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Vision & Intelligence

EVIDENCE BRIEF
NOVEMBER 2026

EVIDENCE BRIEF · EVENT MANAGEMENT

Events Bend, Then Return

How do events survive crises?

In 2020, the events industry lost most of its activity within months, and in 2026 regional conflict again forced major trade fairs in the Gulf to move. Studies of organizers in Poland and Australia, of conventions and exhibitions in Asia and of crisis communication plans show what carries events through a crisis.

By Eventamin · How we work 12 November 2026 Worldwide, Poland, Australia, Asia

4 studies · 3 industry sources

event industry crisis | event resilience | COVID-19 events | crisis communication | event cancellation | event postponement | business continuity | association meetings | trade fairs Asia | event recovery

Also in Market and capital

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KEY FINDING

Crises cut event activity fast and deep, but organizers expected the need to meet to bring events back. Resilience came mainly from within: cooperation built before the crisis, a diversified business and experience, together with communication plans prepared in advance; government support was rated poorly.

Four studies, 2021–2025; industry data 2026

Key findings

- **The pandemic cut events to a fraction.** In 2020, international association meetings fell to around a third of their 2019 number, and space sold at Asian trade fairs to 28 percent[1].
- **Most events were postponed, not cancelled.** Of the events tracked by ICCA in 2020, 44 percent were postponed, 30 percent moved online and 14 percent were cancelled[1].
- **Resilience came from within.** Polish organizers credited cooperation built before the pandemic, a diversified business and years of experience; large, indoor and food events were the most exposed[2].
- **Own savings came first.** 29 percent of Polish organizers survived mainly on their own savings, 21.4 percent on public subsidies and 19.3 percent on money from family and friends[2].
- **Crises recur.** In 2026, regional conflict pushed Arabian Travel Market in Dubai to August and Middle East Energy to September[3].

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FOR THE MARKET

Market outcomes

What the studies mean for each part of the industry.

Organisers & associations	Partnerships, a second line of business and prepared crisis communication carried organizers through the pandemic better than public aid. Small, outdoor and local formats proved the most adaptable.
Venues & destinations	Postponement was the dominant response in 2020, which shifts demand rather than removing it; flexible rebooking terms keep that demand with the venue.
Investors & advisers	Event businesses with diversified revenue and long-standing partnerships showed the most resilience. Budget pressure reaches large events with a lag, because they are contracted years ahead.

Crises in the events calendar

The pandemic removed most of the industry's activity within a year. According to UIA statistics compiled in a 2022 study, international association meetings fell from 12,472 in 2019 to 4,242 in 2020[1]. Trade fairs in Asia fell from 2,482 to 1,147, and the space sold at them from 24.5 to 6.8 million square meters[1]. Direct spending on business events worldwide dropped from around 1.15 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019 to 423 billion U.S. dollars in 2020[4].

Crises have not stopped since. In 2026, regional conflict pushed Arabian Travel Market in Dubai to August and Middle East Energy to September[3]. Meetings and incentive programs are among the first budget items cut when economic

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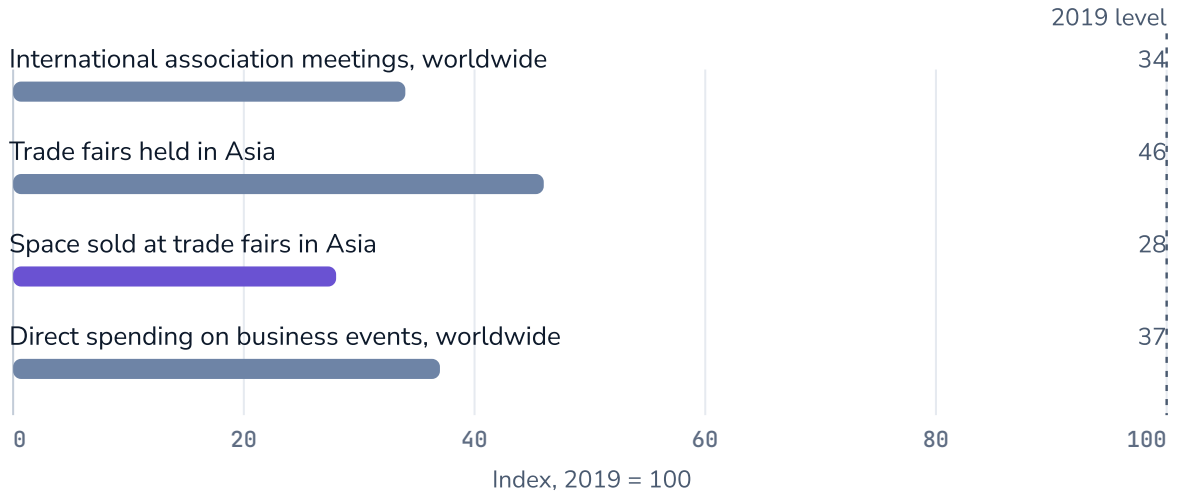
conditions weaken, although the effect reaches large events with a delay because they are contracted years ahead [5].

