



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

EU funding opportunities I – Shared management programmes

Summary



EU Clusters Talks

20 September 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union





EU funding opportunities I – Shared management programmes

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 20 September 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET, to give an overview of the programmes and funding opportunities, explain the mechanisms, and share project examples with the involvement of clusters.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Chris Burns

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. The principle of shared management and overview of funds
Andrei Ion, Deputy Head of Unit, DG BUDG, European Commission
3. Project examples and panel debate
Bruno Amaro, Project Manager, MOBINOV
Felix Arion, General Manager, AgroTransilvania Cluster
Mónica Quesada, Project Manager, Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- 70% of the EU's funding is jointly managed by the European Commission and Member States.
- The national authorities publish the calls and funding opportunities on their [national portals](#).
- Clusters can fit in many funding opportunities related to policy, industry, or specific sectors under the different programmes.
- Shared management funds invest in the economic, social and territorial cohesion of Europe and relate to natural resources and environment.
- Applicants are advised to adapt the proposals to specific needs, familiarise themselves with all requirements, maintain close contact with cluster members, secure recommendation letters from relevant entities, start the process early, team up with experienced partners, and think about the unique value proposition in the consortium.
- It is important to look at the financing conditions to be able to handle investments needed from the applicants.
- Funded projects can significantly contribute to the economic and social development of the regions.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Nina Hoppmann, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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

1. The State of the Union address 2023 is available [online](#) in form of speech and video.
2. European Commission announced a new [SME Relief Package](#).
3. European Commission [adopted a proposal](#) to facilitate cross-border activities of non-profit associations in the EU.
4. Invitation to join [upcoming “Clusters meet Regions” events](#) in Bulgaria, France, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, and Poland
5. In-person EU Clusters Talk [“Clusters meet Regions: An #EUClustersTalk on clusters as drivers of regional economic transition”](#) at the EU Regions Week in Brussels on 12 October 2023, 11:30 – 13:00 CET
6. Invitation to attend the [EU Industry Days](#) in Málaga, Spain, on 4-6 October 2023

2. The principle of shared management and overview of funds

Andrei Ion, Deputy Head of Unit, DG BUDG, European Commission

Andrei Ion explained that shared management plays an important role in the European funding ecosystem. At its core, shared management is a principle by which almost **70% of the EU's funding** is jointly managed by the European Commission and national authorities. This cooperative effort is underpinned by the partnership principle, aiming to include national authorities at every level, along with economic and social partners. The intent is to foster a **holistic approach** where stakeholders, such as research organisations, universities, and civil society, collaborate on the direction of funds and its implementation. The Member States submit partnership agreements and programmes, organise calls and select programmes, and is responsible for the day-to-day management. The European Commission assesses and approves the framework and ensures that projects are successfully concluded. The calls are published on [national portals](#).

Andrei Ion explained that the funds are based on a **strategic plan** which guides the implementation on the ground for the next 7 to 9 years. Developed collaboratively with Member States and the Commission, the plan outlines how the funding will be utilized, considering the existing economic conditions. A predominant focus is directed towards less developed regions, aiming to uplift their economic status to align with the EU average. Simultaneously, it addresses broader reform elements that states need to pursue to maintain a positive economic environment. These initiatives often factor in climate change and other environmental concerns. Furthermore, the specific programs within these shared management funds vary, targeting different policy areas. The **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**, the **Cohesion Fund (CF)**, and a large part of the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** largely deal with infrastructure projects, research, innovation, and climate resilience. The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** and the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** invest in social skills, for example in training and re-



skilling or upskilling, and in aiding regions most affected by the green economy transition. The **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)** helps with the sustainable management of natural resources and climate action and addresses the competitiveness of agriculture. And finally, the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)** supports food security through the supply of seafood products and the growth of a sustainable blue economy. In total, the funds resulted in about 1.5 million projects over a seven-year period.

Closing his presentation, Andrei Ion spoke about the **synergies between shared management and direct management funds**. Some Member States opt to transfer part of their shared management allocations to direct management programs when targeting particular projects. A notable mention is the **“Seal of Excellence”**, a quality label from Horizon Europe, which facilitates a simplified procedure to secure funding under shared management for high-caliber projects. In addition, the **Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)** seeks to reinforce, leverage and steer EU funds from different programmes to investments in critical technologies in Europe and introduces the **“Sovereignty Seal”**, which builds on the experience of the Seal of Excellence and covers more programmes, aiming at further expansion of ease of access to EU funding for quality projects.

3. Project examples and panel debate

The panelists presented projects that were financed by funds under shared management, with the aim to give examples of what the funds can be used for. They also shared their experience with achieving the funding and gave tips for the applications to new calls.

