
THE VALUE OF FINNISH LITERARY EXPORTS

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This study was commissioned by FILI – Finnish Literature Exchange, an expert organisation supporting literary exports in Finland. The report is translated from Finnish to English by Christina Saarinen.

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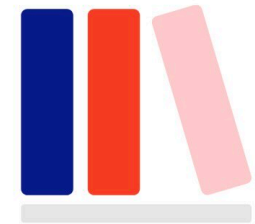
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ABOUT LITERARY EXPORTS

Literary exports are defined as the sale of immaterial translation rights. The translation rights of books written in Finnish, Finland-Swedish or Sámi are sold to foreign publishers, who are responsible for the production, quality, sales and marketing of the translated works. The decision to sell a work's translation rights is the author's. Sales of translations published in Finland are not included in literary exports.

Fourteen actors participate in literary exports in Finland, of which less than half are dedicated literary agencies. Two agencies operate in both Finland and Sweden. In addition, there are six agencies outside Finland that represent Finnish authors.

Each year, 300–400 translations of Finnish literary works are published abroad, in about 40 different languages. Information about these works is collected in FILI's [Translation Database](#).



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Translation rights are generally sold by an agent representing an author or by a publisher's foreign rights specialist. These intermediaries play a central role in the international book market. The sale of translation rights requires a strong understanding of the target market and a broad network of contacts. Rights may be sold through professional contacts or at international book fairs.

Successful literary exports are always the result of collaboration. In addition to publishers and agencies, skilled translators, supportive organisations and, of course, most importantly, quality literature are also essential. Translated literature brings more than just stories to the wider world - it also conveys something of a country's culture and builds bridges between language areas and cultures.

LITERARY AGENCIES IN FINLAND

Bonnier Rights Finland
Ferly
Elina Ahlbäck Literary Agency
Helsinki Literary Agency
Rights & Brands (Finland / Sweden)

LITERARY AGENCIES ABROAD REPRESENTING FINNISH AUTHORS

Bonnier Rights Sweden
Copenhagen Literary Agency
Hedlund Agency
Kontext Agency
Salomonsson Agency
Wylie Agency

STUDY BACKGROUND

This report is a continuation of FILI's series of reports following developments in literary exports from 2011 to 2019. The work began with a project in 2013, which has been followed ever since by an annual report on developments in the value of literary exports.

The figures presented in this report reflect Finnish literary exports in 2020. Figures from previous years are also provided for the purpose of comparison. Additional statistics and reports on literary exports can be viewed on [FILI's website](#).

Data on revenue from literary exports was collected by survey in April–September 2021. The survey was sent to a total of 20 Finnish and foreign actors. We received 14 responses, for a survey response rate of 70%. Not all respondents provided data at the requested level of detail, so some figures make use of imputed values.

Figures are presented as aggregates and are not broken down by actor. It is important to note that foreign organisations not included in this study make up a significant share of Finnish literary exports.

REVENUE FROM LITERARY EXPORTS

A SLIGHT DECREASE IN REVENUE

Respondents were asked to report gross revenue (total revenue earned in Finland) from literary exports in 2020, including both the organisation's and its authors' earnings. Revenue from direct sales of translations published in Finland were excluded from total revenue. Respondents were also asked to break down their total revenue into advances, royalties and other income (such as covers, illustrations and layout).

An advance is the sum paid by a foreign publisher for the right to translate a work. The amount of the advance is contract-dependent and can vary dramatically depending on language area and other factors. Royalties are copyright-based income generated when a translation that has been published abroad has sold enough copies to cover the advance. The amount of the royalty is also contract-dependent.

Revenue from the export of Finnish literature in 2020 totalled nearly **3.6 million** euros. This was a decrease of **4%** compared to the previous year. 61% of export revenues consisted of advances and 33% of royalties. The relative share of advances and royalties remained relatively unchanged.

