

# Italian Trade Jumps 16 Percent in 2021: Fourth Strongest Gain in Europe



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*In what Ricardo Franco Levi calls 'a good year throughout Europe,' Italy in 2021 broke its own records with a 16-percent industry gain.*



Ricardo Franco Levi, president of the Associazione Italiana Editori, AIE, presents the publishers' association's report on Italian industry statistics in the 39esimo Seminario UEM, the Scuola per Librai e Elisabetta Mauri. Image: Fondazione Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri

By Porter Anderson, Editor-in-Chief | @Porter\_Anderson

## Levi: 'Unprecedented in the Italian Book Industry'

One of the most consistently helpful measures always presented by the **Association of Italian Publishers (Associazione Italiana Editori, AIE)** in its industry statistics reports is the contextual view of its performance relative to that of other major players in the book business in Europe.

On Friday (January 28), the association made its full-year report at the 39esimo Seminario UEM, the 39th seminar of the Scuola per Librai Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri program, a "School of Booksellers" annually presented by the Fondazione Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri.



While we'll have further coverage of the conference program in the coming days, the statistical report presented by AIE president Ricardo Franco Levi is our focus today, and that context of the wider performance by key players in the European and Brexited United Kingdom shows Italy to be third in line for growth with a handsome 16-percent gain. that figure and those represented in the chart you see here exclude the digital formats, ebooks and audiobooks, and in the case of Spain, registered here with 20-percent growth, the data is provisional up to December 2021.



As you can see, France and Spain lead in this assessment with 20-percent gains respectively, with Italy's 16 percent following. Norway and Poland show strong positions at 9 percent growth each, while the Netherlands (*Paesi Bassi*) is just behind with 8 percent. Austria then follows at 4 percent, followed with 3 percent each by Germany and the United Kingdom.

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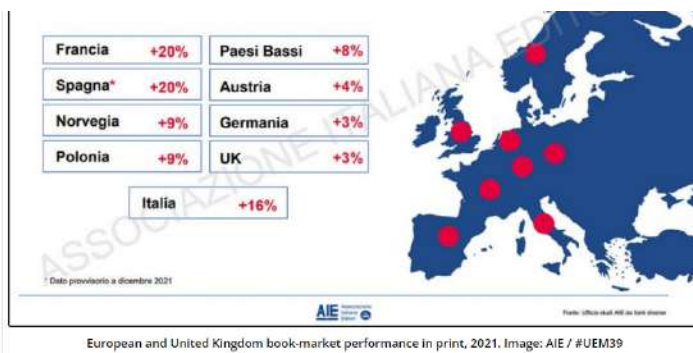
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**Come è andato il mercato di varia nel 2021. L'Italia a confronto con alcuni Paesi europei**

Mercato trade a valore esclusi e-book e audiolibri. Variazione percentuale rispetto al 2020





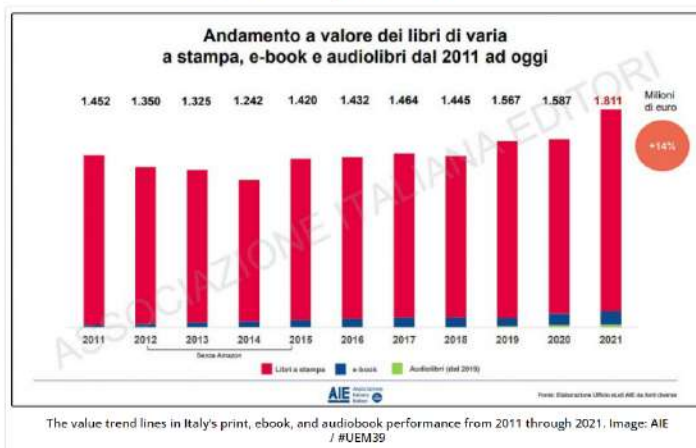
European and United Kingdom book-market performance in print, 2021. Image: AIE / #UEM39

For additional context from the other side of the Atlantic, *Publishing Perspectives* readers will recall that the Association of American Publishers (AAP) just reported last week (January 26) in a year-ending StatShot that the United States' market—in this case across all trade categories—arrived at a 12.2-percent gain in 2021. Brought together in collegial good will, that would situate the States in relation to her sister markets in Europe and Britain in the fourth position, just behind Italy and ahead of Norway and Poland, simply based on percentage gains.