Bruno Amaro from cluster MOBINOV presented three projects funded under PT2020 under the **ERDF**. MOBINOV’s mission is to sustainably promote the **growth and continuity of the automotive industry in Portugal through collaboration** among all stakeholders. The first project developed a digital platform to provide crucial data on the automotive industry, both regionally and globally. This data would then be used to produce reports and studies analysing automotive consumer trends, needs, and challenges. It was developed with two other associations from the automotive sector. The second project was about internationalisation and showcasing Portugal's capabilities in the automotive industry to the world. Through press releases, social media campaigns, and international exhibitions, they aimed to attract foreign investment, identify market opportunities and challenges, and facilitate collaborative actions through knowledge sharing about foreign markets. The third project involved building a prototype car with all components made in Portugal. The purpose was to demonstrate emerging technologies in materials, digital transformation, and innovative designs. This car served as a showcase, highlighting the potential for new patents and innovations.

Bruno Amaro concluded that the funds can contribute to innovation and research advancement, getting access to expertise, and support the economic growth in the region, taking into account the social and environmental impact. Challenges faced during these projects included **navigating the application process**, managing administrative overheads, and adapting to changing regulations. The financial dependence on funding was another concern. To ensure success in future endeavours, he suggested **starting project proposals early, tailoring applications to specific needs, understanding all requirements, maintaining close contact with cluster members, and securing recommendation**



letters from relevant entities. In Portugal, the calls are published and managed in a national portal. To improve the process, he recommended **having more time for the submission**, which often is no longer than three months.

Felix Arion stated that financing is a significant challenge for most clusters. The AgroTransilvania Cluster implemented several projects under the **Romanian National Strategic Plan** where they received contributions between 100,000 and 180,000 EUR. The first project supported the development of local markets, based exclusively on short supply chains, in order to support the marketing of fruits from the Crisana region. The second project focuses on promoting high-quality cold-pressed oils to educate consumers about local products and their advantages. The third project strengthened the local market of Transylvanian dairy products by implementing a concept for short supply chains. The last project focuses on investing in meat quality angus beef and convincing both producers and consumers of its importance of short supply chains. Though all these projects are not massive in scale, they have a **significant impact and contribute to opportunities for small producers to compete in the market**. Regarding the financing mechanism, Felix Arion explained that the promotion of short chains and the local market is financed by 100%, while investments in infrastructure and marketing equipment is financed by 70%. This co-financing from the cluster includes salaries and related expenses. In the past, the cluster partnered with a bank to stem the investment, however, inconsistent policies and red tap made the completion of a co-financed project nearly impossible. To adapt to these challenges, the **cluster now involves key members for the pre-financing of activities**, which get compensated once the funds are released by the authorities. Additionally, the cluster is part of the National Strategic Plan's monitoring committee in order to be part of the discussions and decisions.

Mónica Quesada from the Maritime Cluster of the Canary Islands shared that the cluster's primary mission is to enhance the development and international competitiveness of the Canary Islands' maritime sector. Last year, they were recognised as an **innovative business group ("AEI")** by the Spanish Ministry of Industry, which makes it possible to **pursue national calls explicitly designed for clusters**. However, being accepted as an AEI was difficult for non-industrial regions. In addition, their unique location in the outermost regions of Europe grants them a special status and a specific budget of 82m EUR in the **EMFAF** for innovative marine-based renewable energies, blue biotechnology, aquaculture, research, protection and exploration of deep-sea resources, and training. Despite tourism being the predominant contributor to the GDP, the blue economy has significantly bolstered the Canary Islands' financial stature, accounting for 6.14% of its GDP, as of 2020.

The cluster developed a strategic blueprint for 2023-2027 to propel the competitiveness of their member companies. They select the projects according to these strategic plans, and tap into a variety of funding sources, ranging from regional to national and European. In Spain, the calls are published in the regional and national bulletins as well as in a central online platform. However, national calls often require **a lot of paperwork**. For every application, they are required to submit different documents, even though the same documents were submitted in previous calls. Mónica Quesada recommended having a database on national level to avoid these duplications in the applications.

She highlighted that these funds are often very competitive, and that for European funding it is helpful to **have partners, or specialised consultancies, with experience**. She further recommended that several leading companies of the cluster define the lines of interest for the projects to have clear sectoral interests. Cluster managers should **engage actively in international conventions, forge new**



partnerships, and understand the unique value proposition in project consortia. **Persistence** is crucial, especially when navigating European processes, as the chances of handing in the winning proposal are often between 10-20%. In the cluster, they have a technician who is specialised in the presentation of projects.

Andrei Ion specified that while most of the calls are open for many different stakeholders, **clusters can fit in many opportunities** related to policy, industry, or specific sectors. They can customise their projects to answer the conditions of the call so that the aims fit into their activities and the policy lines.

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. [National portals](#) to find funding opportunities under shared management
2. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#)
3. Invitation to come to [upcoming C2Labs](#) in Slovenia and Lithuania to work on project proposals