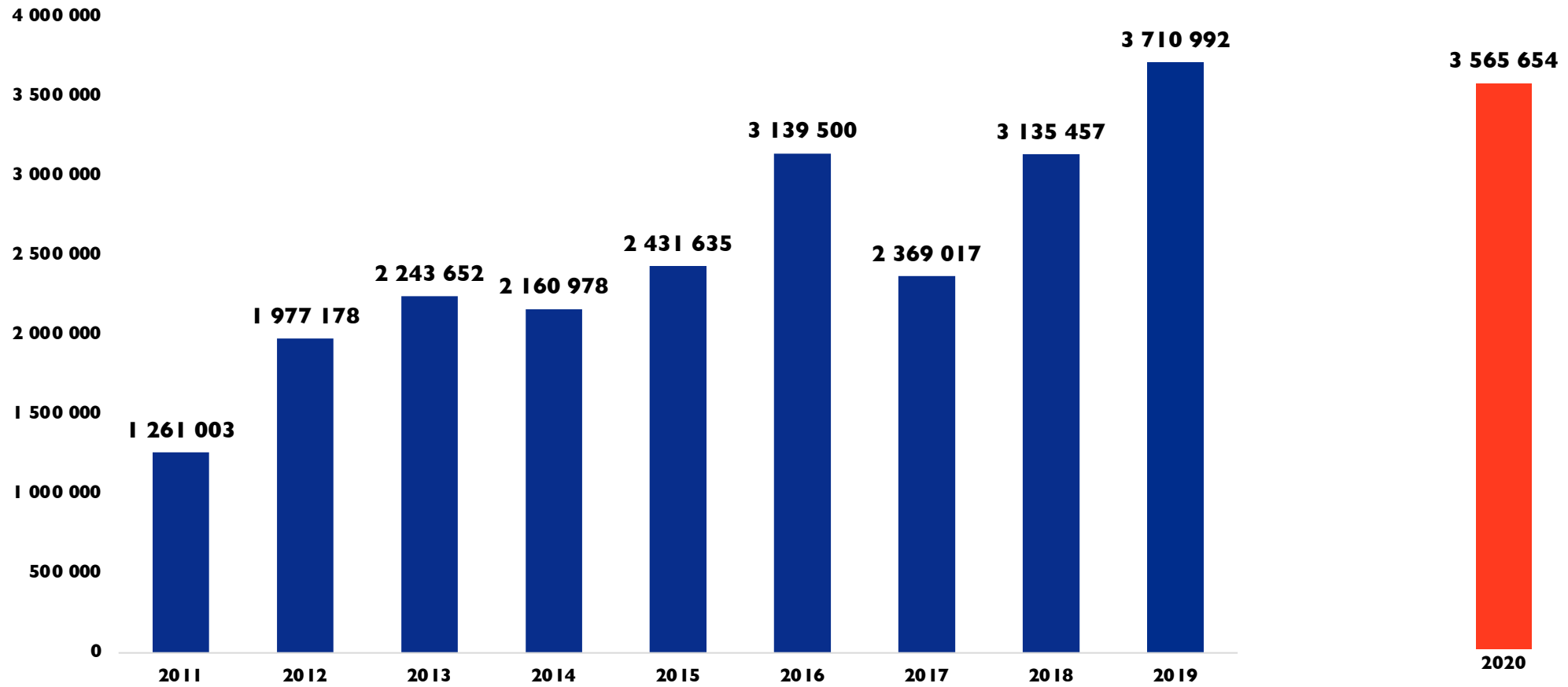
Literary export revenue and number of agencies in the Nordic countries 2019



