

PEOPLE, INNOVATION, MARKETS, CULTURE AND STRATEGIC OUTLOOK: THIS IS THE FUTURE OF ITALIAN EYEWEAR

AT THE GENERAL MEETING, ANFAO PRESENTED ITS STRATEGY TO SUPPORT GROWTH AND STRENGTHEN THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE EYEWEAR INDUSTRY

Milano, July 16, 2026 – **ANFAO – the Italian Optical Goods Manufacturers' Association** – held on July 14 its General Meeting at Palazzo Flangini, the Association's traditional annual opportunity for member companies to come together to discuss shared objectives and future initiatives.

During the meeting, President **Lorraine Berton**, together with the ANFAO team, presented the Association's strategic vision for supporting the eyewear industry through a period of profound transformation, shaped by shifting economic dynamics, technological innovation, and evolving global markets.

"In a world where change has become the norm, ANFAO's role is not simply to represent companies, but to help them build the future," said President Lorraine Berton. "Today, competitiveness depends not only on the ability to respond to change, but on the ability to anticipate it – helping companies recognize emerging signals, create new opportunities, and build the conditions that will enable our industry to remain a leading force in international markets. And it is precisely with this objective that we must above all recognize the value of people and talent, because they are the true driving force behind every business. We can invest in new technologies, enter new markets, and build new facilities, but without skilled, motivated people who are capable of innovating, no company can truly grow. That is where this General Meeting begins: with the voices of those who are turning these projects into reality."

AN ASSOCIATION INCREASINGLY COMMITTED TO SERVING THE INDUSTRY

Throughout the meeting, ANFAO presented an overview of its principal activities along with the new initiatives that will guide the Association over the coming months. The strategy is built around five key pillars – **people, innovation, markets, culture, and strategic outlook** – designed to help member companies navigate the challenges of an ever-evolving business environment.

PEOPLE

Talent Bridging is ANFAO's new program designed to help eyewear companies attract, develop and retain talent, addressing the evolving challenges of today's labor market.

The initiative will kick off on September 15 with *Talent Magnet*, a workshop focused on enhancing companies' attractiveness, understanding the expectations of younger generations, and developing effective employer branding strategies. Featured speaker will be Max Maiorino, a shoemaker from Saronno who has transformed his age-old craft into a successful business through TikTok and Instagram. On October 27, *Talent Sustain* will explore strategies for developing skills, preserving corporate know-how, and strengthening talent retention. The program will then continue with follow-up sessions designed to support

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participating companies in implementing their action plans and sharing the results. The initiative will conclude during MIDO with a closing event featuring a special guest, along with a certification recognizing participants' experience and the skills acquired.

Distinguished guest **Alessia Godler, Director of Space Applications at Adaptronics, a spin-off of the University of Bologna**, shared her personal and professional journey, explaining how space teaches a valuable lesson: there are no boundaries, only new horizons to explore. She also reflected on a path shaped by curiosity, study, sacrifice and perseverance in a field that remains largely male-dominated, emphasizing that every achievement is earned through hard work and determination – and that tenacity is often the true talent that transforms what seems impossible into a tangible opportunity.

INNOVATION

People and talent were not the only themes at the center of the discussion – innovation also featured prominently. **Open Vision** is the new initiative promoted by ANFAO's Lens Group to strengthen dialogue among opticians, optometrists, ophthalmologists and patients while fostering greater awareness of eye health. Inspired by the experience of Eyevolution, the project will consist of eight podcasts hosted by journalist Nicoletta Carbone, the long-time voice of Radio 24, and distributed through the major streaming platforms.

With regard to training, following the success of its inaugural edition, ANFAO is also renewing its partnership with the **LUISS Business School** for its **Export Management** program, specifically for sector businesses. Offered free of charge, the program includes three training sessions scheduled for September 17 in Belluno, October 8 in Milan and October 27 in Rome. The 2026 edition will focus on the practical application of Artificial Intelligence in internationalization processes, providing companies with practical tools to navigate global markets and strengthen their competitiveness.

