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Italy has 1.5% fewer bar businesses than in 2024, FIPE says

FIPE said long opening hours, rising labor costs and average checks of €4.20 are squeezing a €23 billion market

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Italy has 1.5% fewer bar businesses than in 2024, even as customer traffic stayed high and costs kept rising, adding new pressure to a large part of the country’s hospitality industry, according to figures released by FIPE-Confcommercio on Tuesday, November 17.

The trade group said Italy had 124,917 bar businesses, serving a market worth €23 billion a year. Those businesses account for about 374,000 jobs, making the segment a major employer in food service. FIPE-Confcommercio said the sector still draws more than 5 billion consumption occasions a year, or about 16 million visits a day, but many operators are struggling to turn that volume into stronger margins.

The mismatch is clear in the operating model described by the federation. On average, a bar serves about 120 customers a day and stays open 14 hours a day, seven days a week, while the average check stands at €4.20. Breakfast averages €2.90. FIPE-Confcommercio said that structure leaves little room to absorb higher labor, energy and operating costs, even with demand holding up.

The group said 21,741 businesses have either closed or changed their type of offer since 2015. At the same time, it reported that dependent employment in the sector rose 6.4%, reaching 276,730 workers in 2024. That means operators are managing a

business model that still depends on a large workforce while facing thin per-customer revenue.

Price trends have offered only limited relief. According to FIPE-Confcommercio, prices in the sector are rising by about 3% in 2026 overall, while coffee-bar prices were up 2.8% in September. The average price of an espresso reached €1.28, a level that Andrea Illy, chairman of illycaffè and a FIPE board member, said remains among the lowest in the world. He said the revenue left to operators from a single cup is minimal.

The figures were presented at the first Forum of the Italian Bar, held at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome. FIPE-Confcommercio said it organized the meeting to bring together institutions, operators and suppliers to discuss the long-term sustainability of a format that remains central to daily life in Italy.

Lino Enrico Stoppani, FIPE-Confcommercio's president, said the Italian bar remains both an economic and social model, but one that is under growing strain. In his remarks, he said the sector combines business activity, employment, service and community life, yet works with reduced margins and a labor-intensive structure. He argued that protecting the sustainability of bars also means protecting part of Italy's social fabric and a wider supply chain of producers and distributors.

Alongside the market data, FIPE-Confcommercio released findings from a survey by SWG based on a representative sample of more than 2,500 Italian adults. The survey showed that 72% of Italians go to a bar at least once a week and 26% go every day. It said 67% of bar customers have a regular place they consider their trusted bar.

The survey also pointed to a broader social role. According to the findings, 33% of Italians said that a bar staying open late in outlying neighborhoods improves the sense of safety in those areas. FIPE-Confcommercio used that result to argue that bars function not only as businesses, but also as everyday neighborhood fixtures.

At the same time, the survey suggested that customer expectations are shifting. While 56% of respondents said there is still a distinctly Italian way of experiencing the bar, 32% said that identity has weakened or disappeared. The gap appeared across age groups as well. For 22% of Gen Z respondents, the bar is the place where they most

often spend time with loved ones, compared with 9% of Baby Boomers.

Customers are also placing more weight on service standards. The survey found that cleanliness, care, service and hospitality are central in choosing a venue, and 71% of respondents said they would be guided by a certification based on those criteria. FIPE-Confcommercio said that points to growing demand for quality that can be recognized and measured, not just price.

The Rome forum was also used to present the New Etiquette of the Italian Bar, a manifesto developed by Rampello & Partners. FIPE-Confcommercio said the document defines the identity of the sector through six principles: quality, relationships, refreshment, design, decorum and sentiment. The organization said the project is meant to look forward rather than backward, framing the bar as a business that must adapt to changing habits without losing its roots.

Public officials and business representatives attended the event, including Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida and Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri. The program also included regional and municipal officials and operators from across the sector. Among the business participants were owners and managers from companies such as Pasticceria Liquoreria Marescotti in Genoa, Pasticceria Estense in Padua, Caffè Palombini in Rome, Ditta Artigianale in Florence, and Staccoli Caffè in Cattolica, alongside executives from Metro Italia, Campari Group, Heineken Italia and Gruppo San Pellegrino.

The market figures and the Rome event together offered a picture of a sector that remains deeply woven into Italian daily life but is finding it harder to balance long opening hours, heavy staffing needs and modest spending per visit. For hospitality businesses, that pressure is becoming a central issue even in one of the country’s most frequented formats.