

General government expenditure in the EU

Government expenditure accounted for 48.1% of GDP in the EU in 2014

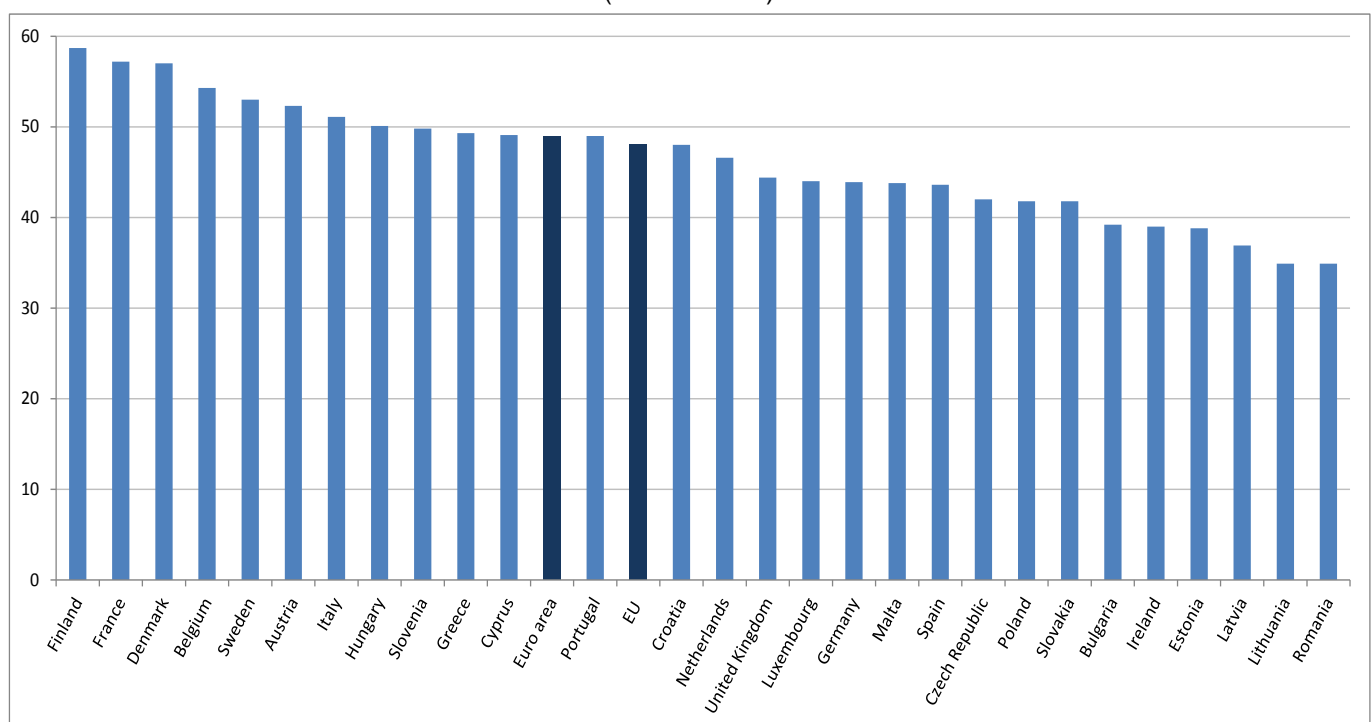
Mainly devoted to social protection

In 2014, total general government expenditure amounted to €6 701 bn in the **European Union**¹ (EU). This represented almost half (48.1%) of EU GDP in 2014, compared with 48.6% in 2013. In the **euro area**¹, the share stood at 49.0% in 2014 (49.4% in 2013). Among EU Member States, general government expenditure varied in 2014 from less than 35% of GDP in **Lithuania** and **Romania** to more than 57% in **Finland**, **France** and **Denmark**.

A detailed breakdown of general government expenditure by main functions² is available for 2013. In the **EU**, the function 'social protection' was by far the most important, accounting for 40.2% of total general government expenditure. The next most important areas in terms of general government expenditure were 'health' (14.8%), 'general public services' such as external affairs and public debt transactions (14.1%), 'education' (10.3%) and 'economic affairs' (8.8%). The functions 'public order and safety' (3.7%), 'defence' (2.9%), 'recreation, culture and religion' (2.2%), 'environmental protection' (1.7%) and 'housing and community amenities' (1.4%) had more limited weights. This data at **EU** level mask however significant differences between the EU Member States regarding both the share and the ranking of each function of general government expenditure.

