



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Cluster policies and networks: Outcomes of the Expert Group on Clusters

Summary

EU Clusters Talks
14 December 2022, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Cluster policies and networks: Outcomes of the Expert Group on Clusters

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 14 December 2022, 8:30 – 9:45 CET, to discuss the development of national cluster policies, differences in the European Union, the importance of cluster policies for cluster managers, and their implementation through cluster networks.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Jennifer Baker

1. Introduction from the European Commission
Peter Czaga, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission
2. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform: National cluster policies in the EU
Jan-Philipp Kramer, Prognos AG / team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
3. Panel debate: Outcomes of the Expert Group on Clusters
Alberto Pezzi, Senior Manager, ACCIÓ
Agata Wancio, Deputy Director, Innovation and Industrial Policy Department, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology (Poland)
Antonio Novo, President, European Clusters Alliance
Bianca Muntean, Cluster Manager, Transilvania IT Cluster
4. Funding opportunities

Key messages:

- The Expert Group on Clusters has two major deliverables – a [recommendation report on cluster policies](#) and the [EU cluster policy toolkit](#) – which the cluster managers are encouraged to use for their daily work and for the dialogue with their governments.
- Cluster policies are widely spread in the EU but have national and regional specificities.
- The implementation of cluster policy as well as the performance of clusters need further monitoring and evaluation.
- Key elements of cluster policies regarding the green and digital transition have remained unchanged during the crisis. Increasing resilience has gained a new importance.
- Public policies should help clusters evolve over time, not only give support in the first years.



1. Introduction from the European Commission

Peter Czaga, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission

Opening this EU Clusters Talk, Peter Czaga introduces the Expert Group on Clusters. Many of DG GROW's actions are directly supporting cluster managers and members of clusters. At the same time, they are working on government policies to support cluster development. In the expert group, the members **compare cluster policies and share good practices** to learn from each other. The group has been operating for four years and consists of representatives from each Member States and independent experts with diverse backgrounds. They produced **two major deliverables: a [recommendation report on cluster policies](#) and the [EU cluster policy toolkit](#)**. He encourages the participants to use these tools for their own work.

2. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform: National cluster policies in the EU

Jan-Philipp Kramer, Prognos AG / team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Jan-Philipp Kramer presents the [summary report](#) on cluster policies and programmes across Europe and priority third countries provided by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform. It gives a comparative overview of cluster policies and landscapes and the importance of clusters and cluster initiatives in the European economy. He explains that **dedicated national and regional cluster policies are widely spread**, especially in the EU Member States, and differ according to the specificities of the countries and regions. Jan-Philipp Kramer emphasises that there are **more than 1,000 cluster organisations operating across the EU**. They are supported with around 6 billion EUR in total for cluster policies.

Regarding the key objectives of cluster policies, the most common aims are **enhancing the visibility of clusters**, supporting cluster **excellence and professionalisation**, supporting the **consolidation of existing cluster organisations**, strengthening the **network** of cluster organisations (cross-clustering), and cluster analysis and support for policymaking. Supporting the creation of new cluster organisations is mostly covered in broader industrial policies.

There are two important funding mechanisms: the **National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, in which clusters are mentioned by 17 Member States, and the **Partnership Agreements under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**.

Looking at the state of play, the ECCP team made a maturity assessment. He states that 14 EU Member States have more than ten years of experience in implementing cluster policies. 81% of EU countries provide financial and technical support as part of their national cluster policy. However, only 20% of the countries have policies that are **monitored** and have either been evaluated ex-ante or as ongoing or interim evaluation.

Finally, Jan-Philipp Kramer highlights that cluster organisations and the presence of natural clusters have a **positive correlation with key indicators of regional competitiveness**, e.g., GDI per capita or employment, and digital competencies. In the future, we must **continue learning**, e.g., through the provided tools, **monitor** the performance of cluster policy implementation, and enable **sustainable business models for cluster organisations**.



3. Panel debate

The discussion focuses on the activities of the Expert Group on Clusters and the development of cluster policies on national and regional level.

