

189/2018 - 11 December 2018

Self-employment in 2017

More than 1 in 5 self-employed in the EU had seized a suitable opportunity to run their own business

Around 30% of self-employed reported no difficulties in their work

In 2017, in the **European Union (EU)**, there were more than 228 million employed people, and about 33 million of them were self-employed. Self-employed people in the EU reported several reasons for becoming self-employed in the current job: suitable opportunity (23%), continuation of the family business (16%), usual practice in the field (15%), flexible work hours (11%), no job found as employee (11%) and request by former employer (2%).

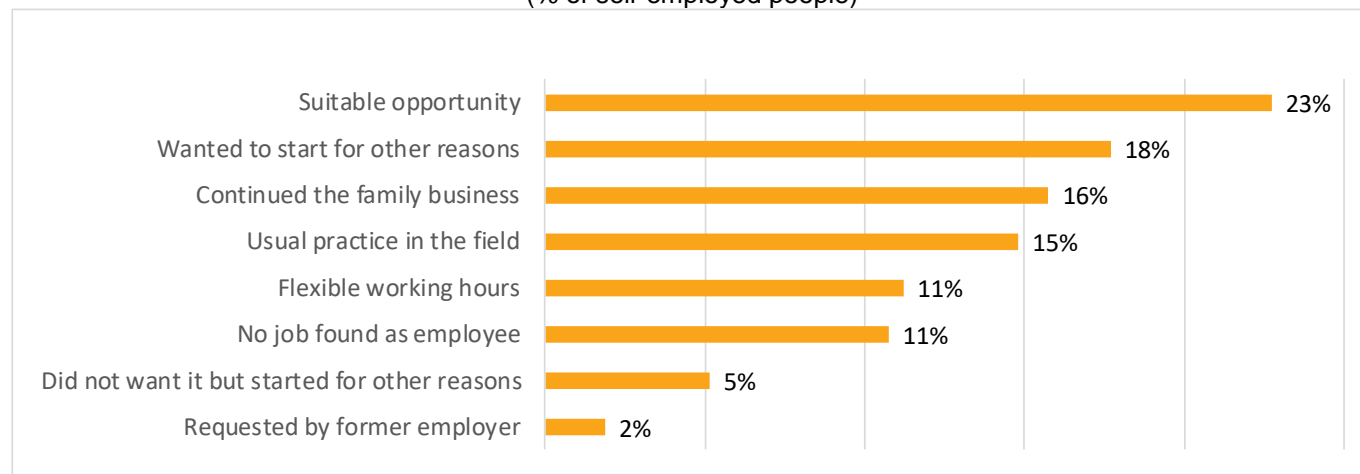
There is a slight difference with regard to reasons to become self-employed reported by male and female self-employed in the EU. More women than men followed the usual practice in the field (16% of female self-employed vs 14% male self-employed) and more women than men opted for flexible work hours (14% vs 10%).

As the main difficulties, the self-employed report high administrative burden (13%) and periods of having no customer, no assignments or projects to work on (12%), delayed payments or non-payments (12%), periods of financial hardship (9%), lack of influence on price settings (8%) and lack of income in case of illness (8%). Almost one third of them reported not facing difficulties (28%).

In 2017, in the EU, 77% of the self-employed had two and more clients where none was dominant, 18% of self-employed people in the EU depended on a dominant client and 4% had no client in the last 12 months.

These selected findings, issued by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**, come from a special data collection from the 2017 European Labour Force Survey ad hoc module on self-employment, presented in a [Statistics Explained](#) article.

