

international bookselling markets REPORT 2023

The European and International
Booksellers Federation



September 2024

The findings in this report are based on direct input from 24 national booksellers associations, EIBF associate members, and partners across 21 countries, including Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Additionally, it incorporates book sales data from third-party sources –see bibliography- for Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, India, Mexico and South Africa.



Table of contents

4	Introduction
5	What can we learn from 2023 figures?
6	Global overview of the bookselling markets
8	Higher value, lower volume
10	Digital formats pave their way
12	A new array of legislative and financial challenges for the sector
14	The sector's endeavours to ensure a healthy future
16	Bibliography
17	Acknowledgements
18	About EIBF

Introduction

For the fourth consecutive year, EIBF continues its efforts to collect sales data from booksellers across the world, in order to provide an overview of the markets they operate in and give them the opportunity to showcase their daily reality. Building on the input from 21 members and partners from 19 different countries, the following report looks at the bookselling landscape in 2023, highlighting key challenges, growth areas and market dynamics.

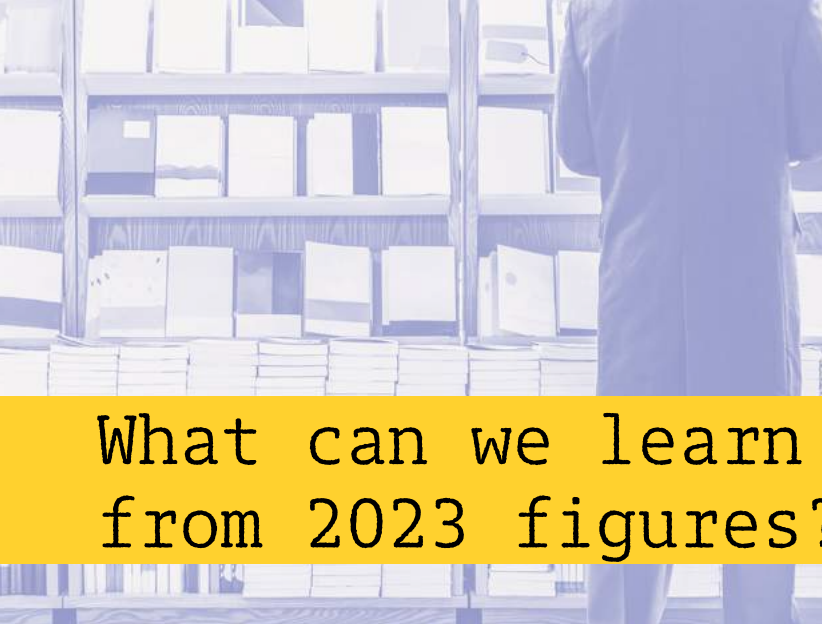
As the voice of booksellers, EIBF represents their interests on a global platform and provides, among others, professional information about the economics, needs and trends characterising this trade. Collecting, analysing and publishing this information is crucial to better understand the bookselling industry. It allows EIBF, and its members, to set the objectives and strategies that will support the sector in the years to come and ensure a thriving future for booksellers.

Since the availability of booksellers' data remains uneven across the globe in terms of format, consistency and structure, we have revised the title of the report and adapted from *Global* to *International* markets, thus better reflecting its current dimension.

The primary goal of this document, however, remains intact: to provide our readers with a wide enough picture of the bookselling sector in 2023, helping navigate in which direction the sector is heading.

Eventually, with each new volume, we aim to expand our reach, add new markets and present the perspective of different booksellers. This ambition will only be fulfilled by strengthening the links between different markets, fostering knowledge-sharing, reaching new audiences and gathering reliable information that will position this document as a key source to understand booksellers' reality in today's global world.





What can we learn from 2023 figures?

At first glance, and looking strictly at overall book sales, one could say that 2023 was a year of growth for the book sector. Out of the 26 markets featured in this report, 16 reported an increase in turnover compared to the previous year

However, many of the participants in this research made a caveat to these figures: the higher turnover is driven by rising costs in the supply chain and therefore, increased book prices. In half of these 16 markets with turnover growth, the number of book units sold actually declined, showing that turnover growth is not always directed by increased demand but by inflation-driven price hikes.

