

Report on the state of publishing in Italy **Consolidated 2023 and first six months 2024 trade market**

by AIE Research Office

Summary

Italian publishing is confirmed as the country's first cultural industry with a turnover (value of sales) of 3.439 billion euros, stable compared to the previous year (+1.1 percent). Included in these numbers are the trade market (1.9 billion), textbooks for schools, professional and university publishing, exports, and sales to libraries. In contrast, the numbers for the first six months of 2024 referring only to the trade market (non-fiction and fiction sold in bookstores, online, and large scale distribution) show a stagnant market, with sales of 675.8 million, down 0.1 percent from the previous year. Down by nearly one million (900 thousand) in the first six months, book copies sold reached 46.1 million. Compared to 2019, the growth is 6.7 million copies. These are the main figures of Italian publishing - photographed by the Report on the State of Publishing in Italy 2024, edited by the Italian Publishers Association - which presents itself as Guest of Honour 2024 at Frankfurter Buchmesse with a number of translation rights sold in 2023 abroad approaching eight thousand and a growing export of Italian books abroad.

The market in 2023

The more than 3 billion euros (3,439 million) in sales certify Italian publishing as fourth in Europe -- behind Germany, the United Kingdom and France -- and sixth in the world. The value of reader spending is higher in Italy than consumer spending on pay TV, free-to-air TV (TV license fee), video games, music and cinema. Trade market sales, including e-books and audiobooks and print books sold in channels such as bookfairs, festivals and smaller outlets, totaled 1,913 million euros in 2023. Added to this is the educational sector, which is worth 1,031 million euros, including 794 million school's textbooks, and the professional sector, 565 million euros. The export of Italian books abroad is worth 51 million, up slightly from last year (+2 percent). These are numbers that translate into 70 thousand people employed in the book chain, including allied industries, more than three thousand bookstores in the country, 5,308 active publishers.

The first six months of trade market 2024

The trade market for the first six months of 2024 is down 0.1 percent from 2023, with sales of 675.8 million. Copies sold are 46.1 million, down 0.9 million from the previous year but up 6.7 million from 2019.

In terms of genres, fiction continues to grow, particularly Italian fiction (+5.4%), but also foreign authors (+3.1%), manuals are advancing (+1%) while comics (-4.8%), children's and YA books (-2.8%), general non-fiction (-3%) and specialized non-fiction (-1.6%) mark a setback. The top 10 best-selling books (attached here) include nine Italian authors and Switzerland's Joël Dicker in first place.

Regarding sales channels, physical bookstores reach 53.7 percent of sales and continue the recovery started after the 2020 crisis, when they weighed 49.1 percent. Online sales weighs in at 41.7 percent (down slightly), large scale distribution 4.6 percent (down).

Production

In 2023, 85,192 print book titles were published in Italy. The growth in annual offerings - tripled since 1988 - is accompanied by the expansion of commercially available books, now amounting to

1.5 million titles, thanks to the possibilities provided by e-commerce to meet an increasingly fragmented and varied demand. Of the more than 85 thousand titles published in 2023 (including 13 thousand self-published), 69 thousand are trade publishing, 3,400 are textbooks for school. To these numbers should be added those of digital production. The e-book catalog today is 619 thousand titles, 32 thousand of them available in accessible versions for blind and visually impaired people certified by Fondazione LIA – Libri Italiani Accessibili. The number of e-books produced in 2023 is 38,400, in 60% of cases these are the digital version of new books published in print.

Internationalization

Italy has been engaged for more than two decades in the internationalization of its publishing industry, which has led it to more than quadruple the number of translation rights sold abroad compared to 2001 (1,800). In 2023, Italy sold 7,838 translation rights abroad. Translation rights bought abroad were 5,400 in 2001 and were 9,328 in 2023. Co-editions with foreign publishers in 2023 totaled 1,845.

The country system relies on support for translations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Centro per il Libro e la Lettura amounting to about 1 million euros per year. Visibility abroad is supported through an annual plan developed by the Italian Trade Agency in collaboration with AIE, which includes participation in foreign trade fairs and incoming actions to the main Italian trade fairs. Italy, where the Bologna Children's Book Fair is held every year, sells abroad mainly translation rights for children's and YA titles, 2,325 in the last year. Most international co-editions, 1,350 out of 1,845, are also concentrated in this sector. In the ranking by genre of translation rights sold abroad, fiction (1,951) leads, general (1,420) and specialized non-fiction (986) follow, and then, again, religious books (429), practical manuals (410), comic books (291), and art and illustrated books (26). If we look instead at geographical areas, the sale of rights to other European countries is the absolute majority, with 65.8 percent of contracts signed. This is followed by Asia (15.3%), the Middle East (6.1%), South America (5.8%), North America (3.6%), Africa (1%) and the Pacific (0.6%). In 1.7% of cases, the geographical area is not indicated.

Reading and purchasing habits

According to the Observatory conducted by Pepe Research for AIE, in 2023 74 percent of citizens between 15 and 74 years old say they have read at least one book, print or digital, or listened to an audiobook in the past 12 months. Specifically, in 2023 82% of the sample in the 15-17 age group read, 78% in the 18-24 age group, 82% in the 25-34 age group, 80% in the 35-44 age group, 71% in the 45-54 age group, 65% in the 55-64 age group, and 72% in the 65-74 age group.

Reading, despite competition from TV series, video games, and social networks, remains a daily habit for more than one in four readers (28 percent), a practice done at least weekly for 67 percent. Four hours and 18 minutes is the average weekly time devoted to reading, and for one in five readers, the book is a habit to which they devote more than five hours of time per week.

Those who bought at least one printed book in 2023 are 65% of 15-74 year olds, with a strong gender disparity. In the case of women, 71% of the total are book buyers, in the case of men 59% of the total.

The Report on the State of Publishing in Italy 2024 is available for sale in EPUB and PDF formats on major online platforms. All materials and the video presentation of Italian publishing are available on the AIE website (<https://www.aie.it/buchmesse2024.aspx>).

NOTE

The Report on the State of Publishing in Italy is based on data from different sources and, in particular, on Nielsen BookScan data until 2023 regarding the trade market survey of printed books. With the new year, as a result of a corporate merger, trade market data are provided to AIE by NielsenIQ-GfK, while bibliographic cataloging support always comes from IE-Informationi Editoriali.

The data presented in this summary are thus provided by Nielsen BookScan, with the exception of the data for the first six months of 2024 of the trade market and comparison with the same six months of previous years, which are instead provided by NielsenIQ-GfK.

These differ from the Nielsen BookScan data in a number of features, two of which are particularly significant. The first is that the surveys are done on a monthly basis, rather than on the basis of 13 four-week periods, as was previously the case. Also, the value of sales is no longer calculated at cover price, but incorporates promotional discounts given to end customers.