



## Startups and capital from over 80 countries at WMF 2026: tomorrow the World Startup & VC Fest returns to Bologna

From June 24 to 26, inside WMF - We Make Future, the international vertical reference event for startups, innovative PMIs, scaleups, investors, corporates, and open innovation stakeholders returns. A three-day event featuring the Startup District, B2B, B2C, and B2G meetings, side events, thematic stages, reserved networking events inside and outside the fair, and the International Startup Competition Finals on the Mainstage. Over 3,000 startups, SMEs, investors, corporates, decision-makers, startup delegations from over 80 countries, and an international network of investors, incubators, VCs, Business Angels, corporates, and accelerators are expected, totaling over 304 billion dollars in Assets Under Management, 1.5 billion dollars in portfolio value, and more than 17,000 managed investment rounds.

Bologna, 23/06/2026

The [World Startup & VC Fest](#) returns tomorrow at **WMF - We Make Future 2026**, the WMF vertical event dedicated to the international ecosystem of startups, innovative SMEs, scaleups, investors, corporates, accelerators, incubators, and open innovation stakeholders.

From June 24 to 26, within the International Trade Fair and Festival on Innovation: AI, Tech and Digital, the World Startup & VC Fest will bring over **3,000 startup founders, innovative PMIs, investors, and innovation stakeholders** to Bologna, with delegations from over **80 countries**, B2B, B2C, and B2G areas, the Startup District, Startup Arena, thematic stages, side events, and reserved networking events inside and outside the fair.

What makes the World Startup & VC Fest strategic is also the **international network** that has distinguished WMF for years: an ecosystem composed of **investors, corporates, venture capital, business angels, accelerators, incubators, startup organizations, media, and open innovation stakeholders** active on a global scale. This network has a particularly strong presence in **Europe, North America, and Asia**, capable of covering the entire lifecycle of a startup, from **pre-seed** to **scale-up**, connecting capital, **deal flow**, industrial skills, and international amplification capabilities. It is precisely this combination that makes WMF a platform for access to markets, partnerships, and growth opportunities, extending beyond the single dimension of a trade fair or competition. Describing the weight of the involved ecosystem are also the numbers related to the present investors, incubators, VCs, Business Angels, corporates, and accelerators: 304 billion dollars in Assets Under Management, 1.5 billion dollars of portfolio value, and more than 17,000 managed investment rounds.

*"The World Startup & VC Fest is one of the tools through which WMF connects startups, innovative SMEs, investors, corporates, and institutions from all over the world, creating concrete opportunities for access to capital, markets, and partnerships", states **Cosmano Lombardo**, Founder and CEO of Search On Media Group and creator of WMF - We Make Future. "The presence of startups active in the 14 strategic sectors of WMF, from AI to robotics, from health to fintech, from space economy to food, up to energy, mobility, tourism, and cybersecurity, multiplies the meeting opportunities between founders, companies, and investors. On one hand, Italian startups and SMEs can come into contact with international capital, corporates, and markets; on the other hand, foreign investors and startups find a qualified context in WMF to get to know the Italian ecosystem, build relationships, and develop*



*new business opportunities".*

### Startups, capital, and markets from all over the world

Among the central and defining elements of the event is the breadth of its international appeal: the World Startup & VC Fest will involve startup delegations from over **80 countries** and a global network of investors, incubators, VCs, business angels, corporates, and accelerators. Confirming the global scale of the program are also the 1,500 applications received from 89 countries for the Startup Competition, from which 140 startups were selected. Among the ecosystems represented, in addition to Italy, are the **United Kingdom, Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Brazil, China, South Korea, Singapore, India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda**, alongside numerous other countries. The startups will be involved across exhibition districts, pitch sessions, meetings with more than **50 foreign delegations**, and reserved networking events inside and outside the fair.

### Business matching, Soft Landing, and networking: concrete opportunities of the three-day event

The World Startup & VC Fest will offer a structured system of opportunities to encourage market access, the meeting of innovation demand and supply, and connections among startups, SMEs, investors, corporates, and institutions. During the three days, dedicated areas for **B2B, B2C, and B2G** meetings will be active between halls 29 and 30 and the event spaces, with the involvement of partners such as **ITA - Italian Trade Agency, Search On, Sellalab, and Legacoop**, to facilitate dialogue among founders, investors, businesses, public administration, and open innovation stakeholders.

Among the most relevant tools is the **Soft Landing Program**, developed with the support of institutional and ecosystem partners such as **Invitalia, Italian Tech Alliance, InnovUp, Roma Startup and Zest**, designed as a fast track to accompany founders and companies entering the Italian and foreign markets, reducing friction and facilitating qualified relationships with public and private entities.

