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# THE VALUE OF FINNISH LITERARY EXPORTS

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**This report was commissioned by FILI – Finnish Literature Exchange,  
Finland’s organisation providing expertise and support for literary exports.**

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## ABOUT LITERARY EXPORTS

The term 'literary exports' refers to the sale of intellectual property rights in the form of translation rights. Translation rights for books written in Finnish, Finland-Swedish or Sámi are sold to publishers outside Finland who are responsible for the translation, quality, sales and marketing of the translated works. Authors make decisions about selling translation rights in their works. Sales of translations published in Finland are not included in literary export figures.

There are 14 entities in Finland involved in literary exports. Half of them are independent literary agencies. Two of those agencies have a presence in both Finland and Sweden. There are also six agencies based outside Finland that have Finnish authors among their clients.

Between 300 and 400 translations of Finnish books are published in around 40 languages each year. Details of published works are entered in the [translation database](#) maintained by FILI.



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OUTSIDE FINLAND**

Sales of translation rights are usually handled on behalf of authors by literary agents or foreign rights departments of publishing houses. These representatives play a key role in the international book market. Their work requires excellent knowledge of the target markets and large networks of contacts. Rights are sold via personal contacts and at international book fairs.

Successful literary exports are always the result of cooperation among many people. Besides publishing houses and literary agencies, other necessary elements are skilled translators, organisations to support exports and of course excellent literature. Books in translation provide more than just stories to the world – they also convey something of the source country's culture and build bridges between different languages and cultures.

#### **LITERARY AGENCIES IN FINLAND**

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

#### **LITERARY AGENCIES OUTSIDE FINLAND REPRESENTING FINNISH AUTHORS**

**Bonnier Rights Sweden**  
**Copenhagen Literary Agency**  
**Hedlund Agency**  
**Kontext Agency**  
**Partners in Stories**  
**Salomonsson Agency**  
**Wylie Agency**

## BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

This report follows on from another report commissioned by FILI on developments in literary exports covering 2011–18. Monitoring activities began in 2013. Since then FILI has commissioned annual reports analysing developments in the value of literary exports.

The figures cited in this report refer to Finnish literary exports achieved in 2019. Figures from previous years' reports were also used to generate comparisons. More information about these statistics and reports are available on [FILI's website](#).

Details of revenues from literary exports were collected via a questionnaire in the spring of 2020. The questionnaire was sent to a total of 20 entities in Finland and abroad. Twelve responses were received, making the response rate 60%. No precise figures were received from entities outside Finland.

The figures are presented as totals and not individually itemised. It is worth remembering that organisations outside Finland, which are not represented in the figures, account for a significant proportion of Finnish literary exports.

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## **REVENUES FROM LITERARY EXPORTS**

## REVENUES FROM LITERARY EXPORTS ON THE RISE

Respondents were asked to cite gross revenues (total revenues registered in Finland) from literary exports in 2019, including sums payable both to their organisations and to authors. Revenues recorded from direct sales of complete translations published in Finland were excluded from the totals. Respondents were also asked to itemise advances, royalties and other revenues (e.g. covers, illustrations, layout) as shares of their total gross revenues.

'Advances' refer to the payments made by publishers abroad to acquire translation rights. The amount is specific to each contract and there is great variation in advances paid, depending on language territories, etc. 'Royalties' are revenues for creators. They are realised after a translation has been published abroad and has sold sufficient quantities to cover the advance. Royalty amounts are specific to each contract.

Revenues from Finnish literary exports in 2019 totalled over **3.7 million** euros. This represents an increase of **18%** over the previous year. Of the total figure, 59% came from advances and 37% from royalties. Advances and royalties have remained on a similar share of the total, though royalties continued their upward trend.



