

International Meetings Statistics Report

62nd Edition – June 2021

Comparative tables on the international
meetings of international organizations

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Introduction

This is the 62nd edition of this report.

For all of its 100-plus years of history the UIA has promoted transnational relationships between people as a key element of stability, peace, scientific advancement and the general betterment of humanity. As an observer of, organizer of, and participant in transnational events the UIA extends its condolences to those who have lost family, friends and colleagues to the pandemic and regrets the tremendous difficulties that all nations have faced during the accompanying social and economic upheavals.

The impact of the pandemic will be felt for years to come and we have already seen aspects of the “new normal” in 2020 itself as associations and event organizers brought creativity, resilience and technology to the fore as they sought to re-design in-person conferences and exhibitions.

The massive impact of the pandemic on international association meetings leads us to revise the presentation of this report. This report offers two sections: a re-presentation of the data for events held in 2019 and a presentation of the data we currently have for what took place in 2020.

Why 2019 again?

If you are familiar with this report then you will be aware that our data for a given year generally does not stabilize until a point five years further on. This is due to the fact that we are not immediately aware of what took place in the preceding year and are constantly updating our databases of international associations and their meetings activity. The Yearbook generally adds 900-1200 new organization descriptions during each annual cycle, and these bring meetings of their own to the statistical picture. We are presenting 2019 again here because it now represents the ***last good year before the pandemic***. We have added some 900+ additional meetings to the database for 2019 in the period between the reports and we have continued our general process of correcting and updating the information we already have. As we continue to elaborate and extend our understanding of the meetings which took place in 2019, the data will be the baseline for analyzing opportunities for recovery and in examining the potential of new initiatives.

And what of 2020?

The presentation for 2020 forced some changes in our approach. We are now actively tracking meetings which are **cancelled or postponed/rescheduled**. Historically the UIA has not had a firm editorial rule in such matters. Situations where conflict or natural disaster caused problems for scheduled meetings can be seen in our time-scale data by gaps or drop off in activity (the World Wars being the clearest examples). UIA had not traditionally described the planned events which had not taken place. By tracking cancelled and postponed events we are able to present a clearer picture of significant circumstances in an association’s life.

Also, we are now more correctly reflecting the participant status of events with **in-person, hybrid, and online/virtual** being added to an event’s description in the database. Historically the only meetings in our data which took place outside a defined town or city were those which happened on a cruise ship or those which took place in a national park or “resort”.

The data for 2020 present a first look at the impact of the pandemic on association life: a first quarter of in-person events which terminated in the first week of March 2020 and then a massive scramble to adjust to lockdowns, loss of transportation and so on. The remaining three quarters of 2020 gave rise to postponements, cancellations, and, into 2021, cascading reschedulings of the same planned-for in-person event. Other events pivoted from the in-person approach and chose hybrid options (when feasible) or fully online (aka virtual) platforms to bring people together.

A note on our 2020 data: why does 2020 look the way it does?

Our traditional editorial notes describe the process by which the UIA interacts with international associations and the meetings industry to compile information about association events. As with every other aspect of life during the pandemic the UIA has also faced changes and disruption to our annual cycles of contact and information gathering. These changes include: UIA staff being on mandatory furlough; association representatives being on mandatory furlough; meetings industry personnel being furloughed; associations and meetings organizers having to make quick (in some cases immediate) decisions about event planning and so on.

This has led to:

- a reduced total amount of 2020 events in the database;
- the need for additional editorial attention given to a single event which may have been postponed as many as three times;
- reduced information provided by our partners
- additional editorial time required to investigate the final status of events which were planned as in-person for the period March-December 2020;
- editors continue their research to reconfirm the final status of events in the database for 2020.

