Call for Expression of Interest
Clusters meet Regions

Context

EU regions need to be able to compete with other more advanced and emerging economies in the fast changing economic and social environment influenced by Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Location matters particularly for clusters. They develop more easily in regional ecosystems with a favourable administrative and regulatory environment and access to skilled labour, markets, financial and business support services. These workshops will bring together clusters and policymakers of the EU, national, regional and local level to learn from each other how to better use clusters to strengthen industrial ecosystems[1], serve national/regional economic development and liaise with other regions with similar transition challenges.

What really matters is the involvement of EU clusters[2] in regional economic governance, in policy design and implementation at regional level.

Clusters Meet Regions workshops are helpful for cluster managers and policy makers in view of engaging clusters in the implementation of regional priorities. Regional authorities need to know their clusters and understand how they can shape, improve, and effectively help in the design and the implementation of the regional development policies. Cluster organisations and their members should take actions and implement projects that are relevant for the economic development of their local communities. The topic of Clusters Meet Regions events will be aligned with the development priorities of the regions interested in hosting this event; in line with the updated EU Industrial Strategy[3] fostering the green and digital transitions as well as resilience building and according to their smart specialisation strategies[4] developed at national and/or regional level. Local clusters should facilitate engagement and collaboration with other European clusters in the same or related economic activities and thus complement regional assets and reinforce capacities to lead the green transition, accelerate the digital transition and build resilience.

Objective of the call

The objective of this call for expression of interest is to draw a list of up to sixteen (16) national/regional authorities with clusters organisations that commit to organise a European workshop 'Clusters Meet Regions' in 2024 and 2025.

The European Commission will select particular locations and dates for these workshops based on the criteria presented below and also taking into account political priorities and supply chain problems related to the current geopolitical situation affecting in particular not only the host region, but also a critical number of regions in other Member States.

Each workshop should be helpful for cluster managers and policy makers resulting in the engagement of clusters in the implementation of regional priorities.

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[1] Definition of industrial ecosystems | European Cluster Collaboration Platform
[2] Homepage | European Cluster Collaboration Platform
[3] Updating the 2020 Industrial Strategy (europa.eu)
[4] Home - Smart Specialisation Platform (europa.eu)

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Who can apply (eligibility criteria)

Applications are opened to any individual stakeholder or to a consortium of more than one stakeholder involved or interested in the regional economic development. Thus, this includes clusters organisations, regional agency of economic development, business network organisations. National/regional authorities can (and are encouraged to) submit their applications as well.

Since Clusters Meet Regions aims at a closer cooperation between the stakeholders that operate in the economic development interests of the region, **having the support of the regional authorities is a must to apply as a host**. Therefore, a proof of their commitment to be involved in the workshop must be attached to the application.

All European regions can host a Clusters Meet Regions irrespectively of their administrative level, NUTS1[5] or NUTS2 are desirable though.

Characteristics of the regional workshops

The workshops will be organised in the framework of the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) activities, with the support of the ECCP team. They should be organised as in person and/or hybrid events of 1.5-2 days programme and held in English. It is possible to make the events interpreted to ensure wider participation. The workshop should target 100 participants (or more). If possible, the organising entity should set up a broadcast system allowing online streaming of the event or at least foresee the remote connection of speakers. Recording will be an additional asset, as the event will be viewed through the European Cluster Collaboration Platform's display media.

The workshops should focus on how to better use clusters to strengthen industrial ecosystems to serve national/regional/local economic development. Hence, the following must be considered while setting the agenda:

- Providing good practices of European relevance on the role of clusters in regional development priorities in view of the ECCP toolkit[6].
- Giving visibility to the cluster policy of the organising EU region or in case a regional cluster policy is not in place, how they intend to integrate clusters in the regions' economic priorities, facilitate the cooperation between clusters and regional authorities in their territory and foster territorial cooperation with suitable actors outside the Region.
- Ideally, it shall be envisioned as a dynamic event in which the audience and speakers can rely on an adequate environment to make the expected dialogue between the clusters and regional authorities fruitful.
- Ideally, it should showcase how other regions in Europe are benefitting from involving clusters in their policy definition.
- Focus on the regional strategic priorities in terms of sectors and topics to address and facilitate interregional/intra-European collaboration in the priority ecosystems.

If you need an inspirational example of what kind of event is desired, you can visit the ECCP website where you will find all the background information of all 'Clusters meet Regions' events held in the period 2022-2023, and those scheduled till the end of this year.

In each event's page you will find all details, the concept and agenda of the event, the "Input Paper" and participant's booklet produced, video recording (if available), event summary, proceeding report and more.