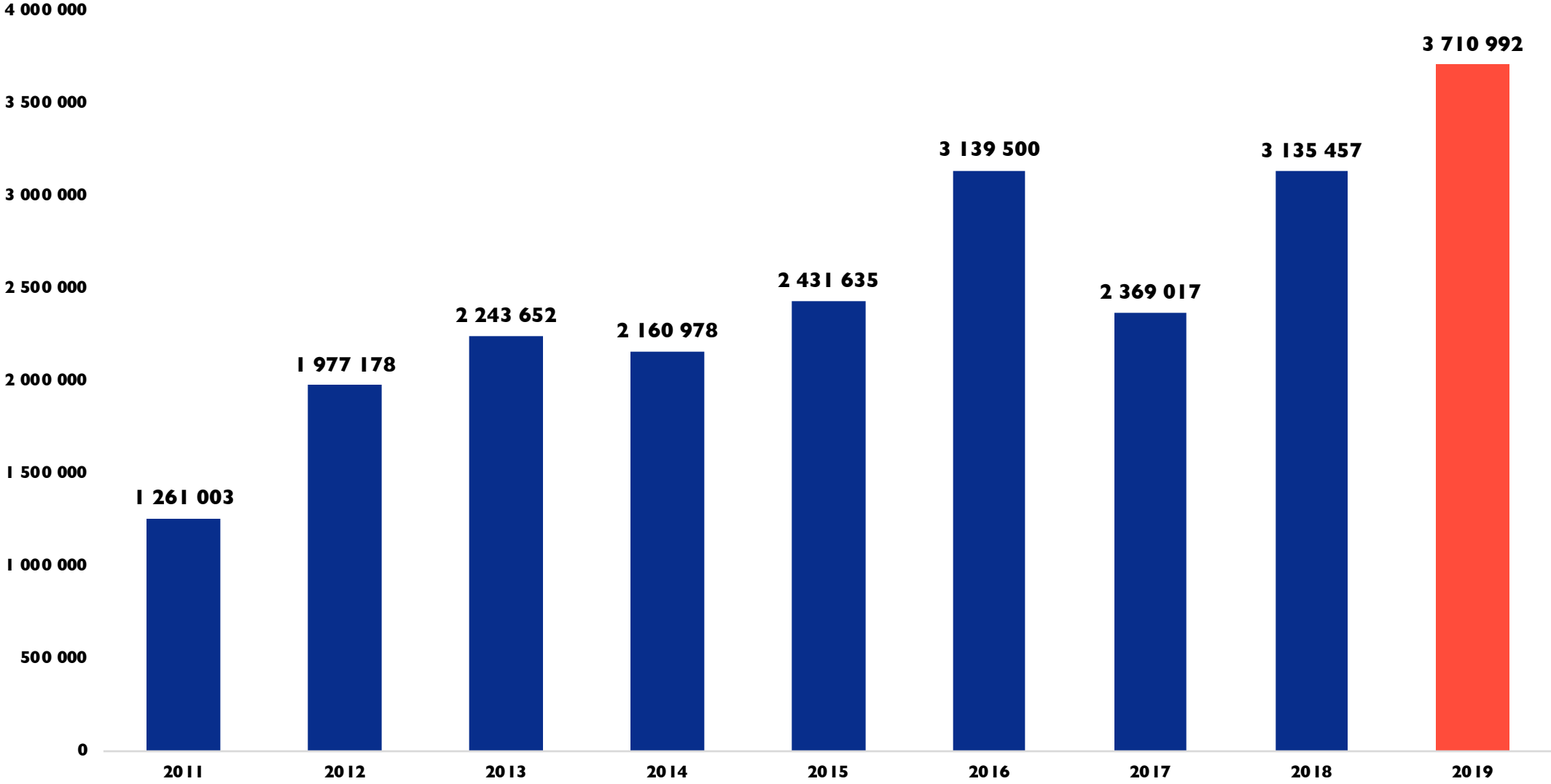
## Revenues from literary exports and agencies in the Nordic countries in 2018, in EUR



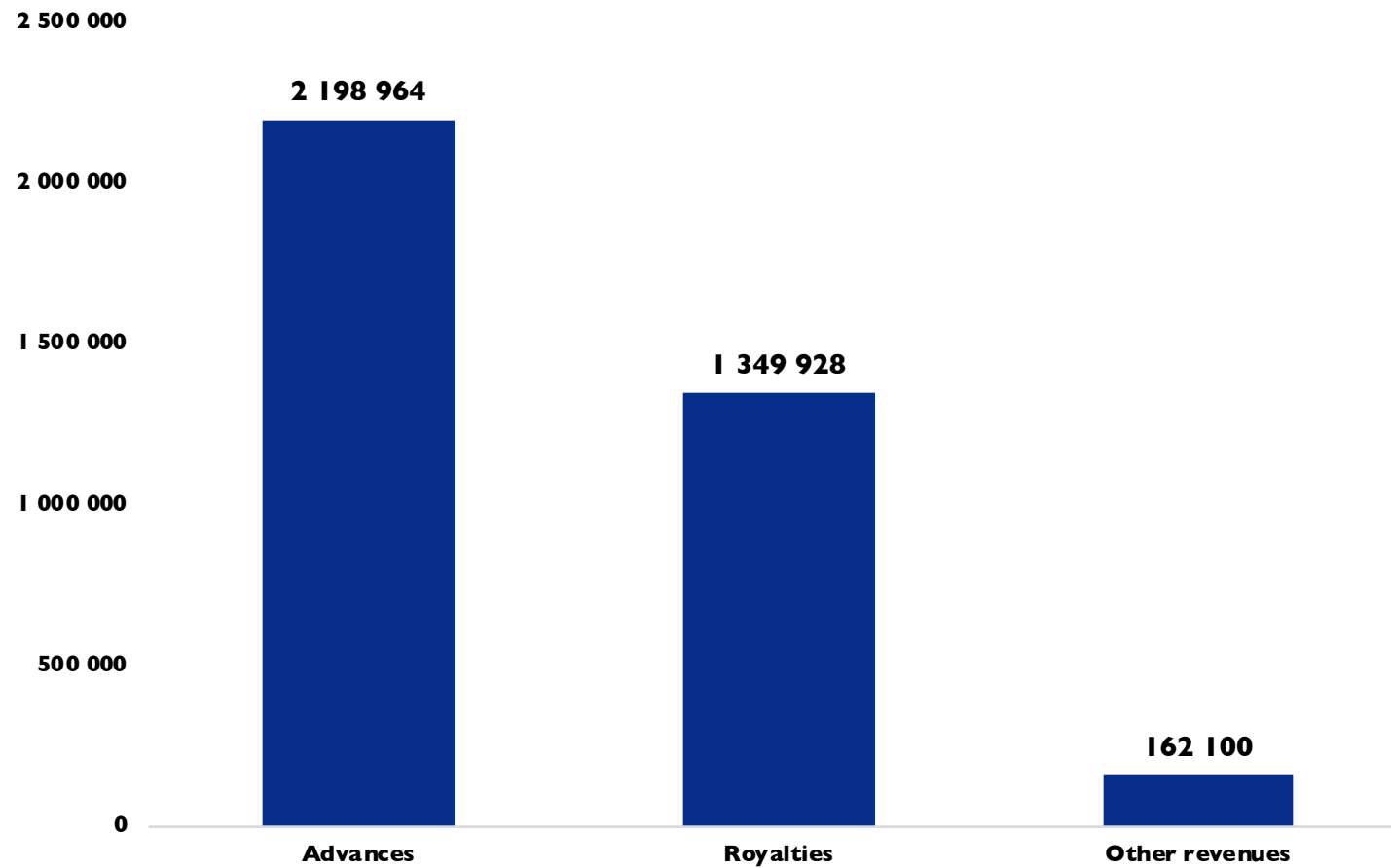
Behind the growth in literary exports are many years of ongoing work to professionalise activities in this area and strengthen networks in various language territories. One key area of emphasis for Finnish literary exports in recent years has been to promote sales to English-language markets.