Business events and exhibitions in 2020 compared with 2019, by indicator

Index: 2019 level = 100.



Sources: Jung & Lee (UIA and UFI data); Events Industry Council; Oxford Economics · Release dates: 2022; May 2026 · Regions: Worldwide; Asia

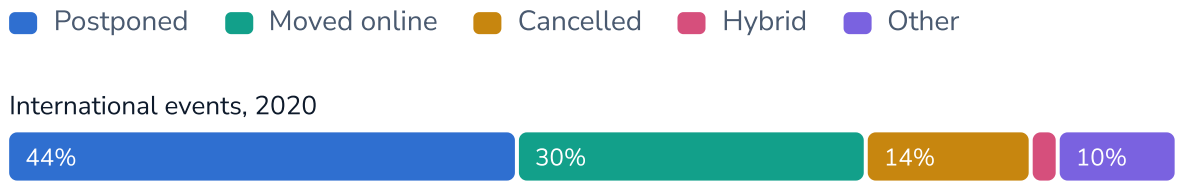
How events responded in 2020

Most organizers postponed rather than cancelled. Of the events tracked by ICCA in 2020, 44 percent were postponed, 30 percent moved online, 14 percent were cancelled and two percent were held in hybrid form [1]. Online formats brought new problems, from learning new technology to unstable networks and fatigue with video calls [1].

Online events did not replace what attendees came for. In an industry survey cited in the study, 67 percent said networking at virtual events failed to meet expectations, and 78 percent hoped to return to face-to-face events [1]. More than 95 percent of organizers expected more hybrid events, and 73 percent planned to run one [1].

Status of international events tracked by ICCA in 2020

Share of events.



Source: Jung & Lee (ICCA data) · Release date: 2022 · Region: Worldwide · Period: 2020