The problem of attributing a location to disrupted meetings

In the case of a hybrid event our expectation is that the location of the in-person element is described as the “location” of the meeting for our purposes. In the case of a planned in-person event which was ultimately held as online/virtual the issue becomes more complicated. Our default approach is that an online meeting with no specified host locale is then attributed to the home office city of the Yearbook organization. For this reason, some traditionally minor cities have risen in the rankings because they host an especially active organization. For example, Piscataway NJ (USA) is home to the meeting-intensive IEEE's headquarters. This reflects the economic aspect of how the event technology is contracted or organized. In other cases, we have seen that the planned locale for an in-person meeting takes on the role of technology partner for the online meeting, thus retaining the geographical credit for the meeting. Neither of these approaches is perfect, but they are sufficient for our purposes of describing what took place in the life of an individual international association. They are less elegant in describing how the local committee may have played the greatest role in making the event happen (reviewing papers, organizing break out groups and so on) or where the technology provider was based. As more meetings are deliberately planned as hybrid or online we will see a reduction in these ambiguities; and we will adjust our approach as needed.

As time passes we will know more about what happened in 2020 and 2021, because 2021 has also been a year of disruption and changed plans. What follows below is a presentation of what we know now, with an expectation of an increase in quantity and range as we move ahead.

What is not displayed in the geographic tables:

- postponed meetings
- cancelled meetings
- identifying / differentiating between in-person / hybrid and virtual meetings

Events in the International Congress Calendar currently marked with meeting-status information				
	Cancelled	Postponed	Virtual	Hybrid
2020	645	1642	2578	118
2021	46	219	729	189
2022	1	16	4	13

This report takes 471,800 meetings into account, organized in 256 countries, in 11,647 cities, by 27,465 international organizations.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions.

The UIA Editorial Team

UIA Survey 2021 – COVID 19 Impact on International Association Meetings

Related to this Report, the UIA is again surveying international associations on their meeting habits and the report will be released on 18 November 2021 (<https://uia.org/publications/meetings-survey>).

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Chapter 1

Research Methodology

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1.1 General methodology

This report is extracted from the Union of International Associations (UIA) database, which is the source of UIA's flagship publications: the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

It should be noted that UIA's criteria for the collection and inclusion of data in this report have not changed since the first edition in 1960; only the presentation has changed.

Since its founding in 1907 the UIA has collected information on international organizations and their international meetings; a first statistical review was published in its *Revue internationale des congrès* in 1910. Since 1960 the UIA has prepared statistics on the international meetings that have taken place worldwide in the preceding year. This work is based on routine research and surveys undertaken by the UIA for the compilation of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (published since 1950) and the *International Congress Calendar* (published since 1960).

The prime source of information is international organizations. The UIA editors work continuously throughout the year on the meetings database, adding and modifying event records using information acquired from international organizations and secondary sources, whether for meetings planned for future years or for meetings which took place in years (long) past. The data in this report are extracted every year anew. The most current edition of the report is therefore the most up to date and comprehensive set of data available.

Because the UIA's meetings database is always changing, data extracted from the database today differ from those extracted and published previously, whether they refer to the future or to the past. Changes may arise from the re-scheduling or relocation of meetings and from the addition of supplementary information on recorded meetings or the addition of previously unrecorded meetings. As data are modified, more meetings are added to the database than are removed.

While never claiming to be a complete survey of all international meetings, the merit of the UIA statistics is that they have been compiled over several decades from the same sources and using consistent methods and criteria.

The editors note that there have been initiatives to determine a standard and generally accepted and applied definition of the term "meeting". While the editors see the need for such an agreement, they point out that the chief merit of the UIA statistics is that they have been compiled over several decades from the same sources and using consistent methods and criteria.

Reminder

In previous editions, in order to be counted in this report a meeting had to have at least 50 participants, or the number of participants be unknown. As of last year's edition, meetings with under 50 participants are also included.

Territorial entities are listed on their own (for example: Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan are *not* grouped under China)

New organization descriptions are created year-round. The editors have always examined information received on international meetings which have no clear link to an international association included in the UIA database, the source of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. In some cases, this examination leads to the creation of new association profiles in the database, and thus to Type A meetings; in other cases, the meetings are considered for Type B or Type C. (See “What meetings are counted in this report?” for more information on Types.)

1.2 What meetings are counted in this report?

This report is extracted from the Union of International Associations (UIA) database, which is the source of UIA’s flagship publications: the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. At the time of producing this edition there were 511,371 meetings in the UIA meetings database of which 471,800 meet the criteria for inclusion in this report. Of these 471,800 meetings 462,627 took place in 2019 or earlier, 4,242 took place in 2020, and 4,931 are scheduled for 2020 or later. Some events take place in more than one city and are counted in this report for each city separately.

