

EU sustainable development indicators at regional level

Statistics Explained

*Data extracted in April 2026.
Planned article update: June 2027.*

Highlights

This article is a part of a [set of statistical articles](#), which are based on the Eurostat publication '[Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context — 2026 edition](#)'. This report is the tenth edition of Eurostat's series of monitoring reports on sustainable development, which provide a quantitative assessment of progress of the EU towards the SDGs in an EU context.

[Leave no one behind](#) is one of the core principles of the 2030 Agenda. It emphasises the need to reduce the various forms of inequalities that exist within and among countries. Inequalities undermine the potential of specific regions, population groups and individuals and their connection to the sustainable development goals (SDGs). As such, while comparing EU countries with each other yields interesting insights, such comparisons sometimes mask differences at the smaller, regional, scale. Moreover, regions play a crucial role in delivering the SDGs because they can tailor the implementation actions to local needs, contexts and challenges.

This section takes an in-depth look at disparities across European regions for six selected indicators from the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. It does so by showcasing differences at the NUTS 2 or NUTS 3 regional level within and across countries¹. More data and analyses at regional level can be found in [Eurostat's regional yearbook](#), in the [Regions in Europe](#) interactive publication as well as in Eurostat's [statistical atlas](#).

Tertiary educational attainment

In 2025, 44.8% of the EU population aged 25 to 34 had attained tertiary education, which means the EU had almost reached its 2030 target of raising the share to at least 45%. Across the EU, tertiary educational attainment rates for this age group ranged from around 66% in Ireland and Luxembourg to less than 25% in Romania (see the analysis in the chapter on [SDG 4 'Quality education'](#)).

More than a third of EU regions had tertiary educational attainment rates above the 45% EU target in 2025

Across the EU, 38.4% of NUTS2 regions had tertiary educational attainment rates above 45%. The highest tertiary educational attainment rate in 2025 was reported in the Lithuanian capital region 'Sostinės regionas' with 77.4%, followed by the French capital region 'Ile de France' with 72.7% and the Irish 'Eastern and Midland' region with 70.4%. Also at the top of the list, with more than two-thirds of the population aged 25 to 34 having attained tertiary education, were 'Warszawski stołeczny' (Poland), 'País Vasco' (Spain), 'Prov. Brabant wallon' (Belgium) and 'Utrecht' (Netherlands).

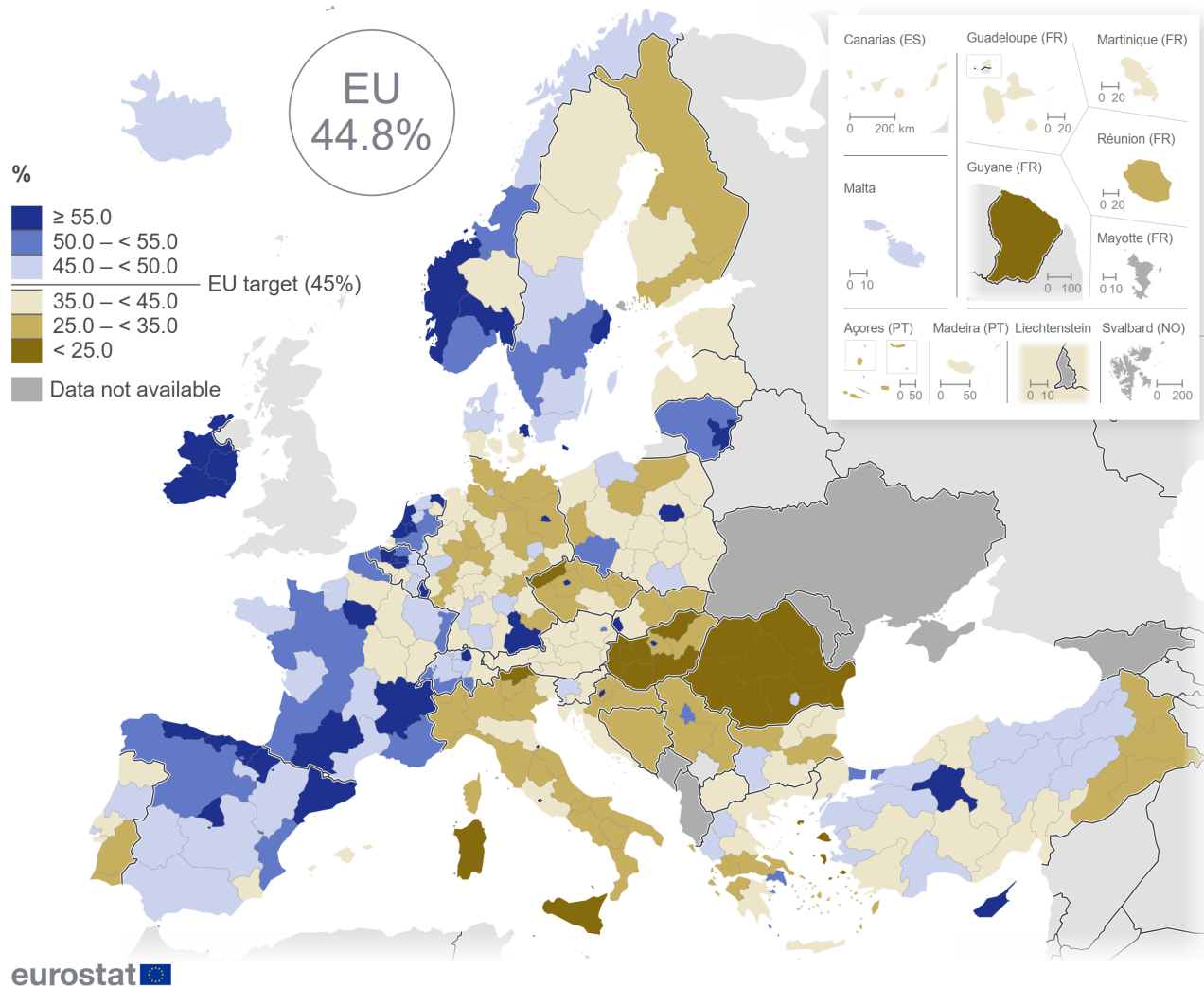
At the bottom end of the distribution were 18 NUTS 2 regions in which only a quarter or less of the population aged 25 to 34 had attained tertiary education by 2025. These regions were primarily rural, or geographically remote or isolated, often characterised by relatively large agricultural sectors and limited opportunities for higher education

¹NUTS (nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a geographical nomenclature dividing countries into regions at three different levels (NUTS 1, 2 and 3 respectively, moving from larger to smaller territorial units in terms of population). For more information about the NUTS classification, see the [respective metadata](#).

and highly skilled employment. These regions were mainly located in eastern and southern EU countries such as Romania (7 regions), Hungary (5 regions) and Italy (3 regions). With the exception of the capital region 'Bucureşti-Ilfov', all NUTS 2 regions in Romania had tertiary educational attainment rates below 25% in 2025 (see Map 1).

Tertiary educational attainment

(% of population aged 25 to 34, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025)



Note: 2024 data for Iceland.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_ifse_04)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap

Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 04/2026

Map 1: Tertiary educational attainment (% of population aged 25 to 34, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025) Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_04)

Within-country disparities across NUTS 2 regions are displayed in Figure 1. France and Greece showed the largest differences between the worst-performing regions and the national average. For France, this was mainly due to 'Guyane', with a tertiary education attainment rate of less than 20% in 2025, being almost three times below the national average of 56.0%. In Greece, 'Voreio Aigaio', with a rate of 19.1% in 2025, was more than two times below the national average of 42.8%. In all other Member States, the ratio of the worst-performing region to the national average was below 1.9 in 2025.