Obviously, changes in consumer behaviour over the past few years have played a pivotal role in the development of the industry. As booksellers associations in the USA, Norway or South Korea warn, reading rates are steeply declining, particularly among young readers, to the detriment of sales. As for the higher inflation rates, they still heavily impact consumer purchasing habits; the increasing prices of books making them less accessible to some consumers.

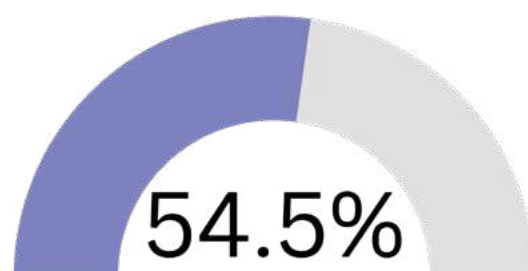
In terms of sales channels, brick-and-mortar bookstores continued to firmly hold their ground in 2023. With online sales slowing or slightly declining –following a period of continued growth throughout the pandemic– physical bookstores stabilized and remained the primary sales channel in most analysed markets.

Hybrid sales models, now consolidated by many independent bookstores, contributed to this stabilisation and even helped them expand their customer base, providing an alternative to

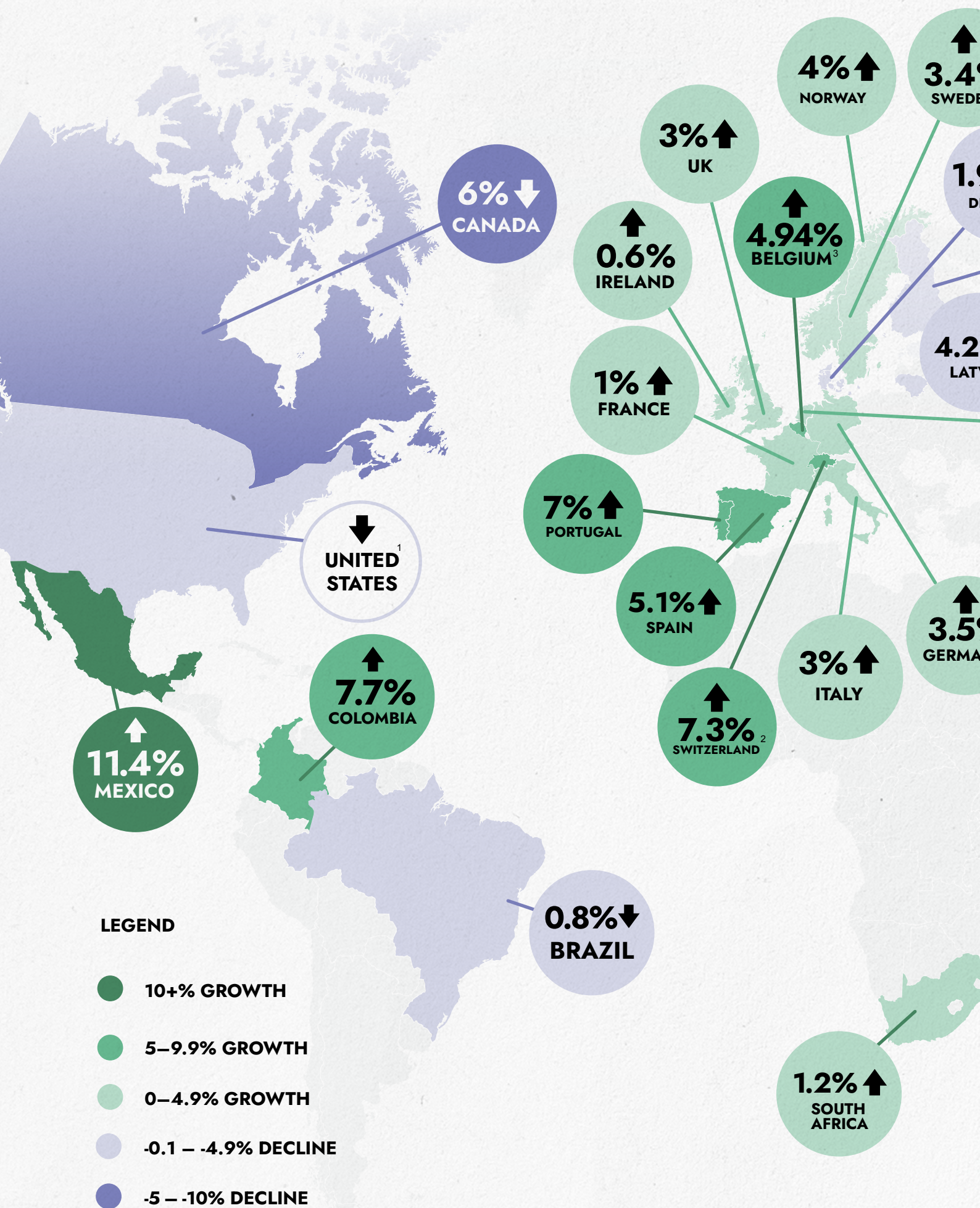
big online retailers. However, competition with these larger online retailers remains a challenge, particularly in countries like the UK and USA, with Ireland also anticipating increased competition with the arrival of Amazon in 2025.

