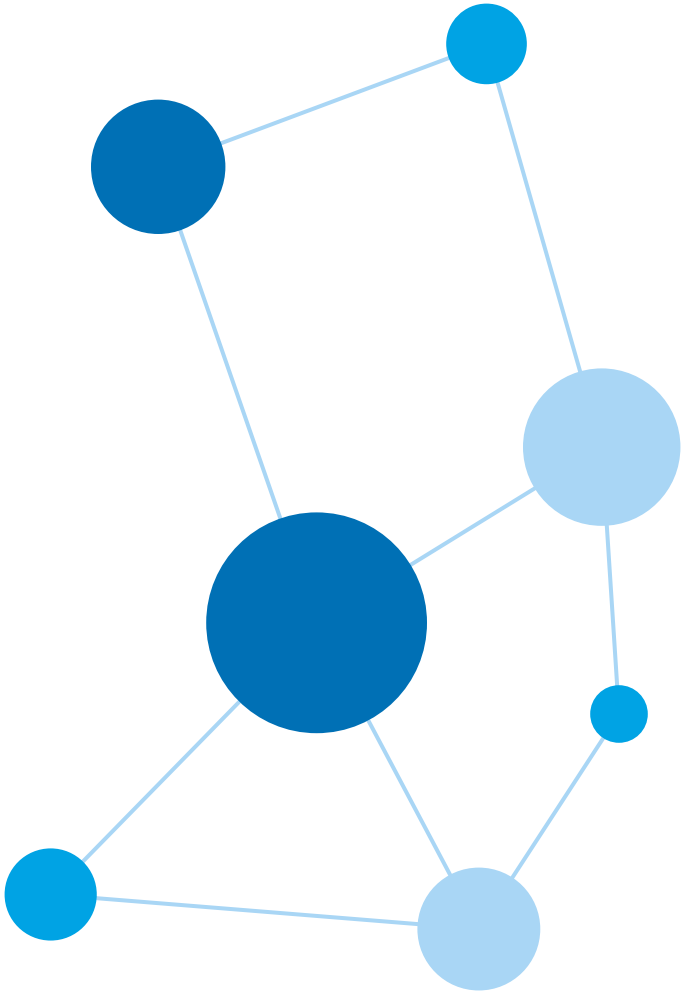
EUROPEAN
CLUSTERS ALLIANCE



Industrial ecosystems and SMEs in the 2028–2034 EU budget

Where two Regulations stand, what is at risk and what the European Clusters Alliance proposes

For cluster organisations, their member companies and their partners · 18 Nov 2026

The situation in one page

WHAT IS HAPPENING

Two Regulations for the 2028–2034 EU budget are being negotiated now. The European Competitiveness Fund will fund business support. The budget performance framework will classify and measure every euro.

WHAT IS AT RISK

An EU for Business Network built for advice to individual firms alone, and fewer dedicated cluster measures in national and regional plans. Enterprises would lose what they gain by working together.

WHAT WE PROPOSE

Ten targeted changes: six in the Fund and four in Annex I of the framework. None creates a programme, a structure or an entitlement, and none takes anything from an existing network.

What you can do. Tell your Members of the European Parliament and your government before the end of November, and answer the ECA consultation by 30 Nov 2026.

Two files: where each stands, the risk and our proposal

FILE 1 · FUNDS

European Competitiveness Fund

COM(2025) 555 · 2025/0555(COD)

Where it stands Parliament's industry committee (ITRE) adopted its position on 10 Nov 2026. Negotiations with the Council, the trilogue, are expected from December 2026.

The risk The EU for Business Network is built for advice to individual firms alone.

Our proposal Six changes: build on all existing networks, as recital 80 says, and give value chains and industrial ecosystems a function.

FILE 2 · MEASURES

Budget performance framework

COM(2025) 545 · 2025/0545(COD)

Where it stands Parliament's joint committee on budgets and budgetary control (BUDG–CONT) is provisionally due to vote on 30 Nov 2026. Negotiations with the Council are expected in 2027.

The risk Cluster support loses its own classification and has to compete inside generic enterprise measures.

Our proposal Four changes: a field for innovation clusters (63a), one collaboration indicator, a title that keeps SMEs and ecosystems, and a rule for cascade funding.

What is at risk is what enterprises gain by working together

If the EU for Business Network is built for advice to individual firms alone, the work that organises cooperation between the companies of a value chain would have no function, no calls and no budget of its own.



