

Sirris celebrates 75th with substantial investments

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€5.5 million in GenAI and three new test environments to boost Belgian tech industry

This year, Sirris is adding an extra €5.5 million to its regular annual investments for knowledge and infrastructure enhancement. A significant part of that will be allocated to the construction of three brand-new industrial demonstration and test environments in the labs in Kortrijk, Genk and Charleroi. The remaining amount will be invested in GenAI research and development. With these additional investments, Sirris aims to further support the Belgian industry and help it meet the unprecedented challenges of energy transition, digitisation and GenAI.

> *‘Seventy-five years on, our commitment to bolstering companies' competitiveness via technological innovation is more relevant than ever. By facilitating the adoption of knowledge and technology, we enable companies to stay three years ahead of market trends, maintaining their edge in competitiveness.’*
>
> - Herman Derache and Jeroen Deleu

Since its establishment on 23 April 1949, Sirris has led the way in numerous technological breakthroughs for its clients and even today, Sirris is more active and ambitious than ever: '*Due to the various successive crises and geopolitical tensions, an increasing number of Belgian manufacturing companies are considering bringing their supply chain back to Europe. This is only possible if they make their production processes more competitive, greener and energy efficient using state-of-the-art technologies. SMEs have insufficient time and resources to keep up with the ever-faster technological evolutions and to assess which innovations they should implement. This is where Sirris makes a difference. Thanks to the know-how they have amassed and industrial test environments, an innovation project does not have to take months or cost unnecessary money. Even five days may suffice sometimes to arrive at a ground-breaking industrial innovation, providing work for hundreds of people.*'

Investing to maintain pioneering position

To mark its 75th anniversary, Sirris is investing an additional €4 million this year in brand-new industrial demonstration and test environments in their labs in Kortrijk, Genk and Charleroi. From December, Belgian manufacturing SMEs will be able to conduct experiments there making use of the latest manufacturing technologies.

Sirris's experts will also guide companies through recent areas such as green energy, cybersecurity and circular production in the coming years, while also stepping up the efforts in the field of AI, with €1.5 million in additional investments by 2024. This should make it possible to give tech companies a good three-year lead in the market.

'Sirris closely monitors all technological advances, well ahead of their introduction to the broader public. Our vision of the Factory of the Future, for instance, was already on point in 2012, long before Germany launched the concept of Industry 4.0. We have already invested some €50 million in it over the past 14 years. We have also been working on circular economy (€5.5 million) and energy transition (€12 million) for more than a decade and have helped many companies get started. This year, we are putting extra focus on AI, which is suddenly shifting gears at breakneck speed. Starting in 2013, we've been assessing its industrial viability and have invested around €14 million in AI, primarily in collaboration with innovative firms. This year, we're even augmenting that with an additional €1.5 million,' says Jeroen Deleu, Director Strategy & Corporate development at Sirris.

SMEs under increasing innovation pressure

Belgium has recently achieved the top spot in Europe for R&D investment. However, there's still significant progress to be made in getting our country's SMEs on board with innovation and speeding up the adoption of new technologies, all while managing risks effectively.

'In Belgium, we still have a lot of work to do to accelerate the use of new technologies. Especially when it comes to SMEs, which account for a good 80% of companies in Belgium. They need external advice more than large companies which have their own R&D and engineering departments. Companies that seek assistance from Sirris experience a fivefold increase in their added value to the Belgian economy, surpassing the average. That is where our brand-new test environments and our additional investments in GenAI will certainly help,' Herman Derache, Managing Director of Sirris concludes.

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