The demand for alternative book formats like audiobooks and eBooks continued to rise in many markets. While not all countries have access to detailed data on these formats, it is clear that digital books gained popularity in several regions, like the Netherlands, Spain, UK, USA or Germany. Interestingly, in Scandinavian countries, where it is known that digital formats are more established – especially audiobooks - growth slowed down, with Sweden seeing a decline in streamed digital book volumes for the first time in 2023.

In response to this ever-evolving landscape, booksellers are demonstrating the resilience that they have proven time and again, emphasizing the vital role that their shops play in the well-being of today's society, as well as the economic and human contribution that they make to their local communities. Booksellers associations are actively supporting their members by offering resources aimed at ensuring the sector's long-term viability. Key initiatives include sector-specific training, the adoption of sustainable practices, and guidance on addressing issues related to freedom of speech and discrimination. Additionally, these associations are investing in programmes to facilitate the transfer of bookshops' ownership, helping to preserve independent bookstores and maintain a vibrant bookselling ecosystem.

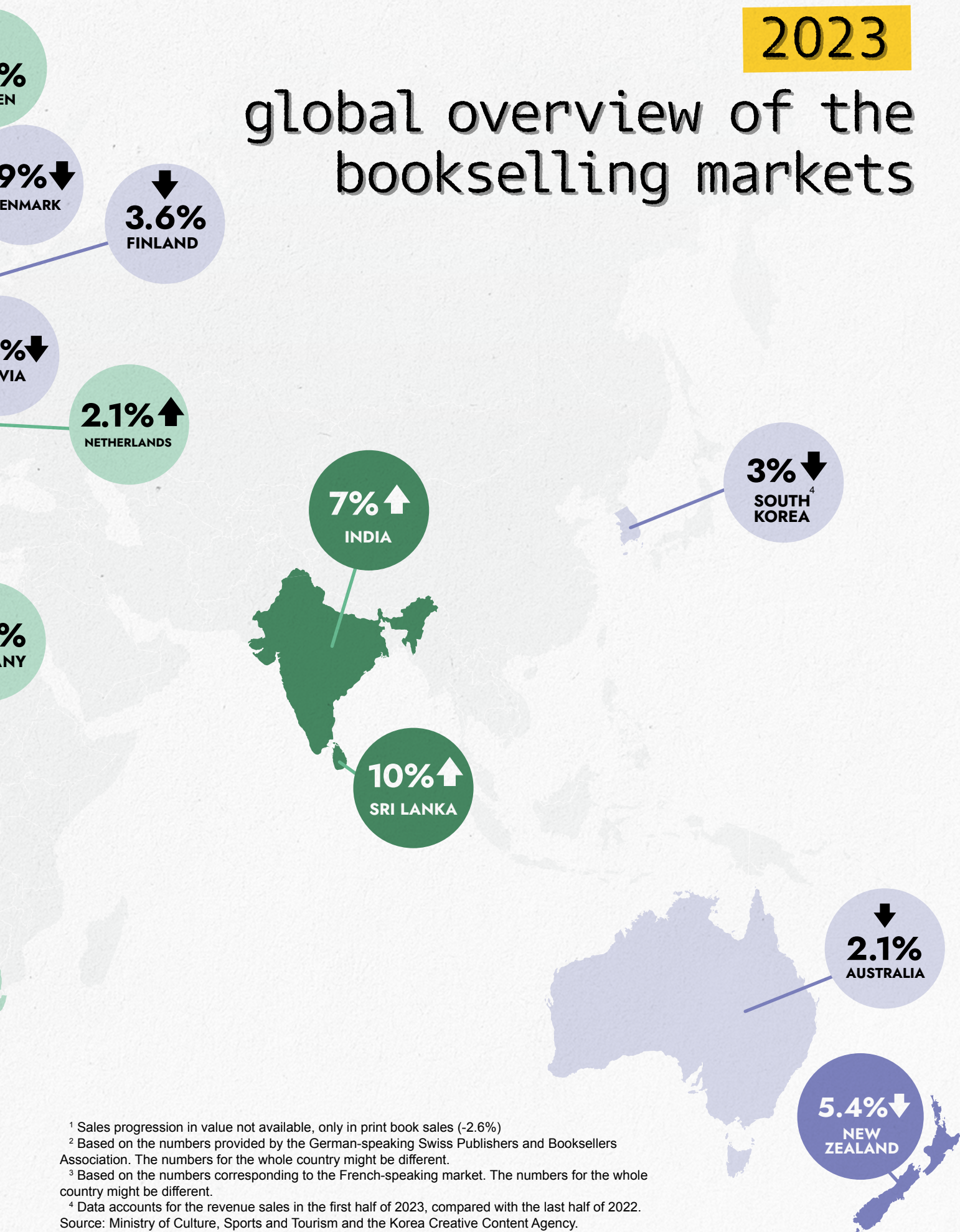


More than half of the analysed markets cited economic inflation as the primary factor influencing their sales performance in 2023



2023

global overview of the bookselling markets




¹ Sales progression in value not available, only in print book sales (-2.6%)

² Based on the numbers provided by the German-speaking Swiss Publishers and Booksellers Association. The numbers for the whole country might be different.

³ Based on the numbers corresponding to the French-speaking market. The numbers for the whole country might be different.

⁴ Data accounts for the revenue sales in the first half of 2023, compared with the last half of 2022.

Source: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Creative Content Agency.



Higher value, lower volume