Alberto Pezzi states that the work of the expert group has practical and tangible results. The recommendation report tackles the most important issues regarding the green and digital transition and increasing resilience, the latter being especially important due to the recent crises. He says that there is future work to be done on **foresight activities**. The report needs to be **translated into projects**, which takes time. Furthermore, Alberto Pezzi explains that the members of the group have built a lot of knowledge through the many meetings over the years. This potential is released in the work of the members.

Agata Wancio explains that the **key elements of cluster policies remain unchanged**, but the emphasis was adjusted in the crisis. While we have new challenges, the competences developed in the clusters stay the same. One of the main targets is to **build synergies across the different policies**, e.g., in industry, innovation, and education. Using clusters as a tool for these different policies can increase resilience and become more competitive.

Antonio Novo adds that, for him, the work of the expert group has been a critical step for increasing knowledge and understanding of cluster approaches and implementation of cluster policy as well as exchanging during the crisis. The recommendation report has been useful for the work of cluster managers and the European Clusters Alliance, as they are in constant dialogue with public authorities. It helps to justify the clusters' positions with an **official reference**. He recommends the participants to use the report for their work. Furthermore, the policy toolkit offers the possibility to **investigate different approaches** that can help both cluster managers and policymakers.

Bianca Muntean says that the expert group has given the possibility to **bring together the grass-root experience from the SMEs with the policymakers**. DG GROW has made a successful work to put clusters on the map. For her, one of the main results is that new programmes, e.g., Digital Europe, or new structures, e.g., European Digital Innovation Hubs, include the work of the clusters and build on existing structures and knowledge for synergies. While the situations of the different regions and countries vary, the members of the group shared the goal to support our SMEs and to come up with support programmes.

Regarding cluster policies, Alberto Pezzi explains that the objective is achieving a **set of coordinated actions**. To design a cluster policy, the government should consider the **national or regional specificities and social aspects**. Other elements are the aim for the cluster policy, e.g., enhancing the competitiveness of companies, and being dynamic and **regularly revise** the cluster policy to adapt to the market. Clusters can serve as a tool to better understand the challenges and to have a dialogue on the real strategic issues of companies. Agata Wancio agrees that the common element is to create, monitor, and evaluate cluster policy in a constant dialogue with the cluster environment. In Poland, the specific challenge is to improve the social capital. She says that the collaboration through clusters and building trust can help in this regard. Antonio Novo adds that clusters are not only a tool, but a reality that companies need to stay healthy. Alberto Pezzi confirms that there are **different meanings of the word "cluster"**, which are a natural phenomenon, the cluster initiative, and the cluster organisation. Speaking about key performance indicators (**KPIs**), Antonio Novo says that this is still an area to work on.

Bianca Muntean emphasises that what makes clusters successful is the **satisfaction of its members**. Cluster organisations must be rooted in the regional reality and deliver specific services to reply to the companies' needs. For example, her cluster mainly focuses on support for innovation. Furthermore, on the one hand, clusters represent the companies in the dialogue with the policymakers, and, on the other hand, translate policies for the companies to make them tangible.

Looking at the green transition, Agata Wancio speaks about the new Green Innovation Hubs, in which clusters can play a role. The government will help the clusters build competences, e.g., in circular



economy. Antonio Novo agrees that governments should help clusters reach the needed knowledge on the green transition, as it is relevant for all clusters independently of their sector. Regarding the length of cluster support, Antonio Novo is of the opinion that young clusters should be supported to build their infrastructure for around four years. Generally, supporting the growth of clusters and **helping them evolve** in the different capacities should be a constant activity **over time**.

4. Funding examples

Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Nina Hoppmann shares the following examples of national cluster funding:

1. In Spain, the “Programme to support Innovative Business Associations” by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism provides support for organisational and coordination structures for clusters, feasibility studies, and the digital transformation with a regular budget of 8 million EUR and an extraordinary RRF (Recovery and Resilience Fund) budget of 50 million EUR.
2. In Poland, the operational programme “European Funds for Modern Economy” focuses on strengthening human and infrastructural resources, testing new services, building platforms and internationalisation. Calls will be launched in 2023.