



EUROPEAN CLUSTER
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

Accelerating Change: The Green Transition in Focus

Summary



EU Clusters Talks
11 December 2024, 8:30 – 9:45 CET

An initiative of the European Union





Accelerating Change: The Green Transition in Focus

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk "**Accelerating Change: The Green Transition in Focus**" on **11 December, 8:30 – 9:45 CET**, to explore the pivotal role of clusters in driving the green transition, foster dialogue on best practices and challenges, and highlight opportunities for collaboration and innovation in achieving climate neutrality and sustainable economic growth.

Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Zivile Kropaite

1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
Ángela Negrete Benedí, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform
2. Green Assist. Advisory Service for Sustainable Investments Support
Gauthier Clar, Green Assist, CINEA, European Commission
3. Green Transition support
Vera Wechner, Circular Economy Consultant, Prognos
4. Good practices showcase
Luca Tarantino, Research, Innovation and Sustainability Officer, Confindustria Emilia Area Centro
5. Panel debate
Fanny Moutin, International Relations Project Manager, Pôle Mer Méditerranée, Business & Innovation Sea Cluster
Silvia Jiménez García, Communication and Innovation Project Manager, FEMETALiNDUSTRY
Jannis Lambert, Principal, Prognos
Ariane R. Decramer, Account Manager, Flux 50FOOD
6. Funding opportunities
Ángela Negrete Benedí, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Key messages

- Clusters are pivotal enablers of the green transition—acting as intermediaries, innovators, and ecosystem connectors.
- Green Assist offers free, expert-led advisory services to support investment-ready green projects—no co-funding or EU programme affiliation required.
- Clusters can access tailored Green Assist support for capacity building, market development, and scalable sustainability initiatives.
- The Green Transition Support platform is a practical knowledge hub created for clusters, not companies—helping you lead the regional shift to sustainability.
- Clusters have a unique role in amplifying successful green initiatives—by communicating achievements, influencing policy, and scaling good practices.
- Regulatory flexibility is key: clusters should advocate for open frameworks (e.g. regulatory sandboxes) that allow innovation to flourish.



1. News from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Ángela Negrete, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

After the introduction by moderator Zivile Kropaite, the following news items were presented:

1. Meet [Trend Universe](#) and access its database
2. [Call for Expression of Interest](#) for organising workshops Clusters meet Regions, deadline 20 December 2024
3. [EU Business Hub](#): EU funded programme for supporting EU SMEs and startups in their expansion to the Republic of Korea and Japan and the incoming business missions to:
 - a. [EU Business Hub @ Smart Energy Week Spring 2025](#), Green & Low-Carbon, Tokyo, 17-21 Feb 2025
 - b. [Healthcare and Medical Equipment Korea 2025](#), Healthcare - Seoul, 17 – 21 Mar 2025

2. Green Assist: Advisory Service for Sustainable Investments Support

Gauthier Clar, Green Assist, CINEA, European Commission

Gauthier Clar began by outlining the nature of [Green Assist](#). It is an **advisory programme** financed by a €30 million budget under the LIFE Programme. Its goal is to stimulate investments in "dark green" sectors, especially in ecological transition, including biodiversity, natural capital, and climate adaptation. **Green Assist does not provide grants**; instead, it offers free, demand-driven, tailored advisory support to both public and private entities within the EU.

The services are categorised into two types: project advisory and enabling advisory. [Project advisory](#) targets individual project owners with clearly identified investments, offering expert guidance from a curated roster of 425 specialists across EU sectors and regions. These experts assist in developing pipelines of investable green projects.

[Enabling advisory](#), by contrast, is designed for organisations—such as clusters or umbrella bodies—that do not control specific projects but can influence multiple project developers. It focuses on broader support like capacity building, market development, mentoring, and the creation of transferable resources. The intention is to address transversal challenges and enable the scaling or replication of results across different contexts and geographies.

Eligibility for enabling advisory is based on criteria such as relevance to common challenges, coordination capacity, scalability of outcomes, and the ability to deliver tangible outputs that filter down to project developers. Gauthier Clar stressed the flexibility of Green Assist in accommodating various beneficiary profiles and needs, while also ensuring non-duplication with other EU instruments like ELENA from the EIB.



