

Italian Plastics and Rubber Machinery Exports Hold Firm

A Moderate Slowdown Offset by Structural Solidity

In 2024, Italy's plastics and rubber machinery industry showed resilience amid global instability, with exports growing for the fourth consecutive year, posting a 1.5% increase and reaching EUR 3.62 billion, helping offset a weak domestic market. Europe and the Americas showed slower demand, while Asia (India and China) and Brazil surged.

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In anticipation of 2025, Italian manufacturers have already noted some encouraging signs, even from the domestic market, in the early weeks of the year, despite rising global tensions. However, a real turnaround - or at least a more pronounced stabilisation of indicators - may not be possible until the second half of the year.

The Italian plastics and rubber machinery industry experienced a mix of highs and lows in 2024, as shown in the year-end report prepared by the MECS Study Centre based on foreign trade data gathered by ISTAT.

2024: A Year of Mixed Sentiments

According to direct surveys conducted by the Secretariat of Amaplast, the roughly 160 member companies closed the books of 2024 with a turnover drop of just less than two percentage points compared to 2023. These results follow a vigorous post-pandemic rebound, where steady growth marked the 2021-23 period after a relatively mild contraction (-3%) recorded in the difficult year of 2020.

On a more positive note, by the end of 2024, there was a slight, yet steady increase (+1%) in the number of employees in Amaplast member companies, reaffirming the industry's ongoing commitment to renewing and strengthening its structure to cope with the increasingly complex challenges in a rapidly evolving global context. This includes the development of cutting-edge technologies using artificial intelligence and the implementation of servitisation-based systems.

The performance of Amaplast members once again shows that the Italian plastics and rubber machinery industry is resilient and able to overcome challenges arising at various levels.

Based on these results, Amaplast forecasts an overall three-point contraction in turnover for the whole sector, compared to 2023.

Despite the well-known and increasingly numerous geopolitical factors threatening global economic stability, this key segment of Italian industrial machinery has once again managed to limit losses; thanks to the quality of its exports. As a matter of fact, exports increased for the fourth consecutive year, posting +1.5%, reaching a total value of EUR 3.62 billion.

Moreover, a surge in foreign sales registered during the final quarter of the year, particularly in December, prompted an upward revision of previous estimates, which had been based on trends observed up until September.

The solid performance of exports, which account for approximately three-quarters of total production, helps to offset a domestic Italian market that is clearly struggling. This is further confirmed by a nearly seven-point decline in imports, which barely exceeded EUR 1 billion - a sharper drop than that recorded the previous year. Italian companies are facing difficulties in planning and implementing the structural investments necessary to acquire the technological innovations needed to improve the competitiveness of their production system. Although this situation is exacerbated by the delays in the implementation of Industry 5.0 decrees, the recently announced simplification measures are expected to ease access to funding and facilitate the application of new policies.

Italian Exports

At a macro level, exports appeared weaker in the European quadrant, especially

Table 1: Destination Areas of the Italian Plastics and Rubber Machinery, Equipment and Moulds Exports (In %)

	2023	2024
Europe (EU)	54.8 (44.1)	52.2 (40.9)
Asia / Oceania	15.6	17.2
North America / USMCA	17.5	17.1
Central / South America	6.6	6.9
Africa	5.5	6.6

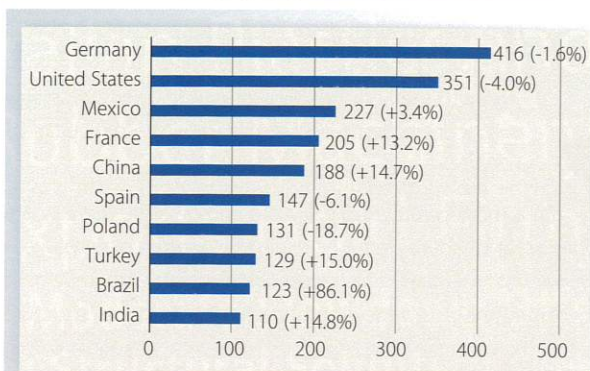


Figure 1: Top ten destination countries of the Italian plastics and rubber machinery, equipment and moulds exports (January - December, 2024; Million Euros - Δ % 2024/2023).

within the EU and revealed stagnation across the Americas. More positive results were observed in Asia (Refer Table 1 and Figure 1).

Focusing on the most important individual markets, supplies to Germany declined by around 2% - a relatively modest drop considering the severe economic and industrial crisis the country has been facing. Nonetheless, Germany remains the top destination for Italian exports in this sector.

This trend appears even more encouraging when compared to the results of German manufacturers, who suffered a dramatic 30% collapse in domestic sales and order intake in 2024.

Other major European markets that had performed well in recent years, such as Spain and Romania, experienced a slowdown (6% and 20%, respectively), while Poland registered a further decline (19%). Conversely, demand from Turkey continued to grow (+15%), despite the ongoing expansion of its domestic manufacturing industry.

Mixed signals were observed in overseas markets, compounded by the recent turmoil caused by tariffs and other protectionist measures threatened, implemented, suspended and reinstated by the Trump Administration. Compared to 2023, Italian exports of plastics and rubber machinery

to the United States - the sector's second-largest destination - fell by 4%; however, it will take several more months to fully assess the impact that any potential new tariff measures may have. On the other hand, further growth was recorded in Mexico, adding to the far more significant expansion seen in previous years. Even so, Mexico remains closely tied to its overbearing northern neighbour, whose policies directly affect Mexican investment plans.

Further South, Italy's exports to Brazil showed excellent performance, with an 86% increase compared to 2023 and a gain of over EUR 120 million driven by strong demand for high-tech machinery.

Exports to India

In Asia, Italy's two main markets delivered highly satisfactory results, as exports to both China and India increased by 15% compared to 2023.

A significant share of Italian exports to India - which topped EUR 110 million, an all-time record - is made up of high-added-value systems for primary processing, often built to order based on the specific needs of the customer. On the one hand, this highlights the need for Indian companies to modernise their production equipment; while on the other, the capacity of Italian manufacturers to supply turnkey systems to produce quality articles at high production rates.

As for the types of primary processing machinery that contribute most to Italian exports, there was a 7% decline in injection and extrusion machines, counterbalanced by the remarkable performance of blow moulding machines, increasingly demanded by and delivered to the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Turkey and Poland.

Positive trends were also observed for flexographic printing machines, which grew by 5% and accounted for 5% of total exports and presses, which also held a 5% market share and recorded an impressive 59% rise. On the contrary, moulds - which represented a fifth of total export value - ended the year with a less than satisfactory 5%.

Future Outlook

In anticipation of 2025, Italian manufacturers have already noted some encouraging signs, even from the domestic market, in the early weeks of the year, despite rising global tensions. However, a real turnaround - or at least a more pronounced stabilisation of indicators - may not be possible until the second half of the year. ■