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[5] NUTS Maps - NUTS - Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics - Eurostat (europa.eu)
[6] Policy Toolkit | European Cluster Collaboration Platform

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As an example, you can find here all the materials produced for the 'Clusters meet Regions' workshop that was held in Barcelona in December 2022:

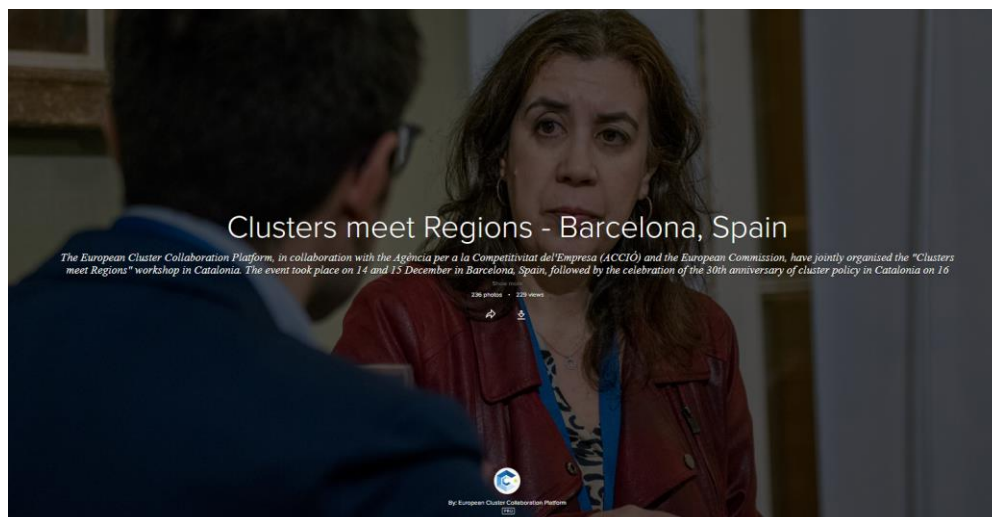**15 December 2022**

Venue: Palau Pedralbes

Address: Avinguda Diagonal, 686, 08034 Barcelona (access through John Maynard Keynes Street at the corner with Jordi Girona)

08:45 – 9:45	**MATCHMAKING EVENT (BREAKFAST)**
10:00 – 10:15	**CLUSTERS MEET REGIONS Opening Session:** - **Mr. Roger Torrent**, Catalan Minister for Enterprise and Labour - **Ms Ulla Engelmann**, Head of "Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters" unit, European Commission (DG GROW)
10:15-11:15	**SETTING THE SCENE** - Introducing "Clusters meet regions", **Ms Marta Batalla Masana**, Policy Officer of "Industrial Forum, Alliances, Clusters" unit, European Commission (DG GROW) - Input paper for Catalonia. **Dr. Jan-Philipp Kramer**, Head of EU Services, Prognos - Talent as a key driver in Catalonia's cluster ecosystem. **Mr. Joan Martí**, Director of Business Strategy Unit, ACCIÓ
11:15-12:45	**CLUSTERS AS TOOL TO ATTRACT, TRAIN AND RETAIN TALENT** Panel discussion, moderator: **Mr. Reza Zadeh**, Executive Director, European Foundation for Cluster Excellence - **Mr Andrei Bunis**, Policy Officer, European Commission (DG GROW) - **Ms. Sandra Sundbäck**, CEO Paper Province - **Mr. Joaquim Solana**, Cluster manager, CENFIM - **Ms. Melissa Torres,** General Manager, Beauty Business School - **Ms. Patricia Valdenebro**, CEO, TCI Network
13:00 – 14:30	**Networking Lunch**
14:30 – 14:45	**SNAPSHOT OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES**

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Input Paper on Catalonia

Flickr Album

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Participant's booklet

Event Summary

The latest ECCP Clusters meet Regions workshop celebrates the 30th Anniversary of Cluster Policy in Catalonia

Submitted by ECCP Team on 22 December 2022

On the 14 and 15 December 2022, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform, in association with the Agència per a la Competitivitat del'Empresa (ACCIÓ) and the European Commission, together organised the "Clusters meet Regions" workshop in Catalonia. The event was held alongside the celebration of the 30th anniversary of cluster policy in Catalonia on 16 December. Over 100 participants from 20 countries representing clusters, SMEs and public/regional governments joined the workshop.

The event took place in Barcelona, and focused on talent and sustainable transition, both of which are considered key assets to boost Catalonia's competitiveness today and in the future. Talent is one of the main pillars in Catalonia's Clusters programme, and as such panellists from the region and beyond discussed its importance in the successful development of cluster policy. Representatives from the food, energy and mobility clusters had the chance to showcase their success stories and share best practices. These ecosystems are among Catalonia's RIS3 priorities and together directly involve more than half of Catalan clusters.

