

General government expenditure in the EU in 2016

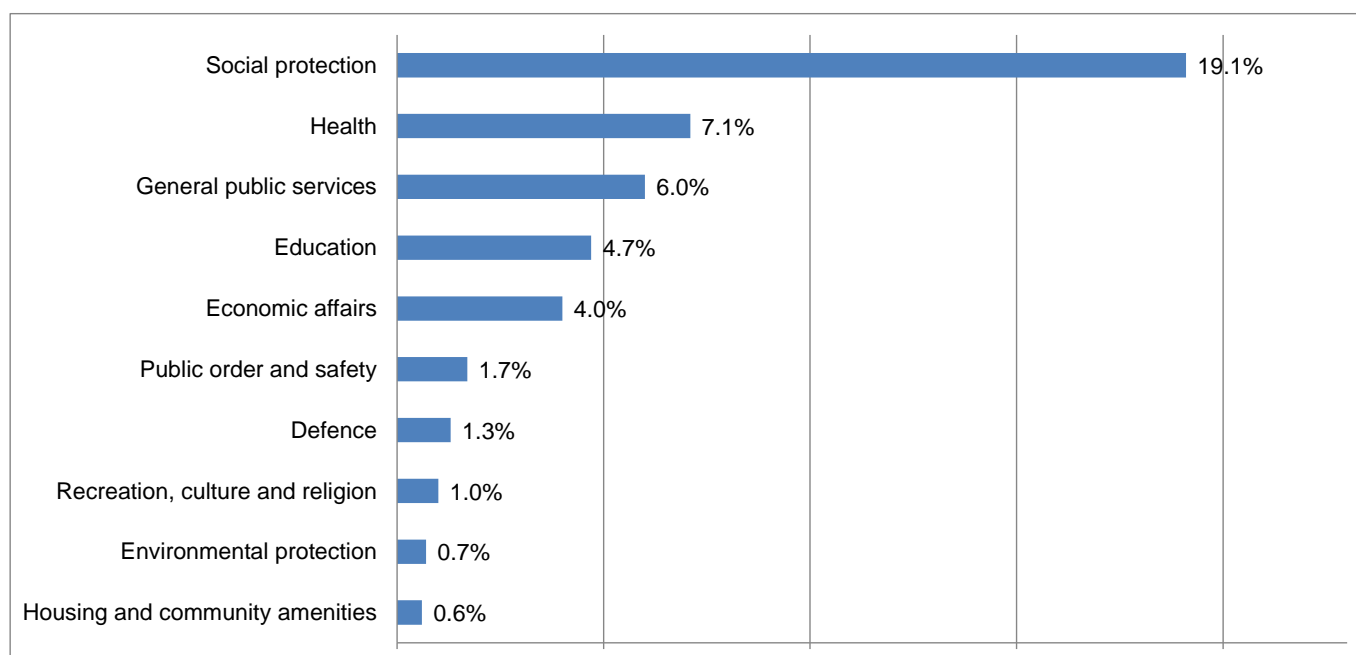
Government expenditure on social protection accounted for almost one fifth of GDP

Representing more than 40% of total public expenditure

Among the main functions of general government expenditure in the **European Union** (EU), 'social protection' was by far the largest in 2016, equivalent to 19.1% of GDP. The next most important areas were 'health' (7.1%), 'general public services' such as external affairs and public debt transactions (6.0%), 'education' (4.7%) and 'economic affairs' (4.0%). 'Public order and safety' (1.7%), 'defence' (1.3%), 'recreation, culture and religion' (1.0%), 'environmental protection' (0.7%) and 'housing and community amenities' (0.6%) had more limited weights. However, these **EU-level** data mask significant differences between the Member States in the share of GDP dedicated to each function of general government expenditure.

The information on general government total expenditure by function comes from an online [publication](#) issued by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.

General government expenditure by function in the EU, 2016
(% of GDP)



Share of general government expenditure related to social protection highest in Finland and lowest in Ireland

Social protection represented the largest area of general government expenditure in 2016 in all EU Member States. The ratio of government social protection expenditure to GDP varied across EU Member States from less than 10% in **Ireland** (9.9%) to over a quarter in **Finland** (25.6%). Eight Member States – **Finland, France, Denmark, Austria, Italy, Greece, Sweden** and **Belgium** – devoted at least 20% of GDP to social protection, while **Ireland, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, Malta, the Czech Republic** and **Bulgaria** each spent less than 13% of GDP on social protection.

Social protection expenditure can be further broken down into a number of detailed groups. The group 'old age', which includes pensions, made up the largest part of social protection expenditure in all Member States. Government expenditure on 'old age' as a share of GDP was highest in 2016 in **Greece** (16.0%), followed by **Finland** (13.7%), **France** and **Italy** (both 13.5%) and **Austria** (13.0%). In contrast, **Ireland** (3.5%), **Lithuania** (5.9%), **Cyprus** (6.2%) and the **Netherlands** (6.7%) recorded the lowest shares. General government expenditure on 'old age' accounted for 10.2% of GDP in the **EU**.

