

# Oral Proceedings at the EPO in Times of COVID-19

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*A personal account on the oral proceedings I recently had before the Boards of Appeal*

I recently had oral proceedings at the EPO's Boards of Appeal for the first time since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe.

As many practitioners may be interested in how this is organized, I am happy to share my experiences:

- Approximately one month before the hearing, the Board asked the parties whether they can participate in the oral proceedings, or whether they are affected by any travel restrictions. As this was not the case, the date for the oral proceedings was maintained.
- Each party further had to indicate who was going to participate in the oral proceedings, and each party was requested to limit the number of participants as much as possible.
- On the day of the oral hearing, when entering the building of the Boards of Appeal, each participant had to complete [this questionnaire](#).
- According to the information by the Board of Appeal, only 50% of the rooms for the oral proceedings are currently used. This reduces the overall number of people in the building. Further, the oral proceedings on a single day are scheduled for different times. This reduces the number of people arriving at the same time.
- When I arrived at the building, there was no queue, and I could immediately proceed with the safety check.
- For the times prior to the hearing and during the breaks, each party had a dedicated "attorneys' room" to themselves.
- Whenever walking from one room to another (e.g., to the attorneys' room, from the attorneys' room to the room for the oral proceedings, etc.), everyone has to wear a face mask.
- In the room for the oral proceedings, there is plenty of space, and there are transparent screens between each chair.
- Approximately after each hour, the oral proceedings are interrupted and the room is ventilated.
- The restaurant/cafeteria is open, albeit with limited opening hours. Also, the spaces per table are limited (every second space has to be left empty), and one has to fill out a form indicating the time one was present in the cafeteria and contact information.

Overall, I found that the oral proceedings were very well organized, and I felt very safe.

I hope this information is useful for some fellow practitioners. Also feel free to reach out to me in case you have any additional question.