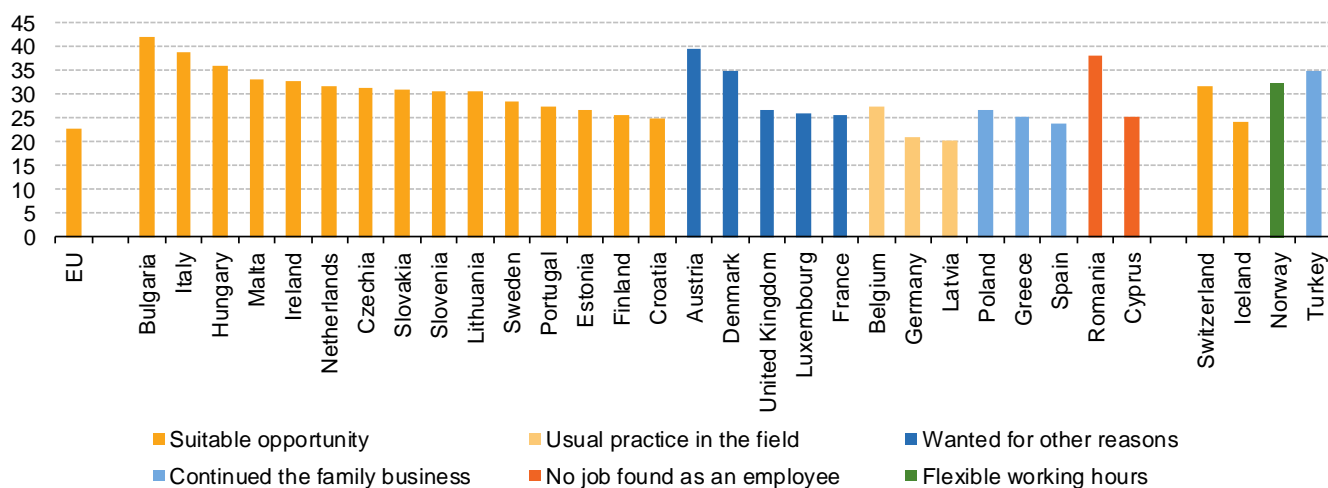
Main reason for becoming self-employed, 2017, EU
(% of self-employed people)



Starting a business as a response to suitable opportunity prevails in most countries, with the highest share in Bulgaria, Italy and Hungary

In fifteen EU Member States, “suitable opportunity” was most frequently mentioned as the reason for becoming self-employed, with the largest share in **Bulgaria** (42%), **Italy** (39%) and **Hungary** (36%). In three countries - **Belgium** (28%), **Germany** (21%) and **Latvia** (20%) - the most frequent reason was “usual practice in the field”. In another three - **Poland** (27%), **Greece** (25%) and **Spain** (24%) - “continuation of family business” was predominant. “No job found as an employee” was noted as the most frequent reason in **Romania** (38%) and **Cyprus** (25%). In five countries - **Austria** (40%), **Denmark** (35%), the **United Kingdom** (27%), **Luxembourg** and **France** (both 26%) – the self-employed wanted to run their own business for “other reason”.

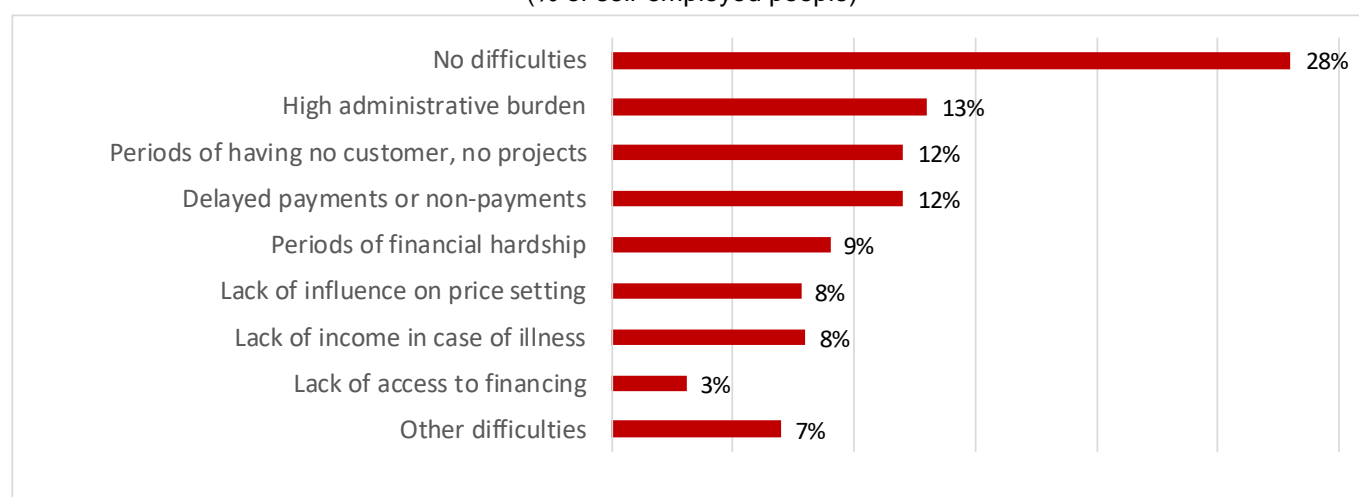
Major reason by country for becoming self-employed, 2017
(% of self-employed)