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Support from the European Cluster Collaboration Platform

CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Before the event, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform team will draft an input paper as a background document for the workshop's participants. Such input papers provide an analysis of the situation in the region where the workshop will take place on a selection of topics. The feedback of local authorities and stakeholders will be very important in order to have a quality paper that could also serve the interest of the local host in the future. Their focus is on issues such as governance settings, entrepreneurial discovery process, investment opportunities, thematic priorities, regional strategy and more.

The input papers will include key findings and recommendations for policymakers and cluster managers, which will be presented at the regional workshops. They would then add value to and supplement the analytical work regarding the role of clusters in regional economic and social development in the EU. The Input Paper will be promoted widely through all ECCP channels before and after the event, and the highlights presented in the frame of the actual workshop, by a 'Data and Policy' ECCP team member.

The European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) team will accompany the local hosts in all the journey to a successful event supporting the development of the concept note of the event, consulting on the most suitable agenda structure and formats, as well as will involve recommendations and engagement in the programme of the European Commission. In addition, ECCP will support the engagement of international speakers and moderators.

More in details:

EVENT MANAGEMENT AND LOGISTICS

The ECCP team will support the local host and organiser in operational and logistic aspects of the event, supporting on venue set and AV planning.

MARKETING

The ECCP marketing team will create an ECCP dedicated event's page, set up a registration system, elaborate the material for the dissemination and promotion of the event (before, during and after) to be used in the communication channels of the platform itself, by the European Commission and by any other relevant national or local stakeholder.

Support provided by the ECCP		
Before the event	**During the event**	**After the event**
Create a retro planning	Coordinate all operational tasks (to be specified, or based on the White Book	Prepare and publish event summary
Establish meeting schedule with milestones (between local host, ECCP and EC).	Presentation of the input paper	Create image gallery and publish all presented materials on ECCP event page
Create a dedicated event page on ECCP. Set up and manage the registration system (EUSurvey or B2Match)	Moderation (if required) of the whole event	Responding to questions regarding the input paper

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Manage promotion via the ECCP, the European Commission and other relevant channels	Support with speakers' presentations and documents they might want to provide	Promote all materials and outcomes via ECCP channels, the European Commission and other relevant channels as well include summary in ECCP newsletter
Propose and facilitate communication with speakers/experts/moderators	Promotion via the ECCP, the European Commission and other relevant channels	Follow up satisfactory survey
Distribution of information prior the event (agenda, participants booklet and input paper) through ECCP mailbox		
Travel and accommodation of few keynote international speakers (negotiated on a case by case basis)		
Prepare the input paper for the event		
Design all marketing materials (as per the White Book)		

What is expected from the host?

The host has to propose an agenda following the structure of previous events.

Therefore, it is expected to start from a general view with policy statements by EU, national and regional representatives and follow up by the sessions on the regional industrial development and collaboration with other regions in similar or related industrial ecosystems important for the host Region. If possible, it is desirable to have some successful examples of public-private sector collaboration in that regard.

Below is an overview of the recommended structure that proved to best work so far. Changes can obviously be proposed.

Recommended Agenda Structure	
Day 1	**Day 2**
Welcoming remarks	Match-making event (optional)
Setting up the scene: Presentation of the Input paper Existing Cluster Policies	
Block I – Regional Economic Development	
Block II – Regional Economic Cooperation (Regional authorities and Clusters)	Site Visits (optional)
Block III – Cross-sectorial and interregional cooperation (Success stories, joint projects).	

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Block IV - Pitching Session (opportunity to present local and international organisations in specific format). **Block V** – Regional and EU financial Instruments and Programmes	Other side events engaging clusters from other European regions such as international projects' meetings, international networks meetings, etc. (optional)

Identifying and mapping the regional needs related to the implementation of the smart specialisation policies and the implementation of industrial ecosystems transition pathways elaborated in line with the updated EU Industrial Strategy (digitalisation, mobility, sustainability...) is required as one of the central elements of discussions.

As the previous section mentions, the ECCP will support the preparation of the agenda, its content and structure, also facilitating the identification and engagement of International speakers and moderators.

Providing (and bearing the costs of) the venue(s), technical equipment, catering. In addition, other costs should be envisaged by the host depending on the proposed structure and characteristics of the event, such as: transportation for the site visits (if any) or a reception for the speakers/moderators/organisers (and possible open to all participants), printing of materials, broadcasting (included streaming) and additional marketing effort. For further details, please refer to the White Book.

