Global framework for reopening exhibitions and B2B trade events post the emergence from COVID-19

**Interim guidance
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ufi The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry

Contents:

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define a structured framework for reopening exhibitions and B2B trade events after the emergence of COVID-19.

- The global exhibition industry pledges to collaborate to ensure the health and safety of all participants to exhibitions and trade shows.
- We expect the appropriate authorities to allow exhibitions to re-open based on the assured implementation of agreed health and safety standards.
- The re-opening of exhibitions will drive economic revitalisation.

Advocacy narrative

- **People and business** – The exhibitions and events industry puts people at the heart of its business model: we bring people together to do business, to learn, to inspire and to meet.

- **Safe and controlled environment** – The health and safety of people is, and always has been, a primary concern of the exhibition industry. Around the world, wherever accredited exhibitions take place, there are robust health and safety standards in place, and we have the capacity to enhance these measures.

- **Additional environmental controls** – Unlike most other types of large events, the format of an exhibition allows the organising stakeholders to structure and steer the audience on all steps of their journey – from their registration, to their arrival on site and entry, to the way they navigate show floors, meetings spaces, and auditoriums, as well as the catering and sanitary options available to them. Exhibition venues are designed specifically to host this type of event and to manage visitors to their site according to strict local authority security policies and international safety standards.

- **Exhibitions create business** – Exhibitions are the marketplaces and meeting places for entire industries – regionally, nationally, and internationally. Exhibitions are a much-needed fast track to drive the economic recovery after COVID-19 – especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, who represent the backbone of every economy and for whom exhibitions and face-to-face events are a leading sales channel. In addition to the industries they serve, exhibitions also contribute to regional development and generate revenue for the travel and tourism sector, as well as hotels, restaurants, retail and transportation.

- **Our pledge** – To honour this responsibility to economies and societies, as an industry we stand ready to open the door to exhibitions as quickly as possible, striking the right and secure balance between public health in times of COVID-19 and the economic health of societies and nations.

- **Our demand** – to political decision-makers: please be open to proactive framework recommendations for safe exhibitions and authorise these exhibitions with respective protocols as soon as possible.

Contributors to this framework

This framework has been prepared in consultation and with the support of all parts of the exhibition industry, including organisers, venues, suppliers and associations. A list of those who have endorsed this document appears at the end.

The framework established here will be used to produce a document that gathers best-practice examples for the various areas listed in the framework below.

1. Introduction – the importance of reopening exhibitions

The purpose of this document is to define a planning framework for organising exhibitions and B2B trade events within the response and recovery phase of the COVID-19 crisis, in line with domestic government directions. The framework established here will be used to produce a document that gathers best-practice examples for the various areas listed in the framework below.

A blanket regulation for all mass gatherings will negatively impact economic recovery after the current pandemic. There are many types of mass gatherings and they all serve various purposes. The participants of exhibition and B2B trade events are focused on doing business, exchanging information, and sharing/transferring knowledge. It is entirely possible for exhibition participants to maintain the required distance from each other and achieve their business goals. The density of people at exhibitions can be maintained at lower levels than at other types of large events due to a number of reasons – for example, exhibitions often take place over a number of days, and the space occupied by an exhibition is much larger than at other types of events. As a result, B2B exhibitions can be managed and operated in a similar way to supermarkets and other retail outlets that have continued to function successfully and safely throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

It is imperative that exhibitions are given the security of planning to re-open in a timely manner under controlled circumstances, as described in this document. This requires clear signals from politicians, as exhibitions have a lead time of several months.

The global exhibition industry will reconnect and rebuild businesses, industries and economies following this unprecedented period of industrial and economic stagnation. The size and far-reaching impact of the exhibition industry are demonstrated by the "Global Economic Impact of Exhibitions" report from December 2019, which calculates the total economic impact of exhibitions to be €167 billion per year globally.

This framework serves as an addition to existing health and safety processes and regulations and should be read in conjunction with the WHO's Public Health for Mass Gatherings: Key Considerations, which provides general advice on the public health aspects of mass gathering events. It is also adapted from WHO's interim planning considerations previously released for mass gatherings in the context of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza, and international meetings attended by individuals from Ebola virus disease-affected countries.