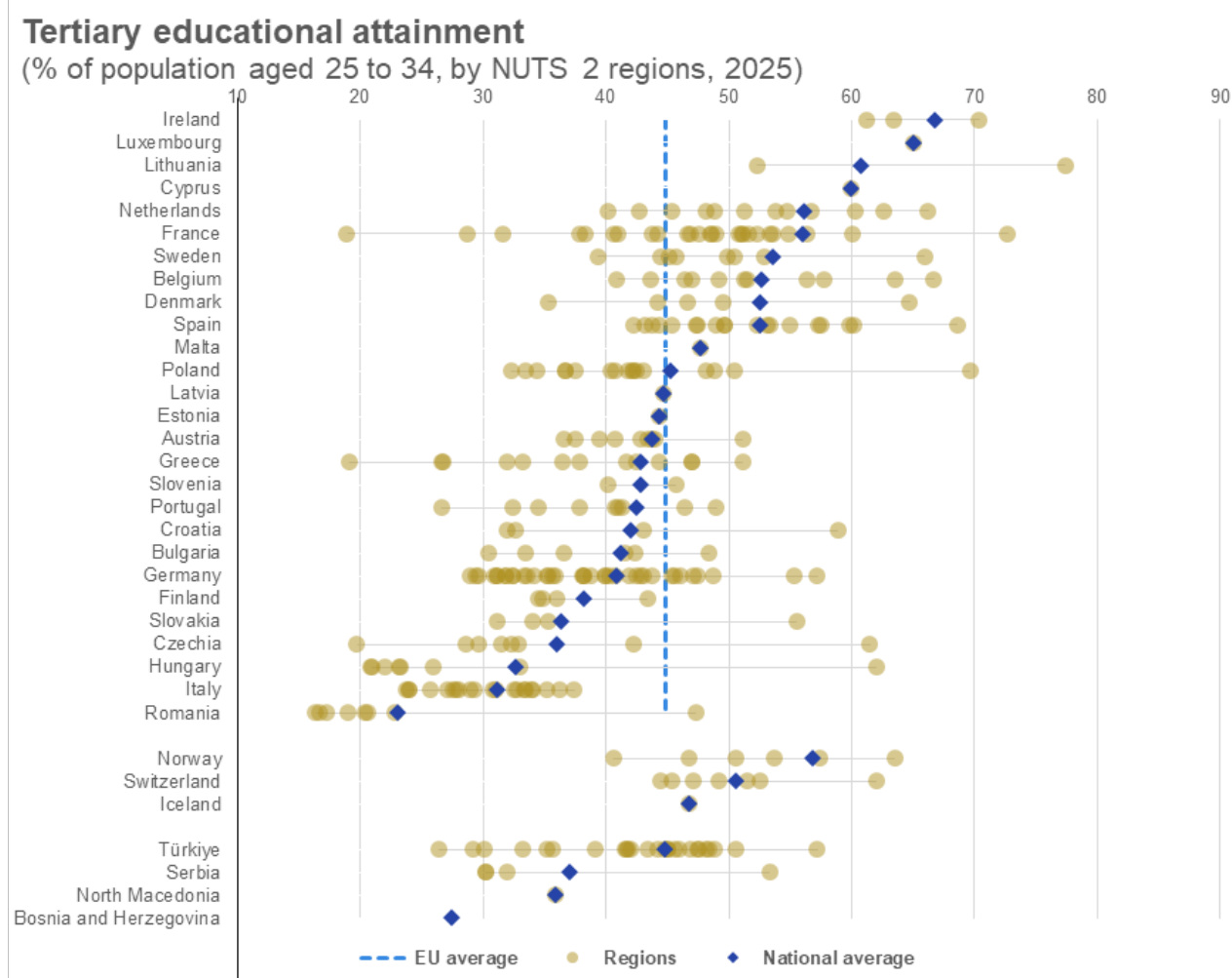


Figure 1: Tertiary educational attainment (% of population aged 25 to 34, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025) Source: Eurostat (edat_ifse_04)

Gender employment gap

Women tend to be more highly educated than men in most EU countries. When looking at participation in the labour market, however, the proportion of working-age men in employment still considerably exceeds that of women. In the EU, 71.3% of women in the age group 20 to 64 years were employed in 2025, compared with a rate of 80.9% for men, resulting in a gender employment gap of 9.6 percentage points. Although this is the lowest value on record, it is still far from the EU target of halving the gender employment gap by 2030 compared with 2019, which would mean reducing it to less than 5.7 percentage points (see the analysis in the chapter on [SDG 5 'Gender equality'](#)).

The highest gender employment gaps were reported in regions in south-eastern Europe

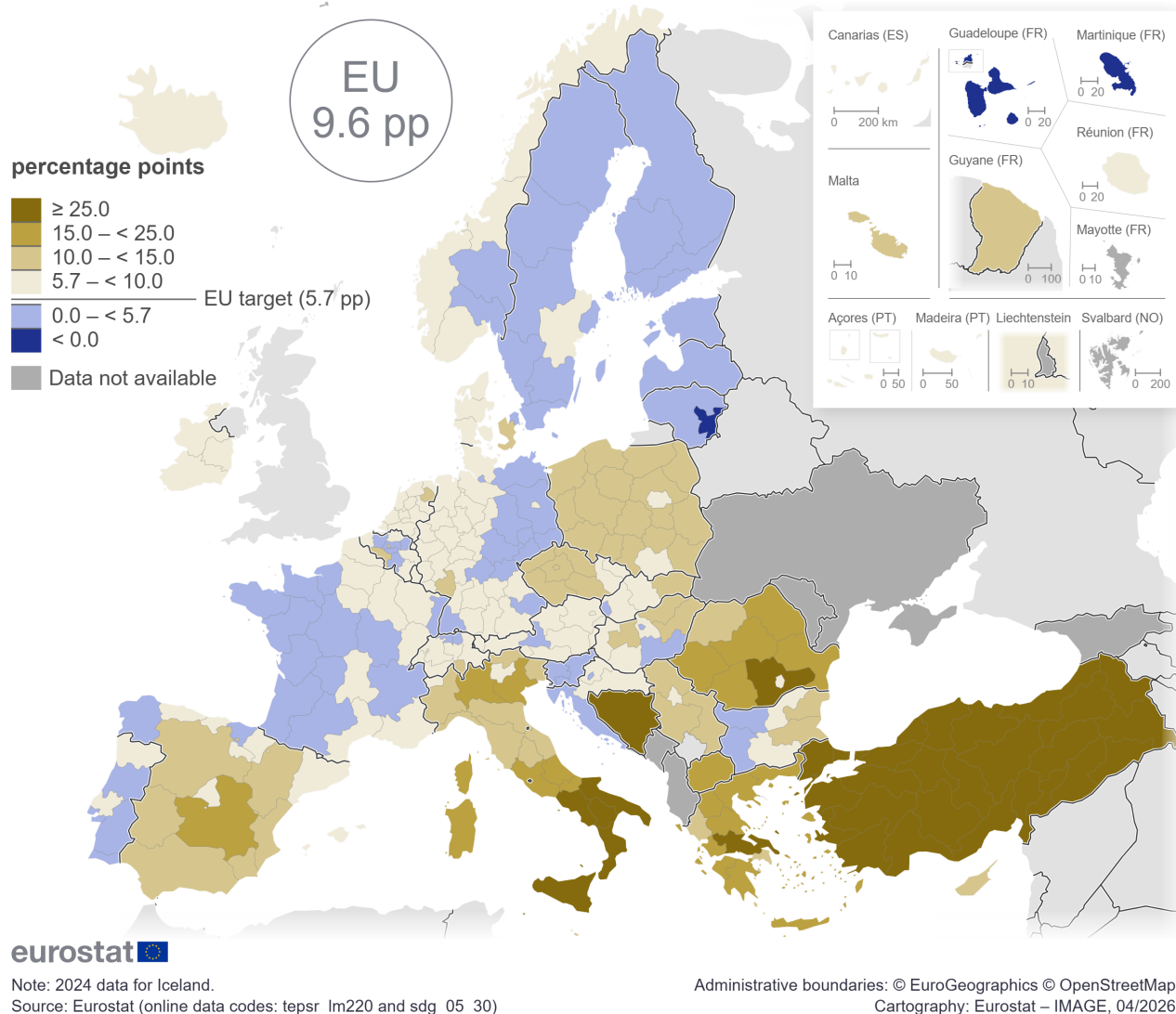
Across EU countries, the gender employment gap ranged from –0.6 percentage points in Lithuania to 19.1 percentage points in Italy in 2025. The gap was generally highest in southern and eastern Member States and lowest in central and northern Europe (see Map 2). At NUTS 2 level, there were three regions with negative gaps, meaning women on average had higher employment rates than men. These regions comprised 'Sostinės regionas' in Lithuania and the French overseas regions 'Guadeloupe' and 'Martinique', with gender employment gaps between –1.0 and –5.0 percentage points. Further regions with gaps close to zero included the Finnish regions 'Länsi-Suomi' and 'Etelä-Suomi', with gaps of 0.1 percentage points. Overall, 65 of the 243 regions with available data (26.7%) had gender employment gaps below the EU target value of 5.7 percentage points in 2025.