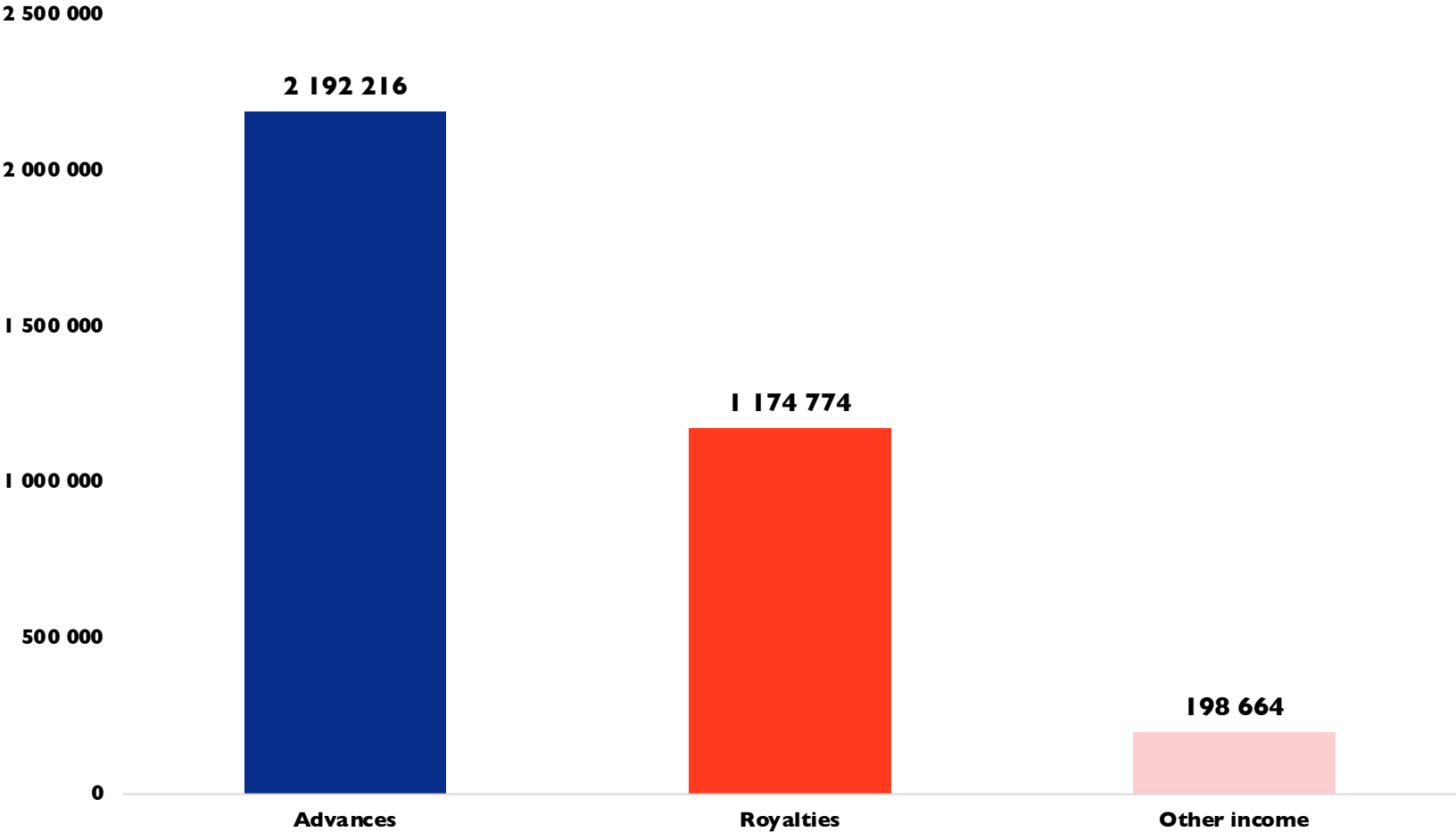
Growth in literary exports is a result of years of work towards the professionalisation of activities in the field and to strengthen networks in different language areas. In recent years, increased sales in English-language markets in particular have been key for Finnish literary exports.

The number of actors exporting literature in Finland is relatively small. The gradual increase in the number of agencies has likely played a role in the growth of export revenues. Comparing Finland to other Nordic countries, it is clear that the number of agencies is reflected in the amount of export revenue. The most recent figures available for Norway and Sweden are from 2019. Comparable figures are not available for Denmark and Iceland.

