ICN Chief/Senior Economists' Workshop 2027

South Africa

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 29, 2026

TO: ICN Chief and Senior Economists

FROM: James Hodge, Chief Economist, Competition Commission of South Africa

RE: **The next ICN Chief and Senior Economists' Workshop**

As you will know, the ICN Steering Group has given its approval for the AEWG's next ICN Chief and Senior Economists' Workshop to be held in South Africa in 2027. This comes after successful workshops in Vancouver, Seoul, Bergen and Budapest. The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a few details and solicit input from ICN members, both about the topics we might include on the agenda, and on agencies' willingness and ability to participate via case presentations or other discussions.

Dates: The Workshop will be held from Wednesday March 3 to Friday March 5, 2027. We are currently planning for this to be a 2.5 day event, similar to that held in Budapest in 2025.

Venue: The Workshop will be held at the *Sun City* resort in South Africa, about two hours outside of Johannesburg. Sun City is a world-class conferencing, entertainment and recreation destination with access to big-five game viewing, golf courses, casinos, and watersports, amongst other activities. Transport between OR Tambo International Airport and Sun City will be provided by the Competition Commission of South Africa, as well as a cocktail reception, conference dinner and a game drive excursion.

Agenda: We are working with the academic advisory team (Joe Harrington, Yannis Katsoulacos, Aviv Nevo and Tom Ross) to develop a program for the Workshop. As at past workshops, sessions will generally include presentations from academic leads, followed by case (or other) presentations by agencies and will feature a considerable block of time for general discussion. We are likely to have only 5 or 6 topics on the final agenda. With this in mind, would you please consider the following list of possible topics and let us know which topics you do, or do not, like, and indicate any excluded topics you would like to be considered. If you would combine some of these topics, please tell us that too. And, as you consider these topics, we would appreciate hearing from you if you think your agency might have a case or other supportive presentation you could contribute to a session on one of these topics. The list below is largely compiled from participant survey responses after the Budapest workshop in 2025.

1. **Methods**: We have at each workshop had some session devoted to current methods (e.g. merger simulation) and this seems useful. A session here might not be devoted to any one particular method but to illustrations of the various methods (quantitative and qualitative) agencies are using to evaluate cases. It could focus on assessing unilateral effects of mergers too, for example. If you have specific methods you would like to see discussed, please indicate that. This session could also include some discussion of how economists are using innovative new tools provided by, for example, AI in conducting their work.
2. **Remedies:** What is the current thinking about remedies, the various kinds of behavioural and structural, in both mergers and abuse of dominance cases? Some recent cases have illustrated just how hard it can be to establish remedies even when the anticompetitive harms are clear.
3. **Roll-ups and private equity**: We are not sure how important a phenomenon roll-ups (particularly by private equity) outside North America are, but in North America at least this has become an important topic with research trying to measure effects on prices and qualities.
4. **Conglomerate/portfolio effects:** While interesting on their own, a session here could be a bit broader than this, perhaps including other non-standard merger issues such as “roll-ups”, common ownership, cross ownership as well as aspects such as ecosystems.
5. **Algorithmic pricing:** This would include, in particular, competitive concerns from the use of third-party pricing algorithms (which can be a form of hub and spoke collusion).
6. **Cartel detection:** This could address responses to declining leniency applications including changes to leniency programs, whistleblower programs, screening of prices and bids, screening of firms’ public announcements etc.
7. **Vertical theories of harm** (for both merger and non-merger cases): This may include, for example, entrenchment theories and ecosystem theories. It could also consider mergers in markets where prices are negotiated (or under “methods” above perhaps).
8. **Competitor collaborations** (agreements that fall short of collusion): How are agencies reviewing these – for example, what theories of harm or benefit are considered, and what remedies are considered? Some of these agreements might relate to other goals of competition policy e.g. sustainability, and national self-sufficiency. (see next topic)
9. **Goals of competition policy:** How have agencies been responding to calls to consider a wider set of goals than has been traditional? This might be a different kind of session, with a moderator and larger set of agency presentations rather than with an opening presentation from an academic lead.

10. **Competition agencies and digital markets regulation:** A number of competition agencies currently have special "regulatory" powers with respect to digital markets, with the EU's DMA being the most well-known example.[1] A session here could review agencies' experience with these powers, with a particular focus on how they integrate regulatory enforcement into their competition mandates. To the extent that "fairness" enters as an objective in these new regulations, some discussion here could also relate to a consideration of "goals of competition policy". This also might be a different kind of session, with a moderator and larger set of agency presentations rather than with an opening presentation from an academic lead.
11. **Competition policy and industrial policy:** How are agencies dealing with the growing push for governments to implement more ambitious industrial policy agendas in many countries? Have they been able to contribute toward making industrial policies more competition friendly, have they had to amend the way they review cases because of other industrial policy objectives of their governments? This also might be a different kind of session, with a moderator and larger set of agency presentations rather than with an opening presentation from an academic lead. This may overlap or be combined with the "goal of competition policy" session above too.
12. **Innovation and dynamic efficiencies:** How are agencies incorporating effects on innovation into there assessment of mergers and complaints. For example, in theories of harm or benefit, or in fashioning remedies to address competition concerns but protect incentives for innovation?

As indicated, we look forward to hearing back from you about:

(i) Which topics do you like or not like, what additional topics might you suggest? Feel free to add here comments on blending or otherwise re-working (or refocusing) topics listed here.

(ii) Would your agency have interesting case studies that could be included in any of these sessions? If you have non-case experiences (e.g. market studies) that could make for nice contributions, by all means tell us about that.

Please respond to my Competition Commission colleague, Jason Aproskie (jasona@compcom.co.za), who will collect feedback for the organising team. In order for us to finalise the program, including finding our academic leads, and provide agencies enough time to plan for their presentations, we would like to receive all your comments by August 1, 2026.

Many thanks, and we look forward to seeing many of you in South Africa in 2027.

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[1] Others (current, in process or under consideration) include Germany, the U.K., Japan, South Korea, Brazil and Turkey.