



Industrial Clusters for an innovative and competitive Europe

Europe is facing the challenge of transforming into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource efficient and competitive economy. Mobilisation of the industry for a clean and circular economy via deeper cooperation across value chains as well as the use of digital, sustainable solutions and disruptive innovation are critical, as stated in the “European Green Deal”. **Our business innovation ecosystems should be integrated around clusters, which actively support as agents of change the transformation of industry**, as stated in the “Vision for the European Industry until 2030” and by the Strategic Forum for a future ready EU-Industry.

European Clusters Alliance

The European Clusters Alliance is a bottom-up initiative that gathers 12 National Cluster Associations, representing more than 700 clusters, where 112.000 of our most innovative businesses collaborate with thousands of universities, research centers and public institutions to boost their competitiveness.

Our mission is to be their common voice, facilitating connections and opportunities to meet the challenges they face. This document describes the critical role clusters must play in Europe’s industrial strategy, as well as underlines their ability to support the innovation actors in the field (research centers, SMEs, mid-size and major groups) make better use of relevant European funding instruments.

Clusters matter. Why?

According to the recently published report “European Panorama of Clusters and Industrial Change”, European clusters account for almost 122.000.000 jobs. Clusters drive growth on Europe through their higher number of innovative and high-growth firms, showing better performance on key social and competitive indicators. They should be considered as regional ecosystems of related industries and competences. Their mission is to facilitate and maintain strong, close and **trust-based** collaborative relations between companies and with research organizations, helping public authorities to strengthen the competitiveness and prosperity of their regions. Clusters, by bringing together SMEs, encourage innovation, job creation and international trademarks and patents.



How clusters are useful tools for the European institutions

Clusters are key tools for successful implementation of European initiatives

As key players of both regional innovative ecosystems and European and international innovation partnerships, clusters are the perfect actors to promote European initiatives and encourage their implementation by their members. SMEs affiliated to a cluster are more willing to participate in European programmes (SME instrument, COSME, Horizon 2020, among others) and their success rates are higher.

Clusters have a significant impact on SME internationalization

Through the European Commission’s initiatives on clusters’ internationalization (COSME calls for proposal Cluster GO INTERNATIONAL), clusters have developed strong international networks that enables



them to become part of - and benefit from - international value chains. The European support for clusters' internationalization must continue to keep fostering the SME growth and competitiveness.

Clusters are facilitators of cross-border and cross-sectorial collaboration

Clusters are a key player to help their members find the right partners or build partnerships between two or more different sectors. This is a fundamental asset to meet challenges such as Green Deal, Durable and Circular Economy, Digitalization, Industry of the Future or organic-food and farming.

For a given sector clusters gather the whole value chain, integrating SMEs and start-ups/scale-ups

Clusters are the only actors able to gather within their innovation ecosystems an entire value chain, creating an environment in which also new companies (start-ups) can fund and scale-up their activity.

Capacity building

The European Commission has strongly supported cluster development for years, through their active involvement in programs such as COSME, INTERREG, HORIZON 2020, etc. The results have been excellent, positioning clusters as the best instruments in terms of efficiency and performance.

What is needed

We call for the recognition of clusters as the most strategic agents in the next European programs: Single market program, Horizon Europe, Cohesion Policy and Digital Europe, reinforcing their presence in the Regional, Industrial and SME Strategies and introducing them in new initiatives currently under preparation , such as the Green Deal challenge or the Skills development where clusters as trust-based, collaborative innovation ecosystems can play a key role.

Throughout the upcoming framework programme over the 2021-2027 period,
clusters are a strategic strength and asset for the European institutions
to provide decisive innovative solutions to the societal challenges we face:

changing economies

changing climate

changing attitudes

For a social, circular, competitive and sovereign Europe



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