MARKETS

ANFAO continues to support the internationalization of member companies and strengthen their presence in global markets through the **Italian Eyewear Exhibition (IEE)** program, developed in partnership with the Italian Trade Agency (ITA). The calendar opens in **Paris** on **September 24** with the second edition of **IEE Paris**, featuring a new format and an expanded hosted-buyer program for professionals from France and neighboring markets. This will be followed, on **October 15 and 16**, by the inaugural edition of **IEE San Paolo**, a new initiative created to foster connections between Italian eyewear companies, Brazilian opticians, and buyers from Central and South America.

From **November 19 to 22**, attention will turn to **Silmo Istanbul**, which returns following the success of last year's edition, reaffirming ANFAO's commitment to a strategic and rapidly evolving market.

Looking ahead, **MIDO 2027**, taking place February 6 to 8, 2027, will once again reinforce its role as the global benchmark event for the eyewear industry, building on the innovation path it has pursued in recent years. Alongside the industry's leading international exhibition, **DaTE** also continues its evolution with a clear and distinctive new identity that has already met with positive feedback. Scheduled for September 12 to 14 at the Salone Margherita in Naples, the

event will provide a valuable opportunity to further develop the project while highlighting the independent and design-driven eyewear segment. DaTE will also benefit from the support of ITA through a hosted-buyer program focused on European markets and a digital communications campaign targeting France, the United Kingdom and Spain.

CULTURE

Culture also plays a central role in ANFAO's strategy, reflected in the connection between eyewear and art through **The Lens of Time**, which will be held from October 13 to 30, 2026, at Palazzo Piacentini on Rome's Via Veneto. This year's edition will also feature a special focus on cinema, with the aim of further developing the project and expanding its content in the lead-up to MIDO 2027.

The same spirit informs **Bella Storia**, the project developed by Venice's M9 Museum as part of its social inclusion initiatives. On July 22, 24 and 25, ANFAO will offer free admission to the museum for all visitors.

STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

Looking beyond the present and developing a strategic outlook that enables businesses to anticipate change has become an essential capability today. This thinking lies behind **Scenari**, ANFAO's new initiative designed to provide entrepreneurs with fresh perspectives and practical tools for understanding the major economic, geopolitical and social shifts reshaping the international landscape. The inaugural event, held in Padua on June 30 with Monica Maggioni and Paolo Magri, offered a particularly stimulating exchange on these issues, confirming the industry's strong interest in opportunities to better understand and interpret today's evolving global landscape.

EXPORTS AND MARKETS: FIRST-QUARTER RESULTS IN AN EVOLVING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Against this backdrop, the ability to interpret global trends and diversify markets has become an increasingly important factor in maintaining the competitiveness of Italian eyewear companies.

During the January-March period, total industry exports reached **€1.34 billion**, down **6.1%** compared with the first quarter of 2025. The slowdown was driven primarily by sunglasses, which fell 7.6%, while optical frames proved more resilient, down just 3.8%.

The U.S. market recorded the sharpest decline. Although the United States remains strategically important for the industry, the downturn reinforces the need to continue diversifying international markets and strengthening the presence of Italian eyewear in high-potential markets.

Having accounted for nearly 30% of the industry's exports in previous years, the U.S. market represented approximately 12% of total exports in the first quarter of 2026, with optical frame exports down 22.4% and the combined optical frames and sunglasses segment down 33.8%.

By contrast, Western Europe continued to perform well. France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom continue to be strategic markets. France remained the industry's second-

largest export market, while Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom all posted positive results. In the optical frames and sunglasses segment, exports increased 6.8% to Germany, 3.6% to Spain and 3.0% to the United Kingdom.

Expansion into Central and Eastern Europe is also compelling, with exports of optical frames and sunglasses to Poland increasing 28.6%. Hungary and Croatia likewise recorded positive growth.

Outside Europe, Hong Kong showed clear signs of recovery, with exports of optical frames and sunglasses up 15.0% while optical frames alone grew 26.9%, reaffirming its role as an important gateway to Asian markets.

Brazil also posted encouraging results, with a 2.5% increase in exports of optical frames and sunglasses, confirming continued demand for Made in Italy products across Latin America, supported in part by the Mercosur agreement.

Taken together, these figures point to an export landscape that is becoming increasingly diversified.

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