

World's biggest mobile show eyes up to 60,000 visitors

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Up to 60,000 people are expected to attend the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona this month, organisers said Thursday, hoping it would resemble its pre-pandemic days despite the absence of several heavyweights.

"We're expecting somewhere between 40,000 and 60,000 people," said John Hoffman, executive director of the GSMA industry association which stages the annual telecoms show, which is the biggest in the world.

Speaking to reporters, he said there would be "more than 1,500 exhibitors" from 150 countries at the four-day event in the Catalan capital which this year runs from February 28 to March 3.

"The whole (mobile telecoms) ecosystem is again coming to MWC here in Barcelona, we're on track to meet and hopefully exceed all of our expectations," he said ahead of the show's 16th edition which will take up seven of the eight pavilions at the city's main exhibition hall.

The show, a key event for showcasing new technologies, had been cancelled at the last minute in 2020 after multiple companies withdrew as the global pandemic took hold.

Last year, the congress did take place although it was in June instead of February and included a mixture of in-person and online events, drawing just 20,000 visitors compared with 100,000 in normal times.

Tight health restrictions also meant delegates needed to be tested at the venue's gates in order to gain entry, but this year they only need to show proof of vaccination.

And this year, 95 percent of the 1,000 speakers will be there in person, said Mats Granryd, GSMA's director general.

"It's important for our industry, it's important for society and for business to come together physically," he said.

In recent weeks, several industry heavyweights have said they would not be attending, among them Sony, which did not participate last year, and China's Lenovo which said it would only be present online.

South Korea's Samsung, the world's biggest smartphone maker, said it would be physically attending alongside other industry giants such as Ericsson, Nokia, Verizon Google, Qualcomm, Cisco and Huawei.

The show will take place as Spain recovers from the pandemic's sixth wave in which the highly-contagious Omicron variant sent cases soaring; although the numbers are falling, cases remain high, particularly in the northeastern Catalonia region.

With infections falling, Spain on Thursday lifted the requirement to wear masks outdoors, and Catalonia also decided to reopen nightlife venues after also dropping a requirement to [show](#) a COVID vaccine passport to enter bars and restaurants.

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