

ITALY OF BOOKS. A TALE IN FIGURES

Every journey, if well-planned, starts with a map, and the 76th Frankfurt Book Fair will be, among many other things, also a journey into the Italy of books, a country that returns as Guest of Honour after 36 years. We thought, as the Italian Publishers Association (AIE), that a special map was needed for this journey, one that would tell not so much about the entire Italian publishing scene, its cultural articulations, its history - that would really have been too difficult an undertaking - but the numbers that, in summary, describe its main characteristics today. Like all maps, it is not the reality, but a representation of it, we trust faithful enough to help you better orient yourself among the books, authors, stories and ideas you will come across in Frankfurt. An X-ray, in short, of the backbone that keeps Italian publishing on its feet. Thus was born this special issue of *Giornale della Libreria*, a publication by AIE. The ambition is to tell in three pages, six chapters and a few charts the gears of a complex but, we think, fascinating machine. The numbers we use are those of the Report on the State of Publishing in Italy, a reference text for the analysis of the sector produced annually by the AIE research office and of which this special is a summary. In the first chapter we will tell how much publishing in Italy is worth, its companies, its employees. We will then describe in the second how large the catalogue of titles is, how many titles are published each year, how the market is divided between fiction and non-fiction, school texts, university books and professional publishing. We will then move on in the third to analyze the different genres and trends in the trade market: fiction, nonfiction, and children's books. The fourth is devoted to the internationalization of the industry through rights sales, and more. Finally, we will close with two chapters on reading - print books and digital books such as e-books and audiobooks - and the buying habits of Italians. All that remains, then, is to wish you a safe journey inside the literary and professional programme of Italy Guest of Honour.

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President of AIE,
the Italian Publishers Association

The size of the market

Italian publishing ranks fourth by value of sales in Europe

The Italian publishing industry had a value of sales of EUR 3,439 million in 2023, an increase of 1.1% compared to the previous year. The Italian market, net of inflation, more than doubled compared to 1988, when sales amounted to EUR 652 million. Not only: the 2023 figure stabilises and consolidates the growth that took place in Italy in the post-pandemic period and that is worth EUR 300 million more in sales than in 2019, a dimensional leap also due to the arrival of new young audiences approaching books through new genres and new forms of promotion on social networks.

Italy is therefore now the fourth largest publishing industry in Europe and sixth in the world, despite the fact that its language pool is in fact limited to national borders. Sales cover all the cultural needs of citizens and reflect the plurality of the publishing offer: leisure reading, education, training, professional updating, research and more, through printed texts, but also e-books, audio books, databases and online services. Overall, digital is worth 13% of the entire market. Sales in the trade market, i.e. fiction and non-fiction sold in bookshops, online channels and large-scale distribution and others point of sale, are worth EUR 1,913 million (printed books, e-books and subscriptions to audio-book channels), the educational sector (school, extracurricular and university) is worth EUR 931 million, of which school textbooks account for EUR 794 million. The professional sector is worth EUR 565 million.

These numbers translate into more than 70 thousand people working for the book industry in Italy. There are over three thousand bookshops in the country and 5,184 publishers. If we consider, again, the 1988 scenario, their number has more than doubled.

TOTAL VALUE OF THE MARKET (COVER PRICES)

2023
3,439
EUR MILLION

Compared to 1988, when the equivalent of EUR 652 million in books were sold, the growth after inflation was 108%, 427% before inflation.