Meetings included in this report are divided into three types. The types are indicated by letters: type A, type B and type C. These letters have, in themselves, no significance in relation to the meetings they group and are used merely for convenience.

Type A: Meetings of international associations

Type A meetings conform to all the following criteria:

- The meeting must have a clear link to an international association included in the UIA database, the source of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. (See also below “What is an ‘international organization’”.)
- The meeting can be linked to either an international non-governmental organization (INGO) or an intergovernmental organization (IGO).
- The meeting is eligible for inclusion regardless of its frequency. A meeting can be a one-off event, part of a regular series, or part of an irregular series.
- The meeting is eligible for inclusion regardless of its location. A meeting series can be held always in the same location, or rotate according to a pattern between locations, or change locations randomly.
- The meeting is eligible for inclusion regardless of its participant numbers.

Included in this report are 4,096 Type A meetings for 2020.

Type A meetings are included in all tables in this report.

Types “B” and “C”: Other international meetings

Type B meetings conform to all the following criteria:

- The meeting does not qualify for Type A but is nonetheless considered to be of significant international associative character.
- The meeting lasts at least 3 days
- The meeting has either a concurrent exhibition or at least 300 participants.
- At least 40 percent of the meeting’s participants are from countries other than the host country and at least 5 nationalities are represented.

Logically, all meetings counted as Type B are also counted as Type C.

Included in this report are 98 Type B meetings for 2020.

Type C meetings conform to all the following criteria:

- The meeting does not qualify for Type A but is nonetheless considered to be of significant international associative character.
- The meeting lasts at least 2 days.
- The meeting has either a concurrent exhibition or at least 250 participants.

Logically, meetings counted as Type C are *not* all counted as Type B.

Included in this report are 146 Type C meetings for 2020.

Types “B” and “C” meetings are included only in some tables in this report.

On average, 900-1200 new organization descriptions are added to the database annually.

1.3 What is an “international organization”?

The UIA database, the source of the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, profiles “non-profit” “international” “organizations” according to broad criteria. It therefore includes many bodies that may be perceived, according to narrower definitions, as not being fully international, or as not being organizations as such, or as not being of sufficient significance to merit inclusion. Such bodies are nevertheless included so as to enable users to make their own evaluation in the light of their own criteria.

“Organization”: There are forms of social organization that may substitute for more formal or conventional forms, such as a conference series with no continuing committee, virtual organizations, networks, cartels, secret societies, religious sects, and bodies with no formal structure or fixed address. Due to the sometimes-vague structure of such bodies, they may be under-reported.

“Non-profit”: The definition of “profit-making”, and the extent to which any “non-profit organization” may incidentally or deliberately make a profit as defined by particular tax regimes, cannot be unambiguously resolved. This grey area is treated with flexibility, though bodies that are unambiguously constituted as “for profit” or with solely commercial aims are excluded.

“International”: The editors look for the involvement of at least three countries on a more or less equal footing, to the possible exclusion of bi-lateral international bodies and those in which a particular country is dominant. Indications of “internationality” include distribution of board members, location of meetings, rotation of secretariat, source of finance, and membership. Bodies that are focused on, or derive from, a single country are likely to be excluded, which may lead to under-reporting of, for example, aid and missionary societies, or language and cultural activities.

The number and variety of organizations in the UIA database are indicators of the problems of information collection. Documenting organizations and their meetings is challenging for reasons such as the following:

- News of the creation, existence or dissolution of an organization may only be received some time after the fact. Information on an organization’s activities may take time to be received and registered by the editors.
- Some organizations are reluctant to publicize their activities. They may not respond to questionnaires or may omit significant information from their replies. Some may not perceive themselves as sufficiently formalized to be mentioned in the same context as those that are legally established.
- Some organizations are ephemeral creations or are only “activated” for infrequent meetings, events or projects.
- Some organizations have frequent changes of secretariat, making continuing contact problematic.