A substantial part of the presentation addressed the potential of clusters to become effective partners in delivering Green Assist's objectives. Gauthier Clar proposed a **"win-win" collaboration** model: while Green Assist benefits from the visibility and outreach of clusters, clusters can rely on external expertise to support their members' investment efforts. He also discussed the importance of balancing transversality (the ability to reach many project owners through a single beneficiary) and verticality (the closeness of the beneficiary to the actual project developers), introducing the concept of proximity levels—from direct project owners (level 0) to cluster-of-clusters structures (level 2 and above).

Finally, Gauthier Clar highlighted the **practical process** for engaging with Green Assist. The application is open year-round and starts with a simple email to the functional mailbox available on the programme's webpage. The request should briefly outline the beneficiary's needs and context. Gauthier Clar acknowledged that the enabling advisory side is still being developed, with most of the 70 projects supported to date falling under project advisory. However, there is growing engagement with clusters and an openness to expand this collaboration.

3. Green Transition Support

Vera Wechner, Circular Economy Consultant, Prognos

Vera Wechner started by explaining that Green Transition Support functions as a **Knowledge Hub integrated into the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) website**. It offers information on topics such as energy efficiency, resource efficiency, and emission reduction. Importantly, it is not designed for businesses directly, but for clusters and their managers who act as intermediaries in regional green transitions.

The first key feature presented was a [step-by-step guide](#) aimed at helping clusters facilitate green transition. The guide includes practical steps, such as identifying the specific needs and challenges of cluster members, integrating sustainability into the cluster's core strategy, and promoting inter-cluster collaboration. The guide is also enriched with good practices, highlighted visually through green hexagons in the document, and includes direct links to further information for each example.

The second feature introduced was the newly launched [Good Practice Collection](#). This resource compiles real-world examples of sustainability-supporting activities led by cluster organisations. It draws from interviews with several cluster managers and aims to share replicable initiatives that have demonstrated value. Examples include the **use of focus groups** to enhance knowledge exchange, the organisation of innovation challenges to drive business solutions, and the establishment of a **sustainability desk** to provide direct support to businesses. The collection is accessible online, and contributions from other cluster managers are actively encouraged to expand the repository.

4. Good practices showcase

Luca Tarantino, Research, Innovation and Sustainability Officer, Confindustria Emilia Area Centro



Luca Tarantino began his presentation by providing a brief overview of the organisation, explaining that it is an Italian industrial association with over 3,200 member companies located in the provinces of Bologna, Modena and Ferrara, in northern Italy. He emphasised that most of these companies are SMEs and are grouped into 20 value chain clusters, primarily in manufacturing sectors such as construction, energy, packaging, automotive, ceramics, and machinery. This introduction set the stage for his main focus: showcasing practical initiatives that support companies—particularly SMEs—in their green transition efforts.

One of the initiatives was the creation of the “**Sustainability Unit**” in 2021, which includes the “Sustainability Desk” as a core service. The **desk supports SMEs in understanding and implementing Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies**. Initially, many companies lacked clarity on what sustainability entailed. In response, the unit provided strategic guidance, gap analyses, tailored training sessions, and impact assessment reports to help firms identify their strengths and weaknesses and define sustainability-oriented strategies.

Luca Tarantino also talked about the “**Project Academy**”, launched to foster a new generation of professionals equipped to drive green transition in the industry. The Academy **recruits recent graduates** on a fixed-term basis and trains them over ten months in sustainability management, innovation, and EU funding. After the initial training phase, participants are introduced to member companies, facilitating direct engagement. The programme not only enhances companies’ access to sustainability expertise but also improves the employability of young professionals. Tarantino shared the success story of a participant who now leads a sustainability unit in a company based in Modena, exemplifying the **dual benefit** of the initiative.

5. Panel debate

Fanny Moutin highlighted the value of these resources for maritime clusters and shared the example of her organisation’s coordination of a technical study to quantify carbon emissions in the Port of Marseille. She emphasised the cluster’s unique ability to align stakeholders and the crucial role of communication in **amplifying the impact and replicability of sustainability initiatives**.

