

The Meetings Industry Manifesto: Priorities for the next EU leadership



CONCLUSIONS FROM EU
DIALOGUE CONFERENCE
ON THE MEETINGS
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INTRODUCTION

This manifesto summarises the results of the **EU Dialogue: driving positive change in the Meetings Industry** conference, which took place in Brussels on April 17th, 2024. It was organised, under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, by **visit.brussels** in partnership with the **Joint Meetings Industry Council** (JMIC), **City Destinations Alliance** (CityDNA) and the **European Exhibition Industry Alliance** (EEIA). More than 180 industry professionals and 52 speakers - including many European policy makers - from 15 countries attended the conference.

The event provided insights into some of the most relevant issues for the Meetings Industry and the EU institutions, with the aim of fostering close, agile and mutually respectful cooperation in the future. On the one hand, this meant creating a better understanding within the Meetings Industry of the workflows and the procedures in the EU political system as well as the impact of EU legislation and the national implementation on our sector. On the other hand, it meant raising the awareness among the representatives of the EU institutions of the positive impact and the current challenges of the Meetings Industry.

The Meetings Industry encompasses a wide range of cross-sectoral actors with a high degree of relevance to nearly all EU policy areas and respective European Parliament Committees and European Commission General Directorates. These include academic institutions, start-ups, scale-ups, SMEs, large companies, local and national governments, clusters, trade organisations, innovation hubs, research institutes etc., as well as venues, organisers suppliers, associations and destinations involved in hosting, planning and organising business events, meetings, conferences, trade fairs, and exhibitions.

Throughout the day, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on a range of critical issues, including sustainability and mobility legislation, the impact of EU trade policy on business events, talent development strategies and the need for digital innovation. By highlighting the contribution of meetings and events across all sectors, industry professionals underlined their integral role in driving innovation, collaboration and economic growth across Europe.

The conference highlighted that **meetings and events are universal drivers of positive change for society**. The Meetings Industry is recognised as a key contributor to the future growth of the global economy across all sectors and plays a vital role in disseminating knowledge and fostering professional practices.

By providing the meeting platforms and marketplaces for all sectors and industries, meetings have the power to drive science and innovation, trade and economic prosperity and to achieve the EU's objectives: to build a resilient economy; to embrace digital transformation; to build a green, fair and social Europe; to promote European interests and values on the global stage; and to strengthen Europe's competitiveness.

In addition, **the Meetings Industry makes a significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and plays a crucial role in tourism and the visitor economy* in general**. This contribution enriches destinations through social inclusion, cultural diversity, knowledge sharing and community engagement.

** The "visitor economy" is a concept that encompasses much more than just tourism, as it examines the whole environment in which visitors and the destination interact, and the various direct or indirect positive impacts that this interaction can have, economically, culturally, socially, and environmentally. Furthermore, the term 'visitor' covers a broader reality than the usual definition of a tourist. A visitor can be an attendee at a congress or professional event, a leisure visitor, a foreign student or expatriate, or a local visiting his or her own region.*

MEETINGS INDUSTRY MANIFESTO - PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT EU LEADERSHIP

With this Manifesto, we call on national and regional authorities, the newly elected members of the European Parliament and the next European Commission to work with the sector in the following areas:

01 The added value of meetings to the visitor economy*

- Recognise the role of knowledge exchange, in the areas of business, corporate, academic, social and economic development.
- Recognise the importance of the role of the meetings in the visitor economy and their contribution to development at local and continental development.
- Recognising the economic benefits of meetings, including high daily delegate expenditure, the ability to attract visitors in the low season and reduce seasonality, cross-sector collaboration, academic advancement, international cooperation and improved quality of life for local residents.
- Establish and maintain a constructive exchange with the meetings industry.

02 The European Commission's Tourism Transition Pathway and the Meetings Industry

- Strengthen the representation of the Meetings Industry, its specific policy needs and its stakeholders in the implementation and follow-up of the Tourism Transition Pathway and other relevant policies in a dedicated Unit at the European Commission.
- Identify concrete actions to highlight the meetings sector and business travel in general.
- Support the sector in its double transition, green and digital, in order to confirm and strengthen the leading innovative role of the European business Meetings Industry at global level.
- Work together to increase the sector's resilience and implement a unified approach to crisis management.
- Strengthen the infrastructure for R&D, education and skills development, while continuously refining mechanisms to promote workforce participation and mobility.
- Support a global "Business Events Destination Europe" campaign.