More than 40% of self-employed in Czechia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom reported no difficulties in their work

In the EU, 28% of the self-employed reported facing no difficulties working as self-employed in the last 12 months.

Main difficulty experienced by self-employed within last 12 months, 2017, EU
(% of self-employed people)

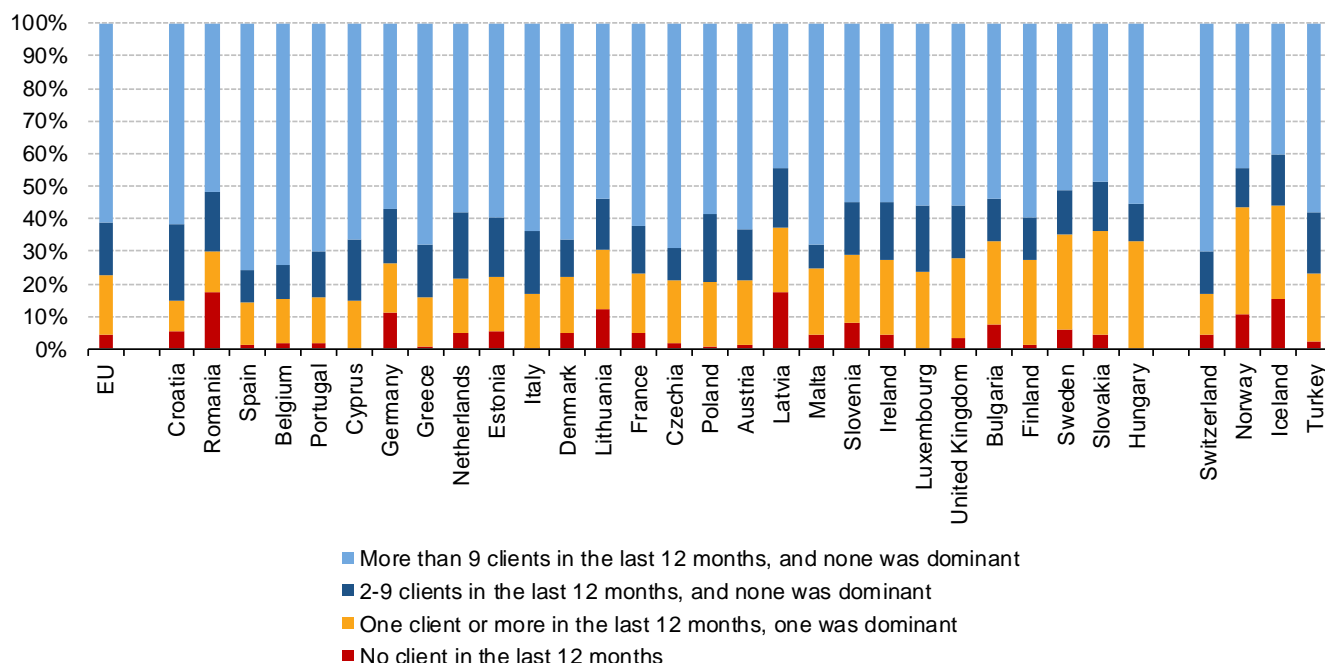


In twenty-four EU Member States, “no difficulty” was most frequently mentioned as experienced when self-employed, with the largest share in **Czechia** (44%), the **Netherlands** (42%), the **United Kingdom** (41%), **Sweden** and **Germany** (both 40%). In three countries - **Estonia** (30%), **Cyprus** (24%) and **Greece** (23%) - the most often mentioned burden was “periods of financial hardship”. In **Italy** (26%), the main reported difficulty was “high administrative burden”.

The share of self-employed not depending on a dominant client largest in Croatia, smallest in Hungary

In the EU, more than 4 in 5 self-employed do not depend on a dominant client. In all EU Member States, the share of self-employed not depending on a dominant client is higher than 60%. Thirteen countries are above the EU average (82%), with the largest share in **Croatia** (91%), **Romania** (88%), **Spain** and **Belgium** (both 87%). **Hungary** recorded the smallest share of self-employed not depending on a dominant client (67%). Some self-employed reported having had no clients in the last 12 months: at the EU level the share is 4% while the largest share of self-employed serving no client in the last 12 months were observed in **Latvia** and **Romania** (both 18%).

Self-employed persons by number and importance of clients in the last 12 months, 2017
(%)



Countries ranked according to increasing share of self-employed persons with one dominant client

Geographical information

The **European Union (EU)** includes Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, 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.

Methods and definitions

The European Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a large sample survey among private households in Europe and an important source for European statistics about the situation and trends in the EU labour market. The topic of the 2017 ad hoc module was self-employment. The European Labour Force Survey (LFS) samples from the usual resident population. This means that newly arrived migrants and migrants who stay less than one year are normally not captured by the survey.

For more information

