WSIS FORUM 2026

6-10 July 2026
Geneva, Switzerland

Session Outcome Document

Competition Policy, Platform Ecosystems, and Fair Opportunities for Small Developers: Building an Inclusive App Economy

Association for Competitive Technology

Tuesday July 7, 16:00 – 16:45 (UTC +02:00)

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/Agenda/Session/212

Key Issues discussed:

- **Legal and compliance costs as a barrier to starting and scaling**: Navigating overlapping regulatory regimes requires legal expertise that small teams often can't afford, effectively raising the cost of entry and diverting resources away from product development toward compliance work.
- **Regulatory fragmentation across jurisdictions**: Divergent rules between the EU, US, and UK create friction for startups trying to scale across borders, forcing founders to adapt their products or business models market-by-market instead of growing on a single, predictable set of rules.
- **Risk of regulation undoing that on-ramp**: If rules designed for large gatekeepers end up disrupting the tools and platforms smaller players depend on, the same regulation meant to increase competition could inadvertently shrink opportunity for the smallest market entrants.
- **Direct link to WSIS's founding vision**: Startups are the ones trying to achieve WSIS's goals with unique ideas, projects and products but they need a regulatory landscape that allows them to do that.
- **Regulatory frameworks built for big players, felt by everyone else**: Regulations usually try to target big players, but the compliance burden and unintended consequences tend to land hardest on small developers and startups rather than the intended targets.

Key Outcomes of the session

- The panel reached clear consensus that regulation written for large gatekeepers routinely lands hardest on the small developers it was never meant to constrain, and framed this as a fixable design problem rather than an unavoidable cost, one that proportionality and up-front small-player impact assessment can address.
- Participants converged on cross-border regulatory coherence as one of the highest-leverage fixes available, agreeing that interoperability and mutual recognition between the EU, US, and UK should be treated as a near-term priority rather than a long-term aspiration.
- The discussion tied startup viability directly to WSIS's founding vision and produced agreement that the SME and startup perspective is structurally under-represented in digital governance, a gap the WSIS+20 process is well placed to close by recognising founders as a distinct stakeholder voice.

Key Recommendations and Forward-Looking Actions

- **Institutionalise startup and SME input early in the legislative process**, rather than through post-hoc consultation, so digital market rules are shaped with small-player impact assessed from the outset, not corrected after the fact.
- **Pursue interoperability and mutual recognition mechanisms between jurisdictions** (EU, US, UK, and beyond) to reduce compliance fragmentation for startups scaling across borders.
- **Use the WSIS+20 process to formally recognise SME/startup voice as a stakeholder category** under Action Line C6, giving founders a standing seat in the multi-stakeholder model rather than an ad hoc one.
- **Establish a recurring startup-policymaker dialogue mechanism** (rather than one-off panels) so the "startups in the room" principle becomes a structural feature of digital governance discussions through 2035, not just a WSIS Forum moment.