Following the dynamic that established itself in the previous year, the book industry continues to feel the effects of market inflation, which led to the rise in prices across the supply chain and ultimately to a higher price tag on books.

In many markets, where turnover increased compared to the previous year, the growth was largely due to rising book prices. Out of all surveyed countries, 14 reported an overall decline in units sold, underscoring this trend. Additionally, for more than half of the markets where data was provided both in value and volume, the respondents reported an increase in value but a decline in the number of units sold. This trend was especially pronounced in Sri Lanka, where the gap between value and volume was stark: while turnover rose by 10%, the number of units sold dropped by 19%, a 29-point disparity.

"Sales increased solely because the average price of books increased by 13,7%."

Koninklijke Boekverkopersbond – KBb
Netherlands

Conversely, in the case of Belgium, Portugal, Spain and Latvia, a growth in volume was recorded last year. In the case of Latvia, turnover saw a decrease, with irregular performance among their members; some bookshops saw growth, while other had a significant drop.

Lastly, the EIBF associate members who took part in the survey – individual bookshops in membership, as opposed to national booksellers associations – offered an overall very positive review of their economic performance throughout the year. Both IQ Bookstore in Kyrgyzstan and Noorongji Books in Canada increased their figures, largely thanks to a larger selection of books in stock and successful efforts to expand their customer base.

"Inflation increased the prices and books became less accessible, we had the biggest inflation in Romania. Overall, the market stagnated."

Cărturești
Romania

"Consumer concerns over inflation and the economic landscape curtailed book spending, and one of the major book retailers experienced a cyberattack in 2023."

Canadian Independent Booksellers Association (CIBA) **Canada**

"Print sales may be down due to a continued decline in reading reported by the National Endowment of the Arts in the previous year as well as the threat of a recession and inflation."