What is expected from the host[7]	
Before the event	**During the event**
Covering of all the costs	
Providing information and facilitate the identification of regional needs	Event steward/hostess/ staff for registration, microphones management
Engagement of local clusters and other organisations	Professional technical support for the streaming (production equipment, professional cameras, recording...)
Engagement of the regional authorities	
Draft concept note with and explanation of the context according to the information obtained	
Proposing and setting the agenda*	
Identification and management all arrangements with the venue	
Identify the best quality/price accommodation options for participants and negotiate promotional rates	
Identification, contact and arrangement of the technical support for the streaming (professional production)	
Identification, contact and arrangement of the catering	

*All the content of the agenda must be agreed with the European Commission (structure, speakers, moderators, etc.)

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[7] See details in annex 2

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Expected outcomes

Outcome 1: To address the importance of cluster policy at regional level and initiate (where cluster policy is weak) or strengthen (where cluster policy is strong) the collaboration between clusters/EEN members and regional authorities.

Outcome 2: To discuss, analyse and plan the use of clusters in each region for the design and implementation of the updated EU Industrial Policy and smart specialisation strategies.

Outcome 3: To initiate and enhance the interregional/transnational cooperation in industrial ecosystems to build, strengthen or reshape EU value chains.

Assessment process

The workshops will give visibility to the cluster policy of the organising region, facilitate the cooperation of clusters and EEN members with regional authorities in their territory and foster interregional/transnational cooperation. The European Cluster Collaboration Platform, with the approval of the European Commission and the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), will select regions according to the following criteria:

Criteria	Criteria description	Assigned weighting
1	Quality of the proposal and level of details: Clear identification and presentation of needs and potential solutions both for policy makers and clusters in the region to be discussed, disseminated, and promoted during the event.	25%
2	Demonstrated capacity/clear strategy to involve key stakeholders (clusters and policy makers)	20%
3	Relevance of the proposal based on regional and cluster needs according to 2021 cohesion report[8], the EU Cluster Panorama[9] and on supply chain disruptions due to the current geopolitical situation	20%
4	Capacity to organise a hybrid event	15%
5	Support offered by the host organisation (i.e. venue, catering, broadcasting), including support going beyond the minimum requested.	10%
6	Accessibility and availability of appropriate accommodations	5%
7	Other aspects, offers and/or suggestion that the region would like to highlight to strengthen its application	5%

IMPORTANT: In addition to the above, the overall geographical distribution of the various Clusters meet Regions events will also be taken into account, ensuring that these workshops are done in such a way as to cover as many different countries as possible within the European Union, including the diversity of regions; from the most developed to the followers and lagging behind. The selection up to the 16 hosting regions will include proposals from Central and Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, Southern Europe and Western Europe in similar proportions, with the aim of providing events close to the regional and clusters communities.

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[8] Eighth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion - Regional Policy - European Commission (europa.eu)
[9] European_Cluster_Panorama_Report_0.pdf (clustercollaboration.eu)

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Procedure for submission of expression of interest

Expressions of interest must be submitted duly completed, following the instructions given on the ECCP website. There will be one cut-off date during 2023 and up to three in 2024. Based on applications received, additional cut-off dates could be announced in 2025.

Applications must be completed in English.

Only fully filled in and timely submitted applications will be assessed.

This Call is an invitation for an Expression of Interest only. It is not an offer, and the submission of an Expression of Interest does not create a contract or agreement of any kind between the European Commission nor the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and the entity expressing the interest to host the Clusters Meet Regions event.

Contact: In case of any questions on this Call for Expression of Interest, please refer to the Clusters Meet Regions White Book or write to clustersmeetregions@clustercollaboration.eu.

Deadline for submission of the Expression of Interest

This call for expression of interest is continuously open. However, applications will be deemed admissible to be considered for a certain quarter of the year only if they are sent before the respective cut-off date.

The selection of the hosting regions will follow up based on the respective cut-off dates:

- 22 December 2023 – 18:00 CET (Brussels time)
- 31 May 2024 – 18:00 CET (Brussels time)
- 30 September 2024 – 18:00 CET (Brussels time)
- 20 December 2024 – 18:00 CET (Brussels time)
- Potentially, depending on previous selections' results, 31 January 2025 – 18:00 CET (Brussels time) (tbc)

Entities that have applied for a cut-off can also be considered for the next selection without the obligation of submitting a new application. They are encouraged to complement their initial proposal.

Entities can apply before any cut-off date independently from the proposed dates of the event. Please note, that less demanded periods and months (therefore with higher chances of selection) are: February, March, June, August, first half of September, second & third week of December.

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ANNEX I: APPLICATION FORM

You are requested to fill this application online via the link: EU Survey.

This form must be filled in all sections.

All the information must be provided in English, including the additional documentation.

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