At the other end of the spectrum were 17 regions in which the employment rates of men were more than 20 percentage points higher than those of women. These regions were in Greece and Italy (7 regions each) and Romania (3 regions). The highest gap was reported in the Greek region 'Sterea Elláda' (29.0 percentage points in

2025), followed by the Italian regions 'Puglia' (28.7 percentage points) and 'Campania' (28.2 percentage points).

Gender employment gap

(percentage points, population aged 20 to 64, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025)



Map 2: Gender employment gap (percentage points, population aged 20 to 64, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025)
Source: Eurostat (tepsr_lm220)

Between 2019 and 2025, the gender employment gap decreased in around 83% of the EU's NUTS 2 regions. The strongest improvements were reported in the French overseas region 'Guadeloupe' (–11.2 percentage points), followed by the Hungarian regions 'Budapest' (–9.9 percentage points) and 'Dél-Alföld' (–9.8 percentage points). In contrast, the strongest increases in the gender employment gap over this period (of 3.7 percentage points and more) were reported by the Romanian regions 'Nord-Est' and 'Sud-Muntenia', 'Mellersta Norrland' in Sweden and 'Prov. Hainaut' in Belgium.

Disparities in the gender employment gap within countries were particularly pronounced in Greece, Spain, France and Italy. In these countries, the worst performing regions had gender employment gaps that were more than 9 percentage points higher than the national average in 2025.

Gender employment gap

(percentage points, population aged 20 to 64, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025)

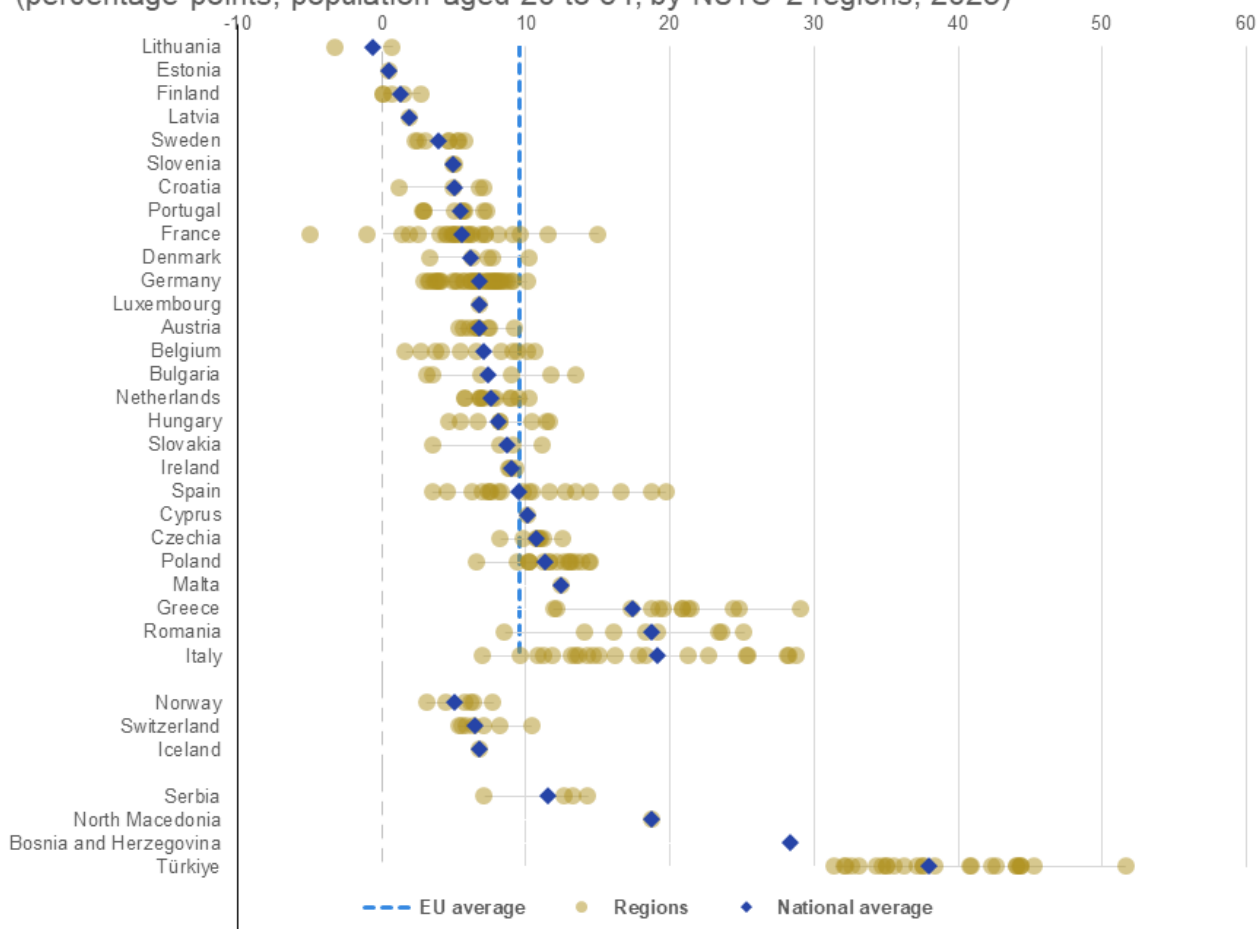


Figure 2: Gender employment gap (percentage points, population aged 20 to 64, by NUTS 2 regions, 2025)
Source: Eurostat (tepsr_lm220) and (sdg_05_30)

