

SME member spotlight - April 2026

HDF Energy

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HDF Energy's high-power fuel cell manufacturing plant and headquarters in Blanquefort near Bordeaux, France



From your perspective, what are the key challenges that SMEs face in the hydrogen sector?

Being an SME in the hydrogen sector offers significant opportunities. Smaller companies can position themselves early in niche markets of this emerging sector. Their agility allows them to **adapt quickly** to this rapidly evolving market.

However, SMEs also face key challenges. First, **regulatory complexity and uncertainty** can slow down project deployment and increase risk exposure — constraints that smaller organisations are often less equipped to absorb due to limited financial and operational buffers. In addition, access to financing remains a major hurdle. The **capital-intensive** nature of hydrogen infrastructure and long project timelines make securing investment both difficult and essential for scaling solutions and reaching commercial deployment.

Another major issue is the gap between **technological readiness and market maturity**. While solutions are increasingly proven, customers and investors still require strong references and guarantees, which can be difficult for SMEs to provide alone.

Finally, **visibility and credibility** at European and international levels are crucial for SMEs to scale up. Building strong partnerships with large industrial players and public institutions is essential to bridge the valley between innovation and industrial deployment.

How has your collaboration with Hydrogen Europe supported or enhanced your work?

As a member of Hydrogen Europe, HDF Energy benefits from a strong platform to **engage with industry peers, policymakers and financial stakeholders** across the European hydrogen ecosystem. This membership enables us to contribute our operational experience from real-world hydrogen infrastructure projects and to ensure that industrial realities are reflected in European strategies and regulatory frameworks.

Through Hydrogen Europe, we are also regularly informed about **evolving European regulations and policy developments**, allowing us to anticipate compliance requirements, adapt our projects accordingly and mitigate regulatory risk in a fast-moving sector.

Being part of Hydrogen Europe also **increases the visibility of our projects** and fuel cell technology while fostering dialogue and cooperation across the entire value chain. It facilitates the **development of partnerships** between SMEs and large industrial players, which is essential to accelerate innovation and market deployment.

For HDF Energy, this collaboration strengthens our integration into European initiatives and **reinforces our role** as both an industrial manufacturer and a project developer actively contributing to the energy transition through concrete, bankable hydrogen solutions.

If you could make one wish, what would it be for the hydrogen sector over the next year?

Our main wish for the hydrogen sector within the next year is to see a **clear acceleration** from pilot projects to large-scale commercial deployment, supported by strong industrial partnerships. This requires **stable regulatory frameworks and concrete investment** decisions enabling hydrogen technologies to scale up.

We also hope to see more **strategic collaborations** between innovative SMEs and major industrial players to accelerate technological development and market adoption. Partnerships such as the one established between HDF Energy and ABB Marine & Ports in December 2025 to co-develop a high-power fuel cell for heavy maritime transport illustrate how combining complementary expertise can **fast-track the decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors**.

Finally, our wish is that hydrogen moves from being perceived mainly as a future solution to becoming a **visible and reliable part of today's energy mix**, delivering tangible benefits for energy security, industrial competitiveness and climate objectives across Europe and beyond.

Are you an **SME or start-up** in the hydrogen and energy transition sector?

Eager to connect with other start-ups and SMEs?



Network with like-minded innovators



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Unlock your scale-up potential

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