Approximately 60% of UIA’s profiles of currently active organizations include information on meetings activity. These data form the basis of this report. Some tables in this report also draw on the secretariat and membership information contained in the profiles. In these cases, a selection has been made using UIA’s hierarchical typology, counting only those organizations classified under one of 10 selected types:

- A = federations of international organizations
- B = universal membership organizations
- C = intercontinental membership organizations
- D = limited or regionally defined membership organizations
- E = organizations emanating from places, persons or other bodies
- F = organizations having a special form, including foundations, funds
- G = internationally-oriented national organizations
- K = subsidiary and internal bodies
- N = national organizations
- R = religious orders, fraternities and secular institutes

More information on UIA’s hierarchical typology can be found on the UIA website in the article [“Types of organization”](#).

1.4 Caveat

The UIA editors work continuously throughout the year on the meetings database, adding and modifying event records using information acquired from international organizations and secondary sources, whether for meetings planned for future years or for meetings which took place in years (long) past. The data in this report are extracted every year anew. The most current edition of the report is therefore the most up to date and comprehensive set of data available. Readers are reminded that data, especially for recent years, are therefore provisional: data will change as research continues and the database is updated.

The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase:

- **by about 11% over the next year**
- **by about 34% over the following five years, and**
- **by about 37% over the following seven years.**

1.5 Geographical names

It is not the intention of the editors to take a position with regard to the political or diplomatic implications of geographical names or continental groupings used. The country, city, and continental names used in this publication are chosen for the sake of brevity and common usage in English. Within the limits of standardization required for statistical purposes, the geographical names used by the organizer of the meeting are respected. This may sometimes lead to territories and dependencies being listed separately, which then affects the totals per country.

The editors are aware there may be inconsistencies in spelling or usage of city names and would welcome being given the information necessary to correct these. Some apparent inconsistencies, however, may be due to the preferences of the organizer (for example, indicating a meeting is held in a suburb or distinct district of a major city rather than in the city itself), or to the exigencies of postal agreements.

1.6 Other resources

Custom research reports based on these and more data from the UIA database are available on request. [Contact us](#) for more information.

Readers wishing to study the overall association meetings market may also find it useful to consult the statistics reports produced by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA). This complementary resource can be used alongside UIA statistics to create a more complete understanding, rather than an alternative or competing view, of the same market segment.

The UIA and ICCA statistics differ, in the first place, because they are based on differing definitions of what constitutes an “international not-for-profit organization”. (See above “What is an international organization”.) All three of these terms – “international”, “not-for-profit”, and “organization” – are large enough, and vague enough, to be interpreted differently. In a matching exercise carried out by UIA and ICCA together, it was found that about four-fifths of the international organizations in the ICCA database also qualify for inclusion in the UIA database; the remaining one-fifth does not meet UIA’s criteria for “international not-for-profit organizations”.

UIA’s association database has many organizations not included in ICCA’s database because UIA has a broader definition of “international not-for-profit organization”, and because UIA’s criteria are not restricted to organizations holding regular, rotating meetings. ICCA’s focus on the meetings activities of international associations, and its definition of “international association meeting”, further refine its selection of the international organizations behind those meetings, while UIA’s broader definitions allow a wider range of meetings and of organizations. For example, UIA’s database also includes organizations which have no (known) meetings activity at all.

Secondly, the UIA and ICCA statistics differ because they are based on differing definitions of what constitutes an “international association meeting”.

- Both include only events organized by international not-for-profit associations, but, as described above, their interpretations of those terms differ.
- ICCA includes only the meetings of non-governmental organizations; UIA includes meetings of both non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations (and acknowledges the grey zone in between).
- ICCA includes only events which occur regularly; UIA includes meetings regardless of their frequency, including one-off events.
- ICCA includes only events which rotate between at least three countries; UIA includes meetings regardless of their location, including events held always in the same location.
- ICCA includes only events which attract at least 50 participants; UIA includes meetings regardless of their participant numbers.

Finally, ICCA and UIA differ in their focus. ICCA collects the information from its members – “specialists in organising, transporting and accommodating international meetings and events” – and also from international associations. UIA derives its information chiefly by direct and regular contact with international associations, and, in the second place, from national, regional, and civic tourist authorities.

