

Italian Textile Machinery orders fall 5% as export demand remains weak

Domestic orders offered a rare positive signal in early 2026, but Italy's machinery sector remains constrained by hesitant global investment and limited order visibility.

Order intake for Italian textile machinery manufacturers fell 5% year on year in the first quarter of 2026, confirming a difficult start to the year for one of Europe's leading textile technology sectors. The decline was concentrated in foreign markets, where orders dropped 7%, while the domestic market rose 21%, according to ACIMIT, the Association of Italian Textile Machinery Manufacturers.

Domestic recovery, export caution

Compared with the previous quarter, October–December 2025, total order intake increased 18%, suggesting some sequential improvement after a weak end to last year. Even so, the overall orders index remained low at 37.3 points, using 2021 as the base year of 100. Italy's domestic index stood at 35.3 points, while foreign markets recorded 37.6 points.

This gap shows that the sector is not facing a collapse in demand, but a prolonged investment pause. Textile manufacturers in many export markets are still delaying capital expenditure because of weak apparel demand, high financing costs, geopolitical uncertainty and pressure to justify machinery spending through clear productivity, energy or automation gains.

Weaving shows better momentum

ACIMIT said weaving and other manufacturing segments showed relatively stronger signals during the quarter. That is commercially important because weaving machinery demand often reflects medium-term confidence in fabric production, export orders and technical-textile investment.

The order backlog at the end of the first quarter guaranteed about 4.5 months of workload, giving manufacturers some operating visibility but not enough to remove caution. Forecasts for the second quarter point to pessimism in Italy and stability abroad.

Promotion becomes strategic

ACIMIT President Marco Salvadè said the first positive sign in the domestic market was encouraging, but added that international uncertainty and slow institutional action continue to limit companies' ability to plan investments. The association is working with the Italian Trade Agency to strengthen promotional activity in strategic markets and sees ITMA 2027 in Hannover as a major opportunity to relaunch investment interest.

ACIMIT represents around 300 companies, employing about 12,500 people, with machinery production worth approximately €1.9 billion and exports accounting for about 86%. The next signal to watch is whether stable foreign orders become a real recovery before ITMA 2027.