NUMBER OF ACTIVE PUBLISHERS

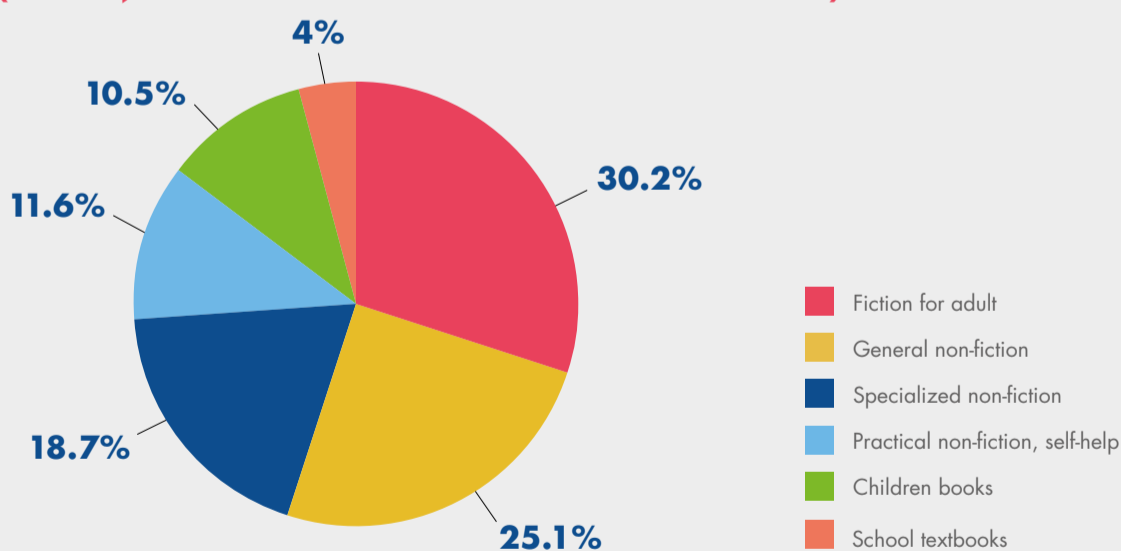
2023
5,308

Compared to 1988, when there were 2,315 publishers, their number has more than doubled: more than 129%.

THE MARKET IN 2023

	2023 EUR thousand
Sales in physical and online bookshops, supermarkets	1,697,000
Sales at trade fairs, festivals and smaller outlets	107,000
E-book	81,000
Audiobooks (subscriptions)	28,000
Total trade	1,913,000
School textbooks	794,100
Installment, collectibles, hybrids	220,000
Databases and internet services	345,000
Sales to libraries	81,000
B2B	35,000
Export of Italian books abroad	51,000

PRINTED TITLES PUBLISHED IN 2023: 85,192 (TRADE, SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS AND PROFESSIONAL)



CATALOGUE OF AVAILABLE TITLES

2023
1.5
MILLION

Compared to 1988, when the catalogue was 250,000 titles, the growth has been 500%.

PRINTED TITLES PUBLISHED PER YEAR (TRADE MARKET ONLY)

2023
68,820

Compared to 1988, when 23,750 titles were published in one year, the growth has been 190%. Self-published titles are excluded.

Production

An ever-growing catalog

The Italian publishing industry has increased the number of titles available in its catalogue sixfold since 1988 and now stands at 1.5 million. Advances in the printing and distribution processes have in fact made it possible to expand the offer available to readers by reducing recourse to out-of-catalogue titles, while annual production has stabilised at over 80,000 new titles in the last three years (85,192 in 2023). The increase in the number of titles offered on the market is matched by an increase in the number of copies sold.

Total annual circulation is close to 200 million copies (198 in 2022, latest available figure). The management of such a large volume of books and titles is possible thanks to an offer to the public that is spread across several channels. Chain and independent bookshops, online bookshops and supermarkets form a balanced system that allows the offer to be differentiated and thus maximise the visibility of the number of offerings to the reader (see purchasing habits). The evolution of communication and promotion on the Internet and social networks also makes it possible to reach increasingly specific niches of the public.

Of the more than 85,000 titles published in 2023 (of which 13,000 self-published), 69,000 are trade publishing, 3,400 are school textbooks. These numbers don't take into account digital production. The e-book catalogue now totals 619,000 titles, some of which are digital versions of printed books, and some of which are only available in electronic format. Within the general catalogue, 32,000 titles are available in accessible versions for the blind and visually impaired people, certified by Fondazione LIA - Libri Italiani Accessibili. E-books published in 2023 are 38,400: in a significant number of cases (60%) these are electronic versions of new titles published in print.