Government expenditure on health and education highest in Denmark

With shares of at least 8% of GDP in 2016, **Denmark** (8.6%) and **France** (8.1%) recorded the highest proportions of government expenditures spent on health among Member States. **Denmark** and **Sweden** (6.9% of GDP), **Belgium** (6.4%) and **Finland** (6.1%) registered the highest shares of government expenditure on education in 2016.

For government expenditure on economic affairs, the highest percentages in 2016 were recorded in **Hungary** (7.1% of GDP) and **Belgium** (6.5%).

The highest share of government expenditure on general public services in 2016 was observed in **Greece** (9.2% of GDP). In 2016, 2% or more of GDP or more was spent on defence in **Estonia** (2.4%), **Greece** (2.1%), and the **United Kingdom** (2.0%). The highest share of government expenditure on public order & safety was observed in **Bulgaria** (2.4%), on environmental protection in **Greece** (1.6%) and the **Netherlands** (1.4%), on housing and community amenities in **Bulgaria** (1.9%) and on recreation, culture and religion in **Hungary** (3.3%) and **Estonia** (2.1%).

Geographical information

The **European Union** (EU) 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** consists of Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Finland.

Methods and definitions

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).

For more information

Eurostat [database](#) on government finance

Eurostat [metadata](#) on general government expenditure by function.

Eurostat [set of Statistics Explained articles](#) on government expenditure by function.

Eurostat [interactive infographic](#) on government expenditure by function.

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General government total expenditure by function in the EU Member States, 2016
(as % of GDP)