There are relatively few entities involved in literary exports in Finland. Part of the increase in export revenues may be down to a slight increase in the number of literary agencies. A comparison with other Nordic countries shows that the numbers of agencies are reflected in export revenues. Figures are not available from Denmark and Iceland.

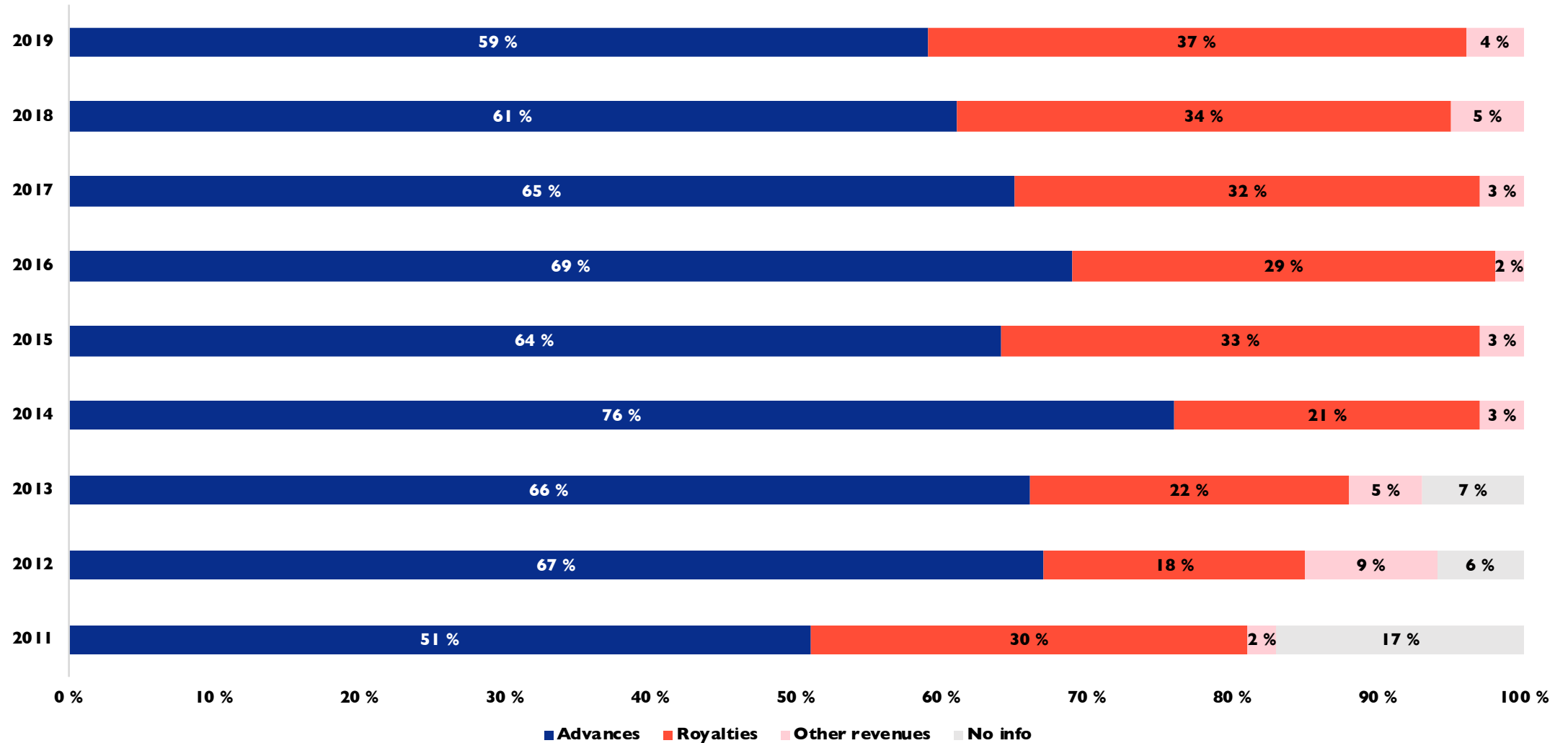
# Gross revenues from literary exports in 2011–2019, in EUR