Research & development personnel

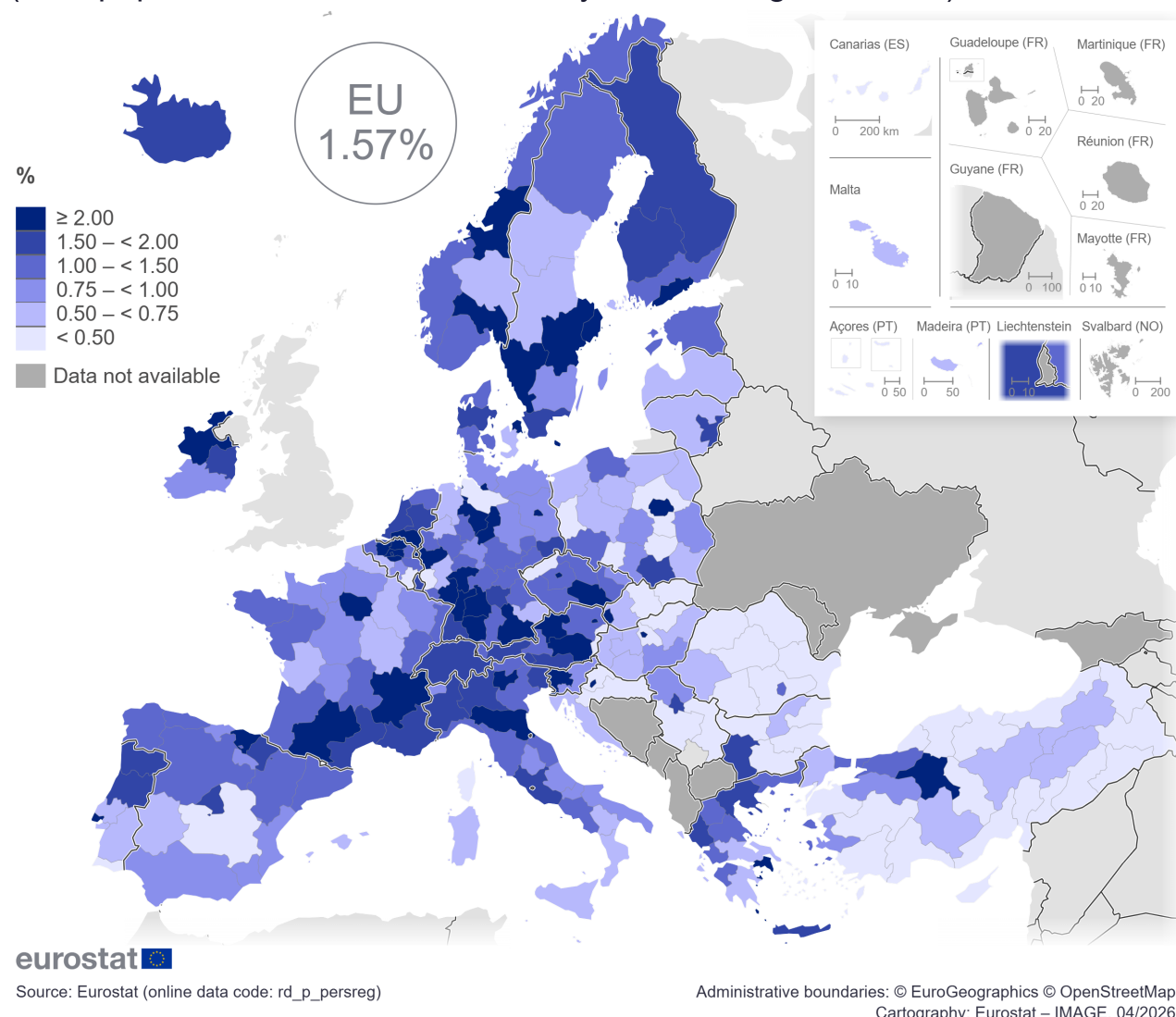
Research and development (R&D) personnel consists of all individuals employed directly in the field of **research and development (R&D)**, including those providing direct services, such as managers, administrators and clerical staff. In the EU, the share of R&D personnel in the labour force (measured in **full-time equivalents**) has continuously increased since 2000, reaching 1.57% in 2023. Across the EU, this share ranged from about 2.3% in Belgium and Denmark to less than 0.5% in Cyprus and Romania (see the analysis in the chapter on **SDG 9 'Industry, innovation and infrastructure'**).

Large differences in the share of R&D personnel between EU regions

Like many other science and technology indicators, the pattern of R&D personnel at regional level (see Map 3) reveals a skewed picture, as R&D activities tend to be concentrated in clusters. Research-intensive regions are often situated around academic institutions, science parks, high-technology industrial activities and/or knowledge-based services. The concentration of competitive and cooperative enterprises in related activities attracts start-ups, other market players and highly qualified personnel, which, in turn, drives the creation of new technologies and innovative output. In contrast, R&D activities tend to be lowest in remote or predominantly rural regions.

R&D personnel

(% of population in the labour force, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023)



Map 3: R&D personnel (% of population in the labour force, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023) Source: Eurostat (rd_p_persreg)

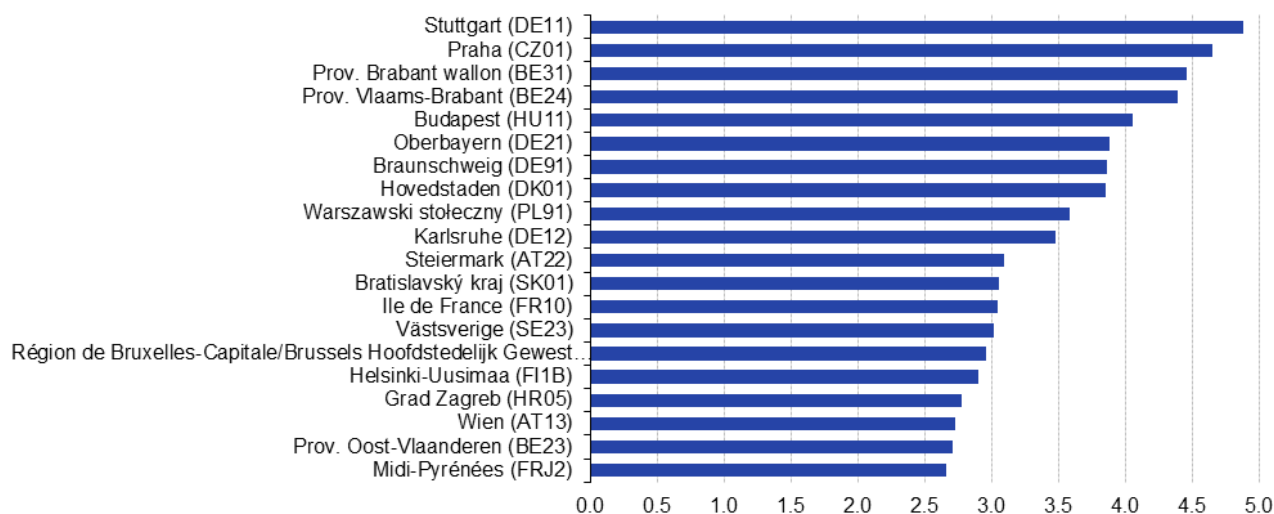
In 2023, 68 of the 231 EU's NUTS 2 regions with available data²(29.4%) had a share of R&D personnel in the labour force that exceeded the EU average of 1.57%. The German region 'Stuttgart' had the highest share (4.88%), followed by the Czech capital 'Praha' (4.65%) and the Belgian regions 'Prov. Brabant wallon' (4.46%) and Prov. Vlaams-Brabant (4.39%). Overall, there were 14 regions in which R&D personnel accounted for more than 3% of the labour force in 2023. Half of the top 20 regions with the highest shares of R&D personnel across the EU (see Figure 3) were in Germany (4 regions), Belgium (4 regions) and Austria (2 regions).

At the bottom end of the distribution were 34 regions in which the share of R&D personnel in the labour force was lower than 0.5%, mainly in eastern and southern Member States such as Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Spain.

²Netherlands: NUTS 1 data instead of NUTS 2.

Regions with the highest shares of R&D personnel in the EU

(% of population in the labour force, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: rd_p_persreg)

eurostat

Figure 3: Regions with the highest shares of R&D personnel in the EU (% of population in the labour force, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023) Source: Eurostat (rd_p_persreg)

Household income

Household disposable income is the total amount of money households have available for spending and saving after subtracting income taxes and pension contributions³. Wealth creation in the EU is often concentrated in economic hubs, where part of the output generated may be attributed to commuters living in surrounding regions. As a result, income per inhabitant in these surrounding regions tends to be relatively high when contrasted with their economic output (as measured by GDP per inhabitant). This is also because within regional accounts, GDP is recorded where it is generated (a person's place of work), whereas income is recorded at their residence (where people live).

