

Interview with Mrs Isabelle GRIPPA,

CEO of hub.brussels

Could you please tell us about the missions and services of hub.brussels?

hub.brussels is the Brussels Agency for Entrepreneurship. It offers a wide array of free advice, services and tools to ensure the success of entrepreneurial projects, with challenges ranging from setting up a legal entity to accessing the right funding sources.

hub.brussels also supports businesses wishing to export beyond the country's borders, just as it promotes foreign investment in Brussels. For these services, we can rely on our network of General Delegates of the Brussels-Capital Region who provide valuable support to Brussels companies abroad.

Our team works hard to make innovation and entrepreneurship accessible to everyone in Brussels, and to create an urban economy capable of supporting innovation, internationalisation and socio-economic impact.

What is hub.brussels approach toward innovation?

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Our agency builds on the unique characteristics of the Brussels-Capital Region to support the sustainable growth of the economy: Brussels is a strong innovator and its innovation score has increased over time. Specific strengths include a high number of international scientific co-publications, a large number of SMEs developing innovation in-

house and a high ratio of people with tertiary education.

Smart specialisation domains are structured around clusters of companies, industry and academia, managed by hub.brussels. They focus on the audiovisual industry, sustainable construction, circular economy, healthcare, ICT and tourism/events/ cultural sectors.

Other initiatives stimulating innovation include starters accelerators (green businesses, industrial circular projects and medical devices/e-health solutions), support to the digitalisation of enterprises and the promotion of social economy practices within the traditional economy. These programmes are run by hub.brussels and designed in collaboration with other public and private initiatives.

Are innovation and internationalisation strongly connected in Brussels?

Given the limited size of regional and national markets, it is natural for Brussels-based companies to focus on international markets from very early on. This is where Brussels' DNA as a European capital comes into play: Brussels-based companies actively engage with European funds and programmes, in order to collaborate with research and business partners across Europe and beyond. These companies – as any other legal entity based in Brussels – can rely on NCP Brussels, the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe and the Digital Europe Programmes to understand how these programmes work and identify the right schemes.

The support services are designed to further boost their R&D activities, carried out internationally with European partners. Within hub.brussels, the NCP Brussels' team provides tailored guidance throughout their entire project lifecycle, from initiation to proposal development and submission. If the project is selected for funding, NCP Brussels extends its support to implementation and impact generation. The support of its specialist advisors proved essential in identifying the most suitable and available calls for proposals, and in developing quality proposals meeting the specific evaluation criteria of these highly competitive programmes.

Should a company be looking for qualified partners abroad to activate collaborative innovation, technology or know-how transfer, another set of services is provided by Enterprise Europe Brussels (EEB), a unique public-private consortium between hub.brussels and the Brussels' chamber of commerce BECI. The EEB advisors are connected to more than 60 countries. They are experts in their respective domains which enables them to connect Brussels companies with relevant collaboration opportunities.

What are the priorities for hub.brussels' international support in the coming months?

To further stimulate innovation by internationalisation, we will continue to fulfil our public service mission by prioritising high value-added initiatives (economic missions and international trade fairs), direct market contacts and support tailored to the needs of each company.

Our international action plan will increasingly focus on Europe, with a dual objective: offering more accessible formats for companies and maximising economic impact. We will also ensure a sectoral balance in order to continue supporting the key industries of the Brussels economy.

<https://hub.brussels/en/>