It is designed to help plan, manage and monitor exhibitions in order to minimise the health and safety risks to staff, contractors, exhibitors and visitors.

The exhibition industry recognises that unspecified mass gatherings are highly visible events with the potential for public health consequences if they are not planned and managed carefully. In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, large-scale events were the first to be shut down. Our industry is supporting the response to the current health emergency by making our exhibition venues available to host emergency hospitals, testing facilities, logistics centres, healthcare workers and homeless people, as well as offering other support.

This document gives policymakers the criteria they need to confidently support the reopening of exhibitions by adopting these guidelines.

2. Exhibitions and different type of large events/mass gatherings

Events must be assessed according to their type and not according to a rigid total number of people. All are important for various economic and social factors, however, exhibitions are not comparable to sports events, concerts or festivals. Decision makers are asked to differentiate here in a targeted manner.

UFI and this framework follow the ISO 25639-1:2008 (E/F) definitions of an exhibition, show, or fair, as "an event in which products, services, or information are displayed and disseminated".

Exhibitions differ from "conferences", "conventions" or "seminars", or other business and consumer events. Exhibitions exclude flea markets and street markets. Exhibitions include:
Trade exhibitions: exhibitions that promote trade and commerce and are attended primarily by trade visitors. A trade exhibition can be opened to the public at specific times.
Public exhibitions: exhibitions open primarily to the general public. A public exhibition is sometimes also known as a consumer show.

Conferences: organised formal meeting, or series of meetings, comprised of groups of representatives belonging to a common interest group, in which issues, ideas and policies are discussed.
Conventions: organised meeting of industry, profession or organisation to share knowledge and experience. Note: A convention is sometimes also known as a "congress".

3. Timescales

Several countries have announced a timescale for the easing of restrictions imposed due to COVID-19: lifting hospitality and travel restrictions, opening non-essential businesses, opening borders, and so on.

Where and when such restrictions are lifted, exhibitions can then also be held safely, open to those participants covered by existing travel rules, whether locally, regionally or internationally.

Venues and organisers will consult and liaise with local authorities about the time schedule of resuming exhibitions.

4. Framework recommendations to operate exhibitions/trade fairs in a safe environment

Note: The measures listed in this framework are all aimed at organising exhibitions in a controlled and safe environment. They are to be considered, adapted and implemented by industry stakeholders, and will be updated with best-practice examples in specific areas going forward.

Measures to be put in place during the build-up (planning phase), the exhibition itself (operational phase) and following the event (post-event review) to protect all exhibition stakeholders:

I.	**Ensure personnel and personal safety**
II.	**Enable physical distancing**
III.	**Increase health and safety measures**
IV.	**Implement crowd control**
V.	**Encourage and enforce measures**

I.		Planning	Operational	Post-event
Ensure personnel and personal safety	Perform risk analysis.	x		
	Manage use of prevention materials (e.g. provide masks, disinfectant gel, disposable tissues).	x	X	X

II.		Planning	Operational	Post-event
Enable physical distancing	Introduce barriers and mark floor to indicate space regulations for all queues and public spaces (e.g. entrance halls, restaurants, catering outlets and toilets). Add physical transparent partition on counters (e.g. admission, registration and customer service).	x	X	X
	Allow spacious distance between booths and aisles for circulation.	x	X	X
	Manage conference-style layout for side events to allow physical distancing.	x	X	

III.		Planning	Operational	Post-event
Increase health and safety measures	Enable access control and conduct health screening (e.g. unified temperature monitoring).	x	X	X
	Work with guidelines dealing with/denying entry to stakeholders who fail health screening test (e.g. set up isolation areas; inform the local disease control department).	x	x	X
	Manage cleaning, sanitation and disinfection regimes of commonly used areas.	x	x	X
	Provide sanitising and handwashing stations.	x	x	X
	Enable no-contact policy (e.g. avoid shaking hands and consider alternative greetings; encourage contactless payment; plan dedicated space for exhibitor and visitor to interact safely).	x	x	X
	Ventilated venues/exhibition halls and other facilities to have air-conditioning and air-filtering processes.	x	x	X
	Adapt frequency of waste disposal.	x	x	X
	Enable exhibitors to have enhanced cleaning and disinfection regimes for booths, exhibits and promotional materials (e.g. suggest that publicity materials be electronic).		x	

