



eBay Small Business Activity Across Italy

The South leads small online business
“Digital Density” ranking

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INTRODUCTION

Advanced economies globally, particularly in Europe, face challenges in providing robust and inclusive economic growth that raises living standards across various regions. A paradox exists where urban hotspots attract people and capital, diverging from structurally weak areas and increasing disparities between the “haves” and “have-nots”. This is particularly evident in Italy, which experiences significant geographic-based economic imbalances between its North-Central regions and the South.

eBay has played a significant role in empowering small businesses across Italy to thrive, offering a global level-playing field marketplace that has supported entrepreneurial ventures for 30 years, and provided sales opportunities locally, nationally, and across borders.¹



To demonstrate how valuable this can be, especially to small businesses located in areas that are more remote or less prosperous, this report explores eBay “Digital Density” data, a measurement of eBay small business activity on a per-capita basis.² While eBay small business activity is present in every region, **the most striking finding is that the top activity originates from the South, surpassing wealthier regions and those that are home to so-called tech “hotspots”.**

Regional economic disparities remain a top challenge for Italy

Among the top five EU economies, Italy has struggled the most to recover from global economic shocks since the 2008 financial crisis. According to the World Bank, Italy’s economy in 2023 was only 0.36% larger than it was in 2007, while other major European economies saw much larger growth.³ This underperformance is attributed to various factors, with a non-exhaustive list including high national debt, a large underground economy, and prevalent tax evasion.⁴

The North-South economic divide in Italy has been well documented over the years. Despite significant resources directed at remedial programs to help the South catch up, the GDP per capita of the South has fallen from 70 percent of the North’s in 1951

to only 55 percent in recent years.⁵ Southern Italy’s GDP dropped more significantly during the double-dip recession of 2008-09 and 2011-13, and its recovery has been weaker, with GDP still 10 percent lower in 2019 than at the 2007 peak, compared to just a 2 percent reduction in the Centre-North.⁶

Efforts to reduce the North-South gap remain a key focus in Italy’s investment policies and the national Recovery Plan. Approximately 40 percent of the Plan’s resources, totaling 82 billion euros, are dedicated to Southern Italy. The objective is to enhance the South’s competitiveness, focusing on digitization, infrastructure and education, positioning the South at the forefront of economic revitalization efforts.⁷ Reforms and investments are still in progress, with the Plan scheduled for completion in 2026.



Vito Mastrochirico

Collectionerd-shop
Mola di Bari

“At eBay, I feel heard and supported. Their support team has opened my eyes to opportunities I had never considered and provided me with marketing and management tools that have made me grow beyond my expectations. For me, eBay is not just a sales platform, it is a partner who stands by me day in and day out.”



eBay Digital Density reveals small business success in southern Italy

eBay “Digital Density” is a measurement of eBay small business activity on a per-capita basis. It facilitates comparisons of the level of entrepreneurial activity on the eBay marketplace between regions that have widely different population levels and profiles. This report uses Digital Density to rank eBay small business activity in Italy’s 21 NUTS2-level regions.⁸

eBay’s global marketplace provides a level playing field for small businesses. eBay Digital Density analyses across dozens of countries in Europe and around the world have shown that strong communities of eBay small businesses emerge in areas that are not the wealthiest or most populous urban hubs.⁹ But eBay Digital Density results in Italy go far beyond finding balance between areas with a mix of differing economic conditions. Instead, **eBay small business activity in Italy is the most striking example of inclusive**

ecommerce success possible. The most economically challenged areas of Italy dominate the ranking of per capita eBay small business success.

The top six eBay Digital Density regions in Italy are all in the South, among the most economically and socially disadvantaged areas. Campania, ranking highest, has the second highest share of its population “At Risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion” (AROPE)¹⁰, the highest unemployment rate¹¹, and third-lowest regional GDP per capita.¹² The other top eBay regions—Abruzzo, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicilia—are also among the most economically challenged, with Calabria and Sicilia ranking first and third in terms of AROPE rates. eBay small business communities in these six southern regions do not just match the success of those based in more advantaged regions, they exceed them all.

eBay Digital Density Rank	NUTS2 Region	% Population at Risk (Rank)	Unemployment Rate (Rank)	GDP per Capita Rank
1	Campania	44.4% (2)	17.4% (1)	19
2	Abruzzo	28.6% (6)	8% (7)	15
3	Puglia	32.2% (5)	11.6% (4)	18
4	Basilicata	27.3% (7)	7.5% (8)	13
5	Calabria	48.6% (1)	15.9% (2)	21
6	Sicilia	41.4% (3)	15.8% (3)	20