Companies

would lose the actions that organise their coordination and cooperation along the value chain.



SMEs

would lose the joint actions that give them critical mass and shared capabilities they cannot build alone.



Industrial ecosystems

would lose the capacity that orchestrates them.

Advice to the individual firm is indispensable and would continue. **What would disappear is the other level.**

The dates that matter



What we ask you to do. Committee and plenary dates in Parliament are provisional or indicative and may move.

European Parliament committee and plenary calendars; ECA Stakeholder Consultation 2026 (clustersalliance.eu/eca-consultation).

Four things you can do now



Share

Forward the ECA briefing to your members, your companies and your partners.



Write to Parliament

Ask the Members you know to support the four changes on Annex I, and an article on the EU for Business Network that says what recital 80 says.



Write to your government

Ask your ministry to keep the Council's wording on the Fund and to propose a function for value chains.



Answer the consultation

Give your view on the future EU for Business Network by 30 Nov 2026. ECA takes the results to the Commission in December.

Detail for each audience in section 4. Consultation: clustersalliance.eu/eca-consultation

1

Why industrial ecosystems matter

What cluster organisations do, and what the evidence says

Cluster organisations build and orchestrate industrial ecosystems

Each brings the companies of a value chain together with research organisations, skills providers, investors and public authorities, and keeps that cooperation working between projects. They provide what no single company can organise alone:

- **Value-chain intelligence and strategic coordination**
- **Supplier development and integration of SMEs into value chains**
- **Joint innovation, technology-uptake and skills programmes**
- **Shared infrastructures**
- **Cross-border partnerships and investment mobilisation**
- **Collective responses to industrial transitions and crises**

