

Culture and leisure

Publishing

From 1926 to 1950, data on publishing were drawn from the “Statistics of applications for licence to print Italian publications” established by the National central library in Florence, which was responsible in accordance with Law no. 432 dated 07th July 1910 for collecting a copy of every work published in Italy, which publishers were obliged to submit.

From 1951, however, those figures on publications were collected directly by ISTAT in an annual survey which aimed to describe their most important aspects. Information on individual works was recorded through the compilation of a specific form drawn up by the Provincial statistics offices at the District press offices which received new publications directly from publishers, as stated by law. The Central Statistical Institute then collected, checked and processed the information contained in the forms.

Initially, statistical surveys covered the first edition and the subsequent editions, while reprints were excluded. The classification of publications by subject included only nine basic categories (Arts; Language and literature; Religion, Philosophy, Law and history; Politics and economics; Mathematics, Physics and statistics; Natural sciences and medicine; Technical disciplines, Administration; Miscellaneous). Over the years, the list of subjects has gradually been extended in line with the evolution of the sector.

Starting in 1964, ISTAT gradually adopted Unesco’s recommendations on international harmonisation of publications statistics. This led to include works between 50 and 100 pages in the survey and, from 1967, to collect data directly from the publishing houses and to cover also reprints and “booklets” (between 5 and 48 pages).

Currently the survey covers the whole range of publications and, in addition to publishing houses in a narrow sense, also involves public and private authorities, study centres, associations, companies, freelancers and companies as well as all those who print books and publications as a secondary, even non-continuous, activity. Eligible units are all the “active publishers” in the current year, i.e. those who have published at least one literary work, as well as the “inactive publishers” who have temporarily suspended their publishing activities. Publishers who declare to have ceased all productive activity or to have definitively terminated their publishing activity although continuing to operate under the same name are excluded.

To update the survey units reference base, ISTAT manages a computerised data archive of public and private bodies involved in publishing. Data in the archive are constantly updated on the basis of information provided by the official magazine of the Italian Publishers Association. A regular review is carried out in the last quarter of each year to include new publishers in the database. The information in the archive is corrected, updated and integrated on the basis of information provided by the publishers responding to the survey. Information recorded in the ISTAT archives include: publisher’s name, VAT code, ISBN code¹, year of establishment, year of publishing start/ending, membership in publishing associations and number of works produced in the year of reference of the survey.

From 1951 to 1963, data cover publications of over 100 pages, and from 1964 to 1966 of over 50 pages. From 1967, in compliance with Unesco’s guidelines² for the international harmonisation of

¹ Each work is associated with an ISBN code (International standard book number), an international unified book numbering system “which allows for the immediate and unequivocal identification of a title or edition of a title by a certain publisher” (see www.isbn.it). As from 31st December 2006 ISBN codes have been composed of three parts: the first relating to the publisher’s linguistic area (978-88 for Italy), the second identifies the publisher and the third identifies the title. For the Italian linguistic area, the ISBN agency is the Italian Publishers’ Association (AIE).

² Unesco recommendations on 19th November 1964 regarding literary production (also see *Recommandation révisée concernant la*

statistics on publishing activities, publications of at least five pages were included in the survey. A publication is defined as a non-periodical printed work. The survey therefore does not include publications in a continuous series, under the same title, with progressive numbering or datation to mark the individual numbers of the series (magazines or similar). On the other hand, books published on a periodical basis with progressive numbering, sold through newsagents or other channels, are included. Official publications by the Government or other public authorities are also included, while propaganda products, when distributed free of charge, and texts whose literary, technical or scientific contents are marginal with respect to their advertising content are excluded. Catalogues, price lists, train timetables, telephone directories, calendars, etc. are also excluded, as well as musical works where the literary text is irrelevant, unbound geographical or topographical maps or charts in the form of atlases and sticker "books" without narrative text.

Information is gathered through a structured, self-filled questionnaire, returned to ISTAT by postal mail, email, the Internet, etc.. From 2000, the form can be filled on line through a protected and certified website, used by approximately half of respondents (46.8% in 2009).

The overall reference population is composed of approximately 3 thousand survey units.

Warnings for time series comparisons

- Data from 1951 onwards are not directly comparable with those recorded in the pre-war period, which did not correspond to coherent criteria and definitions.
- From 1951 to 1963 only works of more than 100 pages were recorded, thus excluding "booklets" (or publications of less than 100 pages), "minor productions" (single editions, songs and ballads, encyclicals, pastoral publications, religious books, judicial publications, legal agreements, industrial patents, financial reports, posters, programmes, catalogues, advertising and propaganda) in addition to "extracts from periodicals".
- From 1964 to 1966 works of 50 to 100 pages were included.
- From 1967, the survey included all publications of at least 5 pages. In compliance with Unesco's recommendations regarding statistics on literary production the following survey criteria and definitions were adopted, and are still in use:
 - the survey includes all works published during the year, in one of more volumes, of at least five pages. The works are divided into "booklets" (from 5 to 48 pages) and "books" (of at least 49 pages);
 - the survey excludes propaganda material, such as catalogues, price lists, advertising brochures, calendars and similar, in addition to special productions such as train timetables and telephone directories.