Campania’s remarkable success serves as a case study to understand how digital platforms can liberate small enterprises from local constraints. This region is not just the eBay Digital Density leader in Italy, but ranks very near the top of eBay small business activity across the EU overall. This, while ranking at the low end of the “digital readiness” in a recent study of NUTS2 regions across Europe.¹³

Italy: eBay economy vs. traditional economy

eBay Digital Density

HigherLower

Italy Region Data

Digital Density Rank	GDP Per Capita Rank	Unemployment Rate	Poverty Rate
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Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano			
16	1	2%	5.8%

Lombardia			
12	3	4%	12.7%

Valle d'Aosta			
21	4	4%	13.8%

Provincia Autonoma di Trento			
19	2	3.7%	10.6%

Friuli-Venezia Giulia			
18	8	4.6%	14%

Veneto			
15	7	4.2%	14.1%

Emilia-Romagna			
9	5	4.9%	7.4%

Marche			
8	12	5.1%	13.6%

Abruzzo			
2	15	8%	28.6%

Molise			
17	16	9.6%	24.8%

Piemonte			
11	11	6.1%	13.8%

Liguria			
14	9	6.1%	17.7%

Toscana			
13	10	5.2%	13.2%

Sardegna			
20	17	10%	32.9%

Umbria			
7	14	6%	13%

Lazio			
10	6	7.1%	26.3%

Sicilia			
6	20	15.8%	41.4%

Puglia			
3	18	11.6%	32.2%

Basilicata			
4	13	7.5%	27.3%

Calabria			
5	21	15.9%	48.6%

Campania			
1	19	17.4%	44.4%

Small online business exporting success across Italy

Small and medium enterprises are vital to Italy's economic and technological advancement, contributing significantly to exports and fostering social cohesion. They play a crucial role in disseminating the "Made in Italy" brand, are deeply entrenched in local communities, championing sustainable development and cultural traditions¹⁴, and they account for a higher share of employment and economic activity in Italy compared to much of Western Europe.¹⁵ At the same time, in the traditional economy, small businesses tend to be less efficient and productive than larger enterprises.

The relative preponderance of small businesses in southern Italy, traditionally seen as a liability, may offer growth upsides through digitalization. Studies indicate that the business sector in Italy is undergoing a transition, with a shift towards medium and large-sized businesses accounting for a greater share of sales, as well as increased commerce through digital channels.¹⁶ Digital platforms appear to be especially valuable to smaller enterprises, with OECD research indicating that digital platform use leads to greater productivity increases for small firms than for large ones, particularly for firms with fewer than 10 employees.¹⁷

The post-pandemic bump in business digitalization and "smart working", including increased remote work models, could benefit the South, allowing more digitally proficient individuals to live and work from southern regions with lower living costs. This phenomenon could counterbalance the "economies of agglomerations" that have benefited large urban areas in Italy's Center and North in recent decades.¹⁸

Furthermore, online platforms diminish the impact of geographic distance on commerce¹⁹, crucially allowing small businesses in economically weaker areas, such as Italy's South, to engage in international trade.²⁰ **The dramatic expansion of remote commerce opportunities brought on by eBay is reflected in the fact that 95 percent of eBay small businesses in Italy are exporters²¹, compared to just 4.2 percent of all Italian businesses.²² Additionally, eBay small businesses reach an average of 15 international markets²³, compared to the traditional average of six.²⁴ Moreover, 51 percent of eBay small businesses serve customers in 10 or more international markets²⁵, and more than one-quarter²⁶ of Italy's eBay small business community exported to four or more continents.²⁷ These figures underscore eBay's pivotal role as a strategic tool for international growth and diversification, allowing small businesses to compete on a global scale.**



Emanuele Iodice

Bruno Tras. Ferr.
Torre del Greco

"A key partner for our growth in recent years has certainly been eBay, which gave us the possibility of being online in a very present way with a low investment."