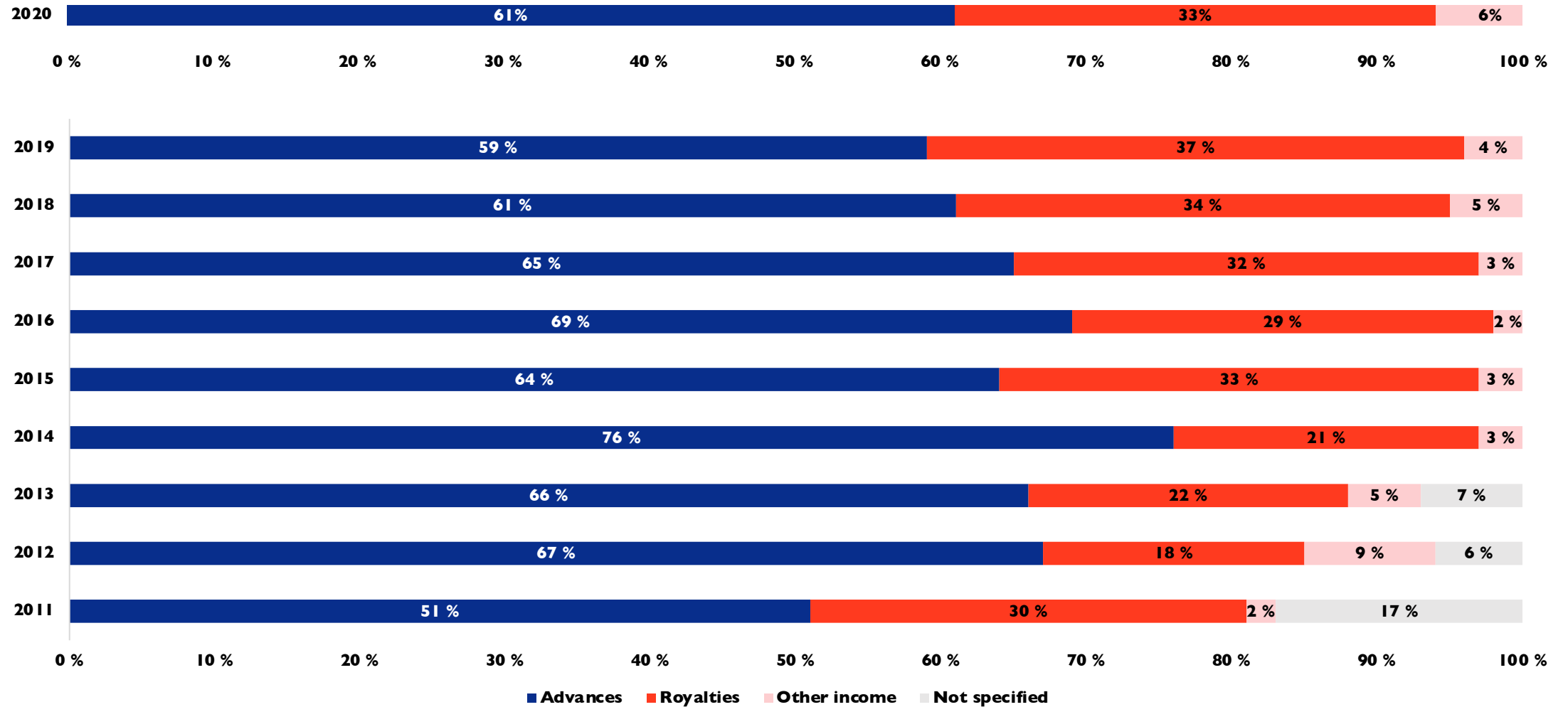
Gross revenue from literary exports in 2011–2019 and 2020, €



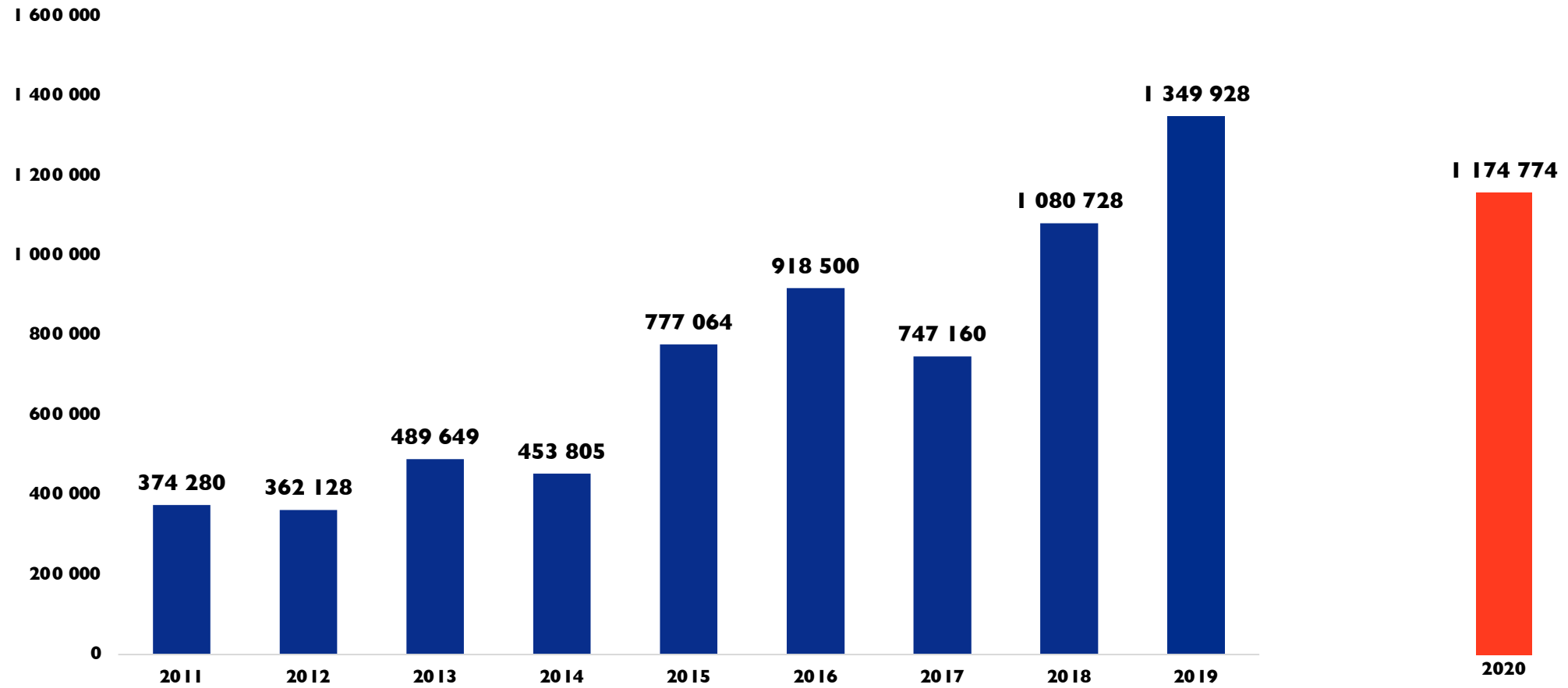
Breakdown of revenue into advances, royalties and other income 2020, €