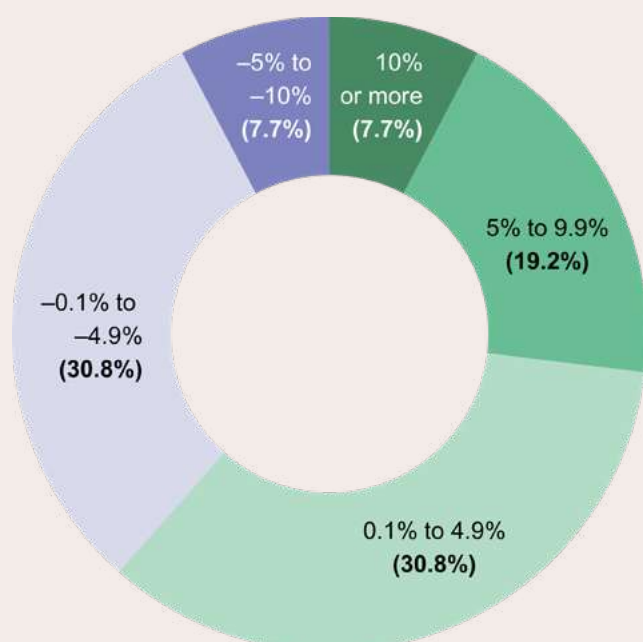
American Booksellers Association (ABA) **United States**

"These are challenging times for customers due to inflation and the war in Ukraine - the government has made several cuts which affect the overall mentality in consumption. Basically, the economy is quite stuck at the moment in Finland."

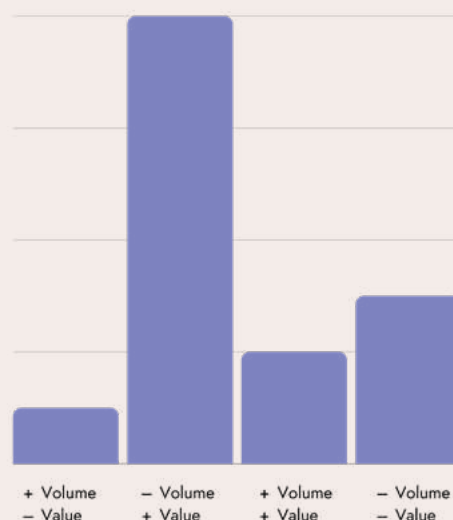
Kirjakauppaliitto **Finland**

"Physical bookstores held the largest share of domestic sales and were the most important channel, with a share of 69% (1 point drop on 2022)."

Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand **New Zealand**




More than half of the analysed markets grew their sales in 2023, a trend that was accompanied by higher book prices



Most of the analysed markets reported a decrease in the number of units of sold printed books.

Most notably, half of the markets with a turnover growth, scored under in unit sales, due to higher inflation and its effect on book prices.



Digital formats pave their way

It is also noticeable how digital book formats –audio or eBooks– have reached an important development in the last year. Countries like Spain, UK, USA, Germany and the Netherlands –where turnover for all digital formats grew by +23.8%– reported a notable increase in the consumption of these products, showing the growing interest from readers in alternative formats.

However, it must be noted that, while the available numbers do clearly demonstrate this growing interest, tracking the sales of digital book formats with accuracy remains challenging in many markets. Inconsistent measurement methods or combined reporting with overall book sales, coupled with the nature of streaming subscription models—especially for audiobooks— makes it difficult to assess unit sales in detail, further highlighting the differences between digital and print business models.

As for the explanations behind this growth, the affordability of these formats, compared to printed books, accounts for one of the probable reasons. The ease of use and the price of the aforementioned streaming models are an incentive to explore this type of formats, especially

with printed books becoming more expensive. Moreover, the familiarity of younger readers with new technologies plays a role in easing the adaptation to consuming such formats.

Interestingly, while digital formats have expanded in many regions, countries like Norway, Sweden, and Finland, traditionally ahead in digital adoption, have seen a slowdown. Both Norway and Sweden reported a decrease in eBook and audiobook sales – the latter for the first time after years of growth – whereas sales in Finland kept growing, although at a smaller rate than other European countries. This said, the digital formats' market share is still much more prominent in Scandinavia than in other countries – in Sweden, it accounts for 33% of the total market value.