Trade market

New audiences and new genres

Trade publishing, i.e. fiction and non-fiction books sold in physical and online bookshops, supermarkets and others point sales, is the largest part of the Italian publishing industry, with sales at a cover price of EUR 1,913 million in 2023. Values, net of inflation, are about twice as high as in 1988, and the growth is even higher if we take print copies sold into account.

Sales in the trade market are overwhelmingly of printed books: e-books and audio books (subscriptions) are worth 6% of the total market, they were 5% five years ago.

Half of the market refers to four large groups - Gruppo Feltrinelli, Gruppo Giunti, Gruppo editoriale Mauri Spagnol, Gruppo Mondadori - while the other half of sales are distributed among small and medium-sized publishing houses, confirming the plurality of the sector.

If we look instead at the genres, slightly less than half of the market is made up of non-fiction books, one third by fiction, and the rest are children's books. Behind this subdivision, lies a scenario of great evolution in the tastes and hence purchases of Italians. Among the most significant growth compared to the pre-pandemic years is that of comics, which rose from 36 million in sales in 2019 to 98.7 million in 2023. In the same period, the universe of erotic and romance increased EUR 27.1 million sales to 60.9 million, science fiction, fantasy, horror from 34 million to 47.3 million. These are all transformations that tell of the arrival of new audiences in bookshops as a result of a renewal of the publishing offer.

Within children's publishing, the 0-5 age group alone accounts for 46% of sales, and has been growing steadily since 2019. This is a production where, by the way, Italian publishers are also highly appreciated abroad.

TRADE MARKET VALUE (COVER PRICES)

2023
1,913

EUR MILLION

Compared to EUR 361 million in 1988, the growth was 430%, 110% net of inflation.

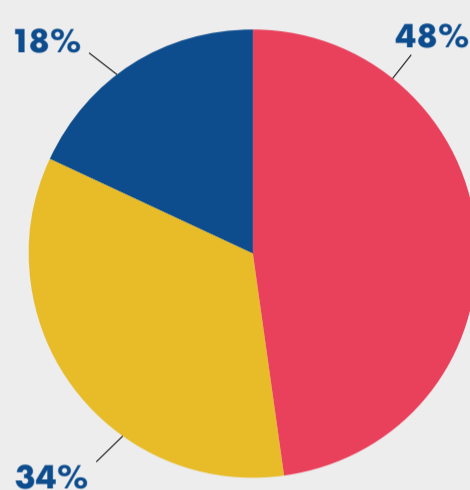
TRADE MARKET: PRINTED COPIES SOLD

2023
112

MILLION

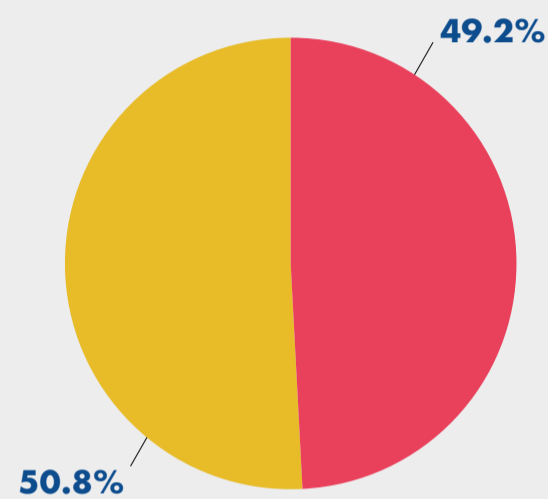
Copies sold compared to 1988, 50 million, have more than doubled: +124%.

TRADE GENRES (VALUE SHARE)



- Non-fiction
- Fiction
- Children's books

PUBLISHERS' TRADE MARKET SHARES



- Small and medium publishers out of groups
- Publishing groups (Gruppo Feltrinelli, Gruppo Giunti, Gruppo editoriale Mauri Spagnol, Gruppo Mondadori)

Internationalisation

Twenty years of growth in world markets

For more than twenty years, Italy has been engaged in the internationalisation of its publishing industry, which has led it to more than quadruple the number of translation rights sold abroad compared to 2001 and which, in 2023, amounted to 7,838. Co-editions with foreign publishers in the same year amounted to 1,845.

