

Culture and leisure

Libraries

The figures on libraries refer to State libraries, which include the national, government and university libraries in addition to those associated with national monuments directly depending on the competent Ministry: the General department of libraries of the Ministry of Public Education from 1869 to 1929, the Ministry of National Education from 1929 to 1943, the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage from 1974 to 1997, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage from 1998 to 2008, indicated by Presidential Decree no. 417 dated 05th July 1995, modified by the Ministerial Decree issued on 12th June 2000.

State libraries are responsible for conserving and collecting Italian publications of national and local importance, acquiring foreign publications according to the specific nature of their collections and, in consideration of the requirements of their users, certifying their possessions, providing bibliographic information and ensuring the circulation of the documents. In particular, the central national libraries in Florence and Rome are responsible for collecting and documenting all the works that are printed in Italy.

Statistical information, available in time series from 1926 onwards, is collected directly by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage through a systematic survey conducted on an annual basis, with the collaboration of the competent central and local structures (departments, library authorities, etc.) as part of its functions to protect and enhance cultural heritage in all its forms.

The Ministry's surveys collect information on libraries' bibliographic material, staff, consultation and lending activities. Consultation refers to reading within the library itself. From 1999, running costs were also recorded, including expenses for functioning and maintenance, purchasing and conserving the bibliographic material, staff salaries and miscellaneous expenses. The figures published refer to libraries open to the public in the year of reference.

During 2007 a working group composed of representatives from the Ministry's Statistics Office, state Libraries and the Department for bibliographical heritage drew up a new survey form in order to update and integrate the definitions of the variables recorded, in line with new regulations. This form was adopted for surveys from 2009 onwards.

Over the years ISTAT has collaborated in the systematic publication of information on libraries collected by the Ministry, taking care of processing and publication of statistical data. ISTAT has also performed in the years 1927, 1935, 1950, 1955, 1965 and 1972 statistical surveys on public libraries (both state and private) in Italy. The field of observation in these surveys (excluding that in 1965) was, however, somewhat limited and some categories of library were not considered. Those surveys have therefore not been included in this section.

Warnings for time series comparisons

Data referring to State libraries were collected on a regular basis according to definitions and procedures that remained relatively coherent over time, making the data substantially comparable up until the 1960s. For the period following 1970 when reading data in the time series, the following instructions must be taken into consideration:

- until 1970 data on consultations refer to the number of works lent for reading in the year of reference; from 1971, however, the figures were obtained multiplying the documents lent for the number of times they were requested in the course of the reference year;
- in 1998, the consultation room in the State medical library in Rome was closed as unfit for use;
- for some months in 1998 the State library in Trieste suspended or limited consultation and lending activities, while the library was moved to new facilities;
- on 14th October 1999 the State medical library in Rome re-opened;
- during the month of August 2000, the National Vittorio Emanuele III library in Naples was closed for works needed to comply with current health and safety in the workplace regulations;
- in 1999 the partial closure of warehouse book deposits due to renovation work caused a reduction in the number of works lent by the Estense university library in Modena;
- from 28th November 1999 to 13th December 1999, the Braidense library in Milan stayed open to the public on Sundays;
- from 2000 to 2008 the Bologna university library was also included, as its transfer from the University of Bologna to the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research had not yet been concluded, in accordance with Ministerial Decree dated 12th June 2000;
- in 2001 the Farfa National monument library was closed for renovation, and re-opened to the public on 08th June 2005.