Turnover in the 2023-2022 period increased by 3.1%, but there are big differences in the formats and we witness that digital is growing strongly.

Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels
Germany

"Compared to 2022, total sales for eBooks increased by 9.2% in value. But the growth is only because the prices for ebooks increased by 9.5%, so in sold "copies" the volume is down by 0.3%."

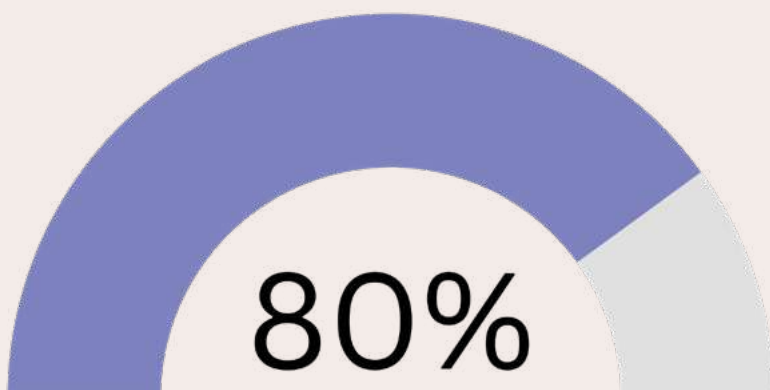
Schweizer Buchhandels- und Verlags-Verband (SBVV)
Switzerland

"There has been big increase in sales and consumption of digital books, especially audiobooks, for many years [which] grew the overall market and the print market was fairly stable, but in recent years we have seen a decline in print. In 2023, there was also a decline in the volume of streamed digital books for the first time."

Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen
Sweden

"Overall, there was a decrease of 1,5% in the audio and ebook volume sales from 2022 to 2023 (from 480 315 to 487 403 units). Streaming services are undoubtedly contributing to keeping audiobook sales down. They may also have an impact on the sales of printed books."

Bokhandlerforeningen
Norway



80% of the analyzed markets that provided specific data for digital book sales —audiobooks and/or eBooks— reported growth for those formats.

A new array of legislative and financial challenges for the sector



On the legislative front, maintaining low VAT rates on books and on cultural goods in general remains a critical priority for many booksellers associations.

In January 2024, the Swiss book market saw the reduced VAT rates that apply to books increase from 2.5% to 2.6%. In Sri Lanka, this exemption is set to be removed altogether for imported books, with these goods planned to have an 18% tariff.

Sadly, several other countries might be following the same direction soon, with Finland, Norway, the Netherlands and Slovakia among those facing potential hikes. In the case of the Netherlands, the government proposal to raise the VAT on books from 9% to 21% -planned by 2026— would severely impact the industry and prove detrimental to bookshops, endangering their financial viability. Conversely, the Belgian book sector is striving for a reduction or even a zero-VAT rate on books to help sustain the sector.

In terms of fixed book price policies, Norway saw a new book law introduced in January 2024. Further regulation on margin control within the

framework of this law is now being discussed, raising concerns among booksellers, who argue that such a measure would drastically restrict pricing flexibility and hamper their ability to respond to market changes. As for Netherlands and Portugal, where there are already fixed book prices, a revision of these legislations is set to take place in the near future.

Additional notable issues involve the overall increase of operational costs, which booksellers must sustain, and the unfair competition between these independent shops and e-commerce giants. In some regions, decision makers have made some efforts to curb these issues through new legislation, such as the Digital Markets Act in the EU and the Consumer Competition Act (DMCA) in the UK, which both aim at levelling up the playing field. However, the never-ending expansion of these big players remains a growing concern; in Ireland, Amazon is set to launch operations in 2025.

Finally, changes in public procurement in some of the markets surveyed also played an important role in their overall dynamics, both positively and

negatively. In Spain, reforms introduced to the Educational Law from 2022, continued benefiting schoolbook sales through bookshops. In Ireland, however, independent bookshops saw their profits from sales of school books drop, following a government decision to grant families with subsidies on educational material for primary school children, ultimately leading to the closure of more than 10 bookshops across the country.

"The market growth is also due to the change in the Education Act, which led to a sharp rise in schoolbook sales in 2022 and 2023."

Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros (CEGAL) **Spain**

"The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in the UK powers have been massively expanded under the DMCC (Digital Markets and Consumer Competition Act) which should see Amazon and other global multinationals curbed a bit."

School books shocks in Ireland have led to closures of more than 10 bookshops."

Booksellers Association (BA)
United Kingdom and Ireland

"18% VAT was imposed on books from January 2024. Due to the political and economic crisis the Sri Lanka, rupee depreciated from Rs.200 to Rs.400 against the US dollar."

Inflation rose to 70% in 2022 but reduced to 10% in the third quarter of 2023. Imported books tripled in price."

Ceylon Booksellers Importers and Exporters Association
Sri Lanka

"In 2023, France saw the adoption of the Darcos Law, [which sets a minimum delivery fee of €3 for all online book purchases under €35]

It is a very important piece of legislation that will hopefully prevent the damaging practices of the bigger online players."

Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF), Syndicat des Distributeurs de Loisirs Culturels (SDLC) **France**



The sector's endeavours to ensure a healthy future

"Offering training programs and workshops for booksellers can significantly enhance their skills in areas such as customer service, inventory management, and digital marketing."

IQ Bookstore
Kyrgyzstan

"Implement reading promotion initiatives to attract an age group that has been drifting away from bookstores (young parents between 30 and 40 years old) in order to address the decline in sales in the children's section."

Syndicat des libraires francophones de Belgique (SLFB)
Belgium

[Due to inflation] "Books will have to compete with other essential goods and services. Better service, improvements in all areas and targeted advertising will help."

Latvijas Grāmattirgotāju asociācija
Latvia

As the bookselling sector continues to adapt to evolving market conditions, several key areas will shape its future trajectory.

In a context of lower margins and a very fragile financial capacity for the sector, the top priority for booksellers associations is to make the sector more competitive and financially sustainable. In this regard, it is key to uphold the essential role that bookshops play for society in the eyes of decision-makers. Leveraging towards the implementation of favourable public policies and enforcing the existing ones impacting the sector is fundamental to benefit the long-term viability of the industry, particularly for smaller businesses.

Literacy promotion also remains a key area of focus, as it is now widespread knowledge that reading skills are declining globally, most worryingly in younger generations. As a result, many booksellers associations who took part in this research emphasize the crucial need to improve reading habits through initiatives aimed at attracting new readers and promoting books. Such initiatives range from campaigns fostering literacy to organizing bookshop events, mostly targeted at kids and young adults.

Upholding and defending positive values are also outlined by many of the surveyed booksellers associations, who are making further developments to ensure diversity, equity and well-being among the bookselling community.

In light of growing cases of book censorship and violence against bookshops and the booksellers themselves, the whole bookselling sector also underlines, now more than ever, the need to protect and safeguard freedom of speech.

Finally, and most crucially, the majority of surveyed countries said they will focus on offering the proper tools for their booksellers to ensure a vibrant and resilient future for the sector, such as professional training activities, sector-specific studies or the development of digital solutions for bookselling professionals.

In this regard, **EIBF is working closely with its member associations to offer adequate training and upskilling resources, as well as to collect and report data on key topics for the sector. This report is only one example of such resources.**

"I would love to see lobbying efforts for fixed book price, and increased tech grants for helping bookstores get online."

Nooroongji Books
Canada

"One of our priorities is to assess the dimension of the imported literature in the Portuguese market, which is growing considerably."

Associação Portuguesa de Editores e Livreiros
(APEL) Portugal

Bibliography

Book sales data per country - sources

Australia: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

Belgium (Wallonie): Syndicat des libraires francophones de Belgique (SLFB). Data corresponding to the French-speaking market; numbers for the whole country might differ.

Brazil: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

Canada: BookNet Canada, *SalesData*. Courtesy of CIBA; Nooroongji Books

Colombia: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

Denmark: Svensk Bokhandel, *Dansk förlagsindustri tappar för andra året i rad*.