"Last year was a good year throughout Europe," Levi told the seminar's international audience of some 850 people. "In France and Spain, the rebounds from the previous year were really quite impressive." And Italy's 16-percent performance is "unprecedented in the Italian book industry," he said.

On a broader scale, the Association of Italian Publishers' research unit ranks the Italian market as sixth in the world after the States, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France.

## Audiobooks Continue Strong Growth



We can bullet out for you some fast takeaways from Levi's report to the Mauri seminar:

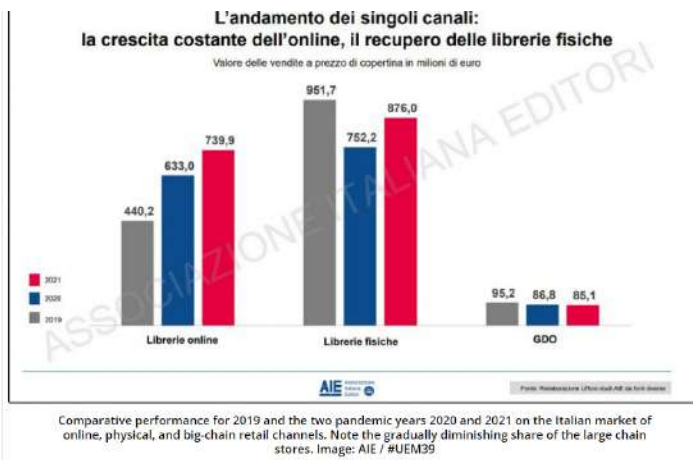
- In 2021, there were 85,551 new print releases in Italy, up 22.9 percent compared to the previous year
- Ebooks in Italy—which traditionally has shown a less robust embrace of *some* digital formats than some markets—fell to 49,313, down 5.6 percent compared to the previous year, but up 1.1 percent in comparison to the pre-pandemic year of 2019

We write "some" digital formats in our previous note because the AIE and Levi presented us with the phrase *the audiobook book continues*, when it comes to downloaded audio formats.

- In subscriptions, audiobooks went from a valuation of €17.5 million (US\$10.6 million) to €24 million (US\$26.9 million), up 37 percent
- Overall audiobook sales, after the **coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic**-driven rise in 2020, have "settled down," the report says, dropping 11 percent by comparison to that first pandemic year, to €86 million (US\$96.2 million)

The high-view value of the trade market, at €1,701 billion for print books alone (US\$1.9 billion), grew to €1,811 billion (US\$2.026 billion), up 14 percent, when the digital ebook and audiobook figures are added to print.

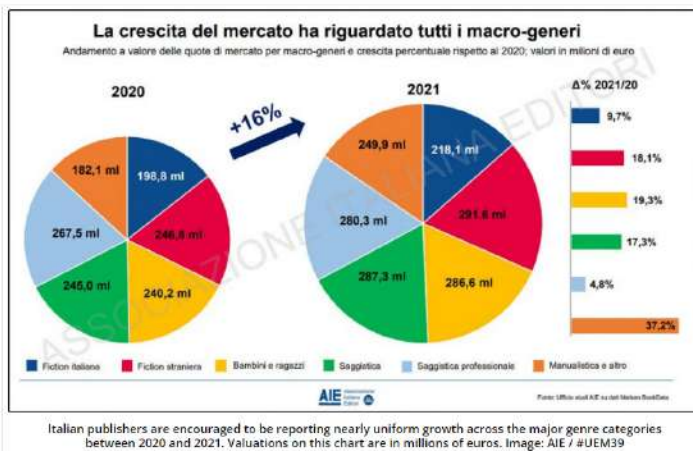
## Online and Physical Retail in Italy



In assessing data from a range of sources, AIE's research group sees online retail pressing forward.