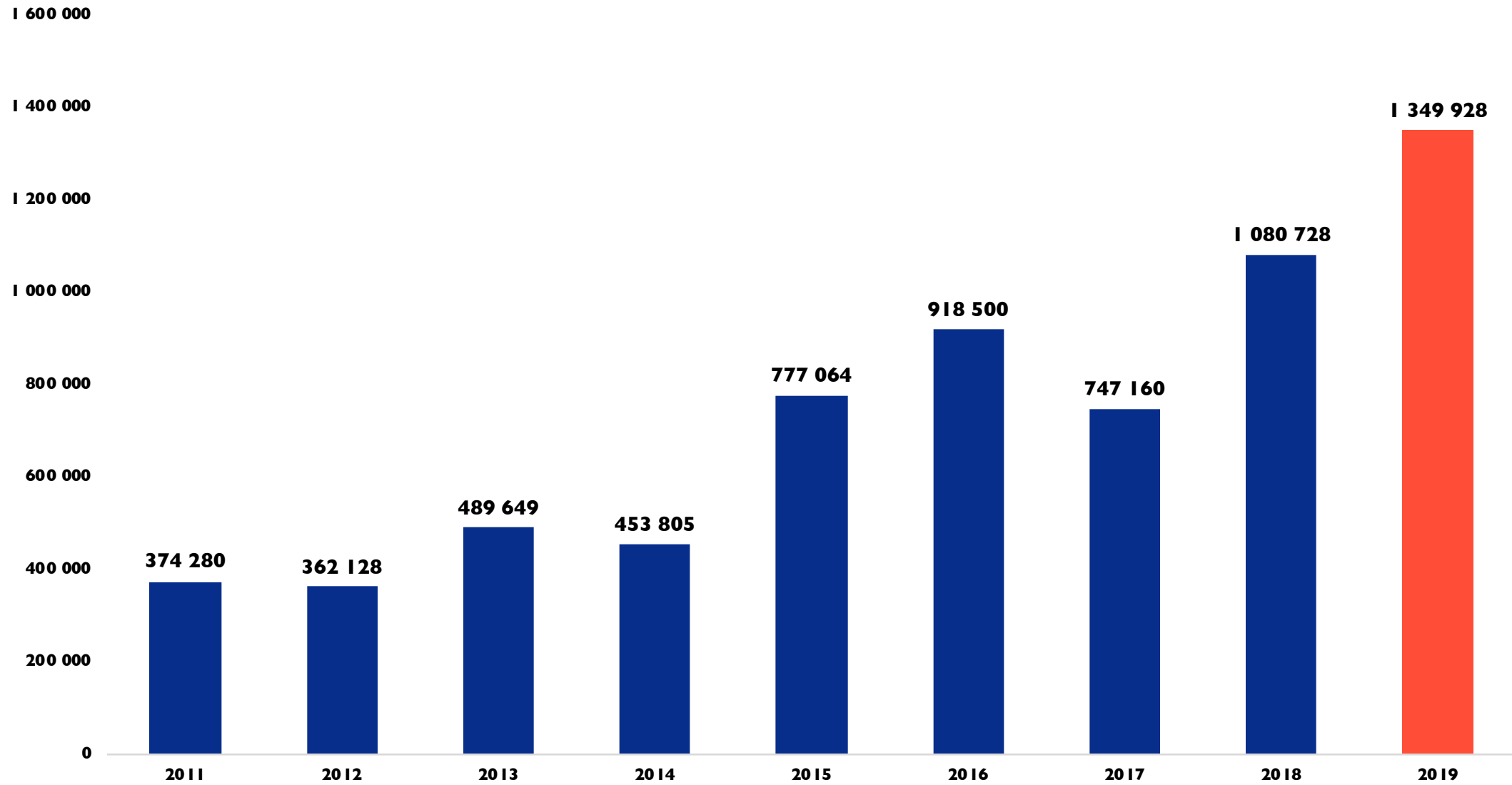
## Gross revenues from literary exports in terms of advances, royalties and other revenues in 2019, in EUR



