skills Academy](#); deadline 15 April 2025.
3. [Data Spaces Support Centre](#); deadline 15 April 2025.
4. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform.](#)

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