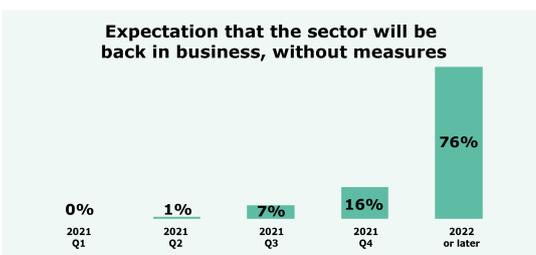
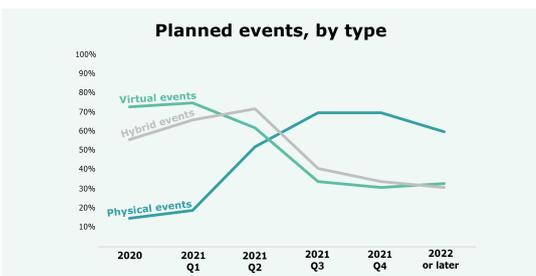
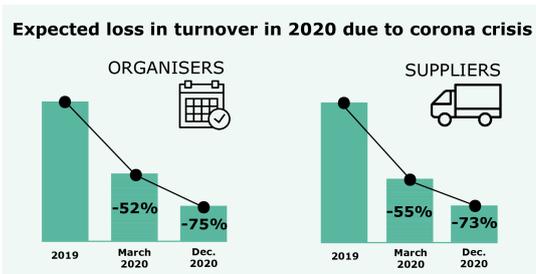


The event sector in 2020: impact of the coronavirus crisis even more severe than expected

An annual review by KdG centre of expertise Public Impact

The event sector got hit hard in 2020. The organisations predict a turnover loss of more than 70 percent in 2020 compared to 2019. Almost half of them had to let people go. The centre of expertise Public Impact of KdG University of Applied Sciences and Arts surveyed the event sector on four moments in 2020: in March, June, September and December. A study commissioned by VISITFLANDERS and EventFlanders, and in cooperation with Experience Magazine and several Belgian event federations.



Small virus, huge financial impact

In retrospect, the coronavirus crisis seems to have made a substantial budget dent in 2020. "Compared to 2019, Belgian event organisers predict a **turnover** loss of no less than 75 percent for 2020. Much more than they initially anticipated in March (52%)," researcher Joris Verhulst explains. "The expected turnover loss for event suppliers (such as caterers, decorators, audio-visual equippers, etc.) also grew substantially, from 55 percent in March to 73 percent in December."

By the end of 2020, for one organiser in five all activities have come to a complete standstill. Among suppliers, even one in three has no activity at all. **The future also remains uncertain:** five in six organisers and nine in ten suppliers foresee financial problems in 2021. Almost all respondents (87%) think that their 2021 turnover will be significantly lower than in 2019. A quarter of organisers and a fifth of suppliers also fear that the second coronavirus wave (October/November) may have given their business the final blow.

Less personnel, more virtual

Almost half (45%) of the organisations surveyed have **had to let people go** since the start of the crisis. In 44 percent of the companies where layoffs occurred, half of the workforce was dismissed. Organisations that terminated contracts with fixed freelancers had to let go almost all of them (93%). Almost half of the organisations expect more layoffs to come in 2021. Recruitments (5%) and new freelancer contracts (3%) were extremely rare in 2020. Most organisations (90%) also hired fewer trainees in 2020 than in 2019.

Only 36 percent of organisations are currently preparing **physical events**. "Most of these are planned for the third quarter of 2021 onwards," says Christine Merckx, head of the expertise centre. "Six out of ten companies are already planning events for 2022. In doing so, for some clearly 'something is better than nothing', as one in four is planning more unprofitable events than profitable ones."

"The steep rise in **virtual events** persists," says Merckx. "About half of the organisers and a third of the suppliers are involved in the planning of these kinds of events. These virtual events are much more planned for the near future and are a welcome workaround to keep activities

www.publiekeimpact.be

Data based on national quarterly surveys in 2020, completed by organisations who are for more than 50% of their turnover professionally involved and/or active in the organisation of events. n March 2020 = 1.119 organisations - n December 2020 = 223 organisations

A research by the centre of expertise Public Impact of Karel de Grote Hogeschool in association with VISITFLANDERS, EventFlanders, Experience Magazine, FMIV and Event Confederation.

going. Still, two in three organisers and one in two suppliers are convinced that virtual and hybrid events are here to stay.

Support measures are still all-important

The sector continues to make ample use of public support measures. For instance, more than six out of ten organisations rely on the bridging support for the self-employed and the New Flemish Protection Mechanism. Still, according to half of them, support measures are still inadequate. Most respondents (82%) indicate that a strong and united sector federation would be crucial in representing the interests of this sector in the future.

Expertise available

Many organisations want to lend a hand in the fight against the coronavirus. More than half of them are willing to put their crowd management expertise into practice in the public domain (e.g. in shopping streets and retail) or have already done so. Just as many organisations are ready to assist the healthcare sector, for example by running or setting up test and vaccination centres.

Post-corona events?

"Three out of four organisations are convinced that it will take until 2022 at the earliest for business to get back to normal," says Verhulst. "Most organisations expect the sector to gradually reopen in the second and third quarter of 2021, albeit not without COVID-measures. The COVID Event Risk Model (CERM) will surely have an important role to play here. This tool maps the COVID security risk for each event. Six out of ten organisations indicate to have already used it. The CERM probably lays the best foundation for a quick and safe relaunch of the sector. Together with 'rapid tests', seven out of ten organisations indicate."

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Centre of expertise Public Impact

Public Impact is a centre of expertise at the KdG University of Applied Sciences and Arts. At its core lies applied scientific research, aimed to 'improve' events and other urban activities. Better events will generate more public impact which, in turn, will bring about more effective use of resources, people and materials. The researchers develop knowledge and expertise which they translate into tools and guidelines, tailored to the sector. Together with a network of consultants, the centre of expertise also guides and trains (future) event professionals, both for the public sector and the (non) profit sector.

EventFlanders

EventFlanders was set up in 2016: a specialised unit that takes Flemish events to a higher level and tracks down international events. EventFlanders works within VISIT FLANDERS and is supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media and Sport Flanders.