



EUROPEAN CLUSTER  
COLLABORATION PLATFORM

# Empowering Clusters and Driving Innovation: ECCP 2024 Insights and Next Steps

## Summary



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

An initiative of the European Union





## Empowering Clusters and Driving Innovation: ECCP 2024 Insights and Next Steps

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, on behalf of the European Commission, organised the EU Clusters Talk "**Empowering Clusters and Driving Innovation: ECCP 2024 Insights and Next Steps**" on **15 January, 8:30 – 9:45 CET**, to reflect on the key achievements of 2024 and present the planned activities for 2025.

### Agenda of the meeting

Moderation: Andrew Lansley

1. European Cluster Collaboration Platform 2024  
*Recap Video*
2. Presentation of the ECCP  
*Mariella Masselink, Head of Unit, DG GROW, European Commission*
3. Clusters meet Regions  
*Teodora Jilkova, ECCP Team member*
4. EU Clusters Matchmaking Events  
*Teodora Jilkova, ECCP Team member*
5. EU Clusters Talks  
*Ángela Negrete Benedí, ECCP Team member*
6. C2Lab  
*Antonio Novo, ECCP Team member*
7. Cluster Booster Academy  
*Hanna Kim, ECCP Team member*
8. Green Transition Support  
*Vera Wechner, ECCP Team member*
9. Trend Universe  
*Jan-Philipp Kramer, ECCP Team member*
10. Funding opportunities  
*Ángela Negrete Benedí, team member of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform*

### Key messages

- Clusters are strategic enablers of EU prosperity, driving innovation, decarbonisation and competitiveness from the ground up.
- The ECCP isn't just a platform—it's a catalyst for cluster growth, visibility and European leadership. Get involved.
- EU matchmaking events open global doors—over 250 cooperation cases emerged from just one year of activities.
- C2Lab helps clusters turn ideas into EU-funded projects—guided by expert mentoring and hands-on collaboration.



- Green Transition Support offers tools and real practices to embed sustainability into your cluster strategy—start now.

## 1. Presentation of the ECCP

**Mariella Masselink, Head of Unit, DG GROW, European Commission**

Mariella Masselink emphasised the **strategic importance of clusters** in supporting the EU's focus on prosperity and competitiveness. She outlined three core areas where clusters contribute to this agenda. The first was the need to build a compelling business case for **decarbonisation and the adoption of new technologies**. Clusters were recognised for their grassroots role in enabling companies, particularly SMEs, to adopt and scale these innovations. Upcoming initiatives, such as the Clean Industrial Deal, were mentioned as key opportunities where clusters can play a central role.

The second area involved improving the **investment journey for companies** by helping to de-risk investments. Here, clusters were acknowledged for their capacity to develop regional investment hubs and create favourable environments for business growth. The third area addressed the need to build value chains across Europe and reinforce the Single Market. The forthcoming Single Market Strategy was mentioned in this context, and clusters were highlighted as essential actors in strengthening connections across regions through initiatives such as the Euroclusters project.

Mariella Masselink concluded by inviting the cluster community to **actively engage** in shaping future priorities. She encouraged participants to share feedback on what had worked well, what could be improved, and which types of support or activities they would find most valuable moving forward. The overarching message was one of co-creation: **clusters are not only beneficiaries but strategic partners in the EU's industrial transformation**. The ECCP will continue to serve as a platform for exchange, collaboration, and policy development, with a clear call for continued dialogue to ensure that future initiatives are aligned with the evolving needs of the cluster ecosystem.

## 2. Clusters meet Regions

**Teodora Jilkova, ECCP Team member**

Teodora Jilkova presented the Clusters Meet Regions initiative as a key platform for connecting regional authorities with cluster organisations across Europe. Since its start in 2022, the initiative has hosted over **18 workshops** in countries like Spain, Poland, and Finland, with 2024 events held in Milan, Chisinau, and Graz. These sessions not only foster dialogue but also include matchmaking activities, allowing clusters to pitch their services and needs. In 2024 alone, the events drew more than **620 participants** and featured **over 540 pitching sessions**, contributing to a cumulative total of more than 2,500 participants since the programme began.