Eurostat [database](#) on LFS ad hoc module on self-employment

Eurostat [Statistics Explained](#) article on self-employment in 2017

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Main reason for becoming self-employed, 2017

(% of self-employed people)

| | suitable opportunity | wanted to start for other reasons | continued the family business | usual practice in the field | flexible working hours | no job found as employee | did not want but started for other reasons | requested by former employer |
|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| EU | 23 | 18 | 16 | 15 | 11 | 11 | 5 | 2 |
| Belgium | 21 | 13 | 14 | 28 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| Bulgaria | 42 | 6 | 4 | 19 | 5 | 20 | 2* | : |
| Czechia | 31 | 10 | 4 | 28 | 11 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| Denmark | 27 | 35 | 4 | 13 | 12 | 3* | 4 | 3* |
| Germany | 16 | 20 | 10 | 21 | 18 | 9 | 5 | 2 |
| Estonia | 27 | 12 | : | 18 | 23 | 9 | 6* | : |
| Ireland | 33 | 8 | 24 | 15 | 11 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Greece | 17 | 15 | 25 | 21 | 1 | 13 | 4 | 3 |
| Spain | 23 | 13 | 24 | 14 | 6 | 13 | 6 | 1 |
| France | 18 | 26 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 7 | 8 | : |
| Croatia | 25 | 13* | 23 | 4* | 4* | 23 | 6* | : |
| Italy | 39 | 8 | 24 | 7 | 8 | 10 | 1 | 2 |
| Cyprus | 23 | 8 | 9 | 20 | 8 | 25 | 4 | 2* |
| Latvia | 15 | 16 | 5* | 20 | 14 | 20 | 9 | : |
| Lithuania | 31 | 15 | 4* | 19 | 12 | 14 | : | : |
| Luxembourg | 22* | 26 | : | 22* | : | : | : | : |
| Hungary | 36 | 3 | 9 | 21 | 20 | 8 | 1 | 2 |
| Malta | 33 | 7 | 20 | 20 | 8 | 7 | 4* | : |
| Netherlands | 32 | 12 | 9 | 9 | 20 | 6 | 12 | 0* |
| Austria | 18 | 40 | 25 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 2* | : |
| Poland | 8 | 25 | 27 | 13 | 9 | 10 | 5 | 3 |
| Portugal | 28 | 17 | 17 | 13 | 3 | 15 | 6 | : |
| Romania | 7 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 8 | 38 | 10 | : |
| Slovenia | 31 | 11 | 26 | 7* | 6* | 13 | 4* | 3* |
| Slovakia | 31 | 1 | 3 | 26 | 4 | 18 | 7 | 9 |
| Finland | 26 | 18 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| Sweden | 29 | 26 | 10 | 8 | 17 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| United Kingdom | 20 | 27 | 7 | 18 | 15 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| Iceland | 24 | 23 | : | 14 | 22 | : | : | : |
| Norway | 11 | 18 | 14 | 13 | 32 | 3* | 7 | 2* |
| Switzerland | 32 | 26 | 14 | 7 | 12 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| Turkey | 25 | 0 | 35 | 14 | 4 | 16 | 4 | 2 |