The program will be enriched by reserved networking events inside and outside the fair, designed to generate high-value meeting opportunities in both formal and informal settings. Among the central events is the **Invitalia Investor Day**, scheduled for **June 24 from 12:00 to 16:00**: a day dedicated to matchmaking, created to intercept the needs of investors, corporates, open innovators, and partners of the Invitalia Startup System, connecting them directly with innovative scale-up companies. An increasingly relevant player in the national innovation ecosystem, Invitalia accelerates business growth, not only through financial incentives but also with orientation and accompaniment services for submitting incentive applications and strategic networking initiatives. This continuous support guides businesses from project definition to accessing key markets, capital, and partnerships for expansion.

And then there is the **Italian Lifestyle**, organized by Nana Bianca Night together with Intesa Sanpaolo and dedicated to the ILS program ; the **WMF Innovation Night**, an event dedicated to



informal meetings between founders and investors ; the **ZEST - Open Innovation Meetup**, designed to create a dialogue between startups, investors, and VCs ; the speakeasy of **UIBM** - Italian Patent and Trademark Office - **UIBM** - Mimit and **EPO** - European Patent Office, and the **Special Partner Night** on June 23 at **Tecnopolo DAMA**, a reserved appointment for stakeholders, institutions, corporates, and innovation leaders to foster strategic connections on AI, data economy, and digital transformation.

### The International Startup Competition Finals on the Mainstage

Among the most anticipated appointments of the World Startup & VC Fest, the **International Startup Competition Finals** will take place on the afternoon of **June 25** on the WMF Mainstage, in front of an audience of investors, corporates, venture capitalists, funds, institutions, and open innovation stakeholders.

**6 final startups** selected globally will compete, featuring solutions spanning some of the most strategic sectors of contemporary innovation: **Wormsensing** from France, with Dragonfly®, an ultra-sensitive sensor for predictive maintenance, structural monitoring, and industrial optimization; **MaestroHub GmbH** from Germany, a data infrastructure platform to connect machines, sensors, and industrial systems in a single real-time data layer; **TerraSpark** from Luxembourg, committed to developing commercial space-based solar power solutions; **Brainfood Intelligent Media Cloud** from Greece, an AI-native infrastructure for publishers and digital knowledge systems; **Mirai S.p.A.** from Italy, with Ocean OS, an autonomy and mission intelligence system for maritime operations ; and **WealthRyse** from China, with Genisys, an AI-driven engine for asset management, risk management, compliance, and reporting.

**Lishe360** from Tanzania, selected through the **Global Impact Challenge** - a WMF call dedicated to impactful startups and innovative PMIs - will also take the Mainstage. The startup develops affordable and locally produced food for children and mothers, integrating production, retail distribution, and digital education.

The finalists will compete for awards and opportunities provided by the competition's partners. Among the scheduled recognitions, the Jury Award will guarantee access to the global finals of the **Startup World Cup** in **San Francisco**, with the chance to compete for an investment of up to **1 million dollars**. The Public Award will instead be linked to the **OVHcloud** startup program. Alongside these recognitions, the Global Impact Challenge will also be highlighted thanks to a package of services made available by the Business Unit Consulting of **Search On Media Group**.

### Mainstage and international appointments for startups, VCs, and businesses

The startup and VC program will also find space on the WMF Mainstage, with panels and moments dedicated to the international ecosystem of innovation and investment. Scheduled events include "**The Business of Global Success: Music, Brands and Leadership**", featuring **Mathew Knowles**, Founder & CEO of Music World Entertainment ; and "**The 28th Regime: One Market for Innovation**", with **Francesco Cerruti** of Italian Tech Alliance, **Lorenzo Minio Paluello** of Roma Startup, and **Tomáš Pospíšil** of the Czech Startup Association.



Also on the schedule is **Scale Up For Future**, featuring **Klarna** and **Trade Republic** on stage, a format dedicated to selected scaleups by the WMF Innovation Team, which will present case studies, business models, and growth paths to the international network of the event.

### **Startup District and Thematic Stages: the program for founders and investors**

Among the central spaces of the World Startup & VC Fest, the **Startup District** will be the exhibition area entirely dedicated to startups and entrepreneurial projects from all over the world. A district where investors, corporates, companies, innovation managers, and open innovation stakeholders can discover innovative **solutions, services, tools and technologies**, including **AI-based** ones, coming into direct contact with internationally selected founders and teams.