The evidence: companies in clusters outperform comparable companies outside them

1,258

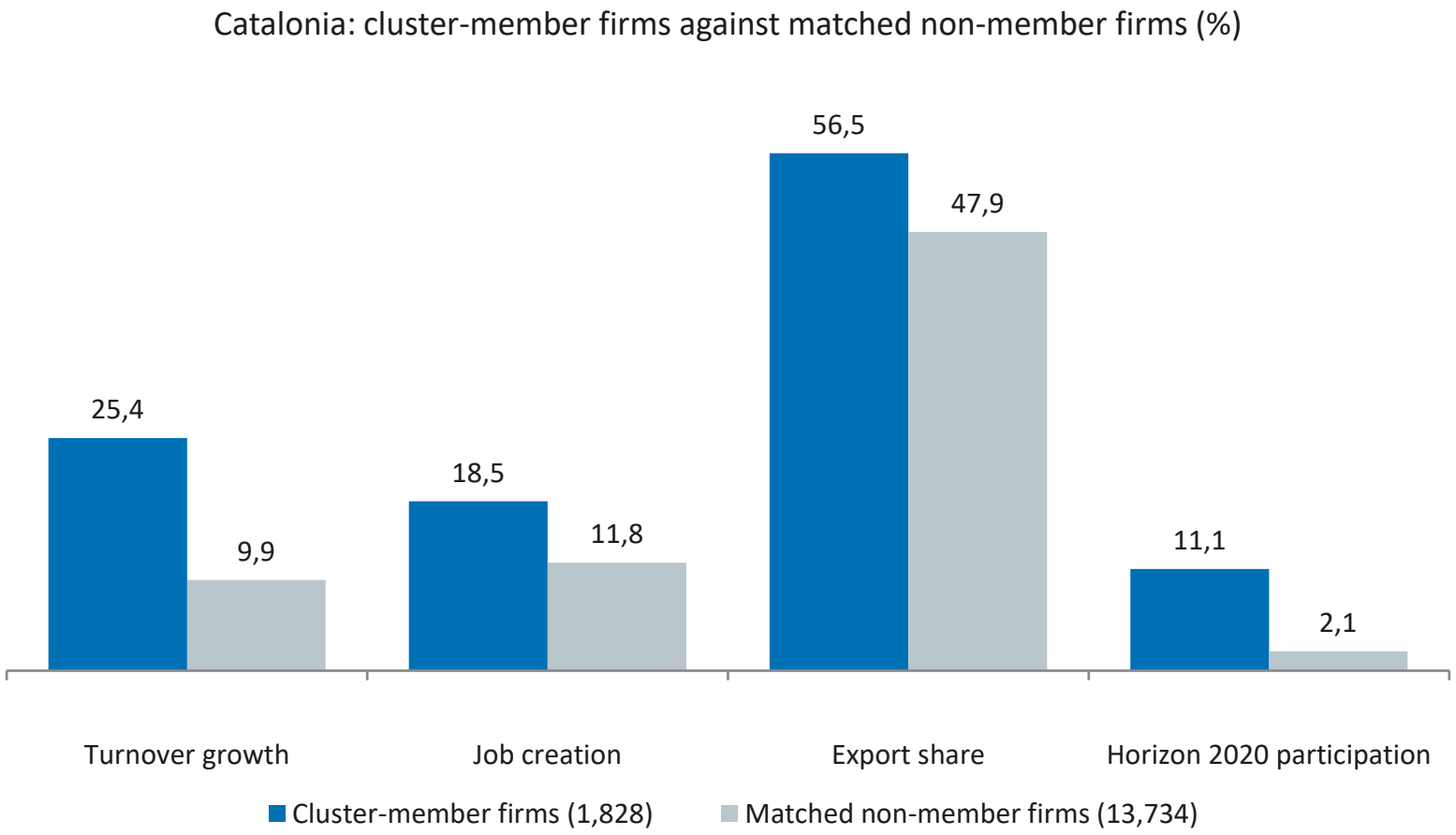
cluster organisations in the EU-27

≈155,000

members

nearly 80%

of those members are SMEs



ECCP Summary Report 2025 (cluster organisations registered on the European Cluster Collaboration Platform); ACCIÓ, control-group evaluation, 2017–2020 data.

The same pattern appears wherever it has been measured

FLANDERS

≈4%

Cluster membership raised firm-level total factor productivity by around 4%.

Independent econometric evaluation of the Spearhead Cluster programme

POLAND

42%

of cluster-member enterprises generate export revenue, against an estimated 4.9% of all Polish enterprises for goods.

PARP national benchmarking of clusters, 2024

EUROCLUSTERS

EUR 30 m+

reaches SMEs through open calls, out of a EUR 42 million budget run by 16 partnerships: proven capacity to manage cascade funding.

EISMEA, 2025

Recognising cluster organisations adds no new actor to the EU budget: it uses an existing, accountable, SME-based infrastructure to deliver what the Fund already promises.

2

File 1: the European Competitiveness Fund

The EU for Business Network and the Value Chains Builder after the committee vote of 10 Nov 2026

Where industrial ecosystems appear in the Regulation

The Fund supports companies in two ways that concern clusters: calls for value-chain projects, and horizontal business support.

Value Chains Builder (Article 16)
Calls for projects along cross-border value chains

Chapter III: horizontal activities for businesses

Project Advisory

Article 26

SME Collaboration

EU for Business Network (Article 27), business support (Article 28), dedicated SME actions (Article 29) and skills development (Article 30)

Access to Union funding

Article 31, with advisory services and dedicated platforms

EUR 234.3 bn

proposed by the Commission for the Fund; Parliament's committee asks for EUR 264.35 billion

EUR 1.8 bn

set aside in Parliament's text for Project Advisory, SME Collaboration, the EU for Business Network and Access to Funding

Recital 80

in all three texts builds the EU for Business Network on the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN), the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) "and other networks"

COM(2025) 555; Council ST 10625/26; European Parliament, ITRE compromise amendment 1 of 10 Nov 2026 (Article 4(2)(aa)). Article numbers as in the Council text.

Three texts are on the table, and they differ on the EU for Business Network

Provision	Commission proposal	Council, 16 Jun 2026	Parliament, committee text of 10 Nov 2026
Foundations of the EU for Business Network	No predecessor named	Article 27(1): “shall be established”; no predecessor	Article 28(2): established “as a successor to the Enterprise Europe Network”
Recital 80	“building on” the EEN, the ECCP “and other networks”	Same wording	Unchanged
What it does	A list of business support measures	Eight measures, taking account of “existing or new structures”	Nine services to businesses; no reference to industrial ecosystems, value chains or cluster organisations
Dedicated platforms, Article 31(2)	Kept	Kept	Deleted
Skills and regional industrial ecosystems, Article 30	Link kept	Link kept	Rewritten; the link disappears
European clusters in Project Advisory, Article 26(3)	Kept	Kept	Kept

COM(2025) 555; Council partial general approach ST 10625/26; European Parliament, ITRE compromise amendment 1. The committee text may still undergo technical adaptation.