CONCLUSION

Italy continues to face the challenge of delivering inclusive and sustainable growth amid entrenched regional disparities. While digitalization is often seen as exacerbating inequality, **eBay Digital Density data shows that robust small business communities are flourishing in the South's NUTS2 regions.** The top six regions - Campania, Abruzzo, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicilia - are all among the most economically disadvantaged and demonstrate that success in ecommerce is not limited to affluent, urban areas. Instead, **eBay's level-playing field marketplace**, which enables even very small enterprises to reach millions of remote consumers, including through exports, **offers especially valuable opportunities to small businesses based in traditionally challenged areas.**

RESOURCES

- ¹ The ecommerce analysis in this report is based on data covering transactions on eBay in 2023 unless otherwise indicated. When analyzing the activities of small businesses on eBay, the data was limited to transactions by sellers who were registered businesses in Italy with sales of EUR 9,240 (equivalent to USD 10,000 using 2023 exchange rates) or more annually on the eBay marketplace. In this report, these sellers are called “eBay small businesses”.
- ² Calculating eBay Digital Density: Digital Density is a measurement of the per capita eBay selling activity carried out by registered eBay small businesses in a jurisdiction. Digital Density in this report is calculated at the NUTS2 regional level. The level of Digital Density is based on two factors – (1) the number of eBay small businesses per 100,000 inhabitants and (2) the total sales by eBay small businesses per 100,000 inhabitants. These two factors are combined in a weighted average and normalized in an Index based on how a region’s eBay seller community performs in relation to the national average.
- ³ The World Bank (Accessed 07/10/2025) “World Development Indicators: GDP 2007-2023 using constant dollars 2015 USD.” Available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG/1ff4a498/PopularIndicators>.
- ⁴ Sylvers, Eric (12/26/2023) “Why Can’t Italy’s Economy Get Into Gear? Consider the Taxi Line -- Painfully long waits for taxis offer a clue about the country’s 30 years of stagnation.” The Wall Street Journal. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/why-cant-italys-economy-get-into-gear-consider-the-taxi-line-1d489cc4>.
- ⁵ Barone, G. and G. de Blasio (01/31/2023) “Place-based policies in the Italian case, part 1: A lot of money for little or no growth”. Vox EU. The Centre for Economic Policy Research. Available at: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/place-based-policies-italian-case-part-1-lot-money-little-or-no-growth>.
- ⁶ Accetturo, A., Albanese, G., Ballatore, R., Ropele, T., and P. Sestito. (April 2022) “The territorial gaps in Italy between economic crises, recovery and health emergency.” Publications of the Bank of Italy. Available at: <https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/qef/2022-0685/index.html>.
- ⁷ “Italy Tomorrow, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.” Available at: <https://www.italiadomani.gov.it/content/sogei-ng/it/it/home.html>.
- ⁸ The report uses the Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS) 2021 classification in which the EU has 92 regions at NUTS1, 242 regions at NUTS2 and 1166 regions at NUTS3 level. Additional background on the NUTS is available from Eurostat at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts>.
- ⁹ eBay (2025) “eBay Digital Density in Europe: Further evidence that small business digitalization delivers inclusive growth.” Available at: <https://www.ebaymainstreet.com/EuropeDigitalDensity>.
- ¹⁰ Eurostat (Accessed 06/04/2025) “Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by NUTS regions.” 2023. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps11n/default/table?lang=en&category=reg.reg_ilc.
- ¹¹ Eurostat (Accessed 06/04/2025) “Unemployment rate by NUTS 2 region.” 2023. Unemployment rate represents unemployed persons as a percentage of the economically active population aged 15-74 (i.e. labour force or sum of employed and unemployed). Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TGS00010/default/table>.
- ¹² Eurostat (Accessed 06/04/2025) “Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2 region.” Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama_10r_2gdp__custom_13939661/default/table?lang=en. Note: Data (2022) is converted from EUR to USD using an exchange rate of 0.951 at: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/yearly-average-currency-exchange-rates>.
- ¹³ Maucorps, A., Römisch, R., and N. Vujanovic (2022) “The Future of EU Cohesion - Effects of the Twin Transition on Disparities across European Regions.” Bertelsmann Stiftung. Available at: <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/the-future-of-eu-cohesion>.
- ¹⁴ SACE (09/02/2023) “Small, medium and more competitive: Italian SMEs testing the export between sustainable and digital transition.” In collaboration with The European House – Ambrosetti. Available at: <https://www.sace.it/studi/dettaglio/piccole-medie-e-piu-competitive-le-pmi-italiane-alla-prova-dell%27export-tra-transizione-sostenibile-e-digitale>.
- ¹⁵ OECD (2014) “Italy: Key Issues and Policies.” OECD Studies on SMEs and Entrepreneurship. OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264213951-en>.
- ¹⁶ Colombo, E., Bracco, E., and A. Zardini. (09/28/2023) “L'Evoluzione Dell'Ecommerce Tra Falsi Miti Ed Evidenze”. Fondazione De Gasperi. Available at: https://www.fondazionedegasperi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/2023.09.28_REPORT-Levoluzione-dell-Ecommerce_FDG_.pdf.
- ¹⁷ Costa, H., et al. (2021) “Are online platforms killing the offline star? Platform diffusion and the productivity of traditional firms.” OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 1682, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/1e2bbe10-en>.
- ¹⁸ Accetturo, A., Albanese, G., Ballatore, R., Ropele, T., and P. Sestito. (April 2022) “Regional inequality in Italy in the face of economic crises, recovery, and the health emergency.” Publications of the Bank of Italy. Available at: <https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/qef/2022-0685/index.html>.
- ¹⁹ Examples from economic literature on this are: Disdier, A. and K. Head (2008) “The Puzzling Persistence of the Distance Effect on Bilateral Trade.” The Review of Economics and Statistics 90 (1), 37-48. Available at: <https://direct.mit.edu/rest/article-abstract/90/1/37/58643/The-Puzzling-Persistence-of-the-Distance-Effect-on?redirectedFrom=fulltext>; Chaney, Thomas (September 2011) “The Gravity Equation in International Trade: An Explanation.” Toulouse School of Economics. Available at: <https://www.tse-fr.eu/publications/gravity-equation-international-trade-explanation>; and Allen, Treb (12/07/2011) “Information Frictions in Trade.” Yale University. Job-Market Paper. Available at: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=1fb7ffc905ff1549fe88fd10cdf0c10befab379>.
- ²⁰ Gomez-Herrera, E., Martens, B., and G. Turlea. (January 2013) “The Drivers and Impediments for Cross-Border e-Commerce in the EU.” European Commission, Joint Research Centre. Institute for Prospective Technological Studies Digital Economy Working Paper 2013/2.