## Gross revenues from literary exports in terms of advances, royalties and other revenues in 2011–2019, %

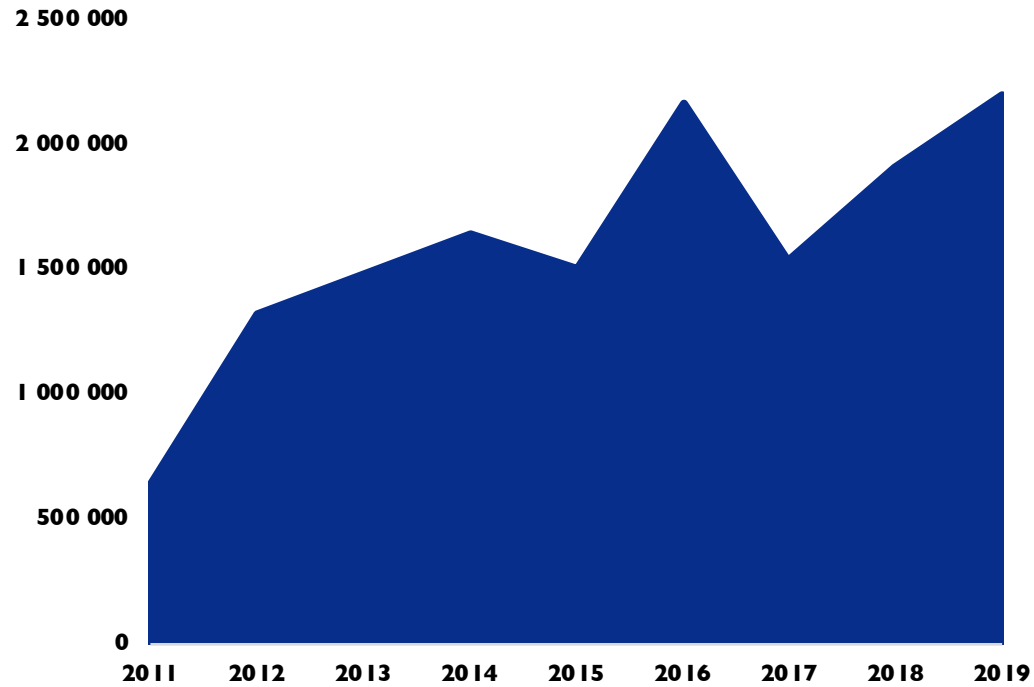


## Changes in royalties over time, 2011–2019 in EUR

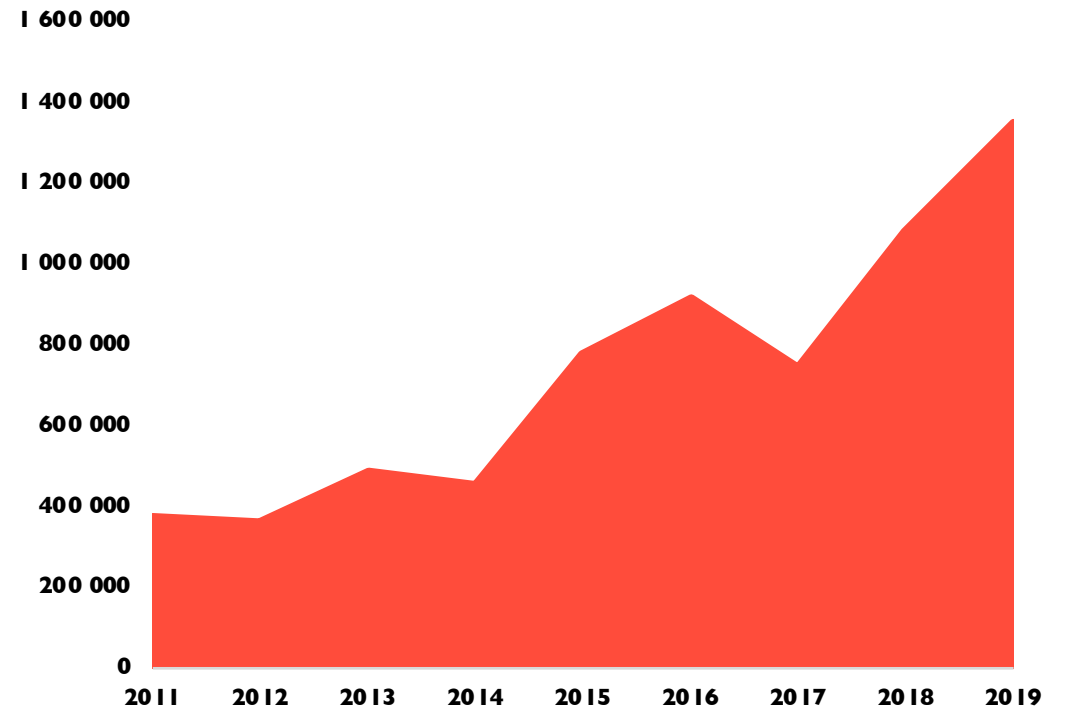


# Changes in advances and royalties over time, 2011–2019 in EUR

## ADVANCES



## ROYALTIES



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## **RIGHTS DEALS**

## INCREASE IN TRANSLATION RIGHTS SOLD

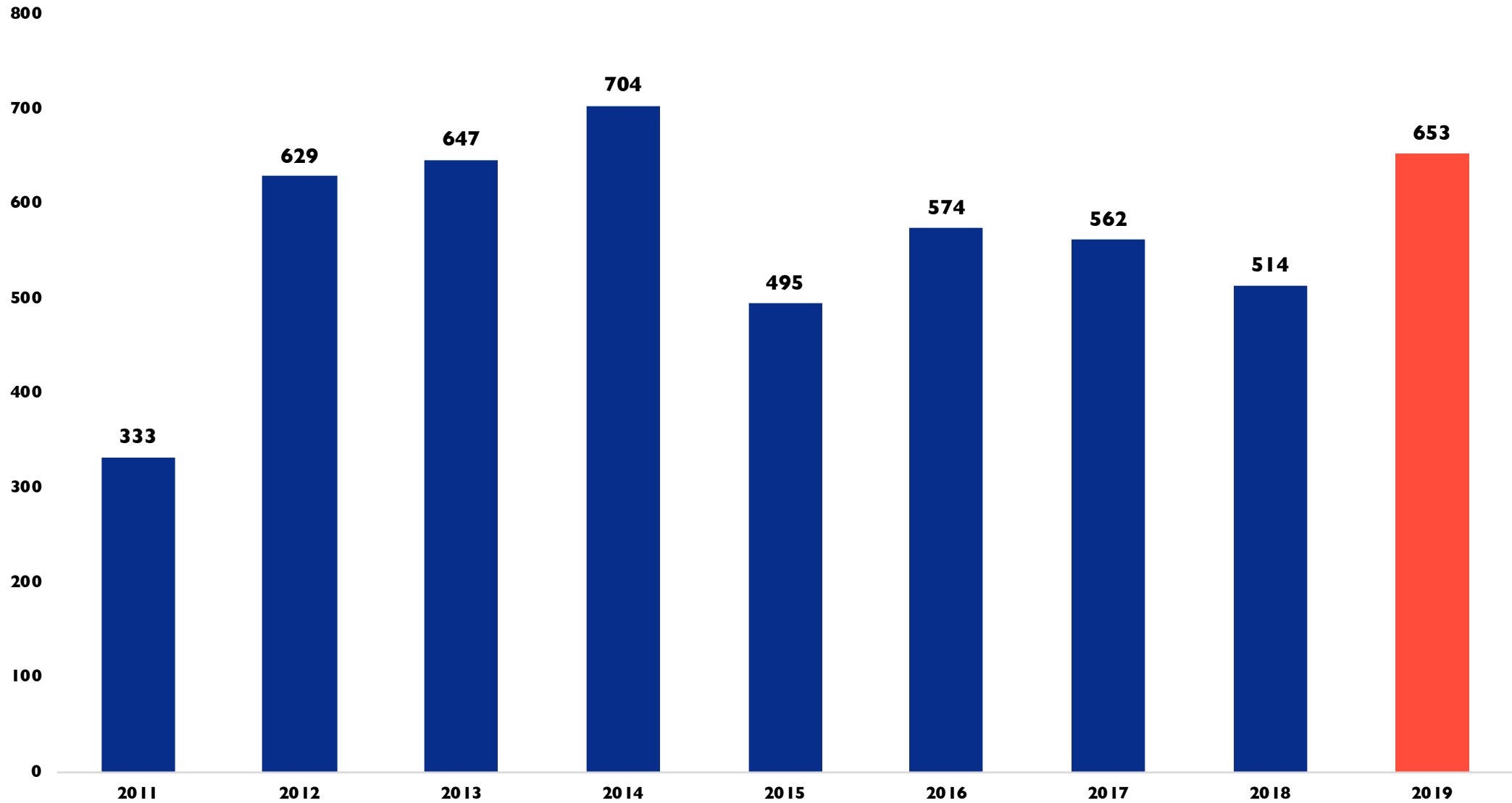
Respondents were asked to state the number of contracts for book translation rights they had agreed, including new agreements for republished works. They were also asked for the number of other publishing deals relevant to literary exports, such as for cover designs and illustrations. It is worth remembering that several contracts may be agreed for a single book.

In 2019 over **650** contracts were agreed for translation rights and related rights in Finnish literature, which is an increase of **27%** over the previous year. Of those deals, 75% were for book translation rights.

This increase brought the total number close to the number achieved in 2014, which was the top year for deals agreed during the period 2011–2019.



## Numbers of rights deals in 2011–2019



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## **EXPORT REVENUES BY GENRE**