What Parliament’s industry committee adopted on 10 Nov 2026

61–13

votes for and against the position, with 12 abstentions

1

compromise amendment rewrites the whole Regulation; every other amendment fell, including those naming clusters in the EU for Business Network

A single predecessor

Article 28(2) establishes the EU for Business Network “as a successor to the Enterprise Europe Network”.

The main channel

The same article has the Fund’s business support measures implemented “in particular through” that Network.

Nine services

Article 28(2a) lists them. It refers to start-up and regional innovation ecosystems, not to industrial ecosystems, value chains or cluster organisations.

Recital 80 unchanged

It still builds on the EEN, the ECCP “and other networks”. Article and recital now say different things.

Two anchors lost

Article 31(2) on dedicated platforms is deleted. Article 30 loses the link with regional industrial ecosystems.

Value Chains Builder

Article 16 adds the connection with industrial ecosystems and SME participation, but does not say who prepares the consortia.

European Parliament, ITRE meeting of 10 Nov 2026, item 13: compromise amendment 1 and voting list; press release of 10 Nov 2026. Mandate to negotiate: 56 votes to 26, with 4 abstentions.

What is at risk: how the instrument would be built

The basic act is the mandate for the work programmes and calls of 2028–2034.

If the basic act…

establishes the EU for Business Network as the successor of a single network and gives it no function for value chains and industrial ecosystems,

the calls that implement it…

would be designed for advice to individual firms. Their format, objectives and eligible activities would not be geared to business collaboration or the development of industrial ecosystems.

Cluster organisations…

would be left with a reduced role, in functions and in budget, as one more beneficiary of calls designed for another purpose.

The cost would fall on enterprises

Companies, SMEs and industrial ecosystems would lose the actions that organise their cooperation.

Advice to the individual firm is indispensable and would continue. **What would disappear is the other level.**

Parliament's Article 28(2) has the Fund's business support measures implemented "in particular through" the EU for Business Network.

Enterprises need two levels of support, and neither replaces the other

Advice to the individual firm

Who Enterprise Europe Network partners and other business advisers

What Information and advice on EU rules and programmes, access to finance, innovation uptake, internationalisation

Reaches The firms that come forward

+

Work at the level of the value chain

Who Cluster organisations and other ecosystem intermediaries

What Mapping capabilities and gaps, developing suppliers, forming consortia, joint programmes, shared infrastructures

Reaches Whole value chains, including the SMEs that would not come forward alone

This is not a contest between networks. The Enterprise Europe Network's services to individual businesses are retained in full; what the text lacks is a function for the other level.

What ECA proposes for the trilogue: six targeted changes

1 Foundations

No single predecessor. Use the wording of recital 80, with EEN partners and cluster organisations on an equal footing as delivery partners, on transparent quality criteria.

Parliament Art. 28(2) · Council Art. 27(1)

2 Functions

An explicit ecosystem and value-chain function, alongside every firm-level service in Parliament's catalogue.

Parliament Art. 28(2a) · Council Art. 28(1)

3 Participation safeguards

Balanced participation, common quality standards and referral between partners; access not conditional on prior EEN membership.

Parliament's coordination clause

4 Value Chains Builder

A facilitation and continuity role for cluster organisations and other ecosystem intermediaries: mapping gaps, mobilising SMEs, preparing projects.

Article 16

5 Platforms and skills

Keep the text on advisory services and dedicated platforms, and the link between skills partnerships and regional industrial ecosystems.

Articles 31(2) and 30

6 Resources

Keep Parliament's EUR 1.8 billion line and name cluster cooperation actions within it.

Article 4(2)(aa)

Compatible with all three texts. No service of the EEN is removed, no entitlement is created and no new structure is needed.

The wording we propose to delegations

A

Foundations of the EU for Business Network · Council Article 27(1)

"The EU for Business Network shall be established, building on the Enterprise Europe Network, the European Cluster Collaboration Platform and other networks. Implementation arrangements shall ensure that Enterprise Europe Network partners and cluster organisations can participate on an equal footing as core delivery partners, on the basis of transparent quality criteria and their complementary capabilities."