Chapter 2

General overview of international association meetings

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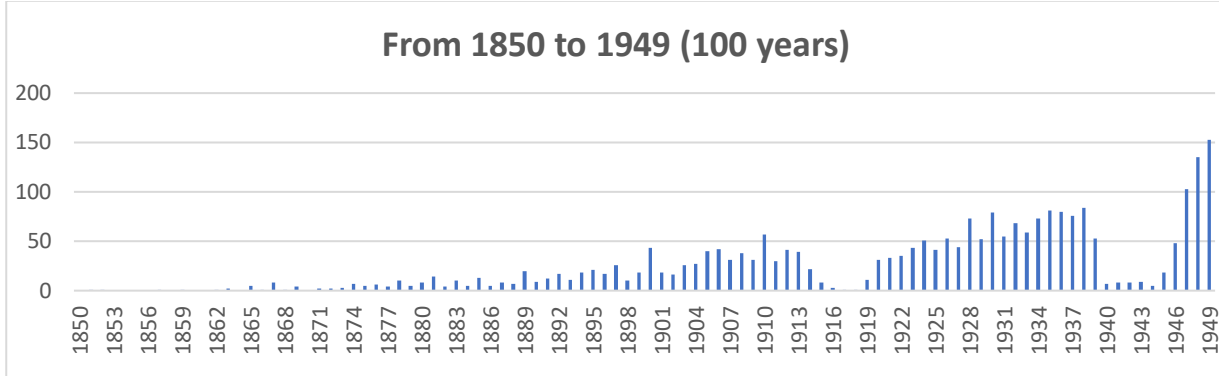
2.1 Comparison with 60th and 61st editions

	62nd edition published in 2021	61st edition published in 2020	60th edition published in 2019
Total number of meetings in the UIA database	511,371	504,822	494,711
Number of meetings included in this report	471,800	465,381	453,139
Number of meetings taking place prior to the reporting year (2019 or earlier)	462,627	448,035	436,847
Number of meetings taking place in the reporting year (2020)	4,242	12,472	11,240
Number of meetings scheduled to take place after the reporting year (2021 or later)	4,931	4,874	5,052
Number of countries represented for all years	256	254	250
Number of cities represented for all years	11,647	11,468	12,682
Number of countries represented for the reporting year (2020)	127	161	167
Number of cities represented for the reporting year (2020)	802	1,251	1,197
Number of active international organizations	42,201	41,534	40,119
Number of active international organizations known to have meetings activity	27,465	25,709	23,625

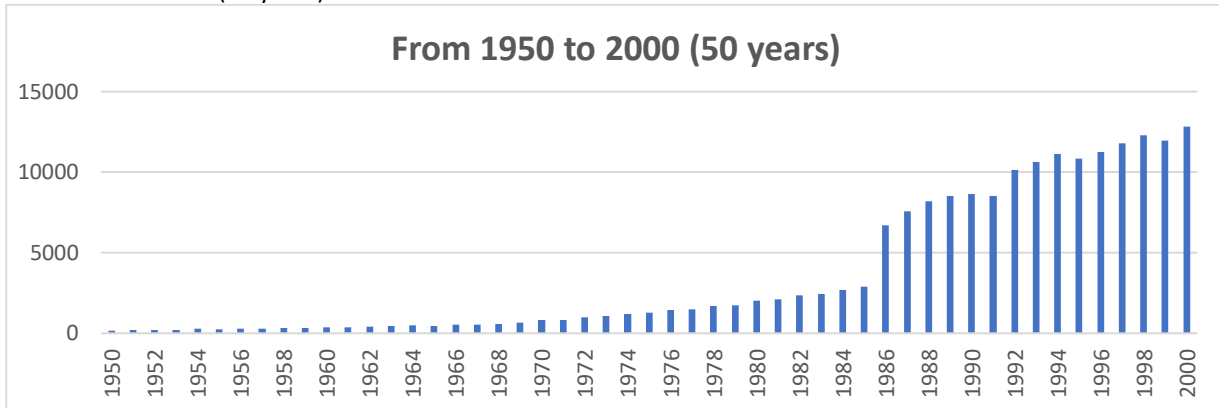
2.2 Number of international association meetings over 150+ years