In 2023, net disposable household income amounted to 21 000 **purchasing power standards (PPS)** per inhabitant in the EU⁴. At Member State level, Luxembourg recorded the highest income levels, with 30 100 PPS per inhabitant, followed by Germany with 25 800 PPS per inhabitant and Austria with 25 400 PPS per inhabitant. Estonia, Bulgaria and Latvia reported the lowest income levels, with values below 15 000 PPS per inhabitant (also see the analysis of disparities in household income in the chapter on **SDG 10 'Reduced inequalities'**).

Household income is highest in central European regions

At the NUTS 2 level, the German region 'Oberbayern' reported the highest net disposable household income with 31 800 PPS per inhabitant in 2023, followed by Luxembourg with 30 100 PPS per inhabitant and the Italian region 'Provincia Autonoma di Bolzano/Bozen' with 30 000 PPS per inhabitant. Regions in central Europe generally had the highest income levels across the EU in 2023, covering Austria and Luxembourg, the southern half of Germany

³The income data analysed here differ from the income data analysed in the chapter on SDG 10 'Reduced inequalities', which refer to adjusted gross disposable income. Net disposable household income is household disposable income after deducting consumption of fixed capital (depreciation), whereas adjusted gross disposable household income is gross disposable income plus social transfers in kind (for example, publicly provided health and education services).

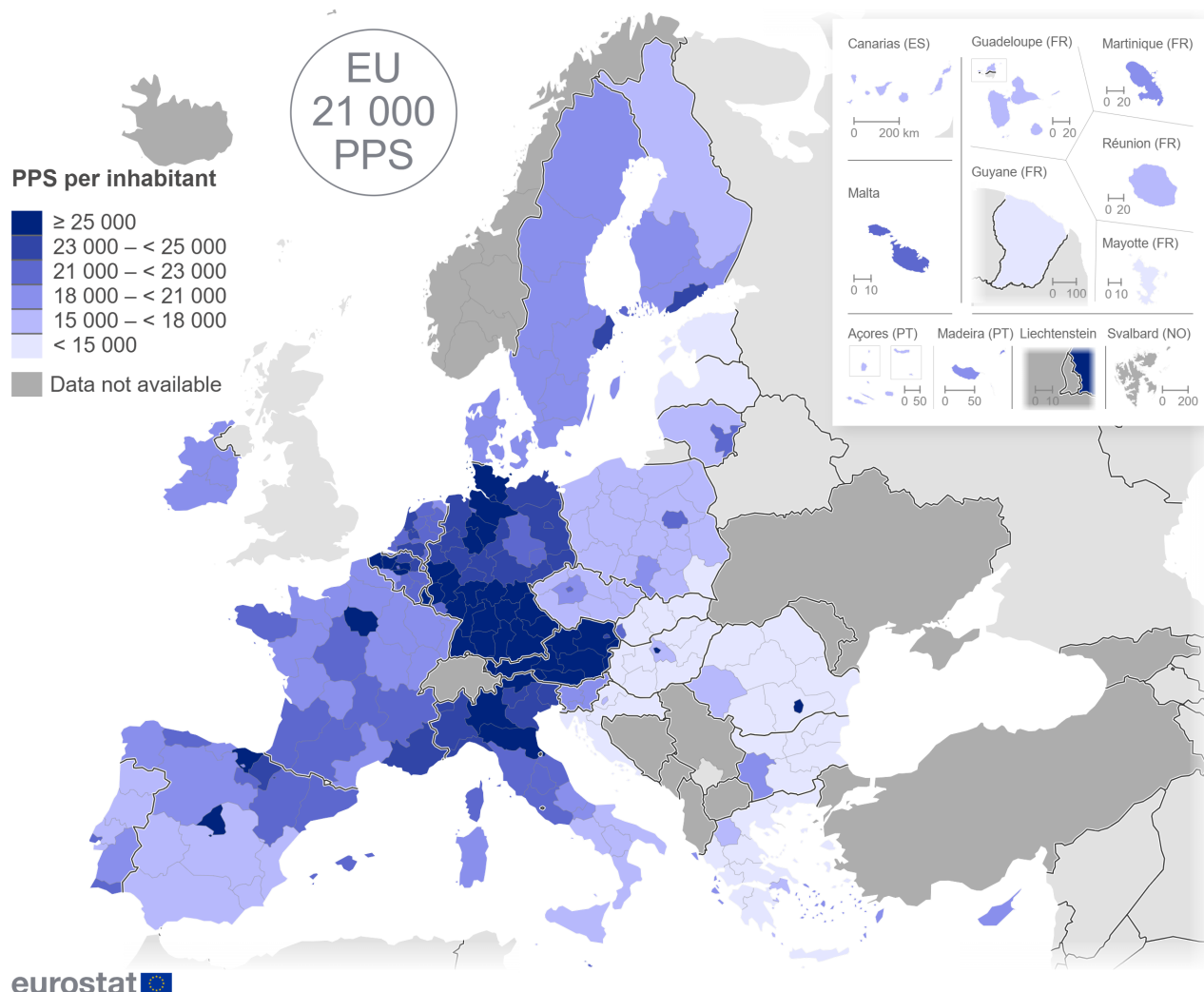
⁴PPS is an artificial currency unit that allows comparing countries and regions by adjusting for price level differences, so that — theoretically — one PPS can buy the same amount of goods and services in each country. The use of data in PPS, rather than in euro (€), takes price level differences between countries into account; the conversion to PPS also reflects the fact that household expenditure is predominantly related to consumption.

and the northern parts of Belgium and Italy (see Map 4). The Romanian capital region 'București-Ilfov' was a notable exception from this regional cluster, having the fourth highest per capita household income in 2023 with 28 500 PPS per inhabitant.

In contrast, income levels were lowest in regions in south-eastern Europe and some French overseas regions. There were 16 regions where net disposable household income was below 13 000 PPS per inhabitant in 2023. Most of these were in Bulgaria (5 regions), Romania and Hungary (4 regions each) and France (2 regions). The lowest values were reported in the French overseas region 'Mayotte', with 7 600 PPS per inhabitant in 2023.

Net disposable household income

(PPS per inhabitant, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023)



Source: Eurostat (online data code: nama_10r_2hhinc)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
 Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 04/2026

Map 4: Net disposable household income (PPS per inhabitant, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023) Source: Eurostat (nama_10r_2hhinc)

Regarding within-country disparities, France had the largest difference between the national average and the region with the lowest per-capita household income ('Mayotte' and 'Guyane'), with a ratio of 2.9 and 2.0 respectively (see Figure 4). In all other Member States this ratio was below 1.4. From the remaining countries, Italy, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria had the largest differences between the national average and the region with the lowest income levels, with ratios of around 1.35.

