**Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags**

**Evolving in a changing world**

**With 8,000 attendees from over 100 countries, the 103rd edition of Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags came to a close. Attendance grew from Poland, the UK, Africa and the USA, while numbers from Germany remained steady. The event, which kicked off the Spring/Summer 2026 season, featured the debut of the renewed Gardabags format – a launch met with excellent success. There was strong participation in the numerous events designed not only to drive business, but also to promote networking and innovation. It was also announced that, over the next three years, the expansion works on the exhibition centre will be completed.**

“The big fashion brands understood that the sneaker had to change – and they succeeded in changing it. We now have a sports shoe that’s a ballet flat, and a ballet flat that’s a sports shoe.” This was one of the insights shared by Maria Cristina Rossi, teacher at Arsutoria School, with the large audience attending trend talks in the Highlights Area at Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags.

Her observation captures, in simple terms, the much broader and more complex transformations affecting not just fashion, but the entire market. But how can we respond to a shifting landscape? The key concept is "Knowing How to Become". “Knowing How to Become” refers to the ability of individuals and organisations to continually learn and adapt to ever-changing contexts, environments and situations.

It is the most fitting way to describe the work carried out by Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags since the early 2000s: “We began by focusing on internationalising the exhibitor base – the fair that moves the world.
More recently, we’ve evolved the event into a must-attend opportunity for the entire footwear and accessories community. A place for doing business, of course, but also for staying informed and connecting intelligently – through a rich program of events, the Business Scout services, and the app that enables direct contact between exhibitors and buyers,” as **Alessandra Albarelli, General Manager of Riva del Garda Fierecongressi**, explained.

**KEY FIGURES FROM THE 103RD EDITION**

The 103rd edition of Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags, held from 14 to 17 June 2025, welcomed 8,000 attendees from over 100 countries, meeting organisers’ expectations and reflecting broader market trends.

**Roberto Pellegrini, Chairman of Riva del Garda Fierecongressi**: “Once again, the summer edition has proven to be stronger than the winter one. Visitor numbers remained largely stable – a solid result considering the many complications currently affecting global markets, as well as the military conflicts that, during the fair itself, escalated and prevented several countries from participating.”

Buyer attendance grew from the UK (+5%) and Poland (+15%), with Germany holding steady and Italy showing a slight decline. Non-EU inbound attendance was also positive, with India up by 13.6%, and both Africa and the United States registering a +10% increase.

That buyer quality – often more important than quantity – continues to drive order placements is confirmed by the consistent demand for more exhibition space to welcome new exhibitors and allow existing ones to enlarge their stands. “We will meet these demands by expanding the exhibition centre. Over the next three years, we plan to **complete works that will make the fairgrounds even more welcoming: we will add another 20,000 m2**, building new halls for a total investment of around **€50 million**. This will ensure an even greater international reach and exhibitor diversity,” revealed Roberto Pellegrini.

This diversity is indeed one of the event’s greatest strengths, as confirmed by **Antonia Reading of Hotter**, a major UK retail chain with its own manufacturing company, who visited the fair for the first time: “I was amazed by the variety of the offering – both in terms of the chance to meet suppliers from literally all over the world and the different levels of quality I could choose from.”

**THE EVOLUTION OF GARDABAGS... AND BEYOND**

Undoubtedly, the most talked-about transformation at the June edition was the revamp of Gardabags. Social media lit up with photos of the new halls entirely dedicated to the event, which doubled in both floor space and collection offering. A stylish, fashion-forward atmosphere defined the **three new zones designed for interaction between exhibitors and buyers** – the pillars of the new Gardabags format: Sourcing, Sourcing4Bridge, and Brands, not to mention the strong presence of exhibitors specialising in travel goods.

Having successfully redefined the Riva event as the essential hub not only for footwear trade, but now also for bags, backpacks and travel accessories, Riva del Garda Fierecongressi is already looking ahead. The next step: the progressive evolution of Expo Riva Schuh itself, beginning with the unveiling of a new visual identity – a reflection of the fair’s continued innovation, adaptability, connection to its local roots and commitment to networking.

The **new logo** – featuring a clean and immediate design – complements the renewed identity of Gardabags and clearly conveys the message of a modern, functional and service-oriented trade fair. Every detail of the new design has been carefully analysed to communicate Expo Riva Schuh’s commitment to keeping pace with the times, while maintaining strong and consistent brand recognition.

**INNOVATION**

**Alberto Mattiello – futurist, author, Head of Innovation Retail Hub, and member of the Scientific Committee of Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags –** also addressed the profound changes shaping the world during his opening speech at the **Startup Competition**: “Artificial Intelligence remains the central theme when it comes to innovation. After being used to streamline processes and save us time, it has evolved into a wide array of specialised, customisable and controllable tools capable of ‘reasoning’. Now, it’s reaching a third evolutionary stage. We’ve entered the era of Massive Automation: within a few months, we may all become programmers – not because we’ve learned to code, but because machines will do it for us, creating applications tailored to our needs.”

The ever-growing panel of judges, composed of leading buyers and industry experts, selected **Irisphera** (Romania) as the best solution among those presented during the June 2025 edition of the **Innovation Village Retail**, an initiative organised in collaboration with Retail Hub, which – across its eight editions – has showcased 68 startups from 19 countries.

Thanks to their win, Irisphera will have the opportunity to exhibit at the next edition of the event, scheduled for January 2026, further strengthening its presence on the international stage.

 The company will promote its platform, which uses **artificial intelligence and 3D technology to help consumers find clothing tailored to their bodies**, offering personalised suggestions on size, colour and style. The result is a significant reduction in returns, an enhanced shopping experience and valuable analytics for retailers.

Other events throughout the four-day fair also drew large crowds: the **Highlights Area**, where attendees explored consumer trends and gathered reliable insights to inform purchasing decisions; the **Market Focus** sessions, a prime opportunity for buyers to discuss their local markets and meet suppliers suited to their specific needs; and the **Expo Riva Nights**, where connections were built beyond business in a festive, relaxed atmosphere.

Once again, the 103rd edition of Expo Riva Schuh and Gardabags demonstrated its ability to truly "Know How to Become" what the industry needs – and it will continue to do so in future editions, starting with the next, which will take place from **10 to 13 January 2026**.