These charts show the number of international association meetings of Type A from 1850 to 2020.*

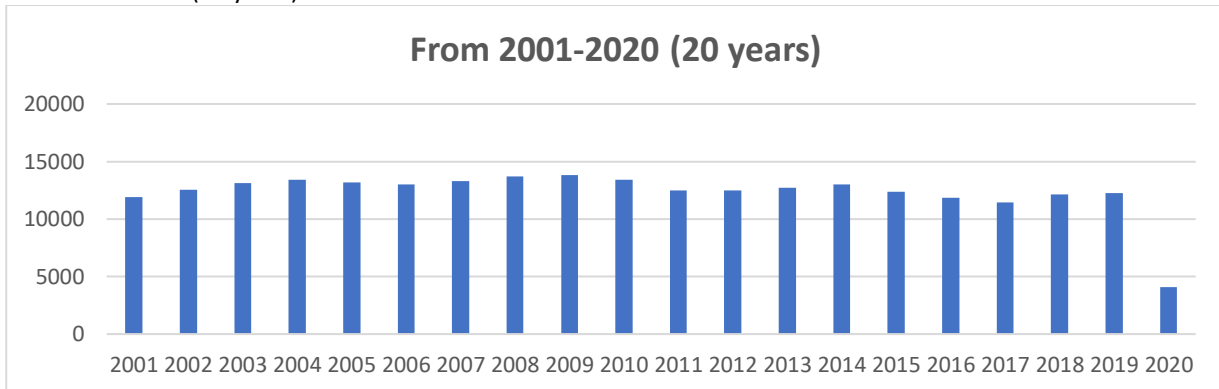
From 1850 to 1950 (100 years)



From 1950 to 2000 (50 years)



From 2001-2020 (20 years)



* The data in this report are drawn from the UIA database, the source of the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Note that each chart has a different **scale on the Y axis**: number of meetings.

The significant change in the mid-1980s is due to **digitalization** enabling more comprehensive collection of data. UIA still holds a significant paper archive of earlier years.

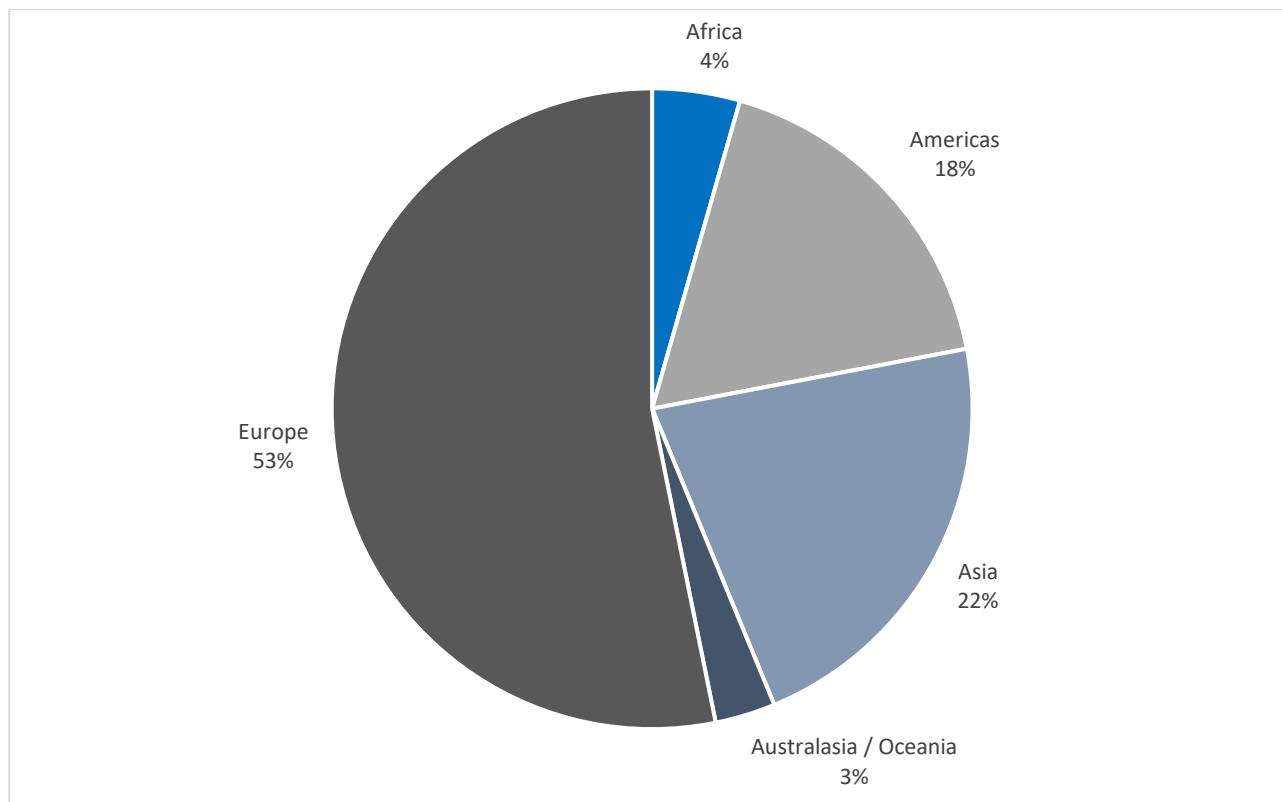
Caveat: The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase by about 11% over the next year, by about 34% over the following five years, and by about 37% over the following seven years.