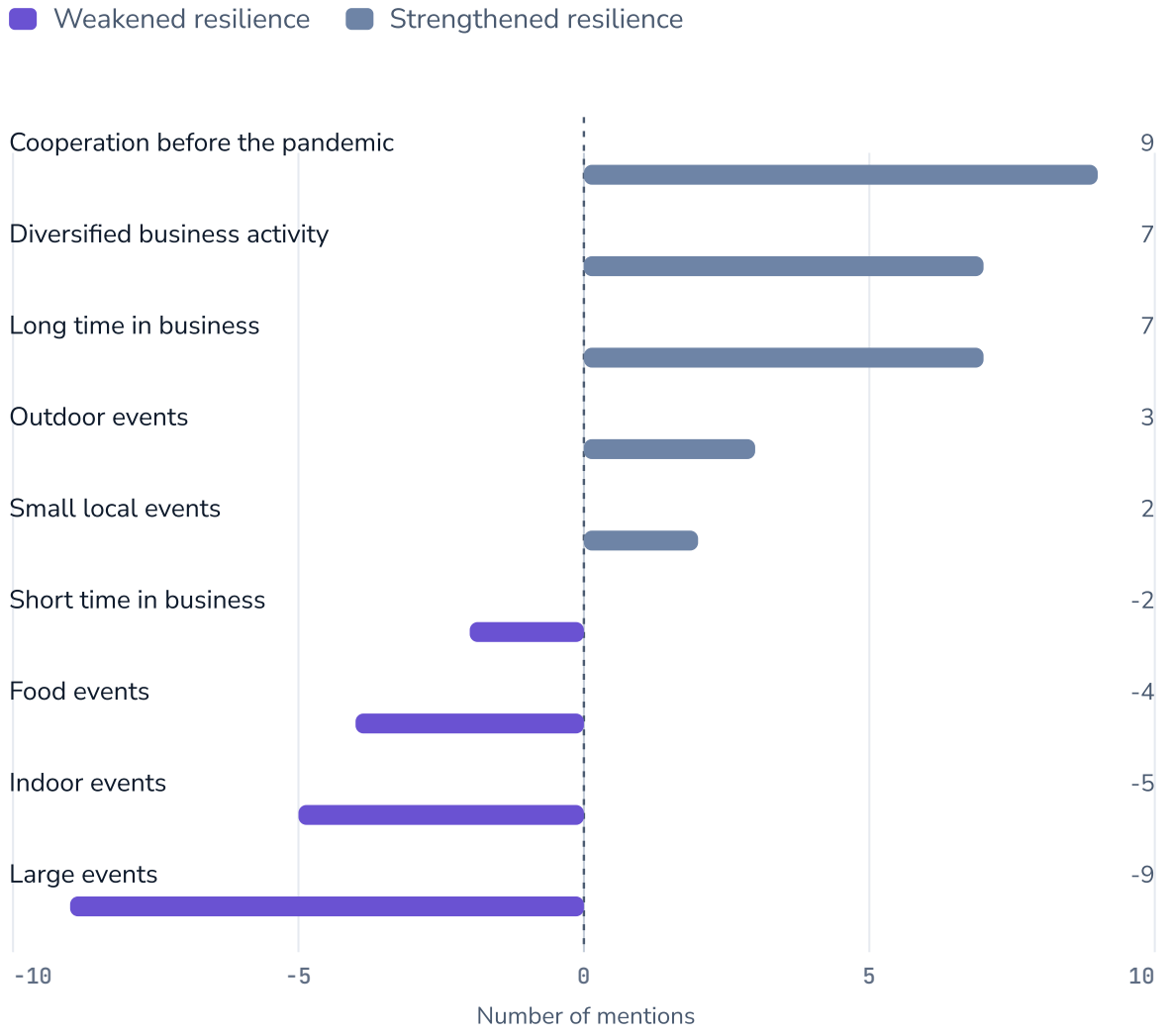
What made organizers resilient

Resilience came mainly from inside the business. In a 2021 survey of 145 event organizers in Poland, with 15 follow-up interviews, organizers named cooperation built before the pandemic, a diversified business and a long history in the market as their main strengths[2]. Large, indoor and food events were the most exposed[2]. 65.5 percent of the organizers had a second line of business[2].

Public support was not what kept them going. 29 percent survived mainly on their own savings, 21.4 percent on public subsidies, 19.3 percent on money from family and friends and 13.8 percent on bank loans[2]. Organizers rated the clarity, predictability and financial side of government measures negatively[2]. In 2021, 73.1 percent were running events again, and most expected the industry to return to its pre-pandemic state by 2022 or 2023[2].

Features that strengthened or weakened event organizers' resilience in Poland during the pandemic

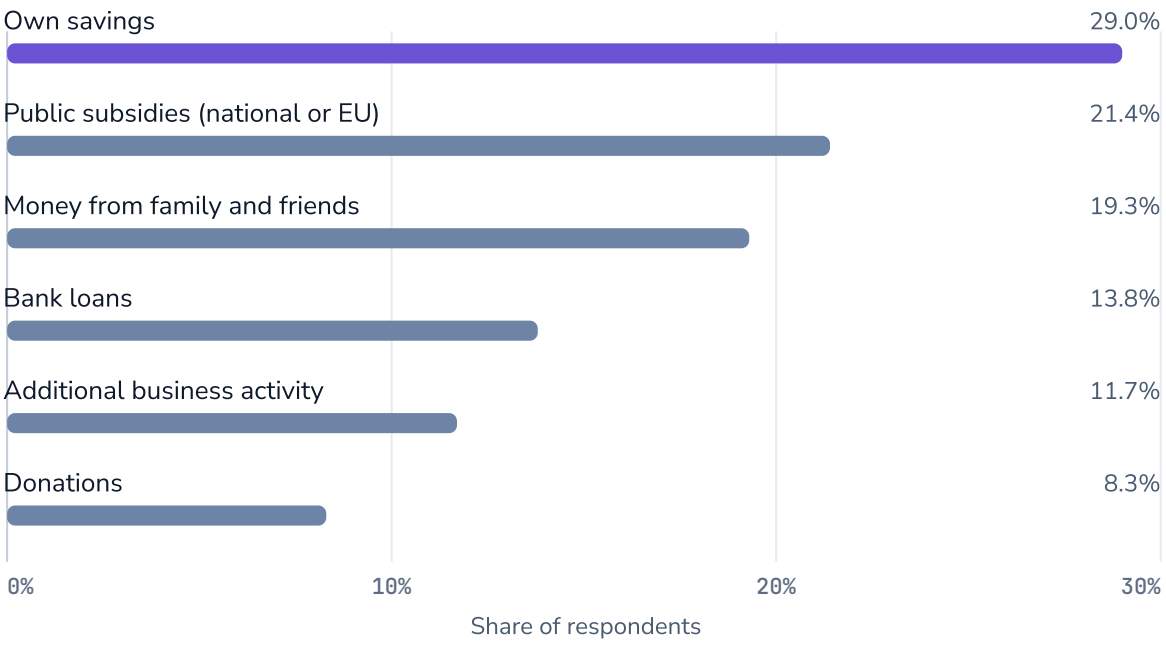
Number of interview mentions; positive values strengthened resilience, negative values weakened it.