This information on general government expenditure by function comes from an online [publication](#)³ released by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**.

Total general government expenditure in the EU Member States, 2014
(as % of GDP)



Largest decreases of general government expenditure relative to GDP in Greece and Slovenia

In 2014, total general government expenditure accounted for more than half of GDP in eight EU Member States, with the highest shares being recorded in **Finland** (58.7%), **France** (57.2%) and **Denmark** (57.0%). Conversely, total general government expenditure represented less than 40% of GDP in six Member States: **Lithuania** and **Romania** (both 34.9%), **Latvia** (36.9%), **Estonia** (38.8%), **Ireland** (39.0%) and **Bulgaria** (39.2%).

In 2014, the ratio of general government expenditure to GDP decreased in a majority of EU Member States compared with 2013. The highest increase in the ratio of general government expenditure to GDP was recorded by far in **Cyprus**⁴ (+7.7 percentage points between 2013 and 2014), followed by **Malta** (+1.6 pp), and **Austria** (+1.4 pp). In contrast, significant decreases were registered in **Greece**⁴ (-10.7 pp) and **Slovenia**⁴ (-9.9 pp). Total general government expenditure as percentage of GDP dropped at **EU** level by 0.5 pp in 2014 compared with 2013, and by 0.4 pp in the **euro area**.

Total general government expenditure in the EU Member States, 2014

	in millions of euro	in euro per inhabitant	as % of GDP	Change 2014/2013, in percentage points of GDP
EU ¹	6 701 315	13 153	48.1	-0.5
Euro area ¹	4 961 272	14 617	49.0	-0.4
Belgium	218 585	19 592	54.3	-0.1
Bulgaria	16 486	2 279	39.2	1.0
Czech Republic	65 148	6 191	42.0	0.1
Denmark	146 643	25 987	57.0	-0.1
Germany	1 274 415	15 469	43.9	-0.4
Estonia	7 567	5 751	38.8	0.0
Ireland	72 324	15 672	39.0	-1.7
Greece ⁴	88 371	8 039	49.3	-10.7
Spain	461 124	9 924	43.6	-0.7
France	1 226 481	18 530	57.2	0.2
Croatia	20 684	4 887	48.0	0.3
Italy	826 262	13 591	51.1	0.2
Cyprus ⁴	8 597	10 084	49.1	7.7
Latvia	8 882	4 452	36.9	0.9
Lithuania	12 676	4 328	34.9	-0.6
Luxembourg	20 745	:	44.0	0.5
Hungary	51 782	5 250	50.1	0.3
Malta	3 490	8 171	43.8	1.6
Netherlands	305 424	18 111	46.6	-0.2
Austria	171 936	20 140	52.3	1.4
Poland	172 760	4 489	41.8	-0.4
Portugal	84 729	8 146	49.0	-1.1
Romania	52 306	2 622	34.9	-0.4
Slovenia ⁴	18 565	9 004	49.8	-9.9
Slovakia	31 410	5 797	41.8	0.7
Finland	119 691	21 913	58.7	0.9
Sweden	227 679	23 481	53.0	-0.3
United Kingdom	986 554	15 293	44.4	-1.1
Iceland	5 849	17 959	45.4	1.4
Norway	172 306	33 536	45.7	1.6

The source dataset is available [here](#).

