

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

At WMF 2026, the World Startup & VC Fest returns: 3 days of business, B2B, and networking with 3,000+ startups, investors, and corporates from 80+ countries.

BOLOGNA, BOLOGNA, ITALY, June 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- 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 PMIs, 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 PMIs 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.

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