Definitions of meetings of Type A, of Type B, and of Type C can be found in "Research methodology" (section 1.1, page 7).

2.3 Meetings by continent

2.3.1 Continental division in the past 20 years

This chart shows how the international association meetings of Type A held from 2001 to 2020 are spread over the continents.*



* The data in this report are drawn from the UIA database, the source of the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Caveat: The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase by about 11% over the next year, by about 34% over the following five years, and by about 37% over the following seven years.

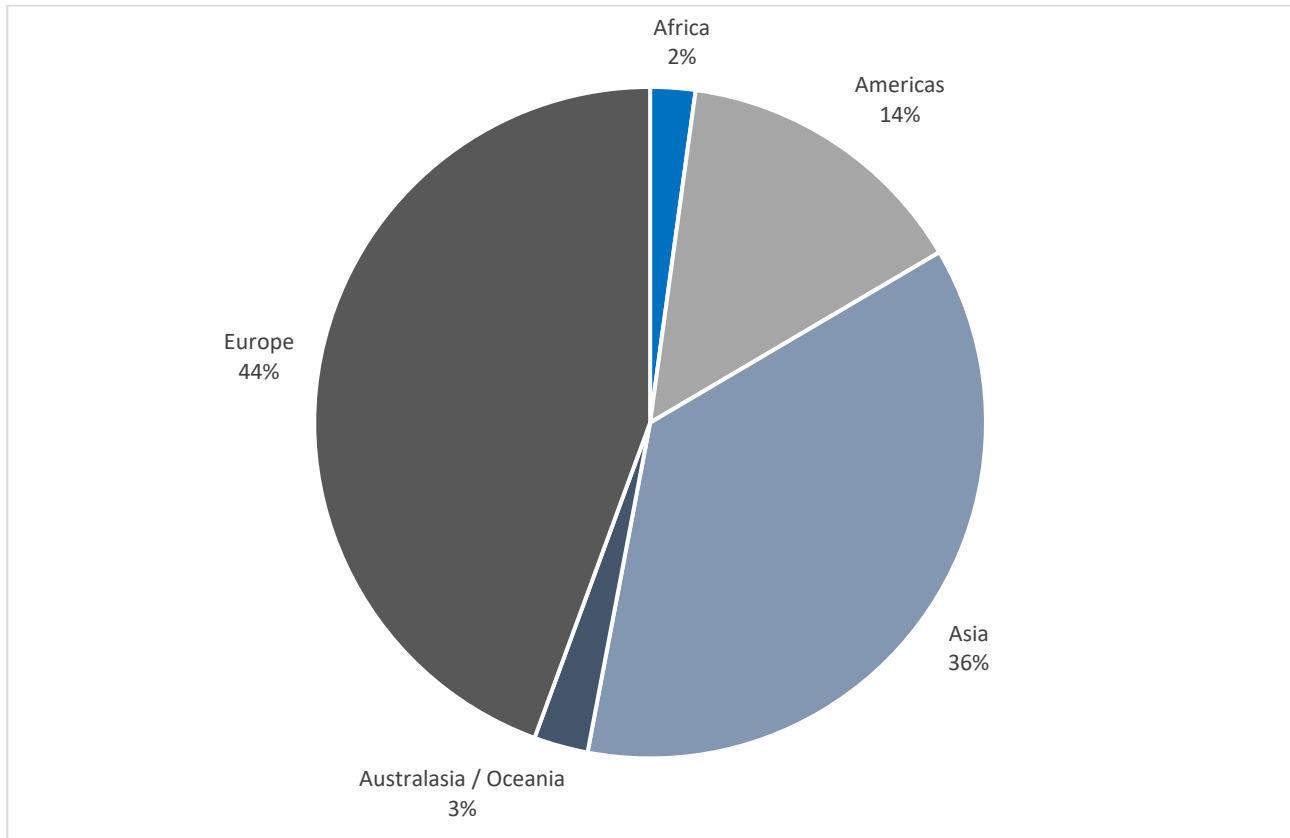
Definitions of meetings of Type A, of Type B, and of Type C can be found in "Research methodology" (section 1.1, page 7).