<https://www.svb.se/nyheter/dansk-forlagsindustri-tappar-for-andra-aret-i-rad/4259419>

Finland: Kirjakauppaliitto

France: Association des Librairies Informatisées & utilisatrices de Réseaux Electroniques (ALIRE); Syndicat des Distributeurs de Loisirs Culturels (SDLC); Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF)

Germany: Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, *How is the Book Market Faring in 2023/2024? Current Figures and Trends*

Ireland: Nielsen BookScan. Courtesy of The Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland

India: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

Italy: Format Research, ALI, *Osservatorio Sulle Librerie in Italia, Maggio 2024*

Kyrgyzstan: IQ Bookstore

Latvia: Latvijas Grāmatirgotāju asociācija

Mexico: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

Netherlands: KVB Boekwerk, *Verkoopcijfers 2023*. Courtesy of KBb

New Zealand: *Nielsen BookScan New Zealand 2023*. Courtesy of Booksellers Aotearoa NZ

Norway: Bokhandlerforeningen

Portugal: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. Courtesy of APEL

South Africa: GfK Entertainment, Nielsen BookData. *Global Book Market 2023*

South Korea: Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Korea Creative Content Agency, *2023 Content Industry Trend Analysis Report for the First Half of the Year*. Courtesy of KPIPA.

Spain: Federación de Gremios de Editores de España (FGEE). *Avance de resultados comercio interior del libro en España 2023*. Courtesy of CEGAL.

Sri Lanka: Ceylon Booksellers Importers and Exporters Association

Sweden: Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen

Switzerland (German): Schweizer Buchhandels- und Verlags-Verband (SBVV). Data corresponding to the German-speaking market; numbers for the whole country might differ.

United Kingdom: Nielsen BookScan. Courtesy of The Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland (BA)

United States: American Booksellers Association (ABA)

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the EIBF members for their participation in this report and their continuous support:

Canada: Canadian Independent Booksellers Association (CIBA), Nooroongji Books

Finland: Kirjakauppaliitto

France: Association des Librairies Informatisées & utilisatrices de Réseaux Electroniques (ALIRE), Syndicat de la librairie française (SLF), Syndicat des Distributeurs de Loisirs Culturels (SDLC)

Germany: Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels

Ireland: The Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland (BA)

Italy: Associazione Librai Italiani (ALI)

Kyrgyzstan: IQ Bookstore

Latvia: Latvijas Grāmatirgotāju asociācija, Grāmatnīcas Jānis Roze

Netherlands: Koninklijke Boekverkoopersbond (KbB)

New Zealand: Booksellers Aotearoa New Zealand

Norway: Bokhandlerforeningen

Portugal: Associação Portuguesa de Editores e Livreiros (APEL)

Romania: Cărturești

Spain: Confederación Española de Gremios y Asociaciones de Libreros (CEGAL)

Sri Lanka: Ceylon Booksellers Importers and Exporters Association

Sweden: Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen

Switzerland: Schweizer Buchhandels- und Verlags-Verband (SBVV)

United Kingdom: The Booksellers Association of the UK and Ireland (BA)

United States: American Booksellers Association (ABA)

Thank you also to the EIBF partner organizations that have also contributed to this report:

Belgium: Syndicat des libraires francophones de Belgique (SLFB)

South Korea: Korea Publishing and Culture Industry Promotion Agency (KPIPA)

About EIBF

The European and International Booksellers Federation (EIBF) is a non-commercial umbrella organization, representing national booksellers associations from all over the world. Through its member associations, EIBF speaks on behalf of more than 25.000 individual booksellers of all kinds, including independent bookshops, chains, and family businesses. We have a long history of representing booksellers and advocating for book-friendly policies to the benefit of readers and retailers.

EIBF works in Europe and around the world to further the interests of the bookselling industry. Our main aim is to ensure that the voices of booksellers are heard in every relevant debate, by advocating for book-friendly policies and legislation that benefit both readers and retailers. Our main activity area also includes communication with and services to our members, and we are continuously increasing the exchange of best practices among our members.

What we do



BEST PRACTICE

We provide a forum for discussion and cooperation among our members, facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices

REPRESENTATION

We meet decision-makers in institutions to explain the specificities of the bookselling industry



INDUSTRY NEWS

We regularly inform members about news and updates in the bookselling industry, as well as any legislation impacting the sector

European and International Booksellers Federation - EIBF
Square Marie-Louise 69
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Contact: info@eibf.eu
Tel: +32 (0) 2 580 18 11



europeanbooksellers.eu