Breakdown of revenue into advances, royalties and other income 2020 and 2011–2019, %



Royalties 2011–2019 and 2020, €



BOOK TRANSLATION CONTRACTS

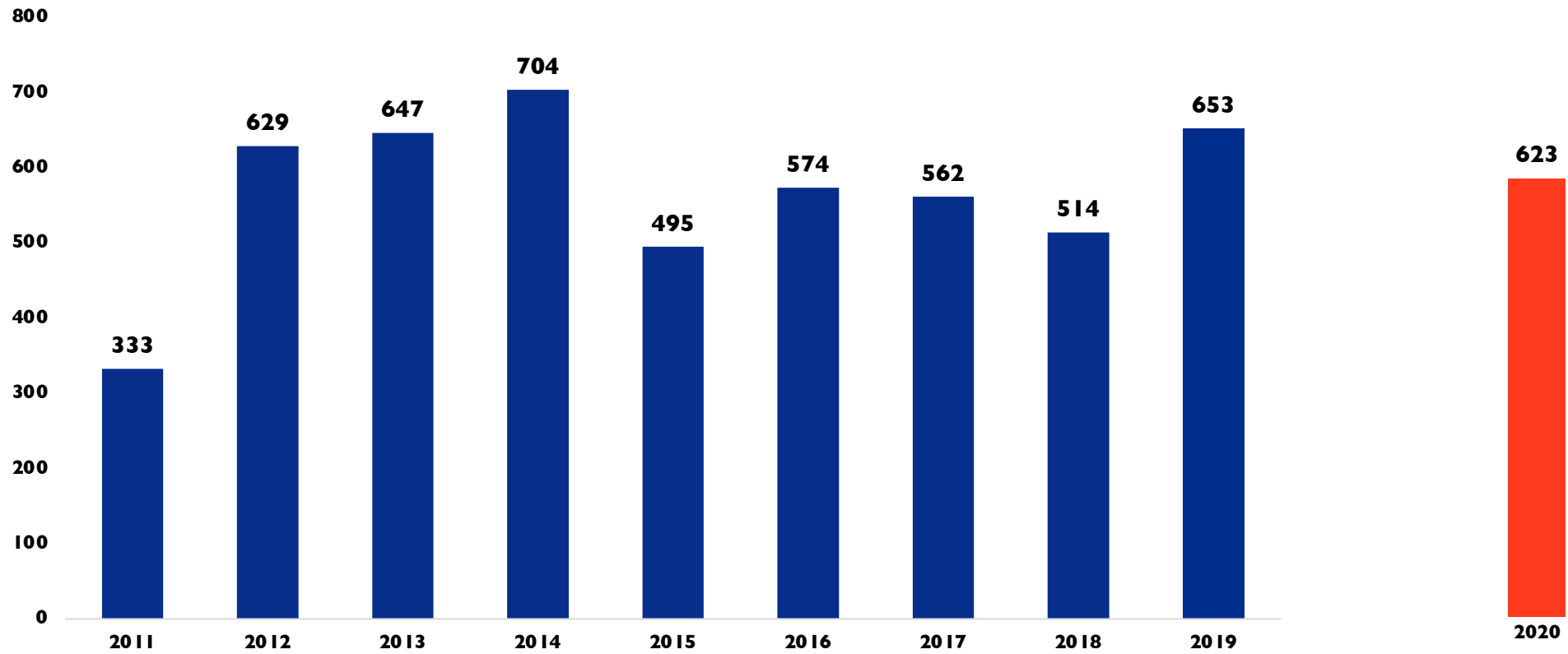
A SLIGHT DIP IN THE NUMBER OF TRANSLATION CONTRACTS