Net disposable household income (PPS per inhabitant, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023)

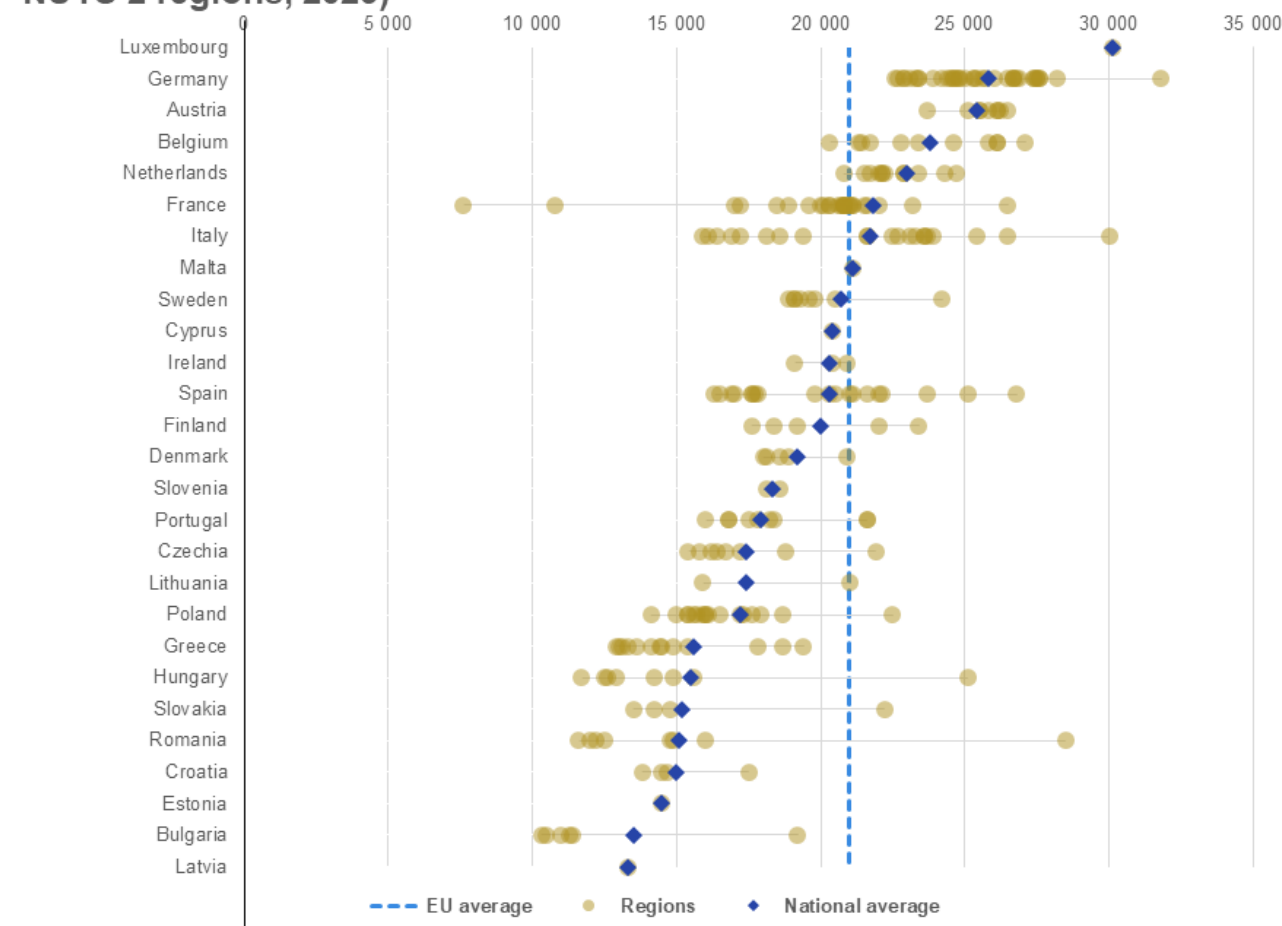


Figure 4: Net disposable household income (PPS per inhabitant, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023) Source: Eurostat (nama_10r_2hhinc)

Organic farming

Organic farming is a way of agricultural production that seeks to limit environmental impacts through practices that encourage the responsible use of energy and natural resources, maintain or enhance biodiversity, preserve regional ecological balances, increase soil fertility and water quality, encourage high animal welfare standards, and enhance the capacity to adapt to climate change.

In 2023, organic farming was practiced on 10.8% of the utilised agricultural area (UAA) in the EU⁵. While the area under organic farming has spread continuously over the past decade, it is still far from the EU's target to reach 25% by 2030.

Across Member States, the share of utilised agricultural area under organic farming ranged from almost 27% in Austria to less than 5% in the Netherlands, Poland, Ireland and Bulgaria, with Malta reporting the lowest share of only 0.8% in 2023 (see the analysis in the chapter on [SDG 2 'Zero hunger'](#)).

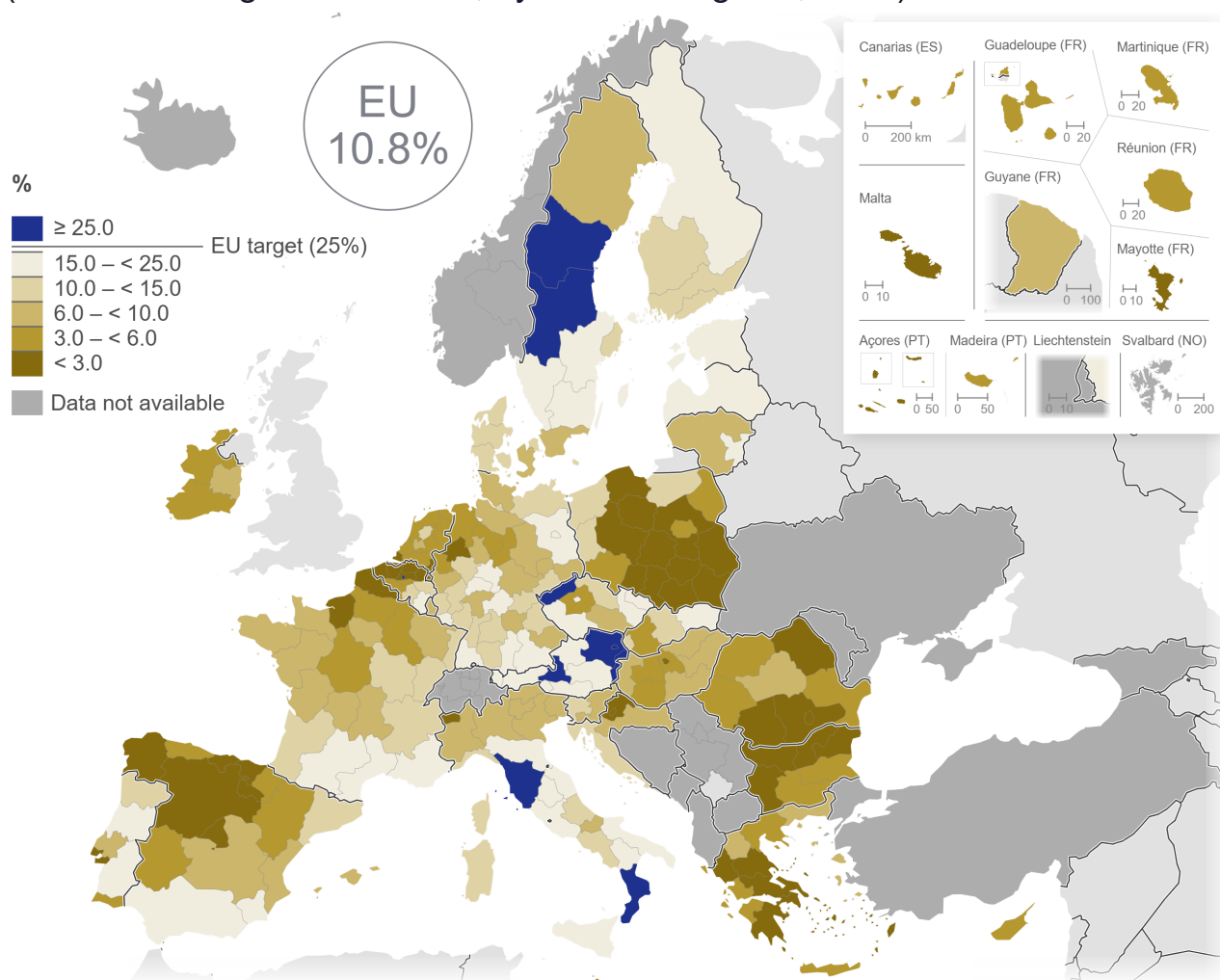
Organic farming varies strongly across EU regions

⁵The data on organic farming reported here encompass both fully converted land and land currently under conversion to organic farming.