	Total	General public services	Defence	Public order & safety	Economic affairs	Environmental protection	Housing & community amenities	Health	Recreation culture & religion	Education	Social protection	Social protection, of which:					
												Sickness & disability	Old age	Survivors	Family & children	Unemployment	Others
EU	46.3	6.0	1.3	1.7	4.0	0.7	0.6	7.1	1.0	4.7	19.1	2.7	10.2	1.3	1.7	1.3	1.7
Euro area	47.6	6.3	1.2	1.7	4.2	0.8	0.6	7.1	1.1	4.6	20.0	2.7	10.8	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.4
Belgium	53.2	7.9	0.8	1.7	6.5	0.8	0.3	7.4	1.2	6.4	20.0	3.5	9.1	1.8	2.2	1.8	1.5
Bulgaria	35.0	2.7	1.1	2.4	4.1	0.6	1.9	5.0	1.0	3.4	12.7	0.2	9.5	M	2.4	0.1	0.5
Czech Rep.	39.4	4.2	0.7	1.7	5.9	0.7	0.6	7.4	1.3	4.5	12.3	2.1	7.4	0.6	1.1	0.2	0.9
Denmark	53.6	6.8	1.1	1.0	3.3	0.4	0.3	8.6	1.8	6.9	23.4	4.6	8.4	0.0	4.5	2.5	3.3
Germany	44.2	5.8	1.0	1.6	3.1	0.6	0.4	7.2	1.0	4.2	19.3	3.2	9.2	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.7
Estonia	40.6	4.2	2.4	2.0	4.3	0.6	0.4	5.3	2.1	5.9	13.5	2.2	7.2	0.1	2.5	1.2	0.4
Ireland	27.1	3.7	0.3	1.0	2.3	0.3	0.5	5.2	0.5	3.3	9.9	1.9	3.5	0.6	1.4	1.2	1.3
Greece	49.8	9.2	2.1	2.2	3.8	1.6	0.2	4.9	0.8	4.3	20.7	1.5	16.0	1.8	0.6	0.5	0.3
Spain*	42.2	6.1	1.0	1.9	3.9	0.8	0.5	6.0	1.1	4.0	16.8	2.4	9.2	2.3	0.7	1.8	0.5
France*	56.4	6.1	1.8	1.6	5.6	0.9	1.1	8.1	1.2	5.4	24.4	2.8	13.5	1.5	2.4	2.0	2.2
Croatia	47.1	8.8	1.2	2.3	5.3	0.6	1.1	6.5	1.8	4.8	14.7	2.0	8.5	1.4	1.8	0.5	0.5
Italy	49.4	7.9	1.3	1.9	4.0	0.9	0.7	7.0	0.8	3.9	21.1	1.8	13.5	2.7	1.5	1.2	0.4
Cyprus	38.6	7.7	1.5	1.7	2.6	0.3	1.5	2.6	0.9	6.0	13.8	0.5	6.2	1.5	3.1	0.8	1.7
Latvia	37.3	4.4	1.6	2.2	4.9	0.5	0.9	3.7	1.4	5.5	12.0	2.2	7.2	0.2	1.2	0.5	0.7
Lithuania	34.2	4.1	1.6	1.5	3.0	0.5	0.4	5.8	1.0	5.2	11.2	3.1	5.9	0.3	1.0	0.5	0.4
Luxembourg	42.1	4.7	0.4	1.0	5.5	0.9	0.5	4.8	1.2	4.8	18.2	1.8	10.8	0.0	3.6	1.1	0.8
Hungary	46.7	7.9	0.7	2.3	7.1	0.5	0.8	4.8	3.3	4.9	14.3	2.8	7.2	1.0	1.9	0.3	1.1
Malta	38.1	6.4	0.6	1.2	4.6	1.0	0.3	5.6	1.0	5.4	12.0	1.1	7.4	1.4	1.0	0.4	0.7
Netherlands*	43.4	4.3	1.2	1.9	3.9	1.4	0.3	7.7	1.3	5.3	16.2	4.2	6.7	0.1	1.2	1.6	2.4
Austria	50.7	6.6	0.6	1.4	5.7	0.4	0.3	8.0	1.2	4.9	21.6	1.9	13.0	1.4	2.3	1.5	1.5
Poland	41.2	4.7	1.6	2.2	4.1	0.4	0.6	4.6	1.1	5.0	16.9	2.6	9.1	1.8	2.5	0.5	0.4
Portugal*	45.0	8.3	0.9	1.8	3.2	0.6	0.5	5.9	0.8	4.9	18.0	1.3	12.1	1.8	1.1	1.0	0.8
Romania	34.0	4.4	0.9	2.0	4.5	0.6	1.2	4.0	0.9	3.7	11.6	1.1	8.4	0.1	1.4	0.1	0.5
Slovenia	45.1	6.6	0.9	1.7	4.5	0.6	0.4	6.7	1.4	5.6	16.7	2.3	9.5	1.4	1.9	0.5	1.1
Slovakia*	41.5	5.3	1.0	2.3	4.5	0.7	0.5	7.4	1.0	3.8	15.1	2.9	8.1	0.8	1.3	0.2	1.8
Finland	56.0	8.1	1.3	1.2	4.5	0.2	0.3	7.2	1.4	6.1	25.6	3.4	13.7	0.7	3.2	2.6	2.0
Sweden	49.5	6.6	1.2	1.3	4.1	0.3	0.7	6.9	1.1	6.6	20.6	4.2	10.3	0.3	2.4	1.3	2.1
UK	41.5	4.6	2.0	1.8	3.0	0.7	0.7	7.6	0.6	4.7	15.8	2.5	8.6	0.1	1.4	0.1	3.1
Iceland	45.1	6.8	0.1	1.3	4.8	0.6	0.5	7.5	3.0	7.1	13.4	2.8	6.9	0.0	2.0	0.4	1.3
Norway	50.8	4.7	1.6	1.2	5.4	0.9	0.8	8.7	1.6	5.6	20.3	6.9	7.4	0.2	3.6	0.6	1.6
Switzerland	34.3	4.8	0.8	1.7	4.0	0.6	0.2	2.2	0.8	5.6	13.6	3.0	6.8	0.3	0.5	1.2	1.8

* Spain, France, the Netherlands, Slovakia (COFOG groups only) - data are provisional; Portugal – data are estimated.

Figures may not add up due to rounding.

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

General government expenditure by function in the EU Member States, 2016
(as % of total government expenditure)