Respondents were asked to report the number of titles for which they had made book translation contracts, including renewal contracts for the republication of books. When looking at the figures, it should be kept in mind that multiple contracts can be made for one book.

In 2020, slightly more than **620** contracts related to the translation of Finnish literature were made, which is **5%** less than the previous year.

The greatest number of contracts were made for children's and young adult literature, which made up more than half (55%) of all book translation contracts. The next largest number of contracts were made for fiction (35%).

Number of book translation contracts 2011–2019 and 2020



EXPORT REVENUE BY CATEGORY

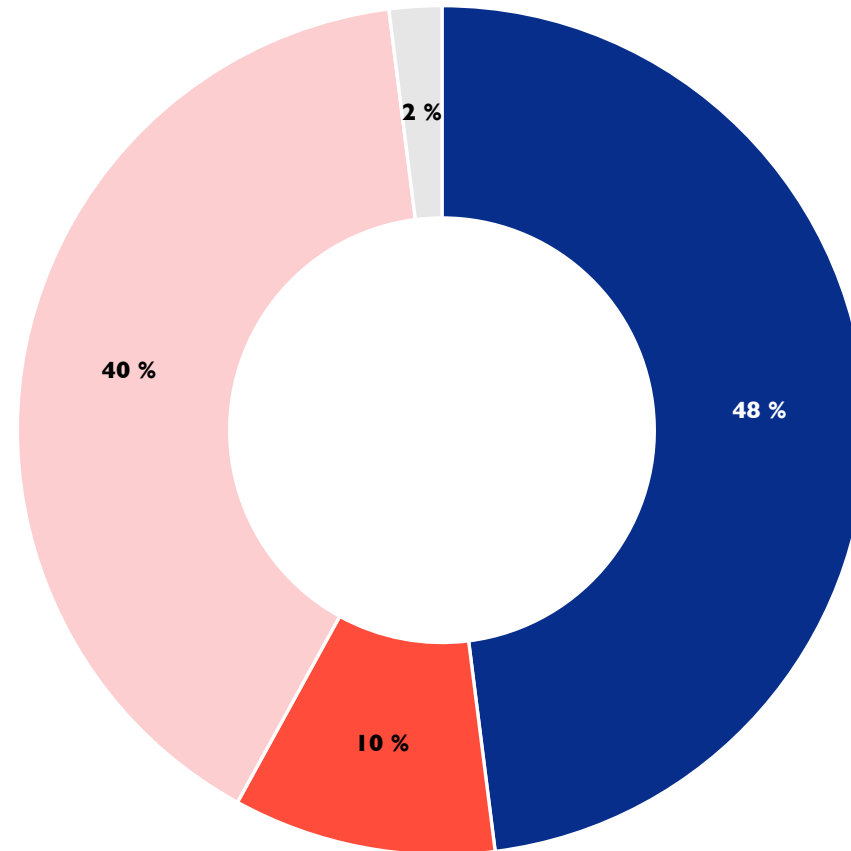
FICTION BROUGHT IN THE MOST REVENUE

Respondents were asked how their export earnings broke down across different categories of literature. Fiction here includes prose, poetry, essays and thrillers. Non-fiction includes works classified as general non-fiction. Other literature includes categories such as comic books.

In 2020, almost half (48%) of export revenues came from fiction, a clear increase in the category's share of total export revenues. Compared to the previous year, the share of children's and young adult literature decreased slightly.