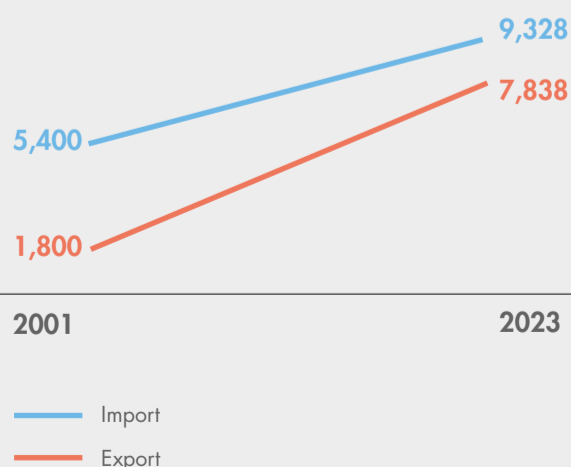
Italian publishing relies on support for translations from the Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale and the Centro per il libro e la lettura amounting to approximately one million euros per year. This is complemented by the activities of SEPS –

Segretariato Europeo per le Pubblicazioni Scientifiche, a non-profit association aimed at financially supporting the translation of non-fiction works of high cultural value. Visibility abroad is supported through an annual plan developed by ICE – The Italian Trade Agency, in collaboration with AIE, which includes participation in foreign trade fairs and incoming actions to the main Italian trade fairs. Further promotional opportunities include participation in international trade fairs as Guests of Honour. Last in order before Frankfurt: Paris, Bucharest, Tunis and Warsaw.

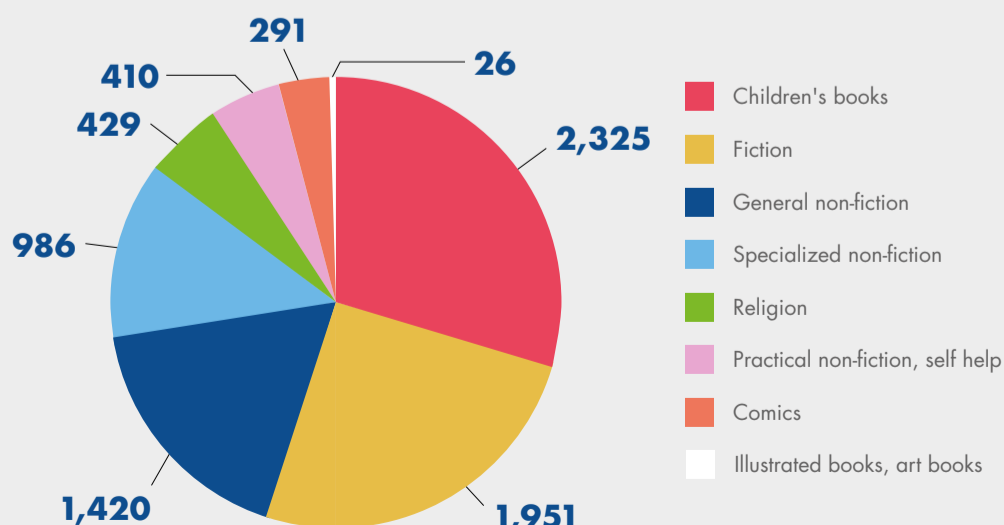
Italy, where the Bologna Children's Book Fair is held every year, sells mainly translation rights of children's and young adult titles abroad, 2,325 last year. Most international co-editions, 1,350 out of 1,845, are also concentrated in this sector. In the classification by genre of the best-selling titles abroad, fiction, general and specialised non-fiction follow. Religious books, practical manuals, comics, art books and illustrated books are other genres sold abroad.

Looking at the geographical areas, the sale of rights to other European countries is the absolute majority, with 65.8% of the signed contracts. 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 the cases, the geographical area is not indicated.