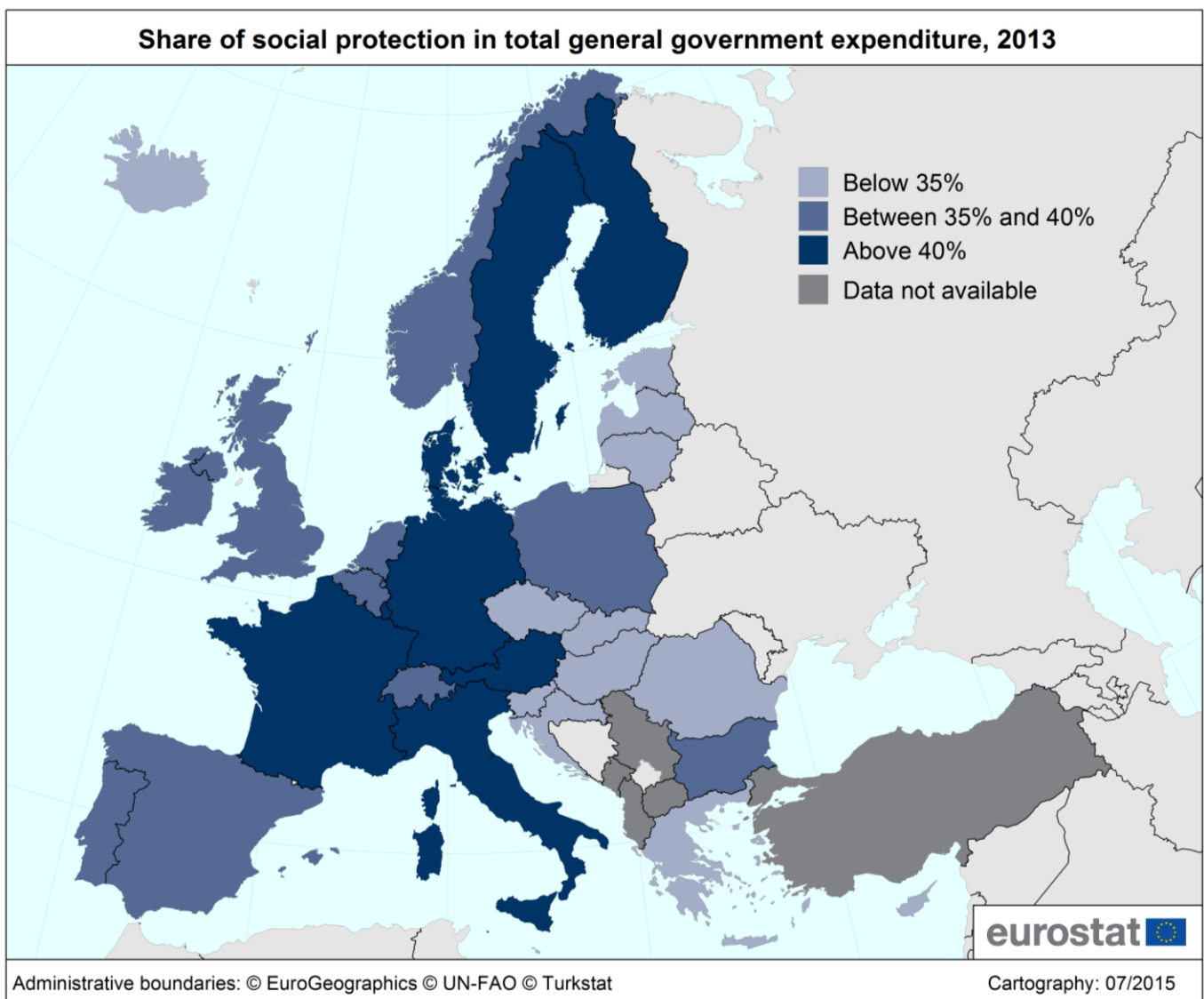
: Data not available

Share of social protection expenditure related to old age highest in Italy

In all EU Member States, social protection represented the most important area of general government expenditure. Its weight varied across EU Member States from 28.6% of total general government expenditure in **Cyprus** to 44.4% in **Luxembourg**. Eight EU Member States devoted more than 40% of their expenditure to social protection.

Social protection expenditure can be further broken down into nine detailed groups. The group 'old age', which includes pensions, made up the largest part of social protection expenditure in all EU Member States. More than a quarter of total general government expenditure was devoted in 2013 to old age in **Italy** (27.6%), **Bulgaria** (25.9%), **Luxembourg** (25.8%), **Austria** (25.3%) and **Romania** (25.1%). 'Old age' accounted for 21.4% of total general government expenditure in the **EU**, and for 22.0% in the **euro area**.

The group 'sickness and disability' represented a notable share in the **Netherlands** (10.1% of total general government expenditure in 2013), **Croatia** (9.5%) and **Denmark** (9.0%), while the share of 'family and children' related expenditure was highest in **Denmark** (8.8% of total general government expenditure) and **Luxembourg** (8.0%). Expenditure for 'unemployment' was highest in **Ireland** (7.6% of total general government expenditure), followed by **Spain** (6.7%), **Denmark** (5.9%), **Belgium**, **Germany** and the **Netherlands** (all 4.3%).