Within the Startup District, the **Startup Arena** will also take shape—the heart of the pitch sessions, where the **140 startups selected** from the **1,500 applications** received from **89 countries** will present solutions in response to WMF's **14 Challenges of the Future**. The pitch sessions will be organized around three tracks: **Technological Disruption, Finance and Scalable Infrastructures, Human Empowerment and Communities of the Future, and Planet, Smart Cities & Impact-Driven Innovation**. Alongside the Startup Arena, the **Startup & VC Plenary** will be the venue for discussion among founders, investors, corporates, and innovation stakeholders on the new scenarios of venture capital, open innovation, and internationalization, focusing on global ecosystems, cross-border strategies, access to European markets, new capital models, and community funding. Among the panels on the agenda is also **Building The Italian Tech Future**, dedicated to the players of the Italian ecosystem who are contributing to the growth of startups, businesses, and tech communities.

The path will be completed with the **Impact to Business Stage**, dedicated to business models and projects with a social and environmental impact, and the **Entrepreneurship Stage**, focusing on the future of entrepreneurship between AI, new business models, trust, and learning. Space will also be given to **Made in Italy Futures**, powered by Philip Morris, dedicated to the future of SMEs, industrial innovation, and the Italian production system. A place for debate on AI, generational transition, labor, territories, and innovation within the production chains of Made in Italy, under the patronage of **COTEC - Foundation for Innovation, CNA - National Confederation of Craftsmanship and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Imprenditori d'Italia, and Confindustria Emilia-Romagna**. These appointments will be joined by the **Startup Day** of the University of Bologna, now in its XI edition, with a focus on innovation, research, youth entrepreneurship, deep tech, ecological transition, and social inclusion.

From June 24 to 26, WMF will thus become the meeting point for those who build, fund, and support the development of high-potential new businesses: an opportunity to intercept technologies, business models, capital, and solutions capable of generating real value in international markets.

WMF - We Make Future is conceived, organized, and produced by Search On Media Group. The event takes place under the **Patronage of the European Commission, MAECI - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**, the Emilia-Romagna Region, and the



**Municipality of Bologna.** With the support of **MAECI - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation**, **ICE - Italian Trade Agency** for the promotion abroad and internationalization of Italian companies, and the **Emilia-Romagna Region**. In partnership with **Visit Emilia-Romagna**. In collaboration with **BolognaFiere**, **Cineca**, and **ESA - European Space Agency**. **Main Sponsors of the 2026 edition: Philip Morris, Dell Technologies, and Intel.**

### Useful Links

- [World Startup & VC Fest](#)

**WMF - We Make Future, The Largest International Trade Fair and Festival on Artificial Intelligence, Technology and Digital Innovation** On 24 - 25 - 26 JUNE 2026, at BolognaFiere, returns the WMF - We Make Future, certified international trade fair entirely dedicated to the world of innovation. An event of global appeal, it gathers annually the best of artificial intelligence, of technology and of digital and social innovation, together with the main international players, startups, scaleups, investors, institutions, universities and non-profit entities. With more than 73,000 attendances from 90 Countries in 2025, +700 exhibitors, over 1,000 speakers and guests from all over the world, + 2,800 B2B meetings organized, 3,000 among startups and investors, and partners involved for an investment portfolio equal to 1,500 billion, +304 billion of AUM, over 72.8 billion dollars in funded operations and more than 17,000 investment rounds managed, the WMF is the international reference Trade Fair for the world of innovation.

#### **Saudi Makes Future - The Largest AI Exhibition in the Middle East**

Saudi Makes Future is the Saudi edition of WMF - We Make Future, certified international trade fair and global reference platform for innovation, Artificial Intelligence and technologies. Developed through the collaboration between Search On Media Group, WMF - We Make Future and PNG Saudi, the event will be held from 14 to 16 December 2026 in Riyadh, at the Riyadh International Convention & Exhibition Center. In continuity with the vision, the experience and the thematic architecture of the WMF, Saudi Makes Future declines the format in an AI key, articulating in 14 strategic sectors that explore the impact of Artificial Intelligence on business, industry, society and institutions. Inserted in the framework of the Saudi Vision 2030, the event proposes itself as an international platform of meeting, cooperation and development, turned to companies, startups, investors and stakeholders interested in new opportunities of growth, education and innovation in the Middle East and at global level.

**Search On Media Group - Humans Leading Innovation** Since 2004 the company has the objective of disseminating digital culture by managing communities, supporting activities of sharing and performing strategic and operational consulting, with the department Search On Consulting, in the sector of Digital Marketing and Digital Transformation for large companies. From the experience and from the professionalism of Search On Media Group are then born the Business Unit Event Agency - which organizes the WMF and other proprietary events and for clients - and the hybrid platform ibrido.io - which manages online, hybrid and offline events, in a customizable and flexible way.

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