Source: Kwiatkowski et al. · Release date: 2023 · Region: Poland · Survey period: April 2021 · Number of interviews: 15

Main source of funds to survive the pandemic among event organizers in Poland in 2021

Share of respondents.



Source: Kwiatkowski et al. · Release date: 2023 · Region: Poland · Survey period: April 2021 · Number of respondents: 145

Connection, meaning and well-being

Practitioners expected events to come back because people need to connect. Sixteen Australian event practitioners interviewed during the pandemic described a shift toward smaller, more meaningful events with regional, charitable or environmental purposes[6]. They adapted by moving to virtual platforms, podcasts and consulting, often in partnership with audio-visual companies[6].

Size shaped the response. Large technology companies adapted their business events quickly, while smaller clients lacked the money or expertise to do so[6]. Practitioners also called for staff support, coaching and resilience training[6]. Polish organizers focused on returning to normal missed the chance to redesign events for sustainability[2].

Planning crisis communication

Crisis communication is planned before the event, not during it. A review of eight crisis communication plans for events in Australia set out generic considerations across three phases: before, during and after the event[7]. Most of them concern preparation: resources and trained staff, a communication strategy with defined crisis triggers and channels, and prepared message templates for each type of crisis and audience[7].

PHASE	CONSIDERATION	PROCEDURES
Before the event	Allocate resources to crisis response	Budget and staff with communication skills[7]
Before the event	Plan the communication strategy	Crisis triggers, key messages, signage and public address, onsite and online channels[7]
Before the event	Prepare communication templates	Templates and tone by type of crisis and audience; incident and feedback forms[7]
During the event	Act on crisis triggers	Consistent internal and external messages; briefings for media and own channels[7]
After the event	Review and report	Debriefs and attendee surveys feed the next plan[7]

Notes on the data

The figures are based on four studies published between 2021 and 2025: a survey of 145 event organizers in Poland with 15 interviews, 16 interviews with Australian event practitioners, a review of eight crisis communication plans, and a conceptual study using UIA, UFI and ICCA statistics for 2019 and 2020[1,2,6,7]. The Polish sample is dominated by nonprofit and public organizers. Industry survey figures on virtual events are taken from the studies, not from the original surveys. Market Data Forecast discloses no method; it is cited for a qualitative point only.

Sources

● Study ○ Industry source

1 Jung, S., & Lee, J. (2022). Current and future influences of COVID-19 on the knowledge management function of conventions and exhibitions [Journal article]. *Service Business, 16(2), 391–410*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11628-022-00488-7 — First-hand

2 Kwiatkowski, G., Ossowska, L., Strzelecka, M., Dragin-Jensen, C., Lien, V. H., Janiszewska, D., & Kloskowski, D. (2023). Building a resilient event sector in times of uncertainty [Journal article]. *Event Management, 27, 481–498*. https://doi.org/10.3727/152599522X16419948695071 — First-hand

3 Khaleej Times; Penta. (2026). Gulf event postponements (Arabian Travel Market, Middle East Energy) [Article]. Retrieved November 7, 2026, from khaleejtimes.com — Reported

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6 Steriopoulos, E., & Wrathall, J. (2021). Re-imagining and transforming events: Insights from the Australian events industry [Journal article]. *Research in Hospitality Management, 11(2), 77–83*. https://doi.org/10.1080/22243534.2021.1917809 — First-hand

7 Steriopoulos, E., Strickland, P., Lewis, C., & Lategan, G. (2025). Towards the Development of Crisis Communication Plans for Events [Journal article]. *Event Management, 29, 1107–1112*. https://doi.org/10.3727/152599525X17418287223147 — First-hand

The evidence

4 studies · 3 industry sources

SAMPLE

Four studies: a survey of 145 organizers with 15 interviews, 16 practitioner interviews, a review of eight crisis plans and an analysis of industry statistics; three industry sources

YEARS

2021–2025 (studies); 2026 (industry data)

METHOD

Organizer survey and interviews in Poland, practitioner interviews in Australia, crisis plan analysis, convention and exhibition statistics for 2019 and 2020

About Eventamin

Eventamin reads the peer-reviewed research on events, exhibitions and hospitality, sets it against industry data and states what it means for the market. Every brief is published by Eventamin as an organisation: its sources, method and corrections are open.

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