B

A function for value chains and ecosystems · new point in Council Article 28(1) or Parliament's Article 28(2a)

"support for the development of cross-border and cross-sectoral value chains, including by identifying complementary industrial capabilities, facilitating supplier–buyer cooperation, aggregating demand and developing collaborative project pipelines and joint investment proposals […]"

C

Value Chains Builder · new paragraph 1c in Council Article 16

"[…] the preparatory and facilitation activities necessary for the formation and continuity of value chain projects […] may be carried out by cluster organisations and other competent ecosystem intermediaries […]"

Extracts. Full wording in the ECA note for Member States and the non-paper for Council delegations. None creates an entitlement, an instrument or a budget line.

Why this serves every Member State, and who shares the principle

It keeps the choice of delivery model open

The Commission and the Member States can build on everything that already works.

It is what the three institutions already say

Recital 80 is the same in the Commission, Council and Parliament texts.

It is how the Fund reaches SMEs in every region

Cluster organisations bring in the firms that do not come forward, and form the consortia that value-chain calls need.

It costs nothing and removes nothing

No entitlement: participation rests on transparent quality criteria.

Who shares the principle

ECA, EURADA and the Vanguard Initiative
Regional development agencies and regional governments ask with us for equal footing and for an ecosystem and value-chain function. Joint statement of 09 Nov 2026: clustersalliance.eu/joint-statement-ecf

The Commission's Expert Group on Cluster Policy
Its working-group papers of October 2026 recommend recognising qualified cluster organisations as delivery partners "in the basic act now, rather than in its implementing rules". Not an official Commission position.

3

File 2: the budget performance framework

Annex I of COM(2025) 545, and what happens to cluster support in it

Annex I is the list every programme will use to classify and report its spending

Every programme

of the 2028–2034 budget, the Competitiveness Fund and the National and Regional Partnership Plans included

classifies each measure

under one of 543 intervention fields listed in Annex I

reports indicators

the output and result indicators attached to that field

and is compared

on what it planned, spent and achieved

It does not decide what is eligible

Eligibility stays with the sector-specific rules (Article 8(2)). Cluster support is not excluded from funding.

It decides what programmes can plan, report and defend

A measure with a field and indicators of its own can be designed, budgeted and evaluated as such. One without them cannot.

COM(2025) 545, Articles 8, 14 and 16 and Annex I.

What is at risk: the dedicated cluster measures built since 2014

2014

Since then, cohesion policy has classified cluster support under a code of its own: 063, then 026

118

programmes use code 026 today, in 23 Member States and in Interreg

EUR 1.1 bn

EUR 1,120.6 million of EU financing is classified under it

The proposed Annex I has no such field. Without a field and indicators of its own, support for cooperation between companies would have to compete inside generic enterprise measures. **The foreseeable result is fewer dedicated cluster measures in the national and regional plans, and the erosion of the capacity built since 2014.**

Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, Annex I (code 026); Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014, Annex I (code 063); Cohesion Open Data, consulted in November 2026.

The problem in four facts

1 The word “cluster” appears nowhere

neither in the Commission proposal, with its 543 intervention fields, nor in the Council’s partial mandate of 26 Jun 2026 (ST 11033/26).

2 Field 63 loses SMEs and ecosystems

The Commission titles it “Support to innovation and advanced support services for SMEs – Processes, Ecosystems, and Strategic Development”. The Council retitles it “Support for competitiveness and innovation in enterprises”.

3 It is a step backwards

Code 063 (2014–2020) and code 026 (2021–2027) classified cluster support explicitly for twelve years. The new Annex I has no such code.

4 Policy recognises intermediaries; measurement does not

The framework counts the users of European Digital Innovation Hubs. Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/2415 lists clusters among knowledge valorisation intermediaries. The Commission funds 16 Euroclusters.

COM(2025) 545, Annex I (field 63; field 67); Council ST 11033/26 (field 63; field 98); Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/2415; EISMEA, 20 Oct 2025.

What ECA proposes for Annex I: four targeted changes

1 A dedicated field 63a

A new line after field 63: “Support for innovation clusters and collaborative industrial ecosystems, including shared innovation infrastructure, cluster management and animation, specialised enterprise services and cooperation between enterprises, research organisations and public authorities”. It continues code 026 and carries 0% in every coefficient column.

