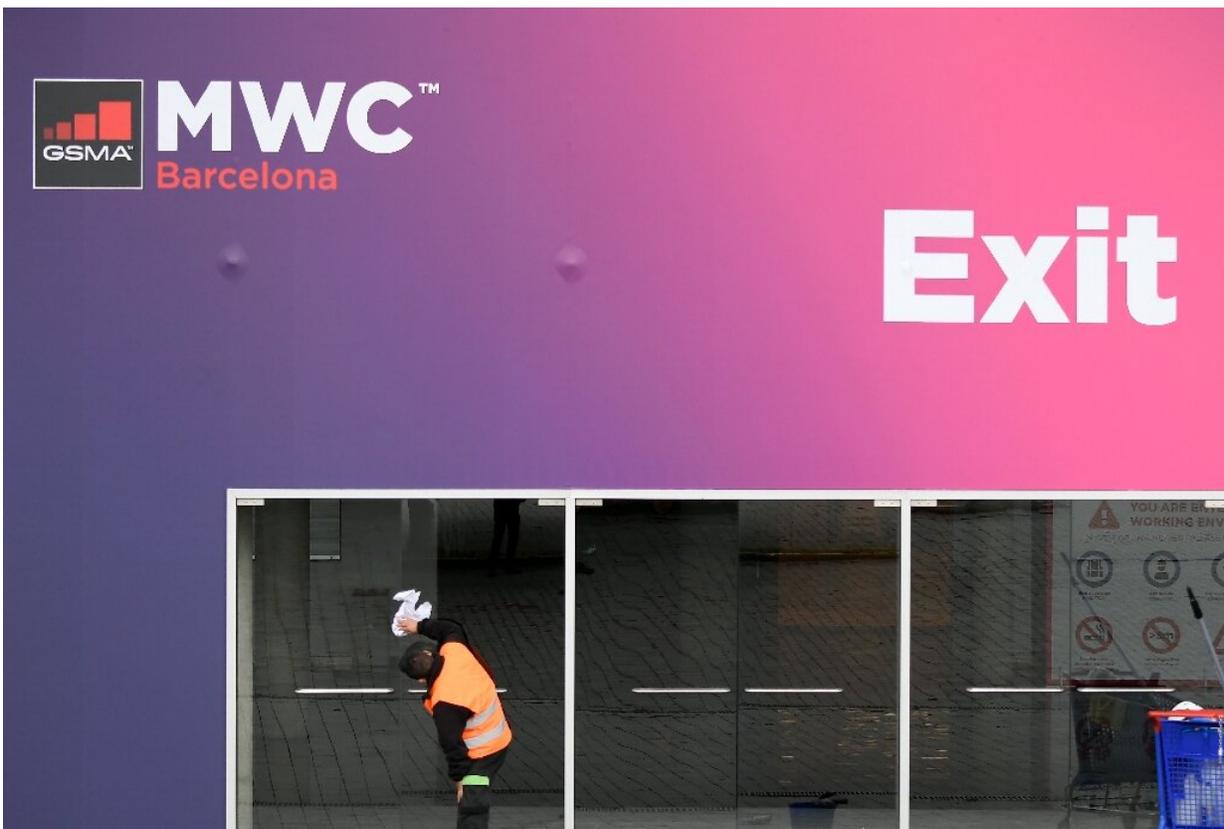


World Mobile Congress cancelled over coronavirus fears

February 12 2020, by Daniel Bosque



The mobile fair is one of the biggest events worldwide to be cancelled so far owing to the virus

Organisers of the World Mobile Congress said Wednesday they have cancelled the world's top mobile trade fair due to fears stemming from

the coronavirus that sparked an exodus of industry heavyweights.

The mobile fair is one of the biggest events worldwide to be cancelled so far owing to the virus that has killed more than 1,100 people to date.

The announcement came after the GSMA, the mobile trade association that organises the annual show, met to decide the fate of the event that had been planned to run in Barcelona from February 24-27.

"The GSMA has cancelled MWC Barcelona 2020 because the global concern regarding the coronavirus outbreak, travel concern and other circumstances, make it impossible for the GSMA to hold the event," a statement said.

It added that the decision was made with "due regard to the safe and healthy environment in Barcelona and the host country," and that host city parties understood the cancellation.

Just hours before the meeting took place, Vodafone, Nokia, Deutsche Telekom, Britain's BT and Rakuten of Japan had pulled out, following in the footsteps of Intel, Facebook, Cisco and China's Vivo.

A source close to the event had said that organisers were wary of being left with a cancellation bill of about 100 million euros (\$110 million). They faced resistance from authorities about declaring a [health emergency](#) in Spain which would allow insurance to cover the costs.



As organisers were considering whether to cancel this year's Mobile World Congress, workers were hanging up the 'welcome' sign at the Barcelona venue

So far, Spain has only registered two confirmed cases of infection, on [offshore islands](#).

The annual congress normally draws more than 100,000 people, including between 5,000 and 6,000 participants from China, organisers say.

But this year, participation was hammered by the viral outbreak which has infected around 44,600 people.

'Working for months for nothing'

The decision is certain to be a major blow for Barcelona, as the huge trade show was forecast to bring in almost 500 million euros, organisers said.

"It's the high point of the year," said Ignacio Arias, manager of the AC Som Marriott hotel which lies very close to the venue where the conference has been held since 2006.

"During the four days of the congress, the hotel is fully occupied with the highest rates of the year. There's no other week like it," he said, with his words echoed by fellow hoteliers.



Vodafone, Deutsche Telekom and Nokia were among the last major tech companies to say they were skipping the Mobile World Congress

"We were supposed to host the team assembling Sony's stand but they haven't turned up. Ericsson has cancelled 30 rooms, and Intel and LG have cancelled their meeting rooms," said the manager of another nearly hotel who did not want to give her name.

"It feels like we've been working for months for nothing. This year has been pretty sluggish so far and this is just going to finish us off."

Ride-sharing firms were also on edge.

"This period accounts for 20 percent of our yearly income," said Jose Maria Goni who runs Unauto, a fleet of vehicles for hire with drivers.

Trade shows have been hit by the virus on several continents, and while Asia's biggest airshow in Singapore went forward nonetheless, more than 70 exhibitors cancelled.

'Epidemic of fear'

The cancellations began on February 4 when South Korea's LG Electronics, which occupies one of the largest spaces at the show, said it was pulling out to "remove the risk of exposing hundreds of LG employees to international travel... as the virus continues to spread across borders".



Hygiene recommendations had been posted outside the Mobile World Congress venue

With the exception of Apple, most major smartphone manufacturers typically present their new products and innovations at the congress.

Before the cancellation, China's top smartphone maker Huawei as well as its smaller rival ZTE, had pledged their executives and staff would undergo a self-imposed two-week quarantine period, while ZTE said its stand and equipment would be disinfected daily.

The organisers had also sought to reassure exhibitors, saying they would step up [security measures](#), impose restrictions on visitors from China and have staff on hand to take visitors' temperatures.

But it wasn't enough, and the trickle of withdrawals quickly turned into a deluge with dozens of companies pulling out of the show.

Regional health minister Alba Verges tried in vain to reassure participants on Wednesday, saying that the only epidemic in Barcelona "is an epidemic of fear."

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