2001-2023 FOREIGN RIGHTS SALES



TRANSLATION RIGHTS SOLD ABROAD IN 2023 BY GENRE



Reading

The book driven by young people

Italian publishing has driven the modernisation of the country by accompanying and stimulating the growth of the population's reading and education rates, which throughout the 20th century have always been lower than in other major European countries. From 1988 to the present day, readers have risen from 18.2 million (ISTAT survey on the population aged 11+) to 32.8 million (AIE Reading Observatory on the population aged 15-74), the population's education rate (upper secondary school diploma) has risen by 30 percentage points, and university enrolment has risen from 1.1 million to 1.9 million. Almost all Italian infants and children, with percentages ranging between 96% and 98% in the 0-14 age group, are encouraged and accompanied towards reading by their adults. Thus today Italy is a country where 74% of the population between 15 and 74 years of age declares itself a reader of printed books, audio books and e-books, a complex universe stratified by age group where cultural consumption and reading habits, which are also very different, intersect. If we consider the three media separately, we see that readers of printed books are 68% of the population, e-book readers 30%, and audiobook listeners 15%, up sharply from 9% in 2019. Those who read the most (considering both printed books, e-books and audio books) are young people between 15 and 17 years old, with a percentage of 82%, those who read the least are men and women between 55 and 64 years old, with a percentage of 65%. On average, each reader enjoys 8.2 titles per year between printed books, audio books and e-books. Reading, despite competition from TV series, video games and social networks, remains a daily habit for more than one reader in four (28%), a practice at least weekly for 67%. Four hours and 18 minutes is the average weekly time dedicated to reading, but for one in five readers, books are a habit to which they dedicate more than five hours of time per week.

READERS (AT LEAST ONE BOOK IN THE LAST YEAR)

2023
32.8 MILLION
AIE Reading Observatory on the population aged 15-74

In 1988, the ISTAT survey estimated Italian readers in the population over 11 years old at 18.2 million.

POPULATION'S EDUCATION RATE (UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMA)

2023
94%

Compared to 1988, when the education rate was 64%, there has been an increase of 30 percentage points.

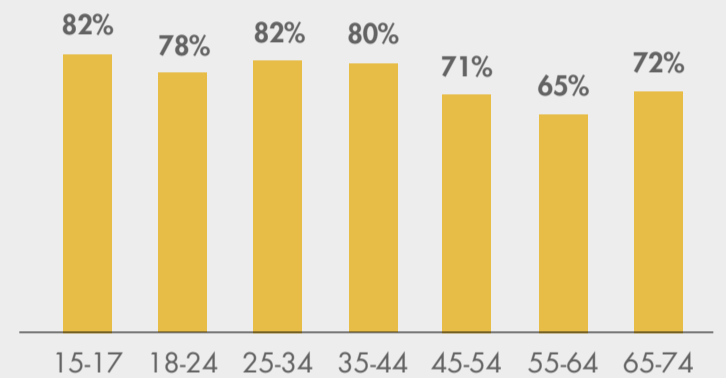
UNIVERSITY ENROLMENT

2023
1.909 MILLION

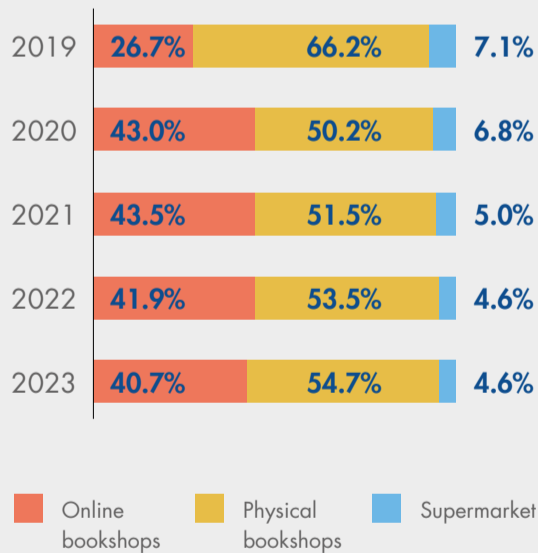
The growth from 1988, when there were 1.1 million enrols, is 74 percent.