She stressed that the initiative plays a crucial role in boosting regional cooperation, attracting investment, and improving policy implementation. It equips local actors with practical tools and insights for more effective economic development. She closed by encouraging clusters to remain engaged, highlighting the ECCP's ongoing work to expand the programme and respond to the needs





of the community. Her message was clear: these events are not just meetings—they're strategic opportunities for clusters to grow their influence and impact.

### 3. EU Clusters Matchmaking Events

**Teodora Jilkova, ECCP Team member**

Teodora Jilkova presented the EU matchmaking events as a powerful tool to promote collaboration, networking, and knowledge exchange among clusters and their members. These events, particularly those held internationally, provide critical opportunities to explore markets beyond the EU and build visibility for participating organisations. In 2024, the ECCP coordinated **five international matchmaking** events and several within the Cluster Meet Regions and the European Cluster Conference, engaging **over 520 participants and resulting in more than 2,300 meetings and 250 identified cooperation cases**.

She also offered insights into key events in places like Berlin, Frankfurt, Singapore, Canada, and India, all strategically linked to major trade expos to maximise outreach. Looking ahead to 2025, confirmed events in Eindhoven and Palma are already underway, with additional international plans in development. She stressed the importance of clusters and SMEs **sharing feedback from past events**, as this input directly shapes future planning. She also acknowledged common challenges faced by clusters when going global—funding, market access, and finding reliable partners—pointing out that matchmaking events are specifically designed to help overcome these barriers.

### 4. EU Clusters Talks

**Ángela Negrete Benedí, ECCP Team member**

Ángela Negrete opened the session by welcoming participants to the 2025 edition of EU Cluster Talks and providing an overview of its impact during the previous year. She described Cluster Talks as a key space for networking, learning, and knowledge exchange within the European cluster community. Hosted bi-weekly on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), the initiative saw significant engagement in 2024, with **over 2,800 registrations, 1,554 unique attendees, and more than 120 speakers across 25 sessions**. The talks collectively reached more than 4,000 views on YouTube, with an average of 172 views per session, demonstrating their relevance to stakeholders from across Europe, including Spain, Germany, Belgium, France, and Ukraine.

Looking ahead to 2025, Ángela Negrete announced the upcoming topics and dates for the next Cluster Talks. These will include sessions on collaboration opportunities in South Korea and Japan, the role of technology centres in cluster development, sustainability, critical technologies, and the EU's Clean Industrial Deal. The talks continue to serve as a central hub for timely discussions on strategic EU policies and international partnerships. She encouraged participants to subscribe to the [ECCP YouTube channel](#), stay informed through the platform, and register for the upcoming sessions to ensure their active involvement in shaping the future of Europe's cluster landscape.



## 5. C2Lab

**Antonio Novo, ECCP Team member**

Antonio Novo introduced the C2Lab as an initiative designed to support clusters, companies, and institutions in shaping high-quality project ideas, with the goal of enhancing their competitiveness in funding calls and attracting public or private investment. The format **combines in-person workshops with ongoing mentoring** before and after the event through a dedicated online platform, enabling collaboration and idea exchange among participants. He highlighted the most recent C2Lab, held in Strasbourg in September, which was considered a success in terms of participation and feedback. Novo noted that many participants choose to return for multiple editions, demonstrating the value of the experience.

He announced that the next C2Lab would take place in Zaragoza, Spain, on 19–20 March, with a dedicated focus on artificial intelligence and its application to key European challenges. This edition aligns with the European Commission's increased investment in AI through programmes like Horizon Europe and Digital Europe. He encouraged cluster managers to bring forward their own project ideas or join others' initiatives during the event. Antonio Novo also announced a future C2Lab in Denmark in May, likely centred on energy, but reiterated that all topics are welcome at any session. He urged interested parties to register for the upcoming info session or reach out with questions, positioning the C2Lab as a strategic opportunity to **engage in EU-level innovation projects**.