In 2023, the top 3 regions with the highest shares of organic farming were all in Austria: 'Salzburg' (51.2%), 'Burgenland' (41.4%) and the capital region 'Wien' (39.0%) (see Figure 5). Only 10 of the 242 NUTS 2 regions with available data (4.1%) exceeded the EU target value of 25% in 2023, including 'Calabria' and 'Toscana' in Italy, 'Severozápad' in Czechia, 'Norra Mellansverige' and 'Mellersta Norrland' in Sweden, 'Niederösterreich' in Austria (in addition to the three regions already mentioned before) and the Belgian capital region 'Région de Bruxelles-Capitale/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest'. Only 31 regions reported shares of above 20% (see Map 5), which were mostly located in Austria (seven regions), Italy (five regions), Czechia and Sweden (four regions each).

At the other end of the spectrum were 46 regions where organic farming was practiced on less than 3% of the utilised agricultural area, mainly in Poland (11 regions), Spain (six regions), Belgium (five regions) and Bulgaria and Romania (four regions each). The Hungarian capital 'Budapest' was the only region reporting zero organic farming practices in 2023.

Area under organic farming (% of utilised agricultural area, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023)



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Note: 2020 data for in Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovenia as well as for Berlin, Bremen and Sachsen-Anhalt (Germany), Mayotte (France), Zeeland and Limburg (Netherlands), București-Ilfov (Romania), Bratislavský kraj and Stredné Slovensko (Slovakia); EU estimate made for the purpose of this publication.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ef_lus_main)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 06/2026

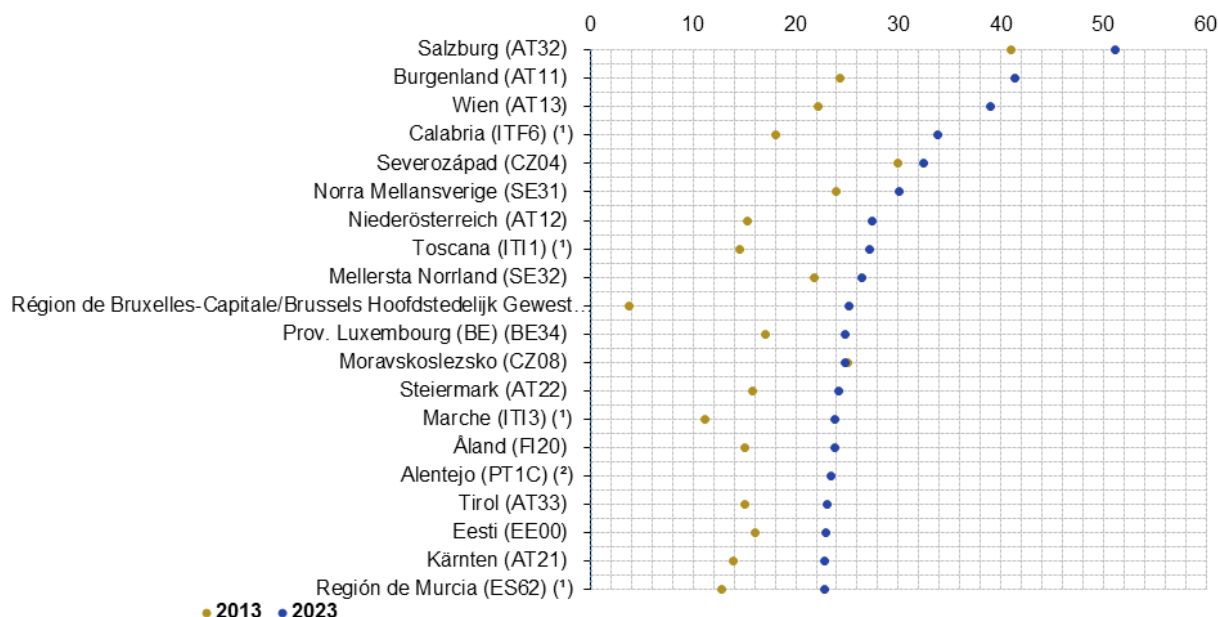
Map 5: Area under organic farming (% of utilised agricultural area, by NUTS 2 regions, 2023) Source: Eurostat (ef_lus_main)

Over the past decade, the share of utilised agricultural area under organic farming has increased in almost all

regions for which data is available over a sufficiently long time period. The increases were strongest in the capital regions of Belgium ('Région de Bruxelles-Capitale/Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest') and Czechia ('Praha'), with the share of organic farming growing by more than 20 percentage points between 2013 and 2023. This indicates that organic farming practices are generally on the rise throughout the EU.

EU regions with the highest shares of organic farming

(% of utilised agricultural area, by NUTS 2 regions, 2013 and 2023)



(*) 2020 data (instead of 2023)

(2) No data for 2013.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: ef_lus_main)

eurostat

Figure 5: EU regions with the highest shares of organic farming (% of utilised agricultural area, by NUTS 2 regions, 2013 and 2023) Source: Eurostat (ef_lus_main)

Terrestrial protected areas

Terrestrial ecosystems in the EU have been protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives since 1979 and 1992, respectively, forming the foundation for biodiversity and ecosystems conservation. The [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#) has set the target to protect at least 30% of EU land, with specific commitments to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. In 2023, 26.4% of the EU land area was under protection as part of [Natura 2000](#) sites and nationally designated protected areas. This share has grown only marginally since 2011, when 24.6% were protected. Across Member States, Bulgaria and Slovenia had the largest extent of protected areas, covering more than 40% of these countries' land area, while in Ireland and Finland less than 14% of the territory were designated as protected areas (see the analysis in the chapter on [SDG 15 'Life on land'](#)).

Protected areas covered more than half of the territory in around 14% of EU regions

