

Mixed reception to Italy's easing of virus lockdown

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Italy allowed bookshops and children's clothing retailers to reopen on Tuesday but some business owners chose to stay shut, fearing it was too soon to lift the coronavirus lockdown.

Launderettes and stationery shops were also permitted to reopen on Tuesday as the government sought to gradually lift stringent lockdown measures imposed on March 9.

But not every shop owner rushed to reopen.

"Open in a desert? Why? A bookstore is a place where people interact—opening a business where no one walks by is dangerous from every point of view," said Cristina Di Caio, a bookshop owner in Milan.

Italy is one of the world's worst-hit countries, with more than 20,000 deaths—the second most after the US.

The pandemic and lockdown measures have crippled its economy and brought [daily life](#) to a standstill.

Most of the country's 60 million people have been confined to their homes and most shops other than pharmacies and supermarkets have been shut.

Though the central government said some shops could resume work, officials in hard-hit [northern regions](#) including Lombardy and Piedmont refused to resume business.

Shops there would stay shut until May 3, when the countrywide quarantine is set to expire.

Lombardy is the epicentre of the outbreak, with nearly 11,000 deaths.

Opening shops "is absurd", said the president of Piedmont, Alberto Cirio.

"I'm working on keeping people at home," he said.

"Maintaining discipline is the only way not to waste the sacrifices made up until now."

But in the south, which has seen fewer deaths and infections, some shops welcomed the easing of restrictions.

At a bookshop in the Sicilian city of Syracuse, the usual tourists were gone but some loyal clients stopped by for the opening, entering one at a time.

"It was still like a party," said owner Marilia Di Giovanni. "It's the human dimension that's started back up again."

The World Health Organization has warned countries against opening economies too swiftly to avoid a resurgence of a pandemic that has already killed more than 120,000 globally.

The International Monetary Fund on Tuesday projected the worst global recession in a century and forecast a 9.1 percent drop in Italy's growth this year.

Bookshops were already in difficulty before the shutdown, hurt by competition from online retailers.

Some bookshop owners were angry that they were ordered to close but deliveries of books from online sellers were allowed to continue.

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