Countries and cities: see "Research Methodology" regarding geographical names.

Continental divisions follow UIA's standard practice.

2.3.2 Continental division in 2020

This chart shows how the international association meetings of Type A held in 2020 are spread over the continents.*



* The data in this report are drawn from the UIA database, the source of the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Caveat: The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase by about 11% over the next year, by about 34% over the following five years, and by about 37% over the following seven years.

Definitions of meetings of Type A, of Type B, and of Type C can be found in "Research methodology" (section 1.1, page 7).

Countries and cities: see "Research Methodology" regarding geographical names.

Continental divisions follow UIA's standard practice.

2.4 Meeting size

2.4.1 Meeting size over 20 years

This table shows the total number of international association meetings of Type A for each category of participant numbers from 2001 to 2020.*

Number of meetings by category of participant numbers at Type A meetings in 2001-2020			
Participants	Total meetings 2001-2020	Average meetings per year	% of total meetings 2001-2020
≤ 100	18,632	931.6	28.4%
101 to 500	31,936	1596.8	48.6%
501 to 1000	7,723	386.2	11.8%
1001 to 3000	5,059	253.0	7.7%
3001 to 5000	1,143	57.2	1.7%
5001 to 7000	449	22.5	0.7%
> 7000	771	38.6	1.2%

* The data in this report are drawn from the UIA database, the source of the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Caveat: The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase by about 11% over the next year, by about 34% over the following five years, and by about 37% over the following seven years.

Definitions of meetings of Type A, of Type B, and of Type C can be found in "Research methodology" (section 1.1, page 7). Only meetings with a known number of **participants** are included in this table.

2.5 Meeting duration

2.5.1 Meeting duration for 20 years

This table shows the total number of international association meetings of Type A of different durations from 2001 to 2020.*

Number of Type A meetings by duration in 2001-2020			
Days	Total meetings 2001-2020	Average meetings / year	% of total meetings 2001-2020
1 day	26,220	1311.0	13.2%
2 days	36,579	1829.0	18.4%
3 days	51,891	2594.6	26.1%
4 days	39,488	1974.4	19.8%
5 days	26,874	1343.7	13.5%
> 5 days	17,884	894.2	9.0%

* The data in this report are drawn from the UIA database, the source of the *International Congress Calendar* and the *Yearbook of International Organizations*.

Caveat: The number of meetings in the database for the year just past will, on average, increase by about 11% over the next year, by about 34% over the following five years, and by about 37% over the following seven years.

Definitions of meetings of Type A, of Type B, and of Type C can be found in "Research methodology" (section 1.1, page 7).

The *International Meetings Statistics Report* is produced for the use of the Associate Members of the Union of International Associations. The Report is available for their exclusive use the first three months following publication.

Custom research reports based on these and more data from the UIA database are available on request.

Associated and complementary information is available in the *Yearbook of International Organizations, Volume 5: Statistics, Visualizations and Patterns*.

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