- Based on published cover prices, the valuations have moved up from €632.96 million in sales (US\$706 million) to €739.93 million (US\$828 million)
- Physical bookstores are recovering, the AIE reports, having lost almost €200 million in sales in 2020 (US\$224 million), but reaching €876 million in 2021 (US\$981)
- Major retail chains still are experiencing a drop, in 2021 down to €85.1 million (US\$95.2)
- Physical bookstores remain the No. 1 channel for book purchases in Italy, the AIE reports, accounting for some 51.5 percent of the action
- Online retail, by contrast, accounts for 43.5 percent of the turnover; like physical retail, that's up a few tenths of a point in 2021 over 2020
- Major retail chains account now for about 5 percent of the Italian market's book sales, having dropped by almost a full percentage point

## The Italian Catalogue's Growth



In a comment that some markets might find enviable, the AIE's research team and Levi note that it's not just bestsellers that are moving the Italian market.

- The 50 bestselling titles account for only 5.4 percent of the market at cover value, and for 4.5 percent in terms of unit sales
- This, AIE notes, is a sign of a market distributed over an ever-increasing number of titles and growing in new releases (up 7 percent), the entire catalogue having jumped 20 percent in 2021
- Particularly cheering is the performance of the category that includes comics, up 37.2 percent (see *manualistica e altro*)
- Sales in comics leaped forward in 2021, from 4.7 million to 11 million unit sales, a 134-percent gain over 2020

Book prices in 2021 dropped 2.4 percent to an average €14.72 (US\$16.48), and those manga and comics sales played into this, as well, contributing to that average lowered price point.

## Italy's Top 10 Bestsellers in 2021





This graphic shows you the Top 10 bestsellers on the Italian market in 2021, encompassing both Italian and international authors, comics, nonfiction, and new releases. Image: AIE / #UEM39

1. *L'inverno dei leoni*, S. Auci, Nord (May 2021)
2. *Cambiare l'acqua ai fiori*, V. Perrin, E/O (July 2019)
3. *La canzone di Achille*, M. Miller, Marsilio (January 2019)
4. *Tre*, V. Perrin, E/O (June 2021)
5. *Il sistema*, A. Sallusti, L. Palamara, Rizzoli (January 2021)
6. *Finché il caffè è caldo*, T. Kawaguchi, Garzanti (March 2020)
7. *Per niente al mondo*, Ken Follett, Mondadori (November 2021)
8. *La disciplina di Penelope*, G. Carofiglio, Mondadori (January 2021)
9. *Le storie del quartiere*, G. Lyon, Magazzini Salani (February 2021)
10. *Una vita nuova*, Fabio Volo, Mondadori (November 2021)

More from *Publishing Perspectives on Italy and its book publishing industry* is [here](#). More on *Ricardo Franco Levi* is [here](#), more on *bookselling* is [here](#), and more on *industry statistics* is [here](#).

More from us on the *coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on world publishing* is [here](#).

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Porter Anderson is a non-resident fellow of Trends Research & Advisory, and he has been named International Trade Press Journalist of the Year in London Book Fair's International Excellence Awards. He is Editor-in-Chief of Publishing Perspectives. He formerly was Associate Editor for The FutureBook at London's The Bookseller. Anderson was for more than a decade a senior producer and anchor with CNN.com, CNN International, and CNN USA. As an arts critic (National Critics Institute), he was with The Village Voice, the Dallas Times Herald, and the Tampa Tribune, now the Tampa Bay Times. He co-founded The Hot Sheet, a newsletter for authors, which now is owned and operated by Jane Friedman.

□ Tags: Association of Italian Publishers, Associazione Italiana Editori, Audiobooks, Book Sales, Bookselling, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Ebooks, Europe, Gruppo editoriale Mauri Spagnol, Industry Statistics, Italy, Online Retail, Reading, Reading Habits, Ricardo Franco Levi, Scuola per Librai Umberto e Elisabetta Mauri, Stefano Mauri, Year End

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