	General public services	Defence	Public order & safety	Economic affairs	Environmental protection	Housing & community amenities	Health	Recreation culture & religion	Education	Social protection	Social protection, of which:					
											Sickness & disability	Old age	Survivors	Family & children	Unemployment	Others
EU	12.9	2.9	3.7	8.6	1.6	1.3	15.3	2.2	10.2	41.2	5.9	22.1	2.9	3.8	2.8	3.7
Euro area	13.3	2.6	3.5	8.7	1.7	1.2	15.0	2.3	9.7	42.1	5.8	22.7	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.0
Belgium	14.9	1.5	3.2	12.2	1.6	0.6	13.9	2.3	12.0	37.6	6.6	17.1	3.3	4.2	3.5	2.8
Bulgaria	7.8	3.1	6.7	11.8	1.8	5.5	14.3	2.8	9.8	36.4	0.6	27.2	M	6.8	0.2	1.6
Czech Rep.	10.6	1.8	4.4	15.0	1.9	1.5	18.9	3.3	11.3	31.2	5.3	18.9	1.4	2.7	0.5	2.4
Denmark	12.6	2.1	1.9	6.2	0.8	0.5	16.1	3.3	12.9	43.6	8.6	15.7	0.0	8.5	4.6	6.2
Germany	13.2	2.3	3.6	7.0	1.4	0.9	16.2	2.3	9.5	43.6	7.3	20.9	4.2	3.8	3.7	3.8
Estonia	10.4	6.0	4.8	10.5	1.4	0.9	13.1	5.1	14.6	33.3	5.4	17.8	0.2	6.2	2.9	0.9
Ireland	13.6	1.1	3.8	8.5	1.2	2.0	19.2	2.0	12.1	36.4	6.9	12.9	2.3	5.1	4.6	4.7
Greece	18.5	4.3	4.4	7.6	3.2	0.5	9.9	1.5	8.6	41.5	3.0	32.1	3.5	1.3	1.0	0.6
Spain*	14.4	2.3	4.5	9.3	1.9	1.1	14.3	2.6	9.5	39.9	5.6	21.7	5.4	1.7	4.2	1.3
France*	10.8	3.2	2.9	9.9	1.7	1.9	14.4	2.2	9.6	43.3	4.9	24.0	2.7	4.2	3.5	3.9
Croatia	18.6	2.6	4.9	11.3	1.4	2.3	13.9	3.8	10.2	31.2	4.3	18.1	3.0	3.8	1.0	1.0
Italy	16.0	2.6	3.8	8.0	1.8	1.3	14.1	1.7	7.9	42.7	3.7	27.4	5.4	3.1	2.4	0.7
Cyprus	20.0	3.9	4.4	6.7	0.7	3.9	6.8	2.3	15.6	35.7	1.4	16.0	4.0	8.1	2.0	4.3
Latvia	11.9	4.4	5.8	13.2	1.4	2.4	10.0	3.9	14.7	32.2	5.9	19.3	0.5	3.3	1.4	1.9
Lithuania	11.9	4.6	4.3	8.8	1.4	1.1	17.1	3.0	15.1	32.8	9.1	17.1	1.0	3.0	1.5	1.2
Luxembourg	11.3	1.0	2.4	13.2	2.2	1.2	11.3	2.9	11.5	43.1	4.3	25.7	0.0	8.6	2.6	1.9
Hungary	17.0	1.5	5.0	15.1	1.1	1.7	10.3	7.1	10.5	30.7	6.0	15.4	2.2	4.1	0.6	2.3
Malta	16.7	1.6	3.1	12.1	2.7	0.7	14.7	2.6	14.1	31.6	2.8	19.5	3.7	2.7	1.0	1.9
Netherlands*	9.9	2.7	4.3	9.0	3.1	0.7	17.7	3.1	12.2	37.3	9.7	15.4	0.2	2.8	3.7	5.5
Austria	13.0	1.2	2.7	11.2	0.8	0.7	15.8	2.4	9.8	42.6	3.7	25.6	2.8	4.5	2.9	3.0
Poland	11.3	3.9	5.3	9.9	1.0	1.5	11.3	2.6	12.1	41.2	6.4	22.2	4.3	6.0	1.3	0.9
Portugal*	18.4	2.1	4.0	7.1	1.3	1.2	13.2	1.8	10.8	40.0	2.9	26.9	4.0	2.3	2.2	1.7
Romania	13.0	2.6	6.0	13.3	1.8	3.5	11.9	2.7	10.8	34.2	3.2	24.8	0.2	4.0	0.4	1.6
Slovenia	14.6	2.0	3.8	10.1	1.2	0.9	14.9	3.2	12.4	37.0	5.1	21.0	3.0	4.1	1.2	2.5
Slovakia*	12.7	2.4	5.6	10.8	1.6	1.2	17.7	2.4	9.3	36.4	7.0	19.6	2.0	3.0	0.5	4.3
Finland	14.4	2.3	2.1	8.1	0.4	0.6	12.9	2.6	10.8	45.8	6.1	24.5	1.3	5.7	4.6	3.6
Sweden	13.4	2.4	2.6	8.4	0.6	1.4	13.9	2.2	13.4	41.7	8.6	20.8	0.6	5.0	2.6	4.2
UK	11.0	4.8	4.4	7.3	1.8	1.7	18.3	1.5	11.2	38.1	6.1	20.8	0.1	3.3	0.3	7.5
Iceland	15.1	0.1	2.9	10.7	1.3	1.0	16.6	6.7	15.8	29.8	6.2	15.2	0.0	4.5	1.0	2.8
Norway	9.2	3.1	2.3	10.6	1.8	1.7	17.1	3.1	11.1	40.0	13.6	14.5	0.4	7.2	1.1	3.2
Switzerland	13.9	2.4	4.9	11.7	1.7	0.6	6.5	2.4	16.3	39.6	8.6	19.8	0.9	1.4	3.6	5.3

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