The source dataset can be found [here](#).

* Low reliability data due to high non-response rate

: Data not available because of very low reliability

Percentages exclude non-response

Main difficulty experienced when self-employed, 2017

(% of self-employed people)

| | no difficulties | high administrative burden | periods of having no customer, no project | delayed payments or non-payments | periods of financial hardship | lack of influence on price setting | lack of income in case of illness | lack of access to financing | other reasons |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| EU | 28 | 13 | 12 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 7 |
| Belgium | 32 | 28 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 10 |
| Bulgaria | 25 | 9 | 21 | 12 | 5 | 21 | : | 4 | : |
| Czechia | 44 | 22 | 3 | 13 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1* | 6 |
| Denmark | 26 | 16 | 8 | 9 | 12 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 15 |
| Germany | 39 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 14 | 2 | 5 |
| Estonia | 25 | : | 10 | 11 | 30 | 5* | 5* | 3* | 5* |
| Ireland | 33 | 7 | 8 | 13 | 11 | 6 | 14 | 4 | 5 |
| Greece | 8 | 8 | 15 | 15 | 23 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 7 |
| Spain | 29 | 3 | 14 | 12 | 8 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 15 |
| France | 26 | 18 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 9 |
| Croatia | 24 | 16* | 12* | 13* | 9* | 14* | 4* | 5* | 2* |
| Italy | 10 | 26 | 22 | 20 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| Cyprus | 23 | 2* | 23 | 8 | 24 | 2* | 4 | 1* | 15 |
| Latvia | 21 | 19 | 22 | 6 | 14 | 7 | : | 4* | 6 |
| Lithuania | 32 | 5 | 23 | : | 17 | : | 11 | 4* | 3* |
| Luxembourg | 28 | : | : | 15* | 12* | : | : | : | 12* |
| Hungary | 38 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 9 |
| Malta | 29 | 6 | 9 | 16 | 10 | 4* | 12 | 4* | 9 |
| Netherlands | 42 | 8 | 9 | 15 | 7 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Austria | 31 | 18 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 20 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Poland | 23 | 14 | 8 | 7 | 11 | 23 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| Portugal | 26 | 8 | 21 | 19 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| Romania | 28 | 5 | 14 | 4 | 17 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| Slovenia | 28 | 5* | 10 | 14 | 2* | 15 | 19 | 2* | 4* |
| Slovakia | 24 | 23 | 6 | 12 | 17 | 5 | 11 | 1 | : |
| Finland | 21 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 13 | 17 | 4 | 2 | 8 |
| Sweden | 40 | 14 | 5 | 4 | 12 | 6 | 5 | 2* | 10 |
| United Kingdom | 41 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 7 | 5 | 12 | 2 | 5 |
| Iceland | 26 | 17 | 6 | 6 | 17 | 8 | : | 6 | 9 |
| Norway | 27 | 12 | 9 | 5 | 11 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 15 |
| Switzerland | 31 | 16 | 6 | 10 | 6 | 11 | 4 | 3 | 12 |
| Turkey | 11 | 3 | 21 | 12 | 22 | 12 | 4 | 14 | 2 |

The source dataset can be found [here](#).