Silvia Jiménez presented the Engineers Eurocluster project, which funded seven collaborative innovation projects aimed at supporting SMEs in energy-intensive industries. She noted the importance of **offering training and technical tools to assist companies** in implementing sustainable practices and accessing new European markets. She also stressed the cluster’s role in **demystifying regulatory frameworks and improving access to funding**.

Jannis Lambert offered a policy and research perspective, noting that while funding is undeniably important, the main challenge lies in navigating **the landscape of available opportunities**. He warned against portraying grants as a one-size-fits-all solution and stressed the need for **informed decision-making**. He introduced the Green Transition Support platform’s good practice collection and starter guide as resources for clusters seeking orientation.

Ariane R. Decramer discussed Flux 50’s strategy to support energy transition through cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation. She shared an Interreg project example involving the exchange of residual heat between industrial actors in Belgium and greenhouse operators in the Netherlands. She underlined the value of **regulatory flexibility** (such as “regulatory sandboxes”) **to unlock innovation**



and highlighted the importance of connecting large corporates, SMEs, and startups in collaborative ecosystems.

During the live poll, many participants indicated that **funding is the main factor driving the green transition**. This prompted a debate among the speakers. Silvia Jiménez García agreed with the poll results, stating that **access to funding is indeed one of the biggest challenges** clusters and SMEs face. She described how clusters, including her own, play a crucial role in helping their members navigate complex funding schemes and access the necessary financial support to implement sustainable innovations. For her, financial support, especially in the form of grants, is not only vital but a core part of the enabling ecosystem that clusters should facilitate. Jannis Lambert, however, respectfully disagreed with the idea that funding—particularly grants—should be seen as the central or exclusive driver of the transition. He acknowledged **that while grants are important for offsetting costs and addressing market failures, they are not a panacea**. He cautioned against the oversimplified narrative that clusters should only help companies “*activate the grant lever*”. Instead, he argued for a **more strategic approach**: project developers should first understand why they need funding, what type of funding fits their objectives, and what the trade-offs are (e.g., administrative burden, conditionality). He emphasised the importance of expert advisory services—such as those offered through Green Assist—to support this reflection and decision-making process.

On the other hand, Ariane R. Decramer did not explicitly contradict either position but added a complementary perspective. While acknowledging that funding is always a factor, she suggested that **one of the real bottlenecks to innovation is not the lack of funding per se, but regulatory barriers, tariffs, and the lack of cooperation across sectors and borders**. From her point of view, innovation is often delayed not because companies lack ambition or capital, but because they face legislative and systemic hurdles that prevent implementation. Thus, for her, the cluster’s role is just as much about enabling cooperation and removing non-financial barriers as it is about facilitating access to funds. Fanny Moutin did not directly weigh in on the funding debate but echoed Ariane’s point about the **need for communication, collaboration, and stakeholder coordination**. Her focus was more on how clusters can act as intermediaries and bridge-builders—between public authorities, companies, and the broader ecosystem—than on the specific mechanisms of financial support.

On the subject of **net-zero technologies**, there was agreement that the field still holds considerable untapped potential. Fanny Moutin and Ariane R. Decramer emphasised the influence of large companies in driving systemic change, while Jannis Lambert pointed out that many of the more straightforward actions have already been taken. The next phase will require more complex, multi-actor approaches, where clusters can play a facilitating role by coordinating and integrating expertise across sectors and borders.

An audience question regarding the **visibility of net-zero technologies** in existing resources prompted further reflection. Jannis Lambert acknowledged that, although the current good practice collection does not yet feature dedicated examples, the **Green Transition Support platform’s starter guide does address net-zero themes and offers orientation** for clusters beginning to engage with these challenges.



5. Funding opportunities

Ángela Negrete, team member, European Cluster Collaboration Platform

Closing the EU Clusters Talk, Ángela Negrete shared the following examples of funding opportunities:

1. [Support for SMEs developing Circular Economy and Sustainable solutions for the Agrifood sector in the Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean](#); deadline 15 January 2025.
2. [Integrated peri-urban areas in the transition towards climate neutrality](#); deadline 11 February 2025.
3. [Creative Innovation Lab](#); deadline 24 April 2025.
4. [EUROCLUSTERS for Europe's recovery](#); deadline 5 February 2025.
5. Opportunities for SMEs: Calls from Euroclusters; published on [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#).