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- ²¹ The eBay data reflects the share of 2023 eBay small businesses (those with EUR 9,240 / USD 10 000 or more in sales on eBay) in Italy, who exported in that year.
- ²² Source for total number of enterprises that export OECD Trade by enterprise characteristics (TEC) data: IV. Trade by the number of partner countries and economic sector. Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TEC4_REV4; Source for total number of enterprises: OECD Structural business statistics by size class and economic activity (ISIC Rev. 4); Total number of enterprises, by sector. Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SSIS_BSC_ISIC4. Where available, the definition used excludes financial and insurance businesses. Where this was not available, the definition used "all businesses". Share = (total number of enterprises that export) / (total number of enterprises).
- ²³ The eBay data reflects the average number of international markets reached by 2023 eBay small businesses (those with EUR 9,240 / USD 10 000 or more in sales on eBay) in each location, who exported in that year.
- ²⁴ Average number of international destination markets reached by exporters = ((number of enterprises that trade with 1 country)*1 + (number of enterprises that trade with 2 countries)*2 + (number of enterprises that trade with 3 to 5 countries)*4 + (number of enterprises that trade with 6 to 9 countries)*7.5 + (number of enterprises that trade with 10 to 14 countries)*12 + (number of enterprises that trade with 15 to 19 countries)*17 + (number of enterprises that trade with 20 or more countries)*25) / ((number of enterprises that trade with 1 country) + (number of enterprises that trade with 2 countries) + (number of enterprises that trade with 3 to 5 countries) + (number of enterprises that trade with 6 to 9 countries) + (number of enterprises that trade with 10 to 14 countries) + (number of enterprises that trade with 15 to 19 countries) + (number of enterprises that trade with 20 or more countries)). Source for (i) Number of enterprises that trade with 1 country; (ii) Number of enterprises that trade with 2 countries; (iii) Number of enterprises that trade with 3 to 5 countries; (iv) Number of enterprises that trade with 6 to 9 countries; (v) Number of enterprises that trade with 10 to 14 countries; (vi) Number of enterprises that trade with 15 to 19 countries; (vii) Number of enterprises that trade with 20 or more countries, using most recent available country data: OECD Trade by enterprise characteristics (TEC) data: Dataset IV – TEC by number of partner countries. Available at: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TEC4_REV4.
- ²⁵ The eBay data reflects the share of exporting 2023 eBay small businesses (those with EUR 9,240 / USD 10 000 or more in sales on eBay) in Italy, who exported to 10 or more international markets in that year.
- ²⁶ 29 percent.
- ²⁷ The eBay data reflects the share of exporting 2023 eBay small businesses (those with EUR 9,240 / USD 10 000 or more in annual sales on eBay) in Italy, who exported to four or more continents in that year.