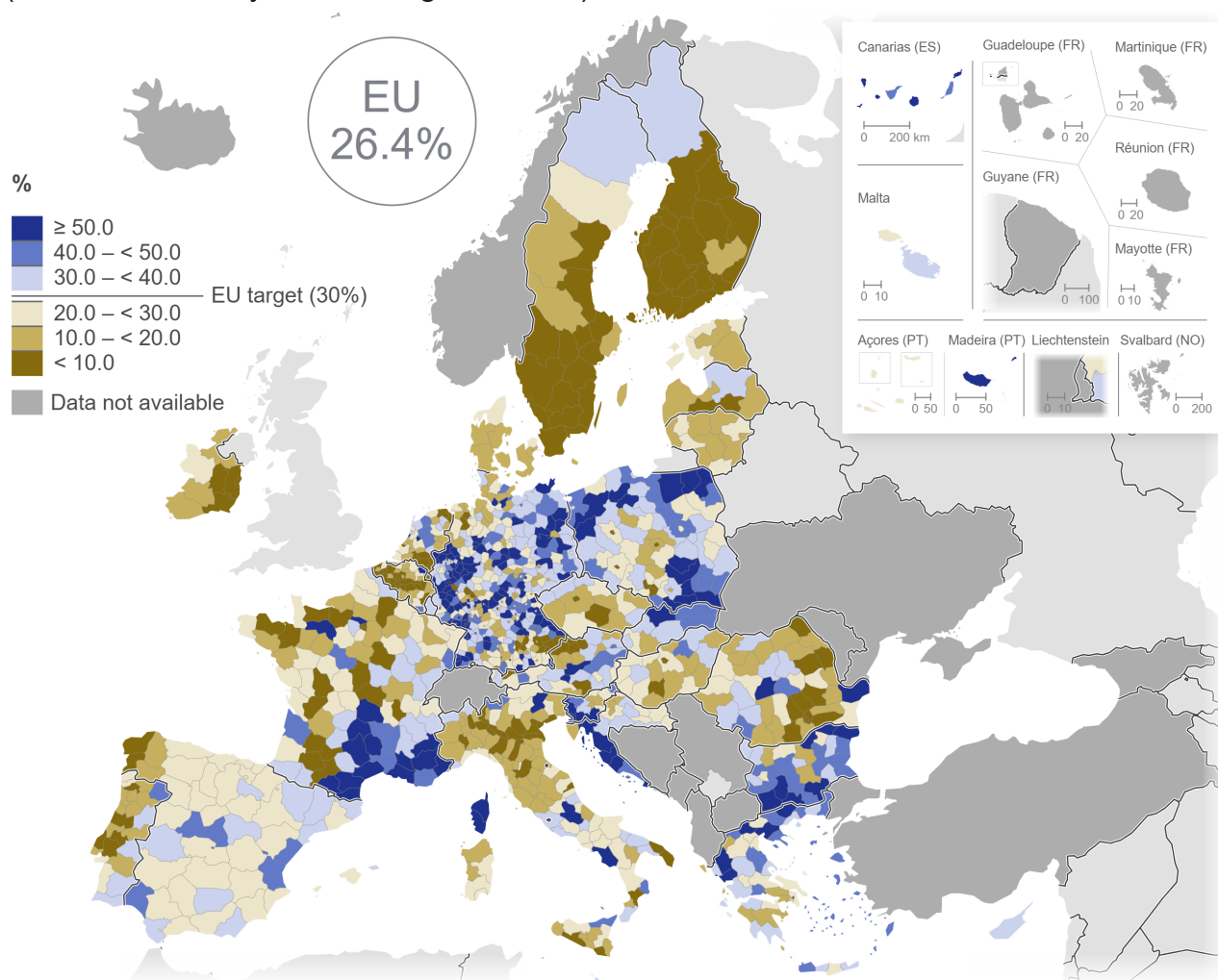
At regional NUTS 3 level, 12 out of the 1 160 regions with available data had more than 80% of their land area covered by protected areas in 2023, including 10 regions in Germany. 'Berchtesgadener Land' in Germany and 'Lungau' in Austria had virtually all their territory covered by protected areas (see Figure 6), followed by 'Ahrweiler' (Germany) with 94.8%. Across the EU, 164 regions (14.1%) had more than half of their territory protected, with the vast majority (96 regions) in Germany, followed by France (17 regions) and Poland (13 regions). In 502 of the 1 160

NUTS 3 regions (43.3%) the extent of protected areas was above the 30% target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

At the other end of the scale were 57 regions in which protected areas covered less than 5% of the territory, mainly in Finland (12 regions), Belgium (10 regions) and France (8 regions). The three regions with the lowest extent of protected areas in 2023 were all in France, including 'Paris', 'Hauts-de-Seine' and 'Val-de-Marne'.

Terrestrial protected areas

(% of land area, by NUTS 3 regions, 2023)



eurostat

Source: European Environment Agency (EEA)

Administrative boundaries: © EuroGeographics © OpenStreetMap
Cartography: Eurostat – IMAGE, 04/2026

Map 6: Terrestrial protected areas (% of land area, by NUTS 3 regions, 2023) Source: European Environment Agency

Even though the total area covered by Natura 2000 sites (76.8 million ha) at EU level was more than twice as large as that of nationally designated protected areas (31.1 million ha), the latter still play an important role at the regional level. As shown in Figure 6, nationally designated areas made up a large proportion of the protected areas in all but one of the top 20 regions with the largest extent of protected areas. Moreover, in almost two-thirds of the 164 regions which had more than half of their territory covered by protected areas, the extent of nationally designated areas exceeded that of Natura 2000 sites. Nevertheless, in a further 20% of regions, protected areas were almost exclusively made up of Natura 2000 areas, showing that both approaches are needed to safeguard ecosystems and biodiversity across the EU. However, it must be noted that the designation of protected areas alone is not a

guarantee of biodiversity protection. The management of these areas is a crucial factor in achieving conservation aims, but a respective assessment is hampered by a lack of comprehensive information on how effectively these areas are managed⁶.

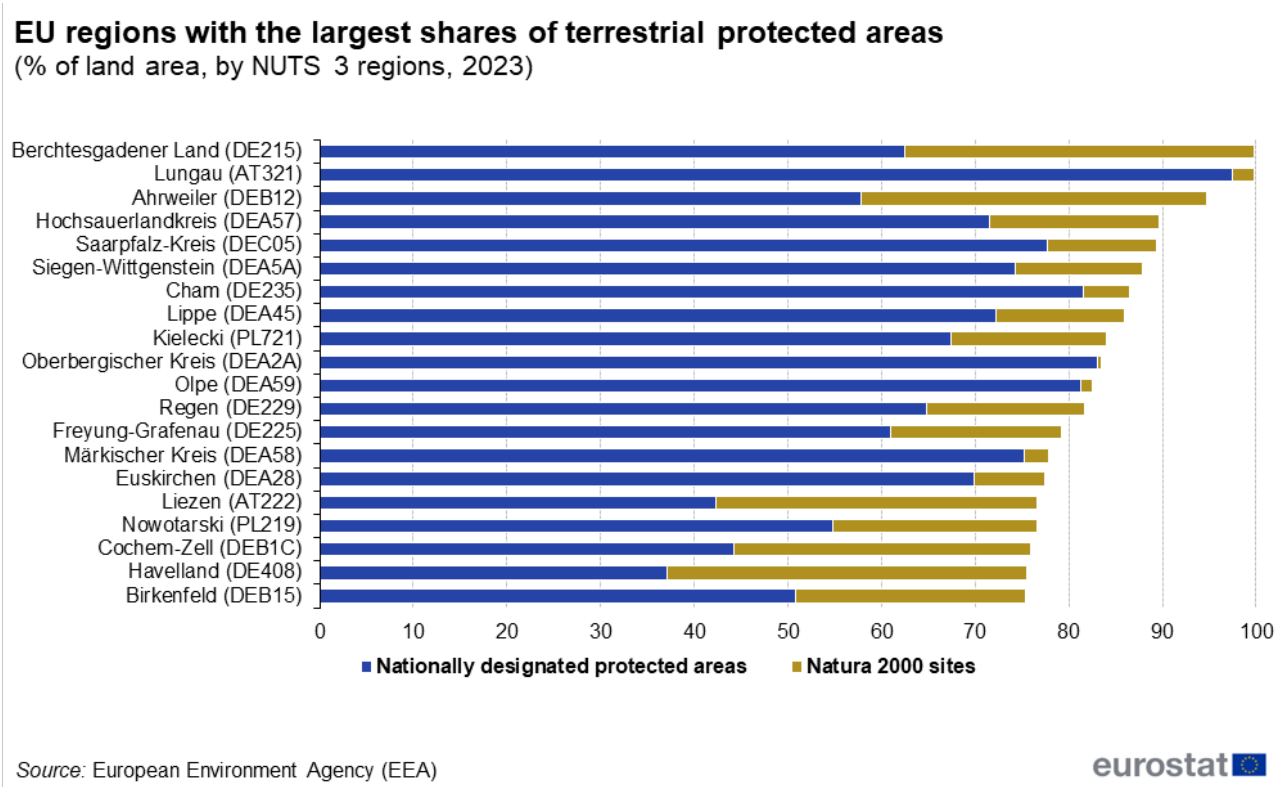


Figure 6: EU regions with the largest shares of terrestrial protected areas (% of land area, by NUTS 3 regions, 2023) Source: European Environment Agency

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Download Excel file](#)

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⁶European Environment Agency (2025), [Designated terrestrial protected areas in Europe](#) .

Database

- [Sustainable development indicators](#)

Thematic section

- [Sustainable development indicators](#)

Methodology

More detailed information on EU SDG indicators for monitoring of progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as indicator relevance, definitions, methodological notes, background and potential linkages can be found in the [introduction](#) as well as in Annex II of the publication '[Sustainable development in the European Union — Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context — 2026 edition](#)' .