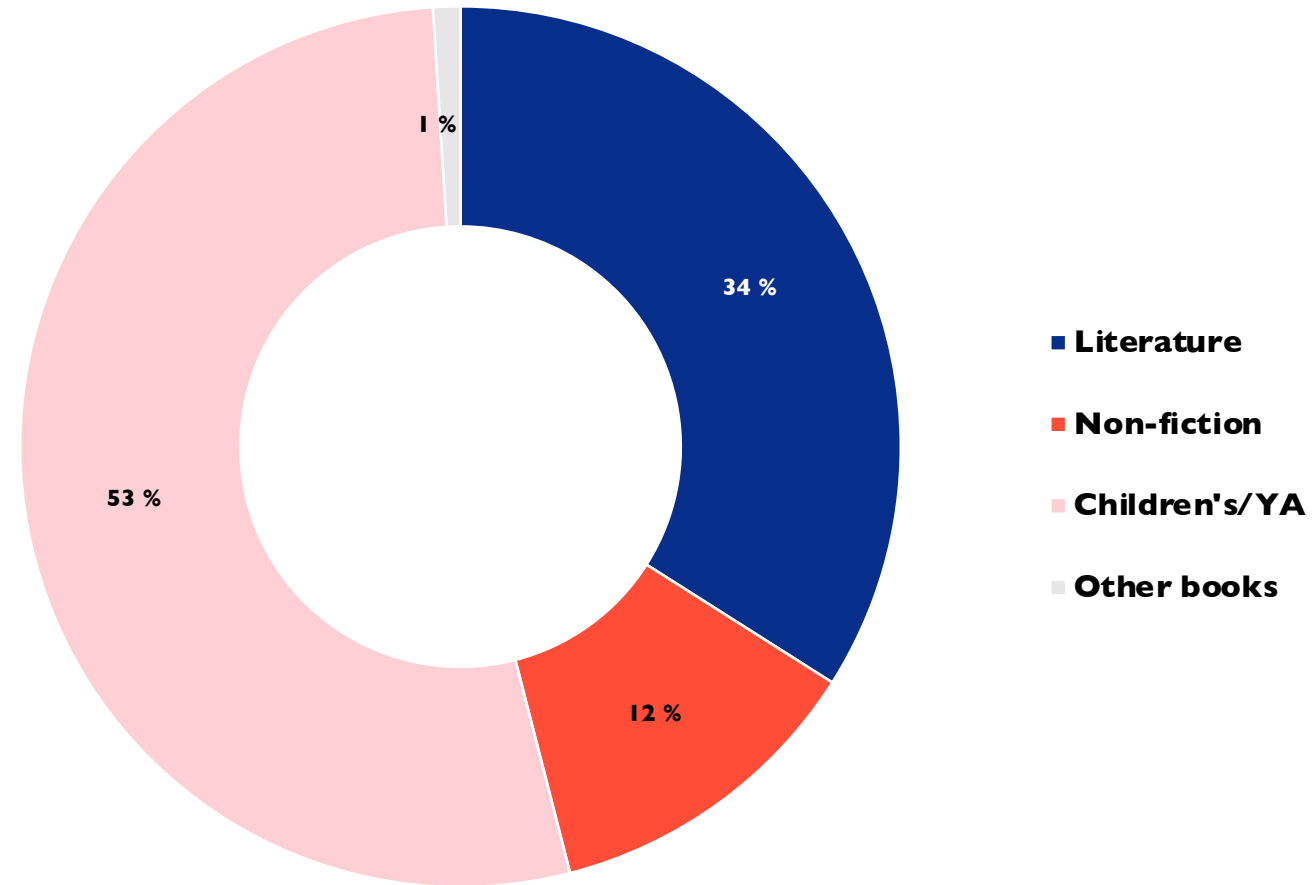
## **STRONG PERFORMANCE FROM CHILDREN'S & YA LITERATURE**

Respondents were asked how their export revenues were distributed among various publishing segments. Here, 'Literature' includes fiction, poetry, essays and crime/thrillers. 'Non-fiction' includes works classified as general non-fiction. 'Other books' includes categories such as comics and graphic novels.

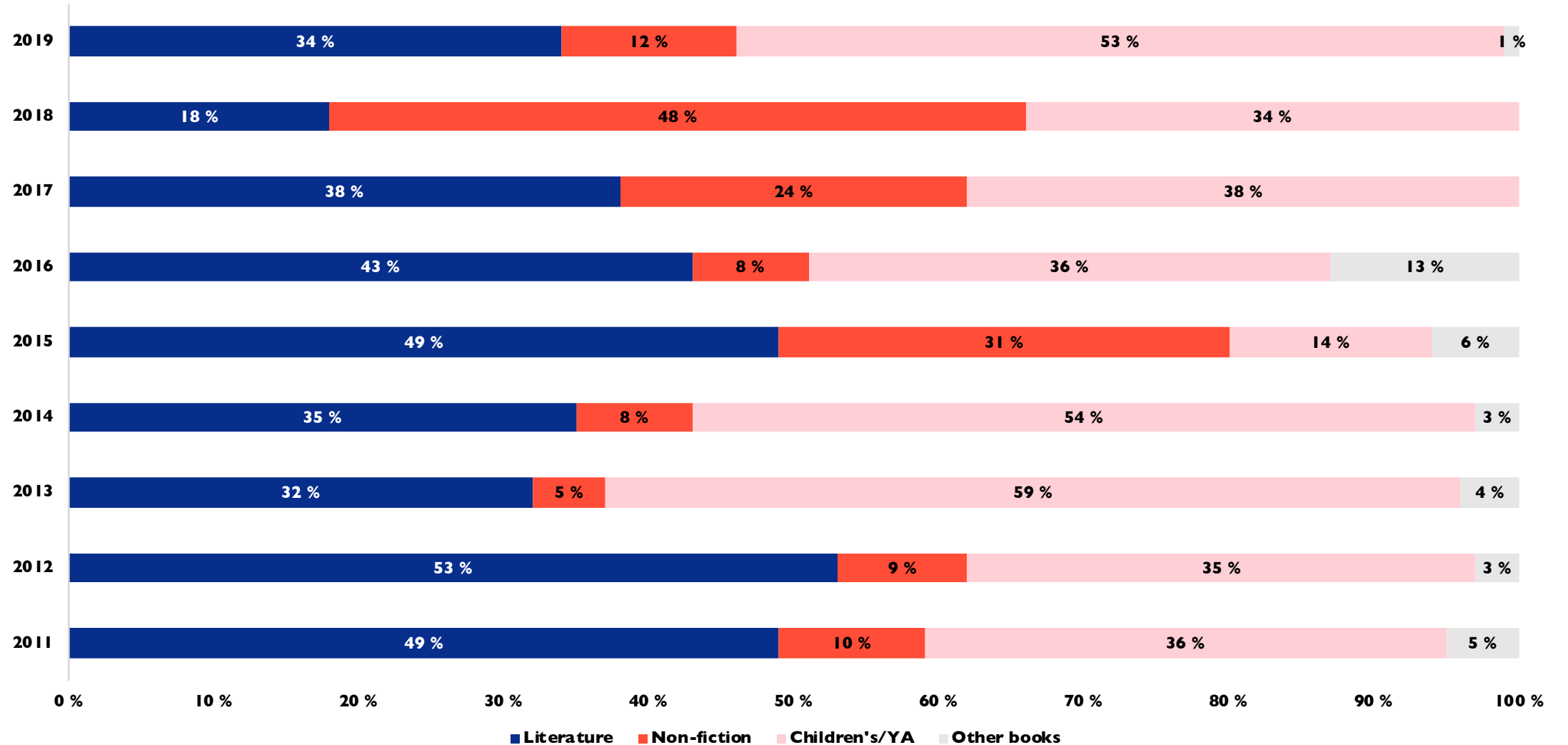
In 2019 children's and young adult (YA) literature accounted for over half (53%) of export revenues. This represents a larger percentage than the previous year. Literature also increased its share of the total over the previous year, while non-fiction decreased as a percentage of the whole.