03 Data and statistics of business events

- Co-develop reliable and consistent data collection and statistical models for the Meetings Industry across Europe, with the aim of anchoring such data in the national statistics and Eurostat.
- Provide support for the refinement of the NACE system to accurately capture all activities included in the Meetings Industry.
- Include a specific focus on business travel within the tourism and transport ecosystems.
- Support the measurement of the economic impact and wider value of the Meetings Industry at all levels for Europe.
- Based on the improved data and participation in the Data Spaces, ensure the implementation of innovative and efficient business processes that build resilience across the Meetings Industry ecosystem.

04 Sustainability and mobility

- Recognise the transformative impact of meetings on society. They have the potential to play a leading role in promoting sustainable practices and social values at an international level.
- Work towards and support sustainable systems in venue management and meeting organisation to promote environmentally responsible practices with the ultimate aim to reach net zero carbon emissions.
- Support and accelerate the development of sustainable solutions for multimodal mobility, accommodation and catering in Europe, enabling business event attendees to reduce their carbon footprint sustainability.
- Align sustainability legislation and policies and provide simple guidelines and templates to reduce the complexity of measurement and reporting for all players in the Meetings Industry ecosystem, allowing SMEs to produce reports with internal resources.
- Improve access to sustainable finance for both large and small companies, ensuring that the benefits outweigh the cost, and related reporting is simplified.

05 R&D, innovation and competitiveness

- Use meetings and exhibitions as platforms to communicate, promote and leverage European programmes, initiatives and policies. This should be done in close cooperation with the respective sectors.
- Contribute to the success of start-ups and SMEs by supporting their participation in conferences and exhibitions in Europe and abroad in order to internationalise their business.
- Boost the activities of the European Innovation Council and other relevant activities, align them with national programmes and bring beneficiaries to trade fairs and conferences inside and outside Europe.
- Work with organisers to promote the protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) at conferences and exhibitions for European companies.
- Support the digital transition of the sector to ensure that Europe remains competitive and at the forefront of the latest innovations.
- By showcasing the scientific and entrepreneurial landscape of a destination, the meetings industry paves the way for new future investments and thereby gears up the competitiveness of member states and the EU overall.

06 Trade policy and visa

- Facilitate a generally open and fair operating environment in the EU and globally through trade agreements, while responding to geopolitical challenges.
- Maintain and enhance Europe's global leadership and competitiveness in the business events sector to ensure the continued success of world-leading conferences, congresses, trade fairs and exhibitions in Europe.
- Include free trade in services in all future trade negotiations and improve the terms, in particular with the UK and the US.
- Simplify and speed up visa procedures for exhibitors and visitors coming to the European Union for business meetings, conferences, congresses and exhibitions.

NEXT STEPS

A sustainable, competitive and forward-looking Meetings Industry in the European Union acts as a catalyst for the development of all sectors and industries. Meetings are a vital component of Europe's capacity for innovation, competitiveness, sustainable development goals and societal change. This industry not only creates employment opportunities and stimulates economic growth, but also facilitates the exchange of knowledge and innovation. The power of business events lies in bringing together the brightest minds to tackle challenges and drive positive change and growth.

We invite and call on EU policy makers at all levels to:

DIALOGUE

Engage in dialogue with Meetings Industry organisations through regular exchange mechanisms developed between the European Commission, the European Parliament and a designated Meetings Industry representation.

Create a dedicated Unit at the European Commission for the Meetings Industry to map, develop strategic visions, objectives and frameworks to achieve economic success.

RECOGNISE

Recognise the global role of the Meetings Industry as a strategic asset for Europe by including specific chapters on the role of meetings and exhibitions in relevant EU programmes and project frameworks.

FOSTER

Ensure favourable conditions for the industry and all other sectors to flourish by facilitating the necessary steps to strengthen the resilience of the sector through specific policies, transition programmes and legislation.

ELEVATE

Use the Meetings Industry as a strategic tool to take R&D and innovation to the next level across all industries, ensuring Europe's openness, competitiveness and prosperity.

REFERENCES

[EU Dialogue - driving positive change in the Meetings Industry](#)

Conference website with programme, topics, speakers and media.

[visit.brussels](#) is the Brussels-Capital Region's tourism promotion and communication agency dedicated to the promotion of tourism, culture and events, the creation of experiences and the quality of welcome for its leisure and business visitors, as well as international associations.

[City Destinations Alliance \(CityDNA\)](#) is a European knowledge-sharing alliance for Destination Management Organisations, Tourism Boards and Convention Bureaux.

[European Exhibition Industry Alliance \(EEIA\)](#) represents the common interests of the European exhibition Industry towards the EU and other stakeholders. It is a co-operation between **UFI** and **EMECA**.

[Joint Meetings Industry Council \(JMIC\)](#) represents the global business events industry. Its members are major international Meetings Industry associations.

CONTACT

www.visit.brussels
www.citydestinationsalliance.eu
www.exhibition-alliance.eu
www.themeetingsindustry.org