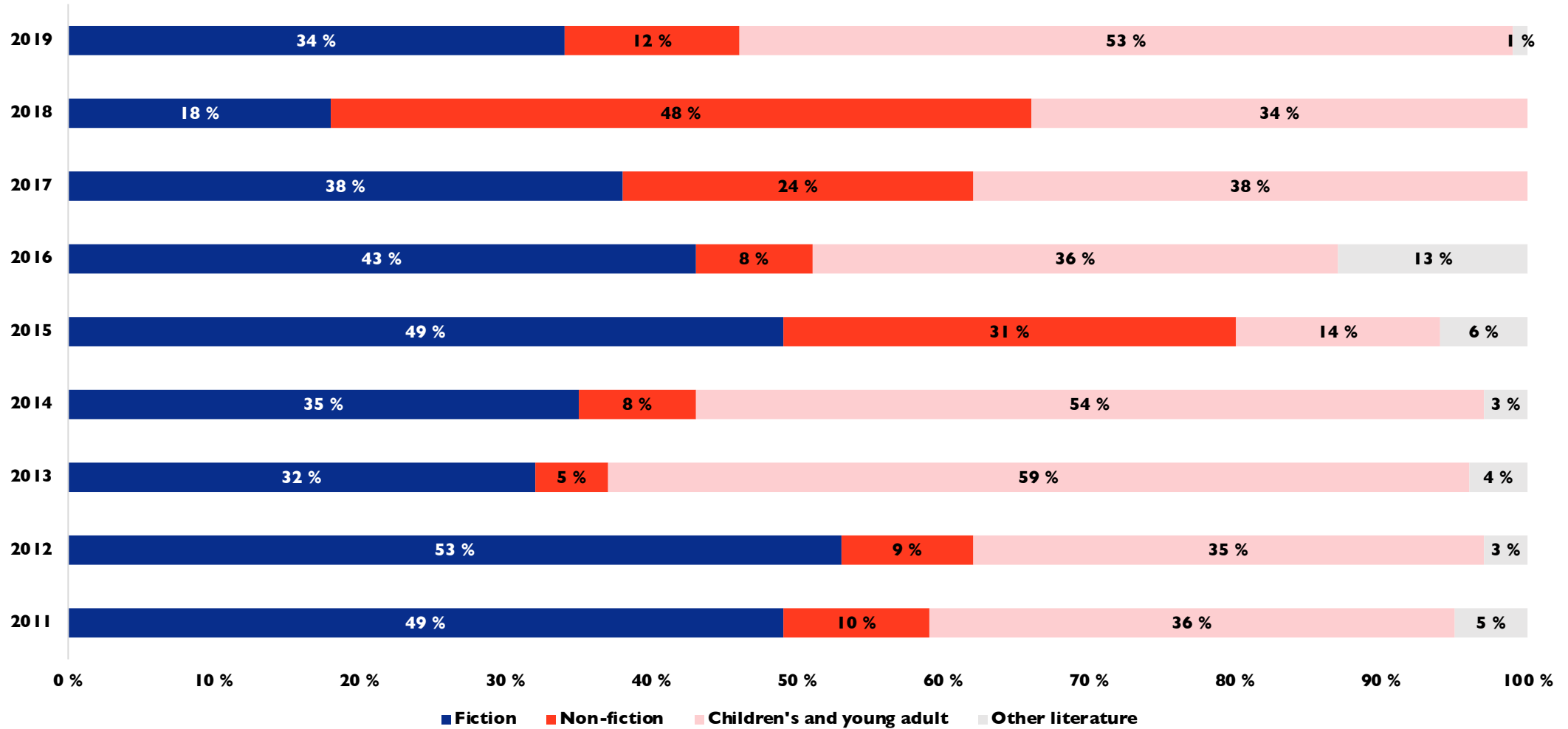
It should be noted that strong sales for even a single title can contribute to annual variations in the breakdown of revenue across categories.