It is worth remembering that annual distributions among publishing segments can vary due to the exceptional performance of a single title. Even with such variations, children's and YA books have remained in a strong position for several years.

## Gross revenues from literary exports by segment in 2019, %



## Gross revenues from literary exports by segment in 2011–2019, %



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# LITERARY EXPORTS BY COUNTRY

## LITERARY EXPORTS TO 40 COUNTRIES

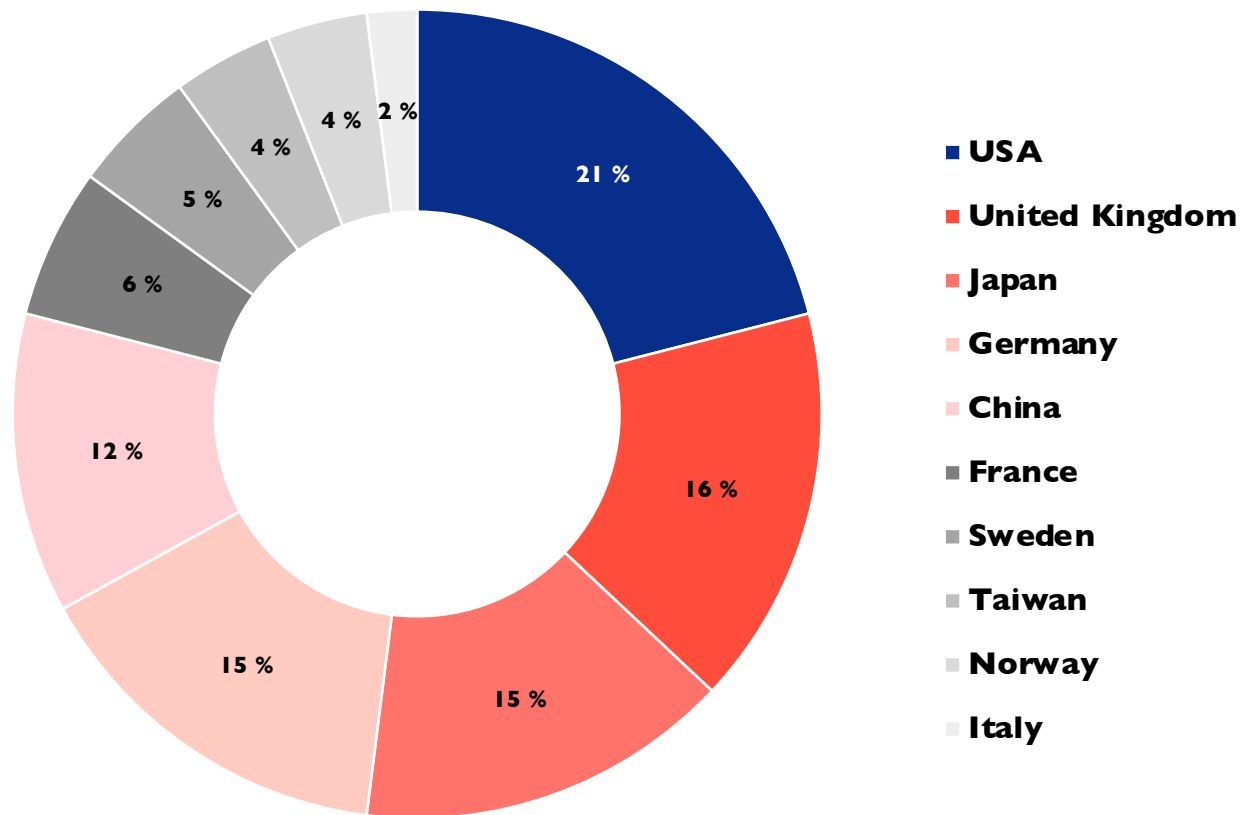
Respondents were asked to state their export revenues and numbers of publishing rights deals for the top 5 countries where they had secured contracts in 2019. They were also asked for the names of other countries where they had secured literary exports.

In 2019 translation rights for Finnish books were sold to a total of **40** countries. Based on overall export revenues, the largest destination country in 2019 was the USA. Revenues received from the USA accounted for at least 12% of total gross revenues. English-language translation rights accounted for over a fifth (21%) of total export revenues.

Total revenues among the top export countries were quite evenly distributed. The numbers of translation rights deals were even more evenly split. According to the questionnaire responses, the largest numbers of rights deals were made with China, Germany and the United Kingdom. There is not a direct relationship between export revenues and numbers of rights deals by country. A good example of this in 2019 is Poland, which was in the Top 5 for numbers of translation rights deals but did not make the Top 10 for gross revenues.

# Top destination countries based on gross revenues\* in 2019, %

\*The percentages relate to the total amount from the Top 10 countries in terms of revenues. These revenues represent 57% of export revenues overall.





## Top destination countries based on numbers of rights deals\* in 2019, %

\*The percentages relate to the total number of deals agreed in the Top 5 countries in terms of rights deals. These deals represent 25% of all deals agreed.