IV.		Planning	Operational	Post-event
Implement crowd control	Attendee flow management (e.g. monitor access routes, queuing space and entrances; separate different areas of the event and control access).	x	x	X
	Adapt registration process and manage set-up to reduce contact onsite (e.g. encourage online registration wherever possible; print badges at home)		x	
	Manage number of stakeholders on exhibition site (e.g. rationalise/simplify raw space/space-only stand designs and construction methods to reduce time required to build and dismantle; allow longer timeframe to set up and dismantle).	x		X
	Manage number of attendees on the exhibition site (e.g. limit number based on area in gross square metres of the venue/hall, as proposed by exhibition safety managers; assign tickets to designated time slots such as days and hours).		x	
	Manage catering offer to allow physical distancing and encourage additional hygiene measures (e.g. distancing tables and limiting capacities inside restaurant areas; avoid buffet-style service stations; offer pre-packed food).		x	

V.		Planning	Operational	Post-event
Encourage and enforce measures	Display measures and cleaning regimes accessible for everyone.	x	x	x
	Work in legal framework that clearly defines duties and responsibilities across all stakeholders involved.	x	x	x
	Establish and maintain direct communication with local authorities.	x	x	x
	Set up medical service points (e.g. medical support, patient handling, treatment and clinical support, patient transport and treatment, clinical waste management).	x	x	X
	Manage training on epidemic prevention (e.g. master the skills of disinfectant use, cleaning public places and emergency disposal).	x		
	Verify registration details on-site and, where appropriate, manage process to inform health authorities.	x	x	x
	Monitor new sources of information and establish processes to act accordingly (e.g. designate a team to follow local news, podcasts and practise rumour controls; establish mechanisms for epidemic prevention and control).		x	
	Manage procedure to address on-site concerns and answer questions from all attendees (e.g. hotline).	x	x	x
	Monitor real-time crowd movements and establish processes to act accordingly (e.g. use technology to track in-show attendees; wristbands; Mobile Apps heatmaps)		x	

5. Contributors to this framework and support from the industry

The following organisations have been part of the task force to prepare and agree this framework, which is a global representation of the exhibition industry.

Exhibition organisers
Clarion Events
Informa Markets
Reed Exhibitions
Tarsus Group

Organisers and venues
Corferias
Dubai World Trade Centre
Fira de Barcelona
GL events
Koelnmesse
La Rural
Grupa MTP
RAI Amsterdam
The NEC

Exhibition venues
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre
Johannesburg Expo Centre
MGM Resorts International
Shanghai New International Exhibition Centre
Shenzhen World Exhibition & Convention Centre

Associations
AEO – Association of Event Organisers
AEV – Association of Event Venues
AFIDA – Asociacion Internacional de Ferias America
AUMA – Association of the German Trade Fair Industry
EEIA – European Exhibition Industry Alliance
ESSA – Event Supplier and Services Association
IELA – International Exhibition Logistics Association
IFES – International Federation of Exhibition & Event Services
SISO – Society of Independent Show Organisers
TCEB – Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau

Service providers/general contractors
Freeman
GES
GL events

6. Endorsement for this framework from within the exhibition industry

The following organizations have endorsed this framework. If you would like your organization to be added to the list please endorse the framework by confirming your support here.

Exhibition organisers
Easyfairs
Euroindex Ltd.
HKF FUARCILIK AS/TRADE FAIRS
Hyve Group
IFP Expo
Informa Markets
Tarsus Group
Veronafiere SpA

Organisers and venues
Brussels Expo
Deutsche Messe AG
Koelnmesse GmbH
Messe München GmbH
RAI Amsterdam

Associations
AFIDA - Asociacion Internacional de Ferias America
HKECIA - Hong Kong Exhibition & Convention Industry Association
HKTDC - Hong Kong Trade Development Council