



The socio-economic conditions of Italian writers

Abstract

The Italian Writers Federation (FUIS Federazione Unitaria Italiana Scrittori) has conducted the first national survey on “The socio-economic conditions of Italian writers”. The results were presented on 21st December 2016 during the Fifth Edition of the Stati Generali dell’Autore (The General Status of the Author), a conference where FUIS provides an annual forum to exchange views and analyse in detail topics like authors’ rights, Italian and European copyright legislation, the dialogue between writers’ associations and so on.

This research is remarkable, because to this day a survey like this has never been conducted and its results presented to the press.

The data are focused on the writing profession, and taken from a survey of a thousand writers. The results emerging from this study reveal how great the social and economic difficulties are which Italian Writers have to cope with nowadays, and testify to the huge changes in the Italian publishing sector and their effects on Italian writers.

The figures and data collected clearly highlight the deep changes in the cultural, digital and publishing scenarios we are all confronting and the statistics reveal a drastic shift in paradigms: today, more than ever, each writer (whether a newcomer or a veteran) cannot be on their own anymore, cannot find solutions individually to a global problem. Writers have to look for debate, for constructive discussion, must be able to coexist and create networks with other writers, finding ways of making a common cause so that the Writers’ voice can play a major role.

This study marks an important step being taken by our Federation in order to better understand the condition of Italian Writers and provide more fitting instruments to communicate the needs and expectations of Italian Intellectual Workers to our Country’s Institutions.



The salient collected data are reported here below.

Income Levels

- In the digital world, **96,5%** of interviewed writers state they can't make a living with their revenues from writing alone.
- Only **37,8% are full-time writers**, though they cannot generate enough income to support themselves, and **32,6%** describe their own job as “author” although 97,7% of the sample state that they “enjoy being a writer”. The sample gathers the greater parts of its revenues from **books (41,1%), teaching (37%) and press articles (19,2%)**.
- When requested to reveal their income bracket, **57,9%** of writers declare net earnings of less than **15,000 euros** (with a robust percentage which is lower than the minimum poverty threshold) while only 25% of the sample says it belongs to the next income bracket.
- The book genres that writers collect the majority of their revenues from are **fiction (32,8%), non-fiction (11,9%) and children's literature (7,5%)**.
- Some interviewees declared they do not receive royalties from their publishers. **56,6%** of the sample confirmed they received a **small amount of revenue, but insufficient to earn a living**.

Contracts

- Contracts are the major issue (and, undoubtedly, the most delicate matter) for writers, though it is often the area of interest where writers are more lacking in knowledge.
- **78,2%** of the sample had never signed a contract where a writer waives his authors' rights. **52,9% of the writers had signed, in 2015, between 1 and 5 publishing contracts, while 47,1% did not sign any contract at all**. Vanity press (we are not referring to self-publishing, but to publishers who asks money to writers to publish them) contracts have increased.



Social Networks

- **Social networks have become prominent places where books are being displayed, consulted and disseminated.** Italian Writers seem to know and use these social networks: the most used is Facebook, followed by LinkedIn and Twitter. In the Web 2.0 context, social media was confirmed as being the virtual place where an author is able to build his or her own network of contacts, relationships, opportunities.
- The internet represents a possibility for writers to showcase their work. According to the survey sample, **social networks are being used to let people know about their books (77,6%), to disseminate invitations to events and readings these writers will attend (75,3%) and to get in touch with readers and other writers (71,8%).**
- **52,9% of writers are aware of the existence of specific social networks for authors.**

Writers dealing with professional services

- **87,6% of our sample do not employ a literary agent.**
- 71,1% of writers say they have never taken professional or legal advice before signing a contract.
- Writers who felt this need turned **to lawyers (48,4%), to friends (41,9%) and to colleagues (12,9%).** Information requests were mostly about **authors' rights/copyright issues (61,5%) and contracts (48,7%).**