READERS (AT LEAST ONE BOOK IN THE LAST YEAR)

2023
74%
POPULATION 15-74 YEARS OLD

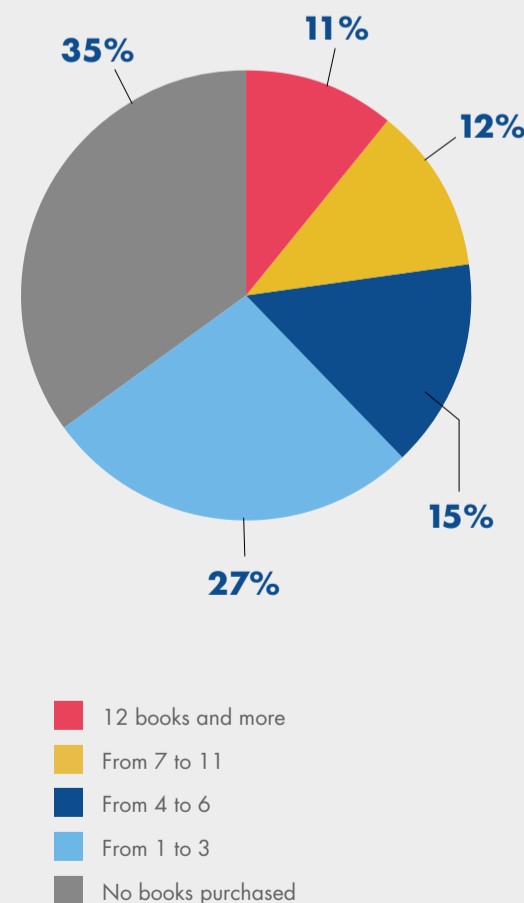


BOOK SALES CHANNELS

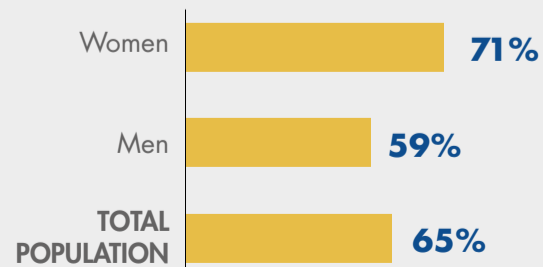


BUYERS OF PRINTED BOOKS BY NUMBER OF BOOKS PURCHASED

Values in %. Population 15-74 years old



BOOK BUYERS



Purchasing habits

Bookshops first channel ahead of e-commerce

Chain and independent bookshops are the preferred purchasing channel for Italian readers: the absolute majority of printed books are bought here every year, 54.7% in 2023. They are followed by online bookshops, which jumped strongly after the pandemic (40.7% in 2023) and then by supermarkets (4.6% in 2023). Since 2020, bookshops have been steadily catching up with online: in 2023, 46% of those who said they bought more books in bookshops than in previous years did so because they reduced their purchases in other channels. Motivations included finding 'better assortments'; 'returning to bookshops' after a period when they had bought 'online during the lockdown' and in the months and years that followed; 'rediscovering the pleasure of the bookshop atmosphere'; returning to a more urban mobility situation ('I pass by a bookshop more often'); and 'choosing to favour the neighborhood bookshop (or the place where one lives) more.' The specific interest in a subject or author is the first purchase impulse declared by 75% of buyers. But what also determines the choice is exposure in bookshops, booksellers' recommendations, presentations (27%), followed by social networks and online communities (24%) and media interviews, reviews, reports in newspapers and cultural inserts (23%).

65% of Italians (aged between 15 and 74) are purchasers of printed books, with an average of 6.6 volumes purchased. The gender imbalance is strong: 71% of women and 59% of men are book purchasers. It is a market largely made up of enthusiasts: 11% of Italians between 15 and 74 years of age buy more than 12 books a year and, alone, generate 41% of the country's book expenditure. E-book purchasers, on the other hand, are 29% of the population between 15 and 74 years of age with an average of 6 titles purchased, those of audio books 14%.