2 One collaboration indicator

In fields 63 and 65: “Number of enterprises taking part in collaborative actions facilitated by cluster organisations or other business intermediaries — by business size, type of intermediary and territorial scope”. It counts enterprises, not intermediaries.

3 Field 63: title and footnote

Keep SMEs and ecosystems in the title and add the ** marker, which lets a project move to a more specific field. On the Council text: “Support for competitiveness and innovation in enterprises, in particular SMEs, including through advanced support services and innovation ecosystems**”.

4 Cascade funding

Classify it once the SME sub-projects are selected (Article 8(2)): provisional classification at award, updated through existing reporting, each amount counted once. This is how Euroclusters and Interregional Innovation Investments work.

No new programme and no new spending. Changes 2 to 4 work within the existing fields and stand on their own.

Evidence and wording in full: ECA policy paper on Annex I, 17 Nov 2026.

How the four changes fit the texts already on the table in Parliament

Text on the table	What it does	Our line
Annex I, after field 63	No amendment we know of restores a field for cluster support	Change 1: add field 63a as a new line, with indicators already in the texts
ITRE amendment 43 (field 63)	Keeps the Commission title with “SMEs” and “Ecosystems”	Support, and add the ** marker (change 3)
REGI amendment 160 (field 63)	Adds “investment mobilised (EUR)” as output	Support, and add the collaboration output in the same compromise (change 2)
Draft report amendments 42 to 44	Mandatory indicator definitions; delegated acts to add indicators	Support: where “collaborative action” and cascade funding belong (changes 2 and 4)
Draft report amendment 46; ECON 22 and EMPL 71	Stakeholder consultation (new Article 8a); Member State flexibility kept (Article 14(2))	Support; add business intermediaries, including cluster organisations, to those consulted

What we ask of the joint committee. Carry the four changes into the compromise amendments before the vote, provisionally on 30 Nov 2026. If they are left out, a plenary amendment remains possible.

Draft report PE787.767; opinions ITRE PE784.361, REGI PE785.455, ECON PE786.895, EMPL PE785.252. Co-rapporteurs: Jean-Marc Germain (S&D, FR) and Niclas Herbst (EPP, DE).

4

What you can do

Members of the European Parliament, national governments, cluster organisations and companies

What Members of the European Parliament can do

If the Member…	When	What helps
sits on BUDG or CONT	Now, before the joint committee vote (provisionally 30 Nov 2026)	Ask the co-rapporteurs and the group's shadow rapporteur to carry the four changes on Annex I into the compromise amendments, and to keep the Article 14(2) flexibility
sits in any committee	Plenary on the framework, indicatively 14 Dec 2026	If the compromise leaves the changes out, support a plenary amendment on field 63a, the title of field 63 and the collaboration indicator
sits on ITRE or is close to the negotiators on the Fund	Before and during the trilogue (Dec 2026 – Jun 2027)	Ask that Article 28(2) be aligned with Parliament's own recital 80, that the Council's Articles 30 and 31(2) be accepted, and that a function for value chains be added in Articles 16 and 28
works with the Commission	2027, implementation	Ask that "collaborative action" enters the indicator methodology (Article 8(3)), and that delivery partners are selected on transparent quality criteria

A short message works best: who you are, how many companies you bring together, and the one change you ask for.

Co-rapporteurs on the Fund: Christian Ehler (EPP, DE) and Dan Nica (S&D, RO). Parliament's negotiators work from the committee text; on the Fund, the initiative lies with the Council.

What national governments can do

In the trilogue the Presidency negotiates for the Council. What delegations say in the Council's working party decides how firmly it holds each point, and whether it puts new wording on the table.

Who	When	What helps
The ministry responsible for industry, SMEs or cluster policy, and the Permanent Representation	Now, and at each stage of the trilogue	Keep the Council's wording on the EU for Business Network: no predecessor, recital 80 as it stands. Keep Articles 26(3), 30 and 31(2). Propose a function for value chains and industrial ecosystems
The finance ministry and the budget counsellor at the Permanent Representation	Trilogue on the framework, 2027	Support a dedicated field 63a and one collaboration indicator; accept a title for field 63 that keeps SMEs and innovation ecosystems; keep the Article 14(2) flexibility
The authorities preparing the National and Regional Partnership Plan	2027	Use Article 14(2) to add a collaboration indicator with a common definition

The wording is ready. ECA's note for Member States gives the proposed text for both files, in English, French and Spanish. Three extracts are on slide 18.