## 6. Cluster Booster Academy

**Hanna Kim, ECCP Team member**

Hanna Kim presented the Cluster Booster Academy as a **hybrid training initiative** aimed at supporting cluster managers and their teams in addressing key challenges of cluster management. The programme combines theoretical content, usually delivered online, with in-person workshops designed to help participants tackle issues such as designing new services, improving communication, attracting members, reviewing business models, and securing funding. Each session is tailored, offering a mix of individual coaching and group activities in a collaborative environment. Participants are encouraged to share experiences, exchange ideas, and reflect on strategies to increase the impact and sustainability of their clusters.

In 2024, two Cluster Booster Academies took place—one hosted in Sofia, Bulgaria, and another that started virtually in November, with the in-person component scheduled for March in Warsaw. The programme welcomed **78 participants from across Europe**, reflecting a broad range of cluster maturity levels, sectors, and geographical backgrounds. Kim underlined the value of peer exchange, particularly for cluster managers working in small or isolated teams and encouraged further engagement. The Academy's inclusive approach and interactive design make it a useful space for learning, connecting, and building strategic capacity.



## 7. Green Transition Support

Vera Wechner, ECCP Team member

Vera Wechner presented the Green Transition Support as a specialised section of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP), created to empower cluster organisations and managers in their efforts to drive sustainability. This knowledge hub does not directly target businesses but rather equips intermediaries with relevant tools, guidance, and examples to support their members in advancing the green transition. In 2024, the platform introduced **a practical step-by-step guide** to help clusters integrate sustainability into their strategies—covering actions like identifying member needs, fostering collaboration, and maintaining open dialogue. In parallel, a curated collection of good practices showcased real initiatives from clusters, such as sustainability helpdesks, innovation challenges, and knowledge-sharing formats, all gathered through direct interviews with cluster managers.

Looking ahead to 2025, the focus will remain on expanding the Green Transition Support content, with new resources tailored to emerging needs within the cluster community. Vera Wechner encouraged attendees to use Slido and the chat to express their priorities, which will shape future knowledge items. There was strong interest in topics such as the **circular economy, emission reduction, and the reuse of resources**. Funding opportunities and access to EU policy overviews—such as the Green Deal and Circular Economy Action Plan—were also highlighted as particularly valuable. Vera concluded by inviting clusters to share additional examples of good practices and reaffirmed the ECCP's commitment to supporting them in translating green objectives into effective, actionable strategies.

## 8. Trend Universe

Jan-Philipp Kramer, ECCP Team member

Dr Jan-Philipp Kramer presented the Trend Universe as a powerful foresight and innovation analysis tool developed under the ECCP to help clusters and their members **anticipate emerging trends and build strategic competitive advantage**. Introduced in 2023, the platform offered access to 14 industry-specific trend radars aligned with the EU's industrial ecosystems and had since expanded to include **over 11,000 innovation articles**. These resources were designed to support clusters in understanding technological developments, such as AI or decarbonisation solutions, with data-driven insights derived from patents, publications, investment flows and news analysis. The tool enabled users to evaluate their cluster's position relative to market benchmarks, identify key strengths and gaps, and tailor innovation strategies accordingly.

Dr Kramer emphasised that the Trend Universe could be used not only by cluster managers and members, but also by policymakers and innovation agencies to guide funding priorities and strategy development. He highlighted examples such as the **Innovation Agency of Tyrol**, which had integrated the tool into its planning process. By offering collaborative foresight exercises, personalised innovation collections and readiness assessments, the Trend Universe allowed clusters to enhance their strategic agendas and provide valuable market intelligence to their members. The overarching



aim was not to predict the future, but to reduce uncertainty and help European clusters remain agile in a highly competitive global environment.

## 9. 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. [Market uptake measures of renewable energy systems](#); deadline 4 February 2025.
2. [Support for SMEs developing Circular Economy and Sustainable solutions for the Agrifood sector in the Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean](#); deadline 19 February 2025.
3. [Innovation Fund 2024 Net Zero Technologies – General decarbonisation – Medium-Scale Projects](#); 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](#).