Breakdown of gross revenue by category 2020, %



■ Fiction ■ Non-fiction ■ Children's and young adult ■ Other literature

Breakdown of gross revenue by category 2011–2019, %



LITERARY EXPORTS BY COUNTRY

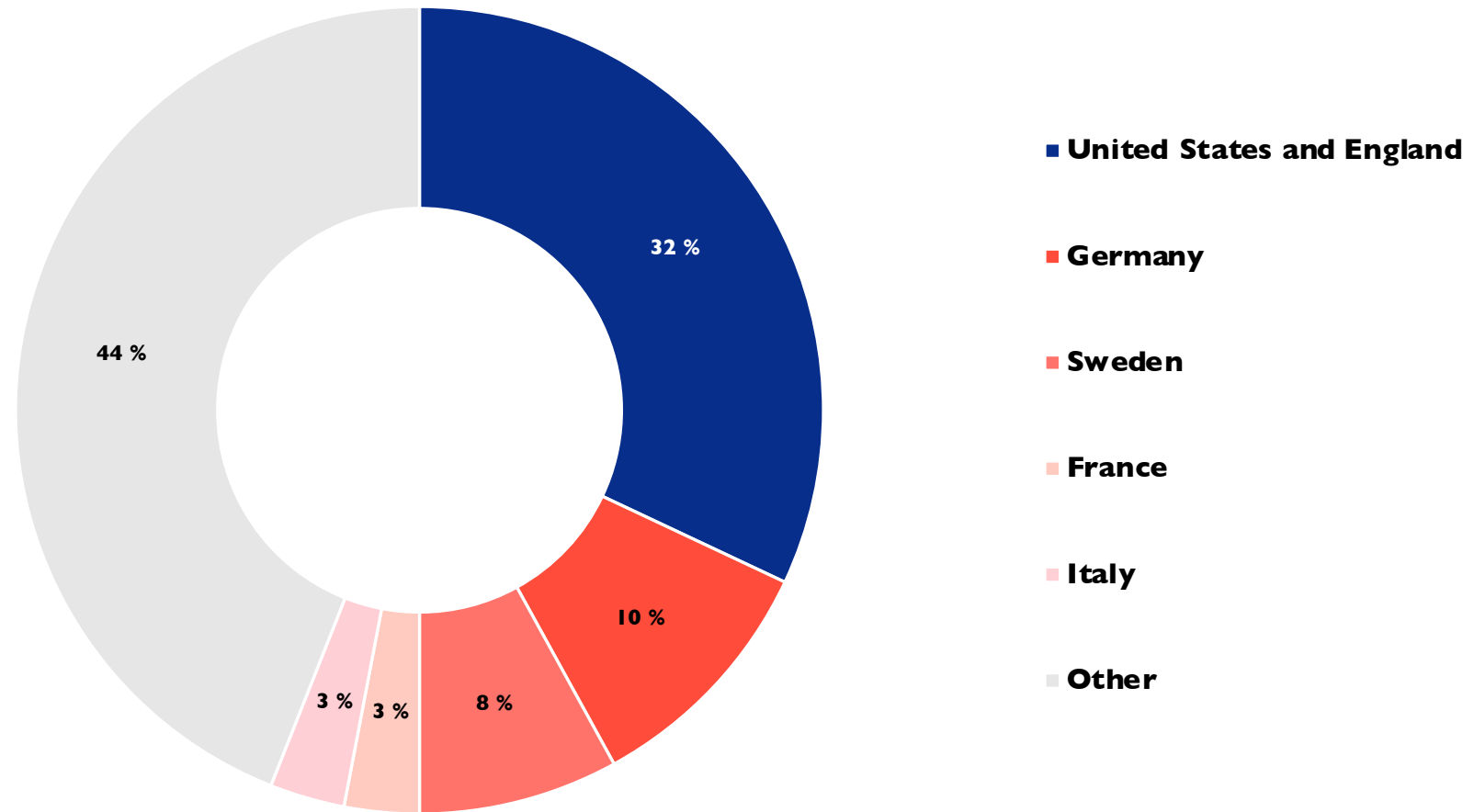
LITERATURE EXPORTED TO ALMOST 50 COUNTRIES

Respondents were asked for information on their 2020 export revenues and book translation contracts in different countries. Not all respondents provided exact amounts of revenue or numbers of contracts for all countries.

In 2020, translation rights for Finnish literature were sold in almost **50** countries. Based on the breakdown of total export revenue, the highest revenue was earned from English-speaking countries (the United States and England), the revenue from which constituted approximately one-third (32%) of total gross income. In terms of quantity, the most book translation contracts were made in Germany, English-speaking countries (the United States and England), Estonia, Russia and Poland.

The figures show that there is no direct correlation between export earnings from a country and the number of book translation contracts made there.

Most significant export countries in terms of gross revenue 2020, %



Most significant export countries in terms of number of translation contracts* 2020, %

*Percentages are relative to the total number of contracts in the ten countries with the highest number of contracts. This number represents about half of all contracts.