Council partial general approach ST 10625/26 (Fund) and partial mandate ST 11033/26 (performance framework).

What cluster organisations and companies can do

Share

Forward the ECA briefing to your members, your companies and your partners, with a short message of your own.

Speak to the people you know

A Member of the European Parliament or their team, your regional ministry, your region's office in Brussels. The letter from the ECA President can go with your own.

Tell us

Let your national cluster association or ECA know whom you reached and what they answered. One European picture helps everyone.

Answer the consultation

ECA Stakeholder Consultation 2026 on the future EU for Business Network, open until 30 Nov 2026. The results go to the Commission in December.

Make it yours. Say how many companies you bring together, and give one example of what they achieved by working together.
Consultation: clustersalliance.eu/eca-consultation

What we ask, and what we do not ask

We ask for

- That the article say what recital 80 already says in all three texts
- A function for value chains and industrial ecosystems in the Fund
- A field and an indicator of its own for cluster support in Annex I
- Participation on transparent quality criteria

We do not ask for

- A new programme, structure or budget line
- An entitlement for any organisation
- Anything taken from the Enterprise Europe Network or from any existing network
- New reporting burdens: the indicator reuses data that beneficiaries already report

Two related cohesion files to watch

INVESTS IN REGIONS

European Regional Development Fund 2028–2034

Whether smart specialisation still names clusters and cooperation between businesses, research organisations and public authorities, as it has since 2014.

Committee stage in the European Parliament (REGI)

PLANS

National and Regional Partnership Plans

Who is a partner in each plan, and what place interregional value chains and innovation investments keep in them.

Committee stage in the European Parliament

The performance framework applies to both: the fields and indicators of Annex I are those their programmes will use. ECA follows both files with its members and partners.

Documents and contact

Briefing for cluster organisations, their companies and partners

18 Nov 2026 · English and Spanish

Letter from the ECA President

18 Nov 2026 · English, French and Spanish

Note for Member States, with the proposed wording

18 Nov 2026 · English, French and Spanish

Policy paper on Annex I of the performance framework

17 Nov 2026 · English, French and Spanish

Joint statement of ECA, EURADA and the Vanguard Initiative

09 Nov 2026 · clustersalliance.eu/joint-statement-ecf

ECA Stakeholder Consultation 2026

Open until 30 Nov 2026 · clustersalliance.eu/eca-consultation

The documents are available from ECA and from your national cluster association. French and Spanish versions are courtesy translations.

EUROPEAN CLUSTERS ALLIANCE

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About ECA

The association of national and regional cluster networks in Europe: more than 1,000 cluster organisations, some 150,000 companies and around 11,000 universities, research centres and public institutions.

Sources

Legislative texts. Proposal for a Regulation establishing the European Competitiveness Fund, COM(2025) 555, 2025/0555(COD); proposal for a Regulation establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework, COM(2025) 545, 2025/0545(COD) (eur-lex.europa.eu). Council partial general approach ST 10625/26, 16 Jun 2026, and partial mandate ST 11033/26, 26 Jun 2026 (data.consilium.europa.eu). European Parliament, ITRE meeting of 10 Nov 2026, item 13: compromise amendment 1 and voting list on the Fund, and press release of 10 Nov 2026; draft report PE787.767; opinions ITRE PE784.361, REGI PE785.455, ECON PE786.895 and EMPL PE785.252.

Earlier classification of cluster support. Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, Annex I (code 026); Implementing Regulation (EU) No 215/2014, Annex I (code 063); Cohesion Open Data (cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu), consulted in November 2026; Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/2415.

Evidence. ECCP Summary Report 2025; ACCIÓ, control-group evaluation of cluster-member firms in Catalonia (2017–2020 data); independent econometric evaluation of the Flemish Spearhead Cluster programme, Journal of Regional Science (2024/2025); PARP, Benchmarking of Clusters in Poland, 2024; EISMEA, “A new generation of Euroclusters”, 20 Oct 2025.

Positions. ECA, EURADA and Vanguard Initiative, joint statement “Complementary strengths. Equal footing. Shared solutions.”, 09 Nov 2026; Expert Group on Cluster Policy, working-group papers, September–October 2026 (not an official Commission position).

The committee text of the European Parliament may still undergo technical adaptation before plenary. Dates of committee and plenary votes are provisional or indicative.