



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

EU funding opportunities II – Direct management programmes

Summary



EU Clusters Talks

27 September 2023, 8:30 – 10:00 CET

An initiative of the European Union





EU funding opportunities II – Direct management programmes

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform organised this EU Clusters Talk on 27 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 direct management and overview of funds
Christophe Galand, Head of Unit, DG BUDG, European Commission
3. Project examples and panel debate
Björg Dam, Project Manager, Life Science Cluster Denmark
Eva Vicente Barragán, Operations Coordinator - Project Management Engineer, ICAMCyL
Maurizio Malè, Cluster Project Manager, Venetian Cluster
4. Funding opportunities
Nina Hoppmann, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- In direct managements, funds are managed by the European Commission and its executive agencies. All steps are administered by the Commission.
- There are different programmes available. The biggest one is Horizon Europe, but other funds like the Digital Europe Programme, Innovation Fund, or Creative Europe can be of interest to clusters and companies.
- There is not enough knowledge about EU funds in the ecosystems. Clusters can help by offering webinars, talks, or events to disseminate the needed information.
- Applicants should not underestimate the personnel effort needed to manage an EU-funded project.
- Some programmes require co-financing. Partners need to be able to invest in their projects.
- Gaining experience in EU projects can take time. It is advised to have experienced partners in the beginning.



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. Publication of the second annual report on the [implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#), including an [online interactive map](#) of RRF-supported projects in each Member State
2. 21 cluster managers came together for the second Cluster Booster Academy in Torino for a 2-day training on 21-22 September 2023.
3. Invitation to join [upcoming “Clusters meet Regions” events](#) in France, Czech Republic, Germany, Romania, and Poland
4. Register to attend 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
5. Invitation to attend the [EU Industry Days](#) in Málaga, Spain, on 4-6 October 2023
6. Enterprise Europe Network invites to a [webinar](#) on market opportunities for European SMEs in India on 5 October, 10:00 CET.

2. The principle of direct management and overview of funding programmes

Christophe Galand, Head of Unit, DG BUDG, European Commission

Christophe Galand presented the EU programmes under direct management. Direct management pertains to the portion of the EU budget implemented at the central level, either by the European Commission itself or one of six executive agencies. As the EU budget is limited, it adheres strictly to competencies and boundaries set by the EU Treaty. The Multiannual Financial Framework regulation determines the overall size of the EU budget and allocations per programme, while the EU Programmes' regulations define the scope of the actions to be financed. Christophe Galand highlighted that importance of spending the budget within these regulations. Overall, 37% of the fund are directly managed by the Commission and its executive agencies, meaning that the Commission is directly responsible for all steps in a programme's implementation.

He explained the key programmes:

- **Horizon Europe:** The most significant programme under direct management to support to all forms of research and innovation. Its budget is close to 100 billion over seven years.
- **Connecting Europe Facility:** The programme supports large infrastructures, especially in energy, green transport, and broadband.
- **Digital Europe Programme:** It focuses on artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and semiconductor research and deployment.



- **Single Market Programme:** It is targeted towards public authorities but includes support for SMEs.
- **European Space Programme:** It procures equipment from firms for space-related initiatives.
- **Erasmus+:** The programme has a strong focus on mobility between students and university collaborations.
- **Creative Europe:** It supports the culture and audiovisual sectors, including the production of cultural goods.
- **EU4Health:** It aims to develop a European health space, with emphasis on data exchange and IT infrastructure procurement.
- **Innovation Fund:** The programme helps to bring to the market solutions to decarbonise European industry and support its transition to climate neutrality while fostering its competitiveness.
- **Internal Security Fund:** It supports tackling radicalisation, terrorism, cybercrime, organised crime.
- **European Defence Fund:** The Commission's key initiative to support, with the EU budget, collaborative research and development of defence capabilities

The funding can be allocated in form of grants, prizes, procurement, and other indirect financial instruments. Grants constitute the largest volume of EU funding and are restricted in volume. The financial Instruments are mainly implemented by the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EU offers guarantees for specific risk exposures taken on by the EIB. This guarantee enables the EIB to issue loans to SMEs and other companies.

All funding and tender opportunities can be accessed through a specific [website](#). Each program or call for proposals has its own set of conditions that align with the requirements of the foundational act or programme behind it. The application process, the award procedure, contract negotiations, and post-award responsibilities like reporting, audits, and communication can be heavy, and there's significant scrutiny to ensure the appropriate use of the EU budget. However, the managing entity of a particular programme will provide guidance and support.

3. Project examples and panel debate

The panellists presented projects that were financed by funds under direct management or that are directed at increasing the participation of companies in the competitive calls. They also shared their experience with achieving the funding and gave tips for the applications to new calls.

Björg Dam, project manager at the Danish Live Science Cluster, explained that they involved in multiple projects funded by European Commission. The main objective of the cluster is to establish partnerships that address societal challenges, specifically in the healthcare industry. She explained that data reveals that Danish researchers have been effective in obtaining funds from Horizon Europe. However, Danish companies, especially SMEs, aren't as successful in this regard compared to companies from other European countries. Therefore, the cluster created a project to **bolster Danish company involvement in Horizon Europe**. The challenge is that many Danish companies, especially startups and SMEs, aren't well-versed with the EU funding mechanisms available to them. The cluster organises collaborative



initiatives, such as webinars, talks, and networking events, to **disseminate information**. The cluster has employees who hold dual roles, both within universities and the cluster. This provides a robust channel to connect researchers, start-ups, and spin-offs with potential opportunities. They also **collaborate with experts in the field of funding** to find matching calls and opportunities for SMEs. So far, they have made the experience that there is **not enough knowledge about EU funds in the ecosystem**.

Eva Vicente Barragán introduced the Horizon 2020 project MINE.THE.GAP, which focuses on the most pressing challenges in the mining sector that need to be addressed for a greener future. The organisation ICAMCyL is closely connected with the industries in their regions and has 15 ongoing projects, spanning a variety of areas, including Interreg, Marie-Curie actions, and Horizon Europe 2020 projects. The MINE.THE.GAP project funded 63 SMEs in 26 projects, introducing 27 new products, services, and technologies to the market. A new I3-project has emerged from the results of MINE.THE.GAP. She concluded that understanding the financing of the open calls required a significant amount of effort and that **using existing tools** that have been proven effective. Applicants should **not underestimate the human effort** needed for such projects. It is important to have **experienced partners** that can guide you through the project and call processes.

Maurizio Malè presented the LIFE VAIA project, which is funded by the European Life programme. The project applies temporary agroforestry in damaged forests as a strategy to ensure economic survival of local communities and increase forest resilience and adaptation to climate changes. The main challenge of the project is the **co-financing** required by the 11 consortium partners. In the Life programme, 60% of the budget is financed by the EU, 40% comes from the partners' own resources. In addition, the reporting procedures take time and effort, and the KPIs need to be clearly defined and monitored. A big plus of the Life programmes is that it allows to have big projects, including infrastructure work, with a running time of 5 to 10 years. Furthermore, Maurizio Malè highlighted that **enterprises can participate to develop business activities**, and that there are many different calls available to tackle environmental issues, also for individual enterprises. The partners get included in a **European network with exchange opportunities** with other projects.

All speakers agreed that the direct management programmes are a **good opportunity** for both cluster organisations and their members. They emphasised that **gaining experience can take time**, and that it is helpful to have a knowledgeable person writing the applications.

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. All calls managed by the European Commissions are published on the [Funding and Tenders Portal](#)
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