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: Data not available because of very low reliability

Percentages exclude non-response

Self-employed persons by number and importance of clients in the last 12 months, 2017

(in thousands and % of self-employed people)

| | no client in the last 12 months | | one client or more in the last 12 months, one was dominant | | 2-9 clients in the last 12 months and none was dominant | | more than 9 clients in the last 12 months and none was dominant | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| | thousands | % | thousands | % | thousands | % | thousands | % |
| EU | 1 377 | 4 | 5 761 | 18 | 5 156 | 16 | 19 420 | 61 |
| Belgium | 12 | 2 | 83 | 13 | 66 | 11 | 462 | 74 |
| Bulgaria | 25 | 7 | 89 | 26 | 46 | 13 | 188 | 54 |
| Czechia | 16 | 2 | 162 | 19 | 88 | 10 | 586 | 69 |
| Denmark | 10 | 5 | 39 | 18 | 25 | 11 | 145 | 66 |
| Germany | 411 | 11 | 562 | 15 | 633 | 17 | 2 128 | 57 |
| Estonia | 3* | 5* | 11 | 17 | 12 | 18 | 39 | 60 |
| Ireland | 12 | 4 | 61 | 23 | 47 | 18 | 146 | 55 |
| Greece | 7 | 1 | 165 | 15 | 176 | 16 | 735 | 68 |
| Spain | 42 | 1 | 368 | 13 | 287 | 10 | 2 196 | 76 |
| France | 147 | 5 | 532 | 18 | 430 | 15 | 1 837 | 62 |
| Croatia | 10* | 5* | 17* | 9* | 43 | 23 | 114 | 62 |
| Italy | 14 | 0 | 837 | 17 | 957 | 19 | 3 182 | 64 |
| Cyprus | : | : | 7 | 15 | 8 | 19 | 30 | 66 |
| Latvia | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 18 | 18 | 42 | 44 |
| Lithuania | 19 | 12 | 28 | 18 | 25 | 16 | 85 | 54 |
| Luxembourg | : | : | 4* | 22* | 3* | 19* | 9 | 52 |
| Hungary | : | : | 138 | 33 | 49 | 12 | 232 | 55 |
| Malta | 1* | 4* | 7 | 21 | 2 | 7 | 23 | 68 |
| Netherlands | 68 | 5 | 220 | 17 | 267 | 20 | 771 | 58 |
| Austria | 6* | 1* | 91 | 20 | 75 | 16 | 293 | 63 |
| Poland | 26 | 1 | 522 | 19 | 562 | 21 | 1 575 | 59 |
| Portugal | 10 | 2 | 87 | 14 | 86 | 14 | 427 | 70 |
| Romania | 305 | 18 | 216 | 12 | 319 | 18 | 903 | 52 |
| Slovenia | 9* | 8* | 24 | 21 | 18 | 16 | 62 | 55 |
| Slovakia | 16 | 4 | 120 | 32 | 58 | 15 | 183 | 49 |
| Finland | 4* | 1* | 66 | 26 | 35 | 14 | 154 | 59 |
| Sweden | 25 | 6 | 122 | 29 | 57 | 14 | 216 | 51 |
| United Kingdom | 160 | 3 | 1 163 | 25 | 764 | 16 | 2 657 | 56 |
| Iceland | 3 | 16 | 6 | 29 | 3 | 16 | 9 | 40 |
| Norway | 17 | 11 | 53 | 33 | 19 | 12 | 72 | 44 |
| Switzerland | 27 | 4 | 76 | 13 | 79 | 13 | 422 | 70 |
| Turkey | 125 | 2 | 1 290 | 21 | 1 148 | 19 | 3 538 | 58 |

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Percentages exclude non-response