Slovakia with highest share of government health expenditure, Greece for economic affairs

Member States differ somewhat in the second most important area of general government expenditure. Expenditure related to health came second in eleven EU Member States: **Slovakia** (health accounted for 18.3% of total general government expenditure in 2013), the **Netherlands** (17.7%), the **Czech Republic** and **Ireland** (both 17.4%), the **United Kingdom** (16.7%), **Lithuania** (15.9%), **Germany** (15.8%), **Austria** (15.6%), **Denmark** (15.3%), **Finland** (14.5%) and **France** (14.2%).

On the contrary, general public services, which include external affairs and public debt transactions, represented the second most important type of general government expenditure in **Cyprus** (24.4%), **Hungary** (20.9%), **Croatia** (18.8%), **Portugal** (17.9%), **Italy** (17.5%), **Malta** (16.5%), **Belgium** and **Spain** (both 15.5%), **Sweden** (14.6%) and **Poland** (13.5%).

Economic affairs expenditure made up the second largest share of general government expenditure in **Greece** (25.5%) and **Slovenia** (24.2%) mainly driven by one-off support to financial institutions, as well as in **Romania** (17.5%) and **Bulgaria** (13.2%), while it was education in **Latvia** (15.7%), **Estonia** (15.4%) and **Luxembourg** (12.7%).

Share of education expenditure varied by one to two across EU Member States

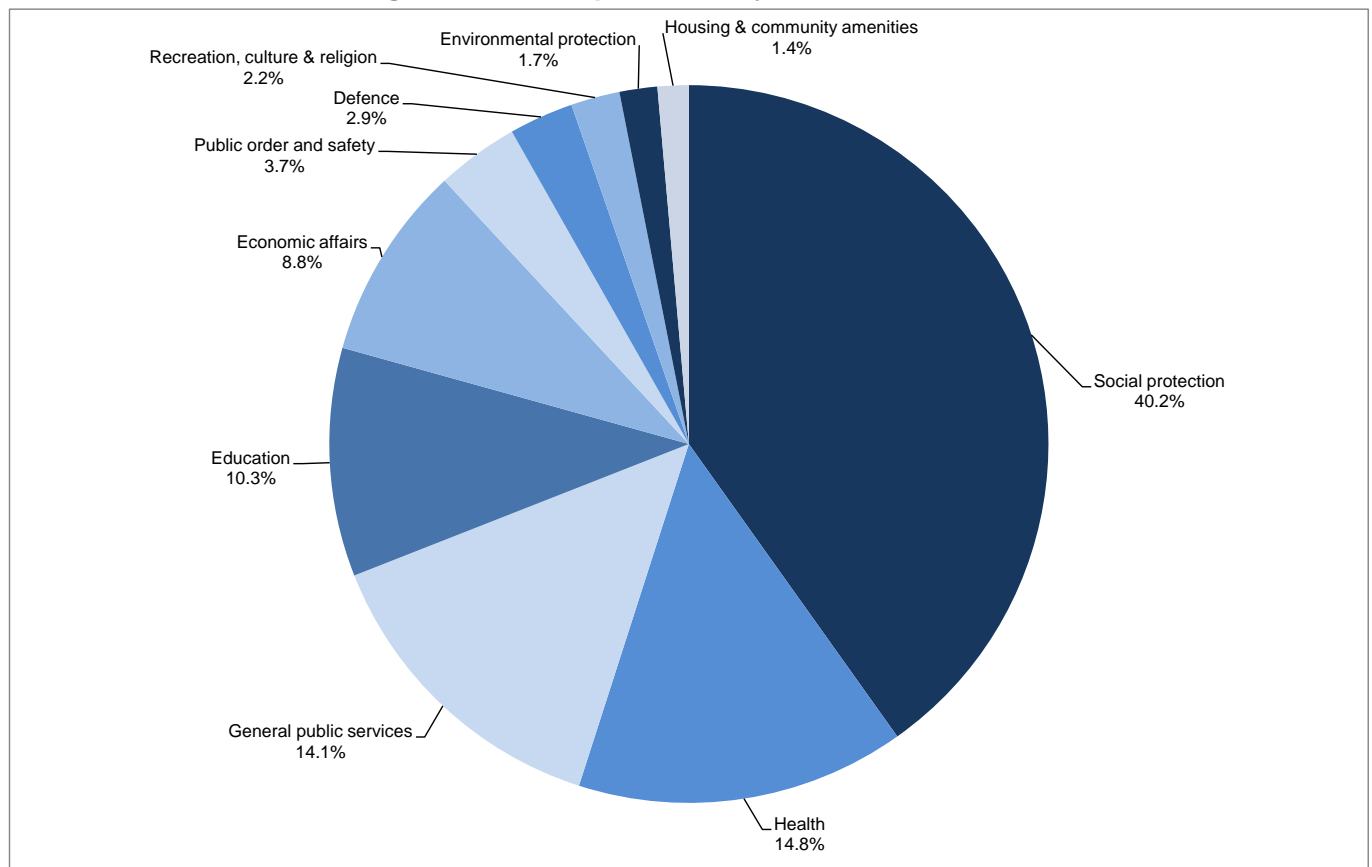
With a share above 15% of total general government expenditure in 2013, **Cyprus** (15.7%) and the three Baltic EU Member States - **Latvia** and **Lithuania** (both 15.7%) as well as **Estonia** (15.4%) - recorded the highest proportions devoted to education among EU Member States, while **Greece** (7.6%), **Italy** (8.0%) and **Romania** (8.1%) had the lowest.

The area 'culture, recreation and religion' accounted for less than 3.5% of general government expenditure in every EU Member State, except **Estonia** (5.4%), **Latvia** (4.2%) and **Hungary** (3.7%).

The share of general government expenditure related to environmental protection was generally limited across EU Member States, with the notable exceptions of **Malta** and the **Netherlands** (both 3.2%).

The share of 'public order and safety' expenditure in total government expenditure was higher in **Slovakia** (8.0%), **Bulgaria** (7.0%) and **Romania** (6.3%) than in other EU Member States, while for 'defence' the **United Kingdom** (5.0%), **Estonia** (4.7%), **Poland** (3.9%), **Cyprus** (3.8%) and **Greece** (3.6%) registered the highest proportions.

General government expenditure by function in the EU, 2013



General government expenditure in the EU Member States by function, 2013
(as % of total government expenditure)

	General public services	Defence	Public order & safety	Economic affairs	Environmental protection	Housing & community amenities	Health	Culture, recreation & religion	Education	Social protection	of which:					
											Sickness & Disability	Old age	Survivors	Family & children	Unemployment	Others
EU¹	14.1	2.9	3.7	8.8	1.7	1.4	14.8	2.2	10.3	40.2	5.8	21.4	2.9	3.5	3.2	3.4
Euro area¹	14.3	2.5	3.5	9.0	1.7	1.4	14.7	2.2	9.7	41.0	5.5	22.0	3.6	3.3	3.8	2.7
Belgium	15.5	1.7	3.4	12.2	1.8	0.6	14.6	2.4	11.8	36.1	5.1	16.2	3.5	4.5	4.3	2.7
Bulgaria	10.9	3.2	7.0	13.2	2.4	3.5	12.1	2.2	9.8	35.7	0.7	25.9	:	6.4	0.2	2.5
Czech Republic	11.1	1.8	4.2	14.3	2.5	2.0	17.4	2.7	12.3	31.7	5.2	18.9	1.4	3.2	0.6	2.4
Denmark	13.6	2.3	1.8	6.3	0.7	0.5	15.3	3.2	12.3	43.9	9.0	14.6	0.0	8.8	5.9	5.6
Germany	14.3	2.4	3.5	7.5	1.3	0.9	15.8	1.9	9.7	42.6	6.7	20.6	4.2	3.5	4.3	3.3
Estonia	10.3	4.7	4.9	12.5	1.7	1.4	13.0	5.4	15.4	30.7	5.8	17.4	0.2	4.0	2.6	0.8
Ireland	16.5	1.0	3.9	7.5	1.6	1.6	17.4	1.8	10.2	38.6	7.8	10.2	2.6	6.4	7.6	4.1
Greece	16.3	3.6	3.1	25.5	1.4	0.5	8.6	1.1	7.6	32.4	2.5	24.3	2.5	1.1	1.5	0.4
Spain*	15.5	2.1	4.5	10.0	1.9	1.0	13.6	2.6	9.1	39.7	5.2	19.8	5.3	1.4	6.7	1.4
France	11.9	3.1	2.9	8.7	1.8	2.4	14.2	2.6	9.6	42.9	5.0	23.6	2.8	4.4	3.4	3.8
Croatia*	18.5	2.9	4.6	12.9	0.9	2.1	14.3	3.1	10.6	30.1	9.3	12.8	2.7	3.5	0.8	1.1
Italy	17.5	2.3	3.8	8.2	1.8	1.4	14.1	1.4	8.0	41.3	3.5	27.6	5.4	2.0	2.3	0.5
Cyprus	24.4	3.8	5.2	7.0	1.1	4.6	7.4	2.2	15.7	28.6	1.3	13.1	3.1	3.3	3.2	4.6
Latvia	13.2	2.4	5.2	13.0	1.8	3.3	10.0	4.2	15.7	31.2	5.1	20.8	0.0	2.3	1.1	2.0
Lithuania	14.9	2.8	4.7	9.8	1.3	0.7	15.9	2.3	15.7	32.0	8.0	16.3	1.1	2.8	1.3	2.7
Luxembourg	11.5	0.8	2.3	9.5	2.6	1.6	11.9	2.6	12.7	44.4	5.2	25.8	0.0	8.0	3.3	2.0
Hungary	20.9	1.0	4.2	13.7	1.8	1.6	10.4	3.7	9.5	33.3	6.9	16.0	2.6	4.3	0.9	2.6
Malta	16.5	1.6	3.3	12.0	3.2	0.8	13.6	2.1	13.9	32.9	3.5	19.5	4.0	2.5	1.4	2.0
Netherlands	11.0	2.5	4.2	8.2	3.2	1.1	17.7	3.4	11.8	36.7	10.1	14.7	0.3	2.2	4.3	5.2
Austria	14.2	1.2	2.6	11.1	1.0	0.7	15.6	1.9	9.8	41.9	4.0	25.3	3.0	4.7	2.8	2.2
Poland	13.5	3.9	5.3	9.6	1.8	1.7	10.9	2.5	12.5	38.3	6.2	22.0	4.4	3.0	1.4	1.2
Portugal	17.9	2.1	4.4	6.7	0.8	1.4	13.3	2.0	13.5	37.8	3.0	23.8	3.7	2.3	3.2	1.8
Romania	14.0	2.2	6.3	17.5	2.1	3.3	11.4	2.5	8.1	32.6	2.4	25.1	0.2	2.3	0.5	2.0
Slovenia	11.3	1.6	3.6	24.2	1.2	1.2	11.6	3.0	10.9	31.4	4.2	17.2	2.7	3.6	1.6	2.2
Slovakia*	13.4	3.1	8.0	7.9	2.2	1.7	18.3	3.1	12.2	30.1	5.3	15.9	2.2	3.6	0.6	2.5
Finland	14.4	2.6	2.4	8.2	0.4	0.7	14.5	2.5	11.2	43.1	7.9	20.8	1.4	5.8	4.0	3.3
Sweden	14.6	2.8	2.6	8.1	0.6	1.4	13.1	2.0	12.4	42.3	8.6	22.7	0.7	4.8	2.9	2.7
United Kingdom	12.5	5.0	4.8	6.8	1.8	1.5	16.7	1.7	12.0	37.2	6.2	18.9	0.1	3.7	0.6	7.6
Iceland	18.6	0.1	3.2	11.0	1.2	1.3	16.8	7.4	17.1	23.2	6.6	5.6	0.0	5.4	2.2	3.4
Norway	9.7	3.1	2.3	10.6	1.9	1.6	17.0	3.1	11.1	39.7	13.9	14.0	0.5	7.5	0.8	3.0
Switzerland	11.7	3.0	4.9	12.3	2.2	0.6	6.5	2.5	17.8	38.6	c	c	c	c	c	c

The source dataset is available [here](#).

* Spain, Croatia and Slovakia: data are provisional.

Figures may not add up due to rounding.

c: confidential

1. The European Union (EU28) includes Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
The euro area (EA19) includes Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Finland.
2. The Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) classifies government expenditure into ten main divisions (known as the 'COFOG I level' breakdown): general public services; defence; public order and safety; economic affairs; environmental protection; housing and community affairs; health; recreation, culture and religion; education; social protection. These divisions are further broken down into 69 groups (COFOG II level).
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/nomenclatures/index.cfm?TargetUrl=LST_NOM_DTL&StrNom=COFOG_99&StrLanguageCode=EN&IntPcKey=&StrLayoutCode=HIERARCHIC
3. **Eurostat**, Statistics Explained article "**Government expenditure by function - COFOG**", available on the Eurostat website: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_by_function_%E2%80%93_COFOG
4. The year-on-year change of general government total expenditure in percentage points of GDP can be influenced by one-off events such as disposals of non-financial non-produced assets, capital injections treated as capital transfers notably to support financial institutions as well as changes in